5-COLOURED COLUMNS (FCC): TO WRITE OR NOT TO WRITE

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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning of languages require multiple strategies to ensure students competence in eventually using the language independently. In the context of English language, which is considered as a second language in Malaysia, the four main skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing are interconnected and taught with at least two of them included in every lesson plan. Learning to write sentences may sometimes be dreary and uninteresting which in turn caused the students to lose interest and unable to master it. This particular research introduced gamified writing activity using Five-Coloured Columns (FCC) that combined fun-learning and sentence construction aspects of the language to guarantee primary school students' continuous focus in learning. Five-Coloured Columns (FCC) in the form of a table is a sentence construction tool with a twist which requires two dice to be rolled to choose words from each part of the sentence. Several formulas were also used to help the students to construct sentences correctly. Sentence construction in the form of Simple Present Tense was chosen for this research. FCC is equally applicable for other tenses with minimal modification according to needs. At the end of research, it was proven that FCC has helped the pupils to write correct sentences, keep their interest in learning and also gain confidence in using English language in the form of writing.

Keywords: writing, primary school, gamified, sentence construction

INTRODUCTION

The usage of English in the classroom is mandatory, and pupils are expected to do it honourably. However, as the principal person responsible for presenting the lesson to the students, particularly English as second language learners (ESL), teaching writing presents a significant challenge to the teachers. Nunan (1991) asserts that creating a logical, fluent, and extensive piece of writing is the most difficult endeavour, and second language learners find it to be much more difficult.

According to Liza Abdullah (2014), students tend to remain with sentence structures that they are comfortable utilising in their writing. Since they had been taught to write in a certain order to prevent grammatically incorrect sentences, students prefer to play it safe and utilise short sentences in their writing. Sentences are extremely difficult to construct since so many factors must be taken into account as writing is developed.

Every day for one hour, there was a conversational emphasis on the English language with little to no use of the pupils'native tongues. The researchers, who are also teachers in the relevant classes, observe the challenges that low proficiency pupils experience since they struggle to write well in English class, particularly when it comes to writing lessons. These pupils required a practical technique to write clearly and correctly.

We realised that the low proficiency pupils occasionally lose motivation since they are virtually drowning in the English language and find it difficult to understand most terms. The situation caught these low proficiency pupils off guard, and as a result, the majority of them, particularly the less

proficient, lost interest in learning the English language. The most significant source of human motivation, according to Bandura (1989), is cognitive engagement. As a result, if the pupils' motivation for learning English remained low, they might not be able to set themselves goals or realise them. Learning won't ever happen, then. Based on the explanations above, it is the responsibility of the English teacher to solve the problem. An English teacher should find another way in increasing the pupils' ability in writing. We therefore developed a writing template that was offered specifically for the pupils with low proficiency in order to assist the students in composing English sentences with motivation and ease.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

For young language learners to achieve literacy, writing skills are crucial. But according to Graham in Mohamed Qaddoura (2020), writing is seen as a "highly complex, cognitive, and self-directed activity" since it calls on a number of different processes, such as the precise use of grammar and semantics and the structure of ideas. Writing is seen as a difficult skill to acquire because of its complexity, particularly for second language learners who want to write well in the target language for academic or professional purposes. Therefore, effective writing techniques can improve writing output and lessen attentional overload.

Language depends heavily on grammar. To produce and arrange words into proper sentences and to assist pupils to comprehend English phrases during learning activities, it is essential to know these fundamental concepts. Grammar can also assist pupils in learning how to communicate with others effectively through speech, writing, sharing, and other written forms. They will be able to describe their daily activities and have a general understanding of reality, especially in the simple present tense. Students who are proficient in grammar will find it simple to use English, including how to form sentences and interact with people.

The teacher plays an important role in assisting pupils in coming up with workable plans for beginning, drafting, revising, and editing. Controlled or guided writing is one of the writing techniques. Mohamed Qaddoura (2020) said that writing teaching should change to include more effective modelling, shared writing, taught writing, and interactive writing techniques and tactics. According to Pinnell and Fountas (1998), guided writing helps students at every level of the writing process. This assistance allowed the pupils to gradually develop and enhance their writing abilities. The goal of guided writing is to offer assistance to beginning writers so they may develop their writing and work independently.

