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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE APRON STORYTELLING APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN ESL CLASSROOMS

KANAGESHWARI A/P MUNISVARARAJAN



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TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN ESL CLASSROOMS**

**KANAGESHWARI A/P MUNISVARARAJAN**



**DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER OF EDUCATION  
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(RESEARCH AND COURSEWORK MODE)**



**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach in teaching English grammar to ESL students. The primary objective is to enhance student motivation and grammatical proficiency through an engaging, narrative-based methodology. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research involved 40 Year 3 students from two schools in Perak, categorised into experimental (Apron Storytelling) and control (rule-driven) groups. Data was collected via pre-tests, post-tests, student perception questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews that were conducted over eight weeks. The quantitative results demonstrated a significant improvement in grammar achievement for the experimental group, as evidenced by the pre- and post-test scores. Qualitative data from interviews further revealed that students found the Apron Storytelling Approach more interactive, relatable, and enjoyable compared to traditional rule-driven methods. The visual aids and narrative structure were particularly effective in fostering understanding and retention of grammatical concepts. The findings suggest that the Apron Storytelling Approach not only improves academic outcomes but also supports 21st-century skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and communication. By integrating visual elements and interactive storytelling, the approach addresses diverse learning styles, offering a holistic and inclusive method for grammar instruction. This study concludes that innovative methodologies like the Apron Storytelling Approach can overcome the limitations of traditional grammar teaching methods. Its implementation can significantly enhance ESL students' engagement and proficiency, making it a valuable addition to the repertoire of pedagogical strategies in language education. These findings have important implications for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to modernise ESL instruction and improve learner outcomes.



## **KESAN PENDEKATAN BERCEKITA APRON DALAM MENGAJAR TATABAHASA BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM BILIK DARJAH ESL**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini mengkaji keberkesanan Pendekatan Penceritaan Apron dalam pengajaran tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris kepada pelajar Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL). Objektif utama adalah untuk meningkatkan motivasi pelajar dan kecekapan tatabahasa melalui metodologi berasaskan naratif yang menarik. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kaedah campuran berurutan penjelasan yang melibatkan 40 pelajar Tahun 3 dari dua buah sekolah di Perak. Peserta kajian dikategorikan kepada kumpulan eksperimen (Pendekatan Penceritaan Apron) dan kumpulan kawalan (pendekatan berpandukan peraturan). Data dikumpulkan melalui ujian pra, ujian pasca, soal selidik persepsi pelajar, dan temu bual separa berstruktur yang dijalankan selama lapan minggu. Hasil kuantitatif menunjukkan peningkatan ketara dalam pencapaian tatabahasa untuk kumpulan eksperimen, seperti yang dibuktikan melalui skor ujian pra dan pasca. Data kualitatif daripada temu bual turut mendedahkan bahawa pelajar mendapati Pendekatan Penceritaan Apron lebih interaktif, relevan, dan menyeronokkan berbanding dengan kaedah berpandukan peraturan tradisional. Bahan visual dan struktur naratif terbukti berkesan dalam memupuk pemahaman dan pengekalan konsep tatabahasa. Dapatan ini menunjukkan bahawa Pendekatan Penceritaan Apron bukan sahaja meningkatkan hasil akademik, tetapi juga menyokong kemahiran abad ke-21 seperti kreativiti, pemikiran kritis, dan komunikasi. Dengan mengintegrasikan elemen visual dan penceritaan interaktif, pendekatan ini memenuhi gaya pembelajaran yang pelbagai, menawarkan kaedah pengajaran tatabahasa yang holistik dan inklusif. Kesimpulannya metodologi inovatif seperti Pendekatan Penceritaan Apron dapat mengatasi kekangan kaedah pengajaran tatabahasa tradisional. Pelaksanaannya dapat meningkatkan penglibatan dan kecekapan pelajar ESL secara signifikan serta menjadikannya tambahan yang bernilai kepada rangkaian strategi pedagogi dalam pendidikan bahasa. Dapatan ini mempunyai implikasi penting untuk pendidik, pereka kurikulum, dan pembuat dasar yang ingin memodenkan pengajaran ESL dan memperbaiki hasil pembelajaran pelajar.

