

Innovative Powtoon: An animated presentation in helping rural schools pupils write grammatically correct simple sentences

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Abstract—Generally, English Language is known as a second language in Malaysia and it is widely used as a medium of communication besides Malay Language. Yet, the situation is a bit different in rural areas particularly in Sabah, a state located in the Eastern part of Malaysia. Apart of both languages, people in the state have their own languages and use them in daily basis. Hence, teaching English Language is really a challenge with pupils constantly have a mother tongue interference in learning English. Thus, many pupils faced difficulty in their active skill, for instance, write simple sentences with grammatically correct without a constant guidance from teachers. This research is aimed to help pupils in enhancing their writing skill. The researchers conducted an action research with Year 3 pupils in two rural schools in Sabah i.e. one school in the Sandakan District and the other school in the Kudat District with 11 pupils and 19 pupils respectively. The researchers used a tool called Innovative Powtoon, an animated presentation in assisting pupils to write simple sentences. The data was collected using survey, interview, pre-test and posttest. The outcome of the research showed a promising result as there is an improvement in pupils' writing. Since Powtoon is based on the animated presentation, it attracted the pupils to learn English in a fun way. As it is free for any presentations that less than three minutes, other teachers can use it to a great extent using their own creativity. It will benefit the school society as it can be used to teach other subjects in the future.

Keywords—Innovative Powtoon, writing skill, rural schools, innovation, tool

I. INTRODUCTION

English Language is one of the most widely spoken language in the world with over than 378 million native speaker nowadays (Statista, 2018). With the vast speakers, being a proficient user of English Language become more significant.

In Malaysia itself, English Language has been a dominant language since the British colonial era. Today, English Language continuously plays a role as a second language that is shown in the manifestation of the new policy 'Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia, Memperkuuh Bahasa Inggeris also known with the acronym MBMMBI or 'Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening Command

of English'. One of the policy's objectives is to improve the proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and English Language among pupils. (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2014).

In becoming a proficient user of English, one should be capable to master four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, the non-native speakers can converse with the native speaker without hesitation. One of the way to interact efficiently with other users either native or non-native is through written text. People can share their ideas and thought via writing. That is why, according to Voon (2007) "Writing is such an important learning tool because it helps students to understand ideas and concepts better." Apart from that, writing is not as easy as it seems for second language learner (L2). There are many factors that affect the capability of L2 learners to write well. As mentioned by Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016), one of the problems among L2 learners in writing among Pakistani students is they have difficulties in grammar and syntax. This problem also faced by pupils in the schools that this research been conducted. Pupils presented their ideas in writing with a lot of grammar mistakes. Therefore, the researchers have come up with a way to overcome the challenges.

The MBMMBI policy emphasizes the importance of both languages for all Malaysians pupils. There are eight strategies in order for the policy to be successful. The Strategy number 8 is expand the usage of materials and ICT in teaching and learning both in Bahasa Malaysia and English classes. Hence, the researchers have decided to take a proactive step in using ICT materials that suit the need of particular pupils in the school mentioned earlier in the paper.

Powtoon presentation has been chosen by the researchers as a tool in the lesson, as it can be the platform for the teachers to be creatively in arranging the contents of lessons based on the topic that will be taught. The researchers created a few animated presentations to help pupils in the writing lessons. It is named as Innovative Powtoon. This tool helped the pupils to get into the lessons as the pictures, sounds, audios and videos that were inserted in the presentations were really useful in getting their attention.

Pupils from both schools mentioned have difficulties in writing simple sentences with zero grammatical errors. Teachers from time to time have to assist them in their writing. Therefore, this research tried to investigate the challenges faced by pupils in writing correct simple sentences and to what extent the Innovative Powtoon can help Year 3 pupils to enhance their writing skill.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language has been used in Malaysia since the pre-independence era. Nevertheless, the levels of English proficiency among Malaysians students are still arguable. In the 2016 Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) or Primary School Evaluation Test, for the first time, the English Language test was divided into two papers; comprehension paper and writing paper. The result of the UPSR for English writing components still below the par according to the former Education Chief Director, Tan Sri Dr Khair Mohamad Yusof (Sinar Harian, 2016). There were distinct UPSR results between urban areas pupils and rural areas pupils. This is because of the exposure to the language is different between these two areas. Chan and Abdullah (2015) said that even though the primary school pupils have 11 years of schooling, but particularly in rural areas, the only exposure they have is during the English classes. This statement also supported by Darmi and Albion (2013) findings. According to them, one of three reasons that affected the proficiency of English among Malaysians depends on the locality they are live in. These have been strengthen with the statement by Nazim and Ahmad (2012) that said without any exception, in order write well, students have to be in the environment that support the development of their writing skill. For that reason, pupils should be given enough opportunities in developing their writing skills with mixed teaching approaches.