Writing ability is a particular talent that enables one to communicate their ideas through written words in a clear and effective manner (Nunan, 1991). The SVO grid table is therefore introduced based on a few prior research in order to assist the young beginners with lower proficiency. The researchers Ariffin, Ismail, Kadir, & Kamal (2018), suggested a tool to teach writing in their previous studies. For those who struggle with subject-object-verb writing, he recommended a grid-like method.

But the issue continues to exist, thus the goal of this study is to widen the discussion of grid-based writing instruction. This is because there has only been a little amount of research in the same region. It is hoped to make a contribution to the teaching community and offer guidance to other educators on how to teach writing in particular. As said previously, the goal of this study is to teach students how to write basic present and simple continuous tense phrases in English using a writing method known as the Five Coloured Columns (FCC).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the effect of using FCC on pupils to write simple present tense sentences.
2. To explore pupils' view of using FCC to write simple present tense sentences.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated to accomplish the study objectives:

1. What is the effect of using FCC on pupils to write simple present tense sentences?
2. What are the pupils' views of using FCC to write simple present tense sentences?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was an Action Research project (AR). As a result, it used a mixed method approach that included both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was collected using the quantitative method. The quantitative data came from the learners' worksheet, learners' test result which is taken as pre and post test and observation report. The qualitative technique was used to collect thematic or descriptive data based on interview transcription, observation checklist and questionnaire items.

Pupils from two Year 4 classes from two primary schools in Sipitang, with 16 pupils in each class, were chosen as participants in the project. FCC was used as the intervention to help and solve the lack of ability to write simple present tense sentences among the pupils. The participants were selected through a purposive sampling procedure. The pupils could not perform well in writing exercises and in need of immediate attention to ensure their smooth transition from lower to upper primary level. The participants were of mixed-ability in terms of language proficiency in writing skill and were learners who rarely practised English at home. The pupils were mostly visual learners hence the idea of having FCC inclusive of five different colours.

The research was carried out in three stages; before-intervention, during- intervention, and after-intervention. An instrument of a simple worksheet with a single picture as shown below was given to the pupils to construct ten sentences, as the before-intervention. They use their existing knowledge of sentence construction to complete the given worksheet.

Picture 1 Worksheet for before-intervention

As for the during-intervention, FCC was used in 10 intervention sessions throughout the course of the project. Intervention sessions referred to the number of writing lessons carried out using FCC. Data was collected during this stage to see the effectiveness of FCC in supporting pupils' learning process. This particular number of interventions was selected to ensure the pupils' familiarity in using FCC to write sentences.

In this stage, the themes for each of the intervention sessions using FCC were decided beforehand to cover necessities based on the syllabus document. It was important to regularly check

with the syllabus in order to have a precise and sufficient pool of related vocabulary. Moreover, with a strong reservoir of vocabulary the pupils will be able to write various sentences using multiple tenses.

ADJECTIVE		SUBJECT		VERB		PREPOSITION		WILD CARD	
2	quick	2	monster	2	cry	2	in front of	2	restaurant
3	surprised	3	caterpillar	3	cook	3	under	3	cafe
4	scary	4	butterfly	4	feed	4	inside	4	zoo
5	pretty	5	teacher	5	help	5	around	5	supermarket
6	angry	6	aunt	6	shout	6	near	6	beach
7	happy	7	frog	7	practice	7	behind	7	bookshop
8	funny	8	film star	8	bounce	8	between	8	kitchen
9	young	9	doctor	9	catch	9	above	9	sports centre
10	naughty	10	alien	10	dance	10	beside	10	house
11	loud	11	monkey	11	kick	11	in	11	park
12	green	12	Upin	12	sleep	12	on	12	classroom

Table 1 FCC template

The interventions took place in 10 writing lessons. The first 10 minutes was to introduce the pupils on the FCC template (Table 1). The implementation continued where another 15 minutes in the main delivery were taken to teach pupils how to construct sentences with the right tenses. Pupils were given two dice each in which they need to roll to determine the word that they are going to get for each column. For example, if the two dice showed the numbers 2 and 3, hence the first word from the first column would be the word in row 5 which is 'pretty'. The steps are repeated until all columns have their own words. Once all the words were selected through rolling the dice, it was time to write the sentence. In order to help them to better understand simple present tense, formulas were also included for them to refer to and memorise. Table 2 below shows the formulas specifying both singular and plural forms of simple present tense sentences.