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### driven Approach in Teaching English Grammar

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
GTM	Grammar Translation Method
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (Integrated Secondary School Curriculum)
L2	Second Language
MOE	Ministry of Education
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Lower Secondary Assessment)
PT3	Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (Form 3 Assessment)
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education)



## LIST OF APPENDIXES

- A Title page
- B Declaration of Authenticity
- C Dissertation Status Verification Form
- D Example of appendixes
- E Example of *Abstrak*
- F Example of Abstract
- G Example of Content Pages
- H Example of Table List
- I Example of List of Figures
- J Example of Abbreviations





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Background of the Study

In chapter 1, the researcher discusses research background, problem statement, research purposes, research objectives, hypotheses, and research design. Additionally, the significance and limitations of the study are elaborated on, along with the definition of terms.

The English language is recognized as one of the most required mediums of instruction in this civilization era. Over the past century, the English language has encountered immense development worldwide. Since then, it has become a universal language used for communication in various sectors including finance, administration, and education. This evolution underscores the escalating prerequisite for the English language over the centuries, evident in its adoption as either a second language or a





foreign language in many countries around the globe. Most of the Asian countries, such as Singapore, Nepal, China, Philippines, and India, use English as their second language. Despite this, in Asian countries, English is a compulsory subject in their education policies (Kawaguchi, 2021).

In Malaysia, English has been broadcasted as the second language since British colonization. In conjunction with this, in 2016, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia implemented a synergistic assessment system under the Common European Framework of References (CEFR), which has been aligned with the English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum as well as the formative and summative assessments under the umbrella of school-based assessment (SBA). Since then, SBA has been implemented to improve the teaching and learning experience in all public schools in Malaysia (Sidhu et al., 2018).



In addition to that, having good literacy in English has become one of the prerequisites for university entry in Malaysia. Therefore, the Sijil Penilaian Malaysia (SPM) school leavers are expected to score at least a band 3 in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) to enter the local universities. This illustrates the importance of English language competence in Malaysia.

Moreover, Malaysian candidates must have at least an average level of English literacy skills for the present job market to get hired for positions that match their expertise (Baharum et al., 2021). Unfortunately, most of the students were terrified to speak in English, which kept them from speaking (Yahaya et al., 2011). This claim is further supported by Noor Azina (2011), who emphasizes that most undergraduates fail to have a strong communication skill in English language due to fluency, improper sentence structure, unclear pronunciation, and poor usage of grammar. The





majority of students struggle to use proper grammar (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). Therefore, grammar is crucial in language learning either in written or oral form (Rossiter, 2021). Qasserras (2023), further claims that grammar provides the structure of language in order to have an accurate meaning and dimension. In materializing this goal, educators play an essential role in ensuring that second language learners can master the target language successfully. Creativity and innovation skills are a significant part of 21st-century learning; teachers are encouraged to use a wide range of idea creation techniques in teaching (Pearson, 2010). According to Sani (2019), most teaching methods do not appeal to or meet students' expectations of language learning. Students find it challenging to learn English grammar independently, where they need to summarise the grammar rules by themselves.

Over the decades, diverse methods have been utilised in teaching grammar.

Teaching grammar began with the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is a classical method that emphasises grammatical rules and translating sentences to the native and target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 11). Following that, the direct method was utilised in grammar teaching (Qasserras, 2023). The direct method is a natural method used to communicate by associating speech forms (Batool et al., 2017). Furthermore, the audio-lingual method emphasised grammar teaching through drill practice (Qasserras, 2023). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) also utilises grammar teaching by focusing on communicative competence in functional grammar (Qasserras, 2023). In general, these methods emphasise deriving the rules at the beginning, which are known as deductive methods. This is because teachers can save time by teaching the grammar rules directly instead of drilling the students on summarising the grammar rules by themselves (Deng & Lin, 2016).





Besides that, with the constant use of the rule-driven teaching approach and lack of creativity and variety, students find a lack of motivation in the implementation of the rule-driven teaching approach in an ESL classroom (Nur, 2020). Furthermore, one study shows that the rule-driven approach may be off-putting to some students, particularly those who struggle with abstract rule memorisation and require more contextually driven learning experiences (Smith, 2021). These students often find traditional methods uninspiring and disconnected from real-life communication needs. As a result, alternative approaches that integrate creativity and practical application are becoming increasingly significant. Recent research advocates for more engaging and interactive methods, such as task-based learning, where grammar is taught through meaningful tasks rather than isolated drills (Ellis, 2017). This approach helps students apply grammar rules in context, making the learning process more relevant and less monotonous.



