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EFFECTIVENESS OF SELF-ACCESS LEARNING IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' GRAMMAR



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A PROJECT PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
EDUCATION IN TEACHING OF ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (TESL)

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS
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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this project paper is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Date: 06/12/2010

(BADRULISHAM BIN MOHD IBRAHIM)

Matric No.: M20072000564





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my thanks to all the people who have made it possible for me to complete this project paper successfully.

My supreme gratitude to my project supervisor, Associate Prof. Dr. Haji Nor Azmi bin Mostafa who has comprehensively and patiently guided me throughout the phases of the study. His advice, ideas, and accessibility has not only added value to the study but also made it an unforgettable one for me.

I would like to convey my appreciation to the pupils and teachers of Sekolah Kebangsaan Gesir Tengah particularly the pupils of class 5 Arif and 5 Bijak. My special thanks also to the headmaster, Mr. Muhd. Rusli bin Husin who has given his full cooperation and support to me in carrying out this study.

Most of all, I am thankful to my wife, children and relatives who have tolerated and encouraged me all the way in facing the challenges and tasks in finalizing this study.





ABSTRACT

This paper proposed the use of self-access learning in learning grammar in the self-access centre with the assistance of the computer assisted language learning and teachers as facilitators. The self-access learning was chosen for this study because it offers a learning environment where learners could be actively involved in the learning process. It also allows learners to make their own learning decisions regarding what to learn, which materials to work on, and when to learn. The pupils' performances and the aspect of grammar were assessed through pre-tests, post-tests and the final marks after the sessions. The study showed that pupils who learnt grammar using self-access learning showed significant improvement through post-test scores. The significant achievement of the pupils was contributed by the assistance of the self-access learning tool (Hot Potatoes software) through computer assisted language learning. The study also showed that all aspects of grammar could be improved by self-access learning tool. In ensuring that the computer assisted language learning and self-access learning are efficient, educators must be well-prepared with computer skills and allow the learners to self-access information. The study recommended that self-access learning and computer assisted language learning be used for enhancing the grammar accuracy among learners.





ABSTRAK

Kertas projek ini mencadangkan penggunaan pembelajaran akses sendiri dalam belajar tatabahasa di dalam pusat akses sendiri dengan bantuan pembelajaran berbantu komputer dan para guru sebagai fasilitator. Pembelajaran akses sendiri dipilih untuk kajian ini kerana ia menawarkan persekitaran pembelajaran dimana para pelajar dapat membabitkan diri secara aktif di dalam proses pembelajaran. Ia juga memberi peluang para pelajar untuk memilih apa yang hendak dipelajari, bahan mana yang hendak dipilih dan bila untuk belajar. Pencapaian para pelajar dan aspek tatabahasa dinilai melalui pra-ujian, pasca-ujian dan markah akhir selepas setiap sesi pembelajaran. Kajian menunjukkan para pelajar yang belajar tatabahasa menggunakan kaedah pembelajaran akses sendiri menunjukkan kemajuan yang signifikan melalui skor pasca-ujian. Pencapaian yang signifikan oleh para pelajar telah disumbangkan dengan bantuan alat pembelajaran akses sendiri (perisian Hot Potatoes) yang digunakan dengan pembelajaran berbantuan komputer. Kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa semua aspek tatabahasa mampu diperbaiki dengan penggunaan perisian tersebut. Dalam memastikan keberkesanan pembelajaran berbantuan komputer dan pembelajaran akses sendiri, para pendidik harus memahirkan diri dalam bidang komputer dan mengalakkan para pelajar mengakses sendiri. Kajian ini mencadangkan pembelajaran akses sendiri dan pembelajaran berbantuan komputer digunapakai dalam meningkatkan kefahaman tatabahasa dalam kalangan pelajar.





TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	2
1.3	Need for the Study	3
1.4	Statement of the Problem	4
1.5	Purpose of the Study	5
1.6	Research Questions	5
1.7	Research Hypotheses	5
1.8	Definition of Terms	6
1.8.1	Self-Access Centre	6
1.8.2	Self-Access Learning	6
1.8.3	Grammar	6
1.8.4	Hot Potatoes	7
1.8.5	Computer Assisted Language Learning	8

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	9
2.2	Learner Autonomy	10
2.3	Self-Directed Learning	12
2.4	Self-Access Learning	14
2.5	Self-Access Centre	16
2.6	Computers and Grammar Teaching	19
2.7	Hot Potatoes Software	24



CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction	27
3.2	Research Design	27
3.3	Sample and Sampling Procedures	28
3.4	Instrumentation	29
3.5	Pilot Study	30
3.6	Data Collection Procedure	31
3.7	Data Analysis Procedure	32
3.8	Limitations	32