In dealing with pupils' attention in the class, teacher should use many approaches and methods in the teaching and learning process. Today, using ICT in English classes is common. Yunus et.al (2013) found that there are many advantages using ICT in teaching ESL writing skills, one of them is engaging students with the lessons. On the other hand, there also some of the disadvantages of using the ICT in writing lessons. The uses of the ICT itself has been really useful to the pupils as they enjoyed learning instead of writing too. But, this has reduced the motor skills of the pupils as stated by Yunus et. al (2013) "...scrolling the computer screen lead to an accelerated but superficial, and often inaccurate, understanding of the content."

Countless ICT materials for teaching offered nowadays, from presenting the lesson's content to assessing pupils understanding. Powtoon is a web-based animation software and it is usually used to make presentations. This software can be accessed through their website and people can choose variety of presentations to be used according to their needs. Powtoon is widely used to deliver lessons especially in writing skills because it combines words and visuals. Yet, most of the presentations are uploaded to YouTube website. For instance, the mini lesson on paragraph writing by Richard Parker (2014) used Powtoon as a tool of teaching. The steps of writing a good paragraph were discussed in a simple and engaging way. In this research, the Innovative Powtoon is used to deliver the lesson in writing classes. It used the same steps as in many presentations in the YouTube website, but these presentations

were saved and brought to the class as a tool to teach pupils to write simple sentences.

In selecting the materials to be included in any lessons, teachers should take into account the socio cultural of pupils as stated by Thirusanku and Yunus (2014). Thus, teaching materials should be something that pupils are familiar with so that they can contribute their ideas meaningfully. The material lessons in this research used Malaysian context in order for pupils to understand them easily and they can connect the lessons with their daily life.

To date, there are only a few studies of overcoming the writing problem among primary school pupils in rural areas have been conducted. One of them was the 'Build Me Up' tool that had been done in a rural school in Belaga, Sarawak, Malaysia. As mentioned by Lim, Yunus and Embi (2017), English is one of the subjects that contribute to the decreasing result of Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) because of the writing component in the English Language papers. The 'Build Me Up' tool was used for pupils to understand the different types of tenses sentence patterns in English. It was aimed for Year 5 pupils who were in Level 2, primary school. For that reason, the researchers opted to do this research in helping pupils to enhance their writing skill in the early stage of schooling, particularly the Year 3 pupils as preparation for them to enter the Level 2 in the next year.

III. METHODOLOGY

An action research has been done in both schools using the Innovative Powtoon as a tool in delivering the lessons. This action research is based on the Kemmis & McTaggart Model (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2008) that suggested four steps i.e. Reflect, Plan, Action and Observe.

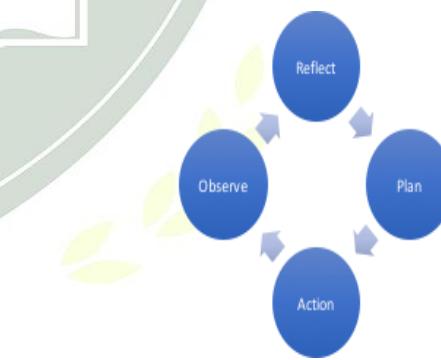


Fig. 1. Four steps in action research based on Kemmis & McTaggart Model.

Reflection has been done in this research by identifying the issue of the research which is pupils unable to write grammatically correct simple sentences without teacher's constant guidance. The plan made by using the Innovative Powtoon as teaching tool in order to enhance their writing skill. The plan conducted by using the tool as treatment for pupils in a period of time and the researchers observed the pupils improvement after the treatment given to them.

The main purpose of the research is to measure the effectiveness of the tool in enhancing the writing skill among pupils in both schools. These both schools are in the District of Sandakan and the District of Kudat in Sabah, Malaysia. The schools are named by School A and School B later in this paper. The participants chosen for the research were from Year

3; 10 students from School A and 19 students from School B respectively. One of the pupils from School A was excluded from the data collecting as the pupil is a special needs student.