In summary, while traditional methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method have laid the groundwork for grammar instruction, contemporary teaching practices are evolving towards more innovative and student-centred approaches. Emphasising creativity, practical application, and varied methods not only addresses the challenges of traditional methods but also meets students' diverse learning needs in the 21st century. To enhance second language learners' interest and engagement in learning English grammar, it is crucial for English language teaching to be more engaging and interesting, integrating interactive and contextually relevant practices that foster a deeper connection with the material.





### 1.1.1 The Implementation of CEFR in Current ESL Classrooms

In late 1957, after the independence of Malaya, the Malay language was established as the national language in Malaysia, while English was designated as the second language, primarily for administrative purposes. This dual-language policy laid the foundation for Malaysia's bilingual education system.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia reformed the curriculum by implementing a synergistic assessment system under the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) - aligned ESL curriculum. This reform integrated both formative and summative assessments under the school-based Assessment (SBA) framework to enhance the teaching and learning process in public schools (Sidhu et al., 2018). The CEFR is an international standard for describing language ability, and its implementation aims to produce an English language programme that meets global benchmarks while improving educational quality across Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

English is one of Malaysia's official languages, alongside Malay, which is the national language. Mandarin and Tamil are recognised as vernacular languages, reflecting the country's multicultural and multilingual society (David & Manan, 2016). In 1988, the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM) was introduced at the secondary school level to build upon the primary education framework and ensure a consistent educational progression (Nii & Yunus, 2022).

The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 was established to transform the education system to meet international standards. The blueprint outlines a comprehensive plan, with its current phase focusing on consolidating best practices





and advancing educational quality. One key objective is to develop six core elements in learners: knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingualism, ethnic and spiritual identity, and national identity (Nii & Yunus, 2022).

In preparation for CEFR implementation, the Ministry of Education Malaysia conducted the Cambridge Baseline report in 2013. This study documented recommendations based on factors such as teachers' performance, lesson observations, and various contextual elements. It also highlighted the challenges and criticisms associated with importing European textbooks, which replaced locally produced materials, sparking debate among educators and stakeholders (Nii & Yunus, 2022).

CEFR emphasises the development of communication skills to improve learners' proficiency across all four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The framework encourages a shift from a purely examination-based approach to one that fosters practical language use and intercultural competence (Abidin & Hashim, 2021). This approach aims to prepare learners for real-world communication and opportunities, reducing the barriers posed by limited English proficiency.

The CEFR syllabus also incorporates 21st-century learning skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. By integrating innovative teaching methods like the Apron Storytelling Approach, educators can effectively address the demands of modern language education and better engage students in mastering English grammar.





### 1.1.2 Apron Storytelling Approach

Inductive and rule-driven approaches are common theoretical approaches that have been practiced in ESL classrooms for decades. The rule-driven approach, often referred to as a more traditional form of teaching, offers a structured method where grammatical rules are explicitly taught (Temperley et al., 1978). In contrast, the inductive approach, a more recent learner-centred method, provides grammatical rules within real-world contexts (Nur, 2020).

The rule-driven approach, rather than the inductive approach, is preferred by many aspiring instructors to generate proof (Siswono et al., 2020). Consequently, students may experience a lack of motivation, rigid rote learning, and diminished interest in language learning (Kassem, 2018). As educational practices evolve, new teaching strategies and approaches have emerged, including creative teaching methods like the Apron Storytelling Approach.

The Apron Storytelling Approach involves using a piece of clothing adorned with symbolic elements to create scenes from a narrative. This approach was selected because storytelling can develop various learning strategies for English, such as inferring the meaning of new words, memory training, and self-testing (Dujmovic, 2006). Storytelling, tales, and songs can engage students and support their writing and speaking skills (Bartan, 2020). Research indicates that storytelling can also aid in visual perception development (Merchant & Thomas, 2013). Given its popularity in promoting literacy development, the Apron Storytelling Approach may offer valuable learning experiences.



Learning and teaching that focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration are fundamental in preparing students for the 21st century. Therefore, incorporating creative teaching methods, such as the Apron Storytelling Approach, into ESL classrooms could be beneficial. This approach may help create a more engaging learning environment, potentially improving language acquisition. However, the impact of such methods can vary depending on implementation and student responses. Creative teaching, often linked with literature, contrasts with traditional grammar instruction, which frequently involves rote memorization of rules.