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1	Introduction	34
4.2	Research Question 1	
4.2.1	The performance of the experimental group after SAL treatment	34
4.2.2	The mean scores difference in post-tests for experimental and control groups	36
4.3	Research Question 2	
4.3.1	The performance of grammar items after the SAL treatment	39

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1	Introduction	42
5.2	Conclusions of the Findings	42
5.3	Implications of the Findings	44
5.4	Recommendations for Further Research	45

REFERENCES	47
APPENDICES	51
APPENDIX A Lesson Plans for Experimental Group	51
APPENDIX B Lesson Plans for Control Group	59
APPENDIX C Pre Test Sheet	69
APPENDIX D Post Test Sheet	77
APPENDIX E Hot Potatoes	86



LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
4.1	Pre test and Post test Scores	34
4.2	Paired Samples T-test Pretest and Posttest	36
4.3	Mean Scores Difference for Both Groups	37
4.4	Paired Samples T-test Scores of Posttests	38
4.5	Initial and Final Marks for All Grammatical Items	39
4.6	Paired Samples T-test for Prepositions	41
4.7	Paired Samples T-test for Pronouns	41
4.8	Paired Samples T-test for Adjectives	41
4.9	Paired Samples T-test for Present Tense	41
4.10	Paired Samples T-test for Past Tense	41



LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
Figure 2.1	Hot Potatoes: Gap-fill Exercise	25
Figure 3.1	The Framework of the Design	27
Figure 3.2	The Teaching Aspect Instruction	31



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

For a few decades, there have been so many disputes on different approaches to teaching grammar. To date, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) are still confronted with the crucial issues of choosing the best approach to improve their students' grammatical accuracy. Through nineteen years of experience as an ESL teacher in a remote, a rural and two urban schools, the researcher found that many of his students always struggled with their grammar. They were Standard Five and Six students and they could be categorized into groups of high intermediate to low proficiency in English. The level of proficiency in English was determined from their semester examination results whereby most of them only managed to obtain scores below eighty per cent. Based on their English Paper 1 in the UPSR examination, it was apparent that these students were very weak in using Prepositions, Pronouns, Adjectives, Simple Present Tense and Simple Past Tense. It is believed that, with five or six years of learning English language in ESL classrooms, they should have at least some basic knowledge of grammar.

In the English syllabuses of Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) and Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), grammar is not taught in isolation. Instead, in the Communicative language Teaching (CLT) approach, which is adopted by KBSR and KBSM, grammar is taught implicitly through meaningful contexts. According to Williams (1995), CLT has met with great success, whereby second language learners who study in CLT classrooms are generally successful





communicators. Unfortunately, now many researchers and teachers have begun to wonder if it is enough to provide students with rich, varied and interesting input alone.

1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The current research is an effort to institute the effectiveness of Self Access Learning (SAL) and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in improving students' grammar accuracy. The theories behind this research are based on ideas of self-directed learning theory proposed by Knowles (1985) and Tough (1971) and learner autonomy theory proposed by Holec (1981). The first claimed that self-directed learners are motivated by various internal incentives, such as need for self-esteem, curiosity, desire to achieve, and satisfaction of accomplishment. The second focused on analysing self-directed teaching activities and the third reinforced the ability to take charge of one's own learning.

The concepts for this research are derived from the ideas of Carl Rogers (1983), Sheerin (1991) and Sturtridge (1997) that student-centred learning and self-access learning in the self-access centre are focused on the student's needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles with the teacher as a facilitator of learning. Student-centred learning requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning. While for the CALL, Beatty's (2003) ideas are brought up regarding teaching and learning using computers.





1.3 Need for the Study

There are several researches which investigate Self-Access Centre, Self-Access Learning and CALL in teaching and learning grammar (Eva Funkuen lai, 2001; Ken Beatty, 2003; Thevy Rajaretnam, 2004; Mick Levy & Glenn Stockwell, 2006; Mark Warschauer, 2006). Most of the researches focused on using printed worksheets and online grammar worksheets (e-worksheet) that students can choose on their own based on their proficiency levels. Unfortunately, some schools in the rural areas have problems with the internet (i.e. no broadband or slow connections) and without internet, students cannot access the websites.

This research has a two-fold need; for students and teachers. Due to the importance of English language as a critical subject in the national examinations in primary and secondary schools specifically in the rural areas and also the main difficulty with grammar, the students necessitate more practical, exciting, effective, convenient and useful ways to learn grammar both implicitly and explicitly. As for the teachers, they necessitate the accurate tool and functional facility to teach grammar in order to make the learning process more constructive, innovative, appropriate, fruitful and beneficial.