Most of the pupils of Year 3 from both schools were unable to write simple sentences with grammatically correct without constant guidance from the teachers. This problem showed in the exercises given to them in their exercise book and had been checked by their respective teachers.

The research used a mixed-method; both qualitative and quantitative to get the data. For the qualitative methods, the data obtained from a simple survey of all participants and from an interview of selected pupils as respondents. The survey was conducted to obtain information about students' perception in learning English Language. Three closed-ended questions with 'Yes' and 'No' response and one open-ended question were enclosed in the survey form. Meanwhile, the interview done to get information on students' preference and students' routine after the school hours. Three questions asked during the interview i.e. the subject that they like the most, person that helps them with their homework and their favorite activities during their leisure time. This method is to answer the research question one of the challenges faced by pupils in writing in English.

In the quantitative method, a pre-test and post-test were used to measure the effectiveness of the teaching tool that was used in the research. A pre-test done by giving pupils a question set that contains some information about a person. Without any other guidance, pupils tried to write five simple sentences.

The next two days, the researchers gave a treatment using the Innovative Powtoon as the tool in the lessons. Pupils were shown some animated presentations using Powtoon that prepared beforehand. The presentations were about writing simple sentences with the correct grammar. The researchers used five question words; i.e 'Who', 'What', 'Where', 'When' and 'How' to teach pupils to write simple sentences. By using question sentences that contained these words, the researchers showed on how to build grammatically simple sentences using the questions given. This is inline with one of the suggestions given by Al-Gharabally (2015). By using questions to plan L2 learners writing, it can improve L2 learners skill of writing.

On the first day, pupils were introduced to 2 question words which were 'Who' and 'What' and the researchers facilitated pupils to write the sentences. Pupils were given 3 worksheets that contained all the question words but they only needed to write 3 simple sentences for two question words they have learnt for that day. On the second day, pupils were introduced to another 3 question words and using the same worksheets, they wrote another 9 sentences, 3 sentences for each question word.

After the treatment done for two days, the researchers came up with a post test. The post test was done to see how well students improved after being taught using the Innovative Powtoon.

IV. FINDINGS

The research was conducted with Year 3 pupils in two rural schools, School A and School B. The pupils in both classes are pupils with mixed achievements, which are good, average and

low achievers. In School A, there are 6 male pupils and 4 female pupils. While in School B, there are 9 male pupils and 10 female pupils.

The research started by researchers done a survey to all pupils. They were given a set of four questions which consisted of three close-ended questions with a 'Yes' and 'No' answers and one open-ended question.

TABLE I. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY FOR SCHOOL A

Pupils' respond		
Closed-ended questions	Yes	No
Do you like the English Language class?	9	1
Do you ask your teacher if you do not understand?	5	5
Is it difficult to write sentences in English?	7	3

The result of the survey for School A shown in Table I. For the first question, nine out of ten pupils of School A answered that they like English Language. 50 percent of School A's pupils were reluctant to ask teacher if they do not understand any topics in English classes. Plus, they think it is hard to write sentences in English.

TABLE II. RESULT OF SURVEY FOR SCHOOL B

Pupils' respond		
Closed-ended questions	Yes	No
Do you like the English Language class?	16	3
Do you ask your teacher if you do not understand?	15	4
Is it difficult to learn English?	10	9

Meanwhile, the result of survey for School B shown in Table II. 15 pupils or 78.9 percent of School B gave a 'Yes' response for the first question. Even though most of the pupils from School B answered that they would ask their English teacher if they were not clear of any lessons, they found it is difficult to write sentences in the language.

In order to have an in-depth understanding of why pupils have difficulties in writing, researchers gave an open-ended question. The researchers found some responses that explains the reasons that pupils could not write well. A lot of pupils said that they do not understand the English Language. The responses are stated below,

'I don't understand English Language'

and

'I can't read words in English'

'I feel it's hard to write in English because the spelling is different with the sound pronounced'.

One of the pupils responded as

'I don't like English Language'.

In the interview session, three pupils of School A were selected to answer the interview questions. Two of the pupils said English Language is their favourite subject while one pupil like Malay Language. All of them were helped by their mother in completing their homework. Two of them finished their homework before they went out to play while one of them does the house chores instead the homework.