Grammar teaching has long been a focus of research, with the importance of linguistic use widely recognised (Alzu'bi, 2015). Learning and mastering English grammar can be challenging for second language learners, partly due to the common reliance on rote learning and mechanical memorisation of rules. These traditional methods may sometimes contribute to reduced engagement and interest in language learning (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021). This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach in enhancing students' grammar learning performance. Additionally, the study seeks to describe a systematic way of implementing the Apron Storytelling Approach and explore its potential based on students' performance in grammar tests. This research could help teachers generate more ideas for creative lesson planning, especially in teaching English grammar.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Language can be defined as a medium of communication in speech and writing that is



used to interact with people in a particular region or country. Language consists of main components such as phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, syntax, and context. Moreover, meaningful communication develops through semantics, grammar, and pragmatics. Grammar illustrates how a language is structured in various ways (Rossiter, 2021). The structure is still vital to teach in English classes, and while teaching structure has become a contentious issue in recent years, grammar instruction has reclaimed its appropriate place in language curricula (Handayani & Johan, 2018). However, low proficiency in grammar has severely constrained learners' language development. Hence, learning grammar is a crucial component of language learning, as it provides foundational knowledge that supports effective communication and comprehension (Handayan & Johan, 2018). It is also important to recognise that other aspects of language acquisition, such as vocabulary development and practical usage, play significant roles in achieving proficiency.



Furthermore, languages are natural forms of communication where children acquire their first language without formal education (Zascerinska, 2010). Second language learning often involves a conscious process, which can include formal learning environments or self-study programmes (Zascerinska, 2010). However, it is important to acknowledge that second language acquisition can also occur through informal and immersive experiences, which significantly contribute to language development.

On average, Malaysian students spend almost 11 to 12 years in primary and secondary education learning the English language, yet many are still not able to master it (Subramaniam, Amin & Yamat, 2017). Particularly in the usage of grammar, students face difficulties understanding "exceptions to the grammar rules" (Haynes,





2005). The process of learning a second language is significantly influenced by a variety of factors, such as one's attitude, level of self-assurance, motivation, time spent immersed in the language, classroom atmosphere, family background, and availability of expert teachers (Haynes, 2005). According to Selvi (2011), the competence of the teacher is another critical factor that influences the acquisition of a second language. A teacher must not only be fluent in the language but also possess a high level of knowledge and expertise in language teaching approaches.

Most undergraduates fail to develop strong communication skills in English due to fluency issues, improper sentence structure, unclear pronunciation, and poor usage of grammar. Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) further claim that the majority of students struggle to use proper grammar. Research suggests that mastering grammar could help ESL learners improve their speaking fluency (Shakir & Mahmood, 2021).



Based on the researcher's prior and current experience of working in primary schools, students learn by rule-driven approaches. The students' performance and competence in English literacy has been far from satisfactory. Therefore, extending grammar teaching through creative approaches is necessary to improve student outcomes. One such creative method that has shown potential is the Apron Storytelling Approach. Traditional teaching methods may not always engage today's learners effectively, and thus, there is a growing emphasis on incorporating more innovative and creative strategies in ESL classrooms to better align with contemporary pedagogical approaches.

The Apron Storytelling Approach stands as a promising solution to these challenges. The approach combines storytelling with visual cues to help students engage with language rules in a more interactive and enjoyable way. The apron, worn





by the teacher, features pictures and symbols related to the story being told, and these visual elements assist students in understanding grammar in context. As opposed to rule-driven approach, which often isolate grammar as a set of abstract rules, this approach situates grammar within a narrative, making it more relatable and easier to grasp. Additionally, storytelling is a natural and effective way for students to acquire language, as it allows them to learn new vocabulary and grammar structures in a context that promotes retention and application.

In teaching English, the four essential skills – speaking, listening, writing, and reading are fundamental to language proficiency. Grammar underpins these skills, as a strong understanding of grammatical rules enhances the ability to communicate effectively in all areas. Despite its importance, research indicates that the most common approach used in grammar instruction is rule-driven (Adwit, 2020). This approach, while traditional, often leads to decreased motivation among ESL students (Dilshad et al., 2019). The Apron Storytelling Approach, by contrast, has the potential to address this issue by making grammar instruction more engaging and enjoyable.

Moreover, this approach supports diverse learning styles. Visual learners benefit from the images on the apron, auditory learners from the storytelling aspect, and kinesthetic learners from the interactive, hands-on nature of the activities. This multimodal engagement can improve student motivation and facilitate deeper learning, as students are actively involved in the process rather than passively receiving information.