Simple Present Tense (Singular)	Simple Present Tense (Plural)
A + SingSub + V(s) A + **Adj** + SingSub + V(s) + **Prep** + **Comp** An + VowSub + V(s) An + **Adj** + VowSub + V(s) + **Prep** + **Comp** The + SpeSub + V(s) The + **Adj** + SpeSub + **Prep** + **Comp**	The + PlurSub + V The + **Adj** + PlurSub + V + **Prep** + **Comp** The + VowSub + V The + **Adj** + VowSub + V + **Prep** + **Comp**

Table 2 Formulas to correctly write Simple Present Tense

The meaning for each part of the formula was explained clearly, specifically during intervention session 1, as shown below in Table 3. From these formulas, pupils can understand the right way to write simple sentences using simple present tense using the words from each column.

Adj	Adjective
SingSub	Singular Subject
PlurSub	Plural Subject
VowSub	Vowel Subject
Prep	Preposition
Compl	Complete (words to complete the sentence)

Table 3 Meaning of parts in the formula

Ten intervention sessions were implemented with the same groups of pupils. While the pupils complete worksheets or do English related activities, observations were taken and everything was jotted down in the teacher's reflective journal. Finally, an interview session was done with all the pupils using semi-structured interview questions.

Teacher's reflection was finalised after the completion of 10 intervention sessions using FCC template to guide pupils to correctly write sentences. The reflection includes the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention as well as whether the pupils have more knowledge on writing sentences and whether they have positive views on the technique implemented.

In the after-intervention stage, several instruments were used; writing worksheets, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation checklists, and teacher's reflection notes. The qualitative instruments were employed to help in understanding pupils' views on using FCC in English writing class. All these multiple data collection methods are to ensure sufficient data triangulation to help in reliability and validity as high reliability and validity in any research, promote transparency and reduce potential for researcher bias (Singh, 2014).
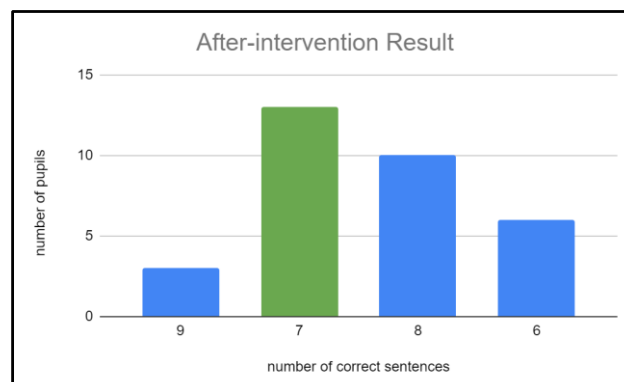
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Q1: What is the effect of using FCC on pupils to write simple present tense sentences?

The first research question sought to observe the effect of using FCC to support students' ability in writing sentences in the form of simple present tense. Different results were obtained from both before-intervention and after intervention as shown in the charts below.
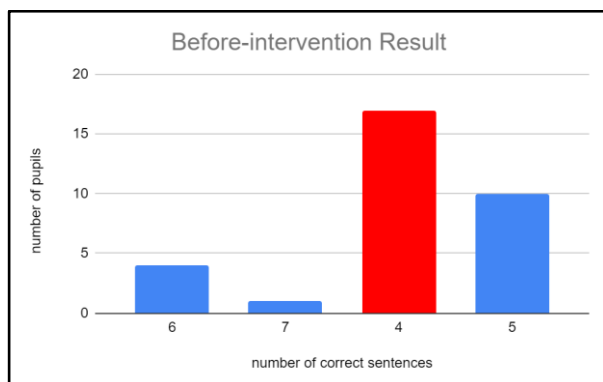
Chart 1: Before-intervention result   **Chart 2:** After-intervention result

By comparing both of the results, it was evident that all 32 pupils have improved their skill in sentence writing in the form of simple present tense, as none of them got less than 5 correct sentences. Since both before-intervention and after-intervention stages used the same instrument of a worksheet with a single picture, the results gained were reliable and sufficient to be concluded as effective.