For the above reasons, the Self-Access Learning (SAL) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) provided in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) are applicable. The SAL is for the students to do the grammar exercises on their own, the CALL provides the computer and the Hot Potatoes software while the SAC provide an encouraging learning environment for the students to complete their tasks.





1.4 Statement of the Problem

The notion that grammar can be learnt implicitly through exposure is in accordance with what Krashen (1985) believes. He firmly believes in comprehensible input. He proposed that given extensive opportunities for meaningful communication in the classroom, grammar would be learnt naturally and automatically. However, in the Malaysian real situation, it is difficult to replicate the natural first language acquisition environment in the actual ESL classroom. These students are not adequately exposed to the English environment. They seldom have or find the opportunity to listen to English language or to speak the language at home. Thus it is very difficult for them to acquire the language in terms of grammatical accuracy.

The researcher noticed that many students in Standard Five and Six classes in his school in the rural area are very weak in answering objective questions related to grammar. Out of forty objective questions in English Paper 1, twenty-five questions focus on grammatical items, five questions on social expressions and ten questions on reading comprehension. The researcher feels that the exercises given to the students in worksheets, workbooks and textbooks are static (i.e. exercises which remain the same in arrangements, content, answers and without feedback) and not authentic enough to make the students understand grammar and assist them to answer the grammar questions correctly.

As a concerned teacher, the researcher tries to investigate how effective is the use of a CALL software, called the Hot Potatoes as an alternative tool in assisting the students to understand grammar and act as a measuring device in the exercises' scores through self-access learning in the Self-Access Centre.





It is assumed that the Hot Potatoes exercises will assist the students to answer the grammar questions correctly and enable them to complete the tasks through self-access learning.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of using self-access learning in improving students' grammar ability, specifically through the use of the Hot Potatoes software in a Self-Access Centre. The study is conducted to assist students to have a better understanding in learning grammar. Besides, it also provides a platform for the students to explore and comprehend the exercises in a learner-centred, experiential approach provided in the software, which is believed to add the element of fun and interactivity into grammar learning, thus developing their grammar accuracy.



1.6 Research Questions

This research is guided by the following research questions:

1.6.1 Will the use of SAL help ESL students to improve their English grammar?

1.6.2 Which aspect of grammar that can be better improved upon with the use of the self-access learning tool?

1.7 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1.7.1 H1: Students who learn grammar through SAL perform better than students who learn grammar in non-SAL classroom.





1.7.2 H2: There is a significant difference in the grammar pre-test and post-test mean scores among students in the treatment group.

1.7.3 H3: There is a significant difference in the post-test mean scores between students in the treatment group and students in the control group.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The definitions of some important terms used in this study are given below:

1.8.1 Self-Access Centre (SAC)

Cottarell and Reinders (2001, p. 2) propose the following definition, “A Self-Access Centre (SAC) consists of a number of resources (in the form of materials, activities and support), usually located in one place, and is designed to accommodate learners of different levels, goals, styles and interests.”



1.8.2 Self-Access Learning (SAL)

Gardner & Miller (2005, p. 8-11) gave two definitions of Self-Access Learning (SAL). The first was “an approach to learning language, not an approach to teaching language”, and the second was “a system for organising resources and an integration of a number of elements which combine to provide a learning environment”.

1.8.3 Grammar

The Oxford English Reference Dictionary (1995) defines grammar as: “the branch of language study or linguistics which deals with the means of showing the relation between words as used in speech or writing,





traditionally divided into the study of inflections (or morphology) and of the structure of sentences (syntax) and often also including phonology.” (p. 608).

1.8.4 Hot Potatoes

The Hot Potatoes (<http://hotpot.uvic.ca>) is an authoring software for Windows and Macintosh platforms, produced by Half-Baked Software, Inc. in 2000. It was designed by Stewart Arneil, Martin Holmes, and Hilary Street to allow users, specifically language teachers and educators to make interactive, Web-based exercises that can be accessed at any Internet-capable computer terminal with a standard Web browser like Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox or Netscape Navigator. The Hot Potatoes uses both HTML and JavaScript; however, one does not need to know these languages to make the Web-based exercises. Instead, users use the program's exercise templates to create exercises on Web pages which then can be uploaded to a server to access them.

The Hot Potatoes software (the latest is Version 6) can create six different types of Web-based exercises which can stand alone or be linked to other exercises to form a sequence of tasks. In advance, users can set up clues and feedback for the exercises. The Hot Potatoes software also allows the users to specify an email address to which scores are sent. Although no knowledge of Web design is necessary to create the Web page exercises, users with such knowledge can customize the materials to a greater degree by manipulating the program code.





1.8.5 Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Beatty (2003) provides a definition of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) that accommodates its changing nature as “any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language” (p. 7).