The importance of language learning, particularly English, is widely recognised in today's global context. English, as a significant international language, requires dedicated focus and mastery from students. In the 21st century, where the



world is rapidly advancing, integrating 21st-century learning skills into education has become essential. These skills aim to foster critical thinking and creativity in students, preparing them for future challenges. Educators play a crucial role in implementing and adapting various teaching strategies to effectively engage students. Despite advancements in educational methodologies, teachers and students often encounter challenges in grammar instruction (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011). Historically, a variety of methodologies and theories have been used to teach grammar, with the rule-driven approach remaining dominant (Obeidat & Alomari, 2020).

This study, therefore, aims to explore the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach in teaching English grammar. By incorporating this innovative technique, the study seeks to determine its impact on student engagement, comprehension, and overall language proficiency in ESL classrooms. Through the lens of this research, insights into the potential benefits of creative teaching approaches like the Apron Storytelling Approach will be provided, contributing to the broader discussion on effective grammar instruction in ESL education.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- i. To compare the English grammar achievement between the rule-driven approach and the Apron storytelling approach, as measured by pre and post- test.
- ii. To examine the difference in English grammar achievement within the rule- driven approach and the Apron storytelling approach, as measured by pre- and post-test.
- iii. To investigate the perceptions of ESL students regarding the use of a

rule- driven approach versus the Apron Storytelling approach in English grammar lessons.

- iv. To compare the students' perception between rule-driven approach and Apron storytelling approach

#### 1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the significant difference in English grammar achievement between students who receive instruction using the rule-driven approach and those who receive instruction using the Apron storytelling approach, as measured by pre and post-tests?
- ii. What is the significant difference in English grammar achievement within students who receive instruction using the rule-driven approach and those who receive instruction using the Apron storytelling approach, as measured by pre and post-tests?
- iii. How do ESL students perceive the use of a rule-driven approach compared to the Apron Storytelling approach in an English grammar lesson?
- iv. What is the significant difference in perception between the students who received instruction using the rule-driven approach and the apron storytelling approach?

#### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The implementation of innovative teaching approaches in ESL classrooms is crucial for aligning with 21st-century education standards. One such approach is the Apron Storytelling Approach, which offers a creative and engaging way to teach grammar. This approach emphasizes learning and innovation skills, essential components of the 21st-century skills framework (Fadel, 2010).

One of the main advantages of the Apron Storytelling Approach is its low-cost nature, making it accessible for a wide range of educational settings. Unlike high-tech



solutions or resource-intensive methods, the Apron Storytelling Approach requires minimal materials, primarily a simple apron decorated with symbolic elements from the story. This cost-effective approach can be easily implemented in any ESL classroom, making it a practical choice for educators who may have limited resources.

The Apron Storytelling Approach also aligns well with 21st-century skills, such as creativity, critical thinking, and communication. By incorporating storytelling into grammar instruction, this approach encourages students to actively engage with the content, use their imagination, and develop their language skills in a more interactive and meaningful way. These elements are vital for preparing students for the modern world, where creativity and adaptability are highly valued.

Moreover, the implementation of this approach can address some of the challenges faced by educators, particularly those who may struggle with integrating new technologies into their teaching. Senior educators, in particular, may encounter difficulties in adopting ICT tools due to factors such as lack of training, motivation, or readiness (Raman & Yamat, 2014). The Apron Storytelling Approach offers an alternative that requires no advanced technology, thus enabling all ESL educators to incorporate creative teaching methods without the need for extensive technological resources.

In summary, the Apron Storytelling Approach presents a valuable tool for enhancing grammar instruction in ESL classrooms. Its low-cost nature, alignment with 21st-century skills, and suitability for educators with varying levels of technological expertise make it an effective and inclusive method for improving language learning outcomes.





## 1.6 Scope and Limitations of The Study

The primary limitation of this study is the relatively small number of participants, with only 40 students involved (20 in each of the two groups). This limited sample size may affect the generalisability of the findings. Future research could benefit from a larger sample to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions regarding the Apron Storytelling Approach.

The study focuses on four specific grammar topics: personal pronouns, adjectives, plural nouns, and past tense. These topics were selected in accordance with the Year 3 grammar curriculum, ensuring relevance to the students' current educational context. Future studies might explore the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach with a broader range of grammar topics to assess its applicability across different areas of grammar instruction.

Additionally, the Apron Storytelling Approach is being introduced for the first time, and its effectiveness is limited to this initial exploration. Expanding research to include various contexts and larger samples will be crucial in determining its broader applicability and refining the approach.