During the before-intervention stage, pupils took quite some time to do 10 sentences based on the given picture. This was due to quite a number of the pupils not remembering how to describe objects and people using English, which was taught in Year 3. It was also observed that pupils made several spelling mistakes while completing the given worksheet. Other than that, most of the pupils write sentences in the form of present continuous tense, which is probably because they have just learnt it a few days back. Other than that, there was a pupil that didn't use any verbs in his sentences, which showed that knowing basic structure of a sentence is an important skill.

Picture 2 & 3 Pupils completing the worksheet

As for the 10 intervention sessions, pupils enjoy the process of rolling the dice and writing down the chosen words to write sentences. From the use of FCC, it became easier for the pupils to identify each parts of the sentences and try to make correct sentences in every session.

Picture 4 & 5 Pupils using FCC during intervention sessions

Q2: What are the pupils' views of using FCC to write simple present tense sentences?

The second research question sought to learn more about how pupils felt about using FCC to assist with easy present-tense sentence formation. An observation checklist, dichotomous questionnaire items, and semi-structured interview questions were the methods utilized to gather the data. Direct observation was used during the observation, and the researchers watched the pupils as they participated in the lesson. Thematic analysis was used to assess and explain the data.

Pupils seemed to enjoy learning English, according to observations made and photographs taken throughout the intervention sessions. When they rolled the dice and attempted to create the sentences, students displayed enjoyment. By allowing the pupils to roll the dice and incorporate a small amount of gamification, the dull writing session was transformed into a fun lesson.

Interviews were the second approach utilised to get the data. Semi-structured interview questions were used in this approach in order to find out the pupils' thoughts about using FCC. The data collected from the conducted interview sessions was analysed thematically.

The answers provided by the pupils were similar, according to a detailed analysis of the data for this question. The majority of them discovered that using FCC could help them write basic phrases using the appropriate simple present tense. The first theme, interaction, was expressed by all 32 interviewees from two classes when they said that they learn more effectively when they talk with their friends. Some of the quotes that reflect how the students felt about how the intervention aided their vocabulary mastery are included below.

"Syiok and boleh bincang ni dengan kawan" (P1L4)
"Fun and a medium to connect with people." (P1L4)

"Kami boleh kongsi idea untuk buat ayat yang betul" (P2L13)
"My friends and I can share our thoughts and ideas on how to write an interesting sentence." (P2L13)

Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
Writing is the most important skill in English	62	38
Do you find it easy to write sentences now?	90	10
Do you like FCC?	93	7
Do you feel good about writing lessons now?	93	7
Do you think you can write freely now?	78	22
Average	**83.2**	**16.8**

Table 4 Questionnaire result

From the questionnaire items of five questions, pupils majorly agreed to item three and item four where they like FCC and they felt good in writing class at the moment. Based on the result, 83.2% of the students agreed on FCC indicating they have a positive attitude towards the use of it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study highlighted specific issues regarding teaching and learning of vocabulary, which consequently affect writing skill in English as a second language. The samples for the action research did not cover the perceptions of the total population since it was conducted with a small convenient sample with participants from only two primary schools in one district. Therefore as the first recommendation, a larger sample of pupils may be selected to better understand their views towards the use of FCC.

Secondly, it is recommended that this technique to be used by other English teachers who encounter similar problems with their pupils. Since FCC helped the pupils in this action research, it may have similar results if conducted with other groups of pupils at a larger scale.

Another recommendation would be for researchers to look at the possibility to transform FCC into a computerised template. Since this is the era where technology prevails, it would be beneficial if next researchers would collaborate with IT experts to develop a software in which it will generate words and sentences according to FCC. English language learners then will have the option to do writing practices with different mediums.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the learning points gained helped the researchers to better understand and fully immerse themselves in the career of English language teachers. This action research had widened teachers' perspective towards strategies in teaching writing by developing teaching practice, expertise and professional self-growth (Goh, 2012). By using the introduced technique, the pupils not only showed improvements in their writing ability, but also they enjoyed the process of it. Seeing the pupils improve themselves somehow left a feeling that one could not express verbally. As teachers, no one should deny their rights to learn as well their ability to improve.

The present action research made a partial contribution in understanding the utilisation of FCC in developing learners' writing ability on simple sentences. Therefore, more studies need to be conducted to carefully investigate the issue highlighted by this study.

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