On the other hand, six pupils were selected to be interviewed for School B. Two pupils said that their favourite subject is English Language and the remaining pupils like some other subjects. Most of them were helped by their parents and family members in completing their homework. One of the pupils finished his work first before spend his time playing with his friend while others played after the school hours. After the survey and the interview session were conducted, the researchers had a general view of pupils' problem in writing simple sentences. Some of them like English Language and that help them to build a positive attitude towards learning English. Pupils done their homework with the help of their family members especially their mother. The researchers are aware that a lot of parents in those schools received only primary level of schooling and they could not help much in their children's homework. The last question showed that pupils only finished the homework given and they did not have the extra effort in polishing their writing skill.

In the next step, the researchers planned to do an intervention to overcome the problem of writing grammatically correct simple sentences. Pre-test had been done to see pupils' writing skill. Then, from the result, a treatment is given to them using the Innovative Powtoon and a posttest done to measure their improvement.

The result of the pre-test and post-test for both schools are shown in Table III and Table IV. During the pre-test for pupils of School A, none of the students could write five and four sentences with the correct grammar. Only one student could write three sentences correctly. There were only two students could write two correct sentences and one student wrote one sentence correctly. The remaining six students could not write even a single sentence with the correct grammar.

TABLE III. ANALYSIS OF RESULT FOR SCHOOL A

Research Participants	No. of correct sentences		Difference
	Pre-Test	Post Test	
Pupil 1	1	5	4
Pupil 2	0	5	5
Pupil 3	2	5	3
Pupil 4	3	5	2
Pupil 5	1	4	3
Pupil 6	0	5	5
Pupil 7	0	4	4
Pupil 8	0	4	4
Pupil 9	0	3	3
Pupil 10	0	1	1
Mean	.7000	4.100	3.400

Yet, the promising result after the treatment been given to the pupils is shown in the post-test result. All of them could write at least one simple sentence with the correct grammar. Five out of ten pupils could write 5 sentences correctly, while 3 students can write 4 sentences correctly. One student can write

3 correct sentences while one student can write one sentence with the correct grammar.

TABLE IV. ANALYSIS OF RESULT FOR SCHOOL B

Research Participants	No. of correct sentences		Difference
	Pre-Test	Post Test	
Pupil 1	5	5	0
Pupil 2	4	5	1
Pupil 3	4	5	1
Pupil 4	5	5	0
Pupil 5	5	5	0
Pupil 6	5	5	0
Pupil 7	5	5	0
Pupil 8	2	4	2
Pupil 9	2	4	2
Pupil 10	2	3	1
Pupil 11	4	5	1
Pupil 12	3	4	1
Pupil 13	0	3	3
Pupil 14	3	5	2
Pupil 15	2	4	2
Pupil 16	3	5	2
Pupil 17	2	3	1
Pupil 18	1	4	3
Pupil 19	1	5	4
Mean	2.9474	4.4211	1.4737

The Table IV shows the result of pre-test and post test of School B. There are 19 pupils in Year 3 of School B. During the pre-test, about five students could write 5 sentences with grammatically correct and the numbers increased to 11 students after they were given the treatment. It is more than 25 percent increase in the result. Five out of 19 students could write 4 sentences correctly while three students could write 3 correct sentences. The students' achievement in School B is remarkable because all of them can write at least 3 sentences with the correct grammar. With the mean score difference of 3.400 and 1.4737 for School A and School B respectively, the result shows that the Innovative Powtoon does significantly help the Year 3 pupils especially those who are average and low achievers.

V. LIMITATION

A limited internet connection is the main factor of why the researchers chose to use Powtoon instead other applications that need a strong internet connection. The tool is meant for presentation or deliver the content of the lesson only and not for the assessment. The assessments in this research are still using the conventional way; write on worksheets as the researchers believed it can enhance their motor skill development.

VI. FUTURE ENHANCEMENTS AND CONCLUSION

The tool used in this research has shown a good result especially in helping average and low achievers to upgrade their writing skills. Having a surrounding of the strong internet connection can be a really fun way of learning as the teacher and students can enjoy using the Powtoon online while in the class. It is hoped that in the future the tool can be improvised and used in other subjects in school.

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