For the semi-structured interviews, only three students from each group were selected. Expanding the number of participants in future research could provide richer insights and a more varied perspective on the effectiveness of the approach.

Regarding the survey questionnaire, the current study required the teacher to explain the questions to the students before they completed it. To improve this in future research, efforts should be made to develop a child-friendly questionnaire with language that is accessible to young learners, allowing them to





understand and respond to the questions independently.

## 1.7 Research Framework

### 1.7.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study involves social constructivism and cognitivism theories. Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge according to which human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction.

Picciano (2017) highlights that social constructivism focuses on understanding teaching and learning as complex, interactive social phenomena occurring between teachers and students. In the context of L2 (second language) acquisition, this theory is particularly relevant as it underscores the importance of interactive communication and collaborative learning in developing language skills. This research will evaluate how social constructivism principles manifest through teacher-student interactions and student engagement in an ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom setting.

Additionally, cognitivism, which emerged as a response to the behaviourist approach that relied heavily on predictable stimulus-response patterns, emphasises the mental processes involved in learning. In L2 acquisition, cognitivism focuses on how learners process and internalise linguistic information, including understanding language structures and meanings. This approach supports the idea that effective language learning involves more than just rote memorisation; it requires meaningful





cognitive engagement with the language (Picciano, 2017).

Cognitive theorists advocated for the idea that the mind plays an essential part in learning, focusing on what transpires between the appearance of an external stimulus and the student's reaction. In this study, the cognitivism theory will be applied through the Apron storytelling approach. This is because literacy experiences in learning tend to create emotional connections in learning. Stories develop students' imagination and creativity, as well as offering different learning experiences to students (Bartan, 2020). Moreover, such a connection assists students' span, processing skills, comprehension, and memory in learning (Brand & Dalton, 2012).

In addition, stories assist the students' visual perception and lead to the discovery of new words or meaningful information (Bartan, 2020). Cognitive theory also emphasizes critical thinking, answers to difficult questions, and greater flexibility in understanding opinions other than their own (Doyle et al., 1998). Hence, this study employs cognitive skills through the Apron storytelling approach, such as attention, sensory-motor, auditory, social-emotional, and visual.



### 1.7.2 Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1.1**

*Methodology of Study*

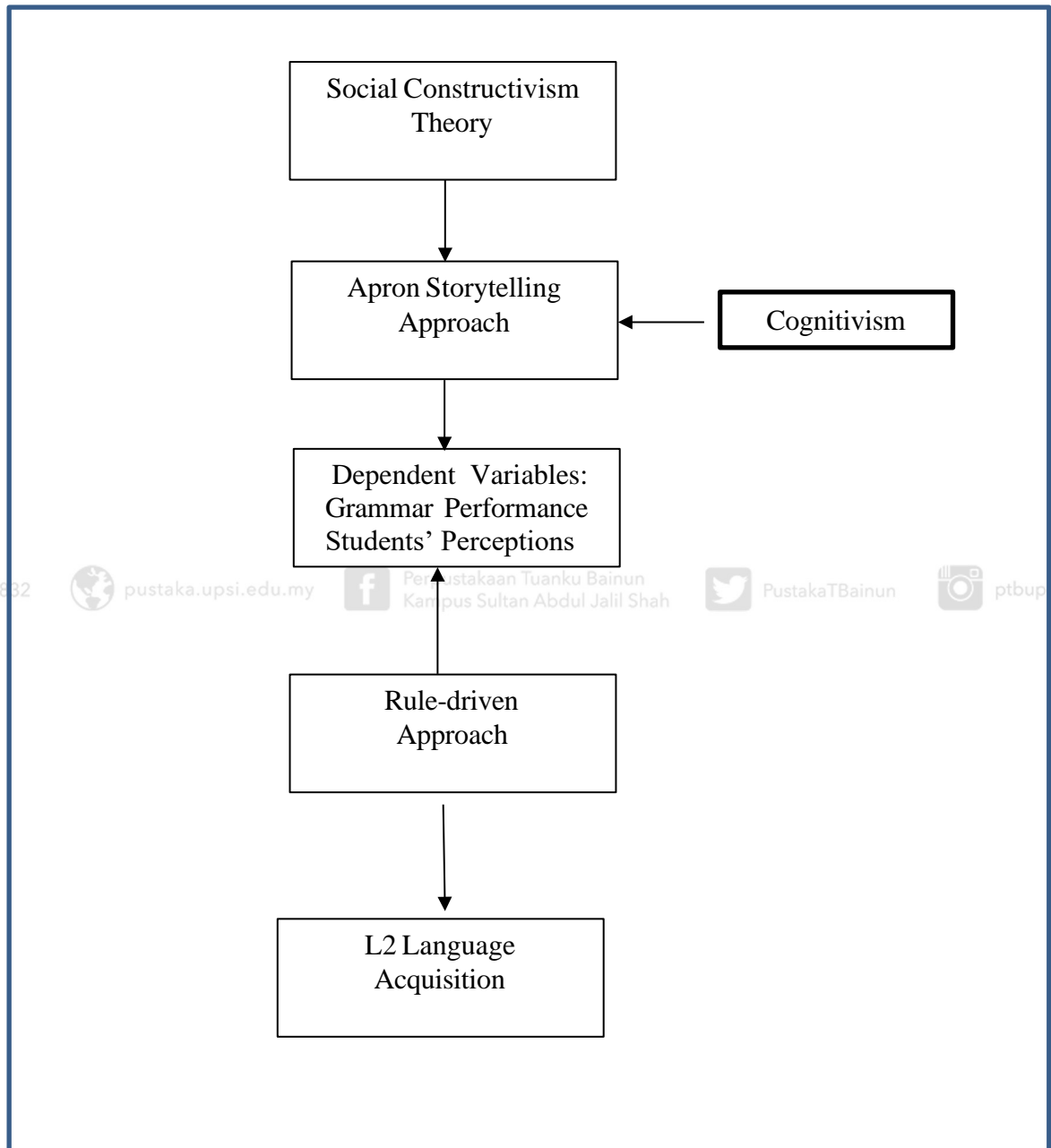


Figure 1.1 shows the conceptual framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach in teaching English grammar, integrating three key theories: Social Constructivism, Cognitivism, and L2 Language Acquisition. Social Constructivism posits that learning is inherently social, with knowledge being co-constructed through interaction and the use of cultural tools. In this study, the Apron Storytelling Approach is employed as a cultural tool to facilitate interactive and contextual learning within an ESL classroom. By using storytelling, this approach helps students collaboratively build their understanding of grammatical concepts, aligning with the principles of social constructivism as outlined by Vygotsky (as cited in Abderrahim & Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, 2021).

Cognitivism focuses on cognitive processes involved in learning, such as attention, perception, and memory. The Apron Storytelling Approach engages students' cognitive skills by incorporating focused attention, visual and auditory perception, and contextualised learning experiences. The effectiveness of this approach is assessed by examining students' responses to stimuli and their performance in grammar tasks, reflecting how cognitive engagement influences language acquisition (Picciano, 2017).

L2 Language Acquisition Theory addresses how second language learners acquire grammatical structures and vocabulary. This theory is used to evaluate the impact of both the Apron Storytelling Approach and the Rule-Driven Approach on language learning. The study explores how storytelling enhances language acquisition through meaningful input and interactive practice, in contrast to the more structured, rule-based instruction of the Rule-Driven Approach.

In this framework, the independent variables are the Apron Storytelling



Approach and the Rule-Driven Approach, each representing different methods of teaching grammar. The dependent variables include grammar performance and student perceptions. Grammar performance is assessed to determine how effectively each approach improves students' grammatical accuracy and understanding. Student perceptions are evaluated to gain insights into their attitudes and engagement with each method, thus providing a comprehensive view of their effectiveness in an ESL classroom setting.

The framework measures the impact of each teaching approaches on grammar performance and student perceptions, offering a nuanced understanding of their effectiveness in teaching English grammar.



The null hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- H<sub>0</sub> 1: There is no significant difference between the rule-driven approach and the Apron Storytelling approach in students' overall pre and post-test mean scores.
- H<sub>0</sub> 2: There is no significant difference within the rule-driven approach in students' pre and post-test scores.
- H<sub>0</sub> 3: There is no significant difference within the Apron storytelling approach in students' pre- and post-test scores.
- H<sub>0</sub> 4: There is no significant difference in perception between the students who received instruction using the rule-driven approach and the Apron storytelling approach.



The alternative hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- H<sub>1</sub> 1: There is a significant difference between the rule-driven approach and the Apron Storytelling approach in students' overall pre and post-test mean scores.
- H<sub>1</sub> 2: There is a significant difference within the rule-driven approach in students' pre- and post-test scores.
- H<sub>1</sub> 3: There is a significant difference within the Apron storytelling approach in students' pre- and post-test scores.
- H<sub>1</sub> 4: There is a significant difference in perception between the students who received instruction using the rule-driven approach and the Apron storytelling approach

## 1.9 Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design to evaluate the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach in teaching English grammar in ESL classrooms and to investigate students' perceptions of the interventions used. The research design comprised a three-phase process, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The research began with a quasi-experimental design, incorporating pre-tests and post-tests to assess the impact of the teaching approaches. This phase aimed to measure the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach in comparison to the Rule-Driven Approach. Both the experimental and control groups from two primary schools in Perak were assessed to establish baseline performance levels and to determine any changes resulting from the interventions.

Following the quasi-experimental phase, a quantitative survey was conducted to collect data on students' perceptions of the teaching approaches. This survey sought to quantify students' attitudes and experiences regarding both the Apron



Storytelling Approach and the Rule-Driven Approach. The survey results provided a broad overview of students' views and were crucial for addressing research questions related to their perceptions.

To gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Three students from each group were interviewed, resulting in a total of six interviews. These interviews, each lasting less than 10 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The semi-structured interviews comprised five open-ended questions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences and opinions about the teaching interventions.

The study was carried out over approximately 8 weeks. In the first week, pre-tests were administered to both groups to determine their initial performance levels and ensure homogeneity. The intervention phase, lasting 4 weeks from week 2 to week 5, involved applying the Rule-Driven Approach and the Apron Storytelling Approach in the respective groups. In week 6, post-tests were conducted to measure changes in performance following the interventions. Finally, in week 7, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions of the teaching approaches used in the study.

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design enabled a comprehensive evaluation of both the effectiveness of the grammar teaching approaches and the detailed perceptions of students, providing a thorough framework for addressing the research questions.





## 1.10 Operational Definition

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and clarity of the terms used in this study:

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** In this study, English as a Second Language (ESL) refers to the teaching of English to learners whose first language is not English, specifically within contexts where English is the medium of instruction in schools. These learners come from regions where English is an official or significant language (Cambridge University Press, 2022; Si, 2019). The focus of the study is on improving their grammatical understanding and application in an ESL classroom setting through comparative teaching approaches.

**Rule-Driven Approach:** The Rule-Driven Approach is a traditional teaching approach for grammar, where teachers explicitly introduce grammatical rules at the beginning of the lesson. Students are then provided with examples and are required to create their own sentences or structures based on these rules (Nunan, 1991; Thornbury, 1999). In this study, the Rule-Driven Approach serves as the control approach, against which the effectiveness of the Apron Storytelling Approach is compared through pre-test and post-test evaluations of grammar proficiency.

**Inductive Approach:** Although the Inductive Approach involves learners deriving grammatical rules from specific examples (Nunan, 1999; Thornbury, 1999), it is not the primary focus of this research. However, elements of inductive learning are integrated into the Apron Storytelling Approach, as students indirectly learn grammar through engagement with the story elements. This approach contrasts with the direct, rule-first strategy of the Rule-Driven Approach.





**Apron Storytelling Approach:** The Apron Storytelling Approach is an innovative teaching approach for grammar, where the teacher uses an apron adorned with symbolic images related to the story being told. As the story progresses, relevant images are attached to the apron, providing a visual and narrative aid to help students grasp grammar concepts. In this study, the Apron Storytelling Approach is examined for its effectiveness in enhancing students' understanding of grammar in ESL classrooms. It is compared to the Rule-Driven Approach through both pre-test and post-test measures, focusing on student performance and engagement.

**Effectiveness of Grammar Teaching Approaches:** Effectiveness in this study refers to how well the Apron Storytelling Approach and the Rule-Driven Approach improve students' grammar proficiency and engagement. It is measured through pre-test and post-test scores to evaluate improvement in grammar understanding, alongside student perceptions gathered through interviews and questionnaires. The operational measure of effectiveness includes statistical comparisons of student performance between the two groups.

**Student Perceptions:** Student perceptions refer to learners' attitudes, feelings, and feedback on the teaching approaches employed during the intervention. In this research, students' views on the Apron Storytelling Approach and Rule-Driven Approach are gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, offering qualitative insights into which approach they find more engaging and effective for learning grammar.

**Quasi-Experimental Design:** This study uses a quasi-experimental design where two groups of ESL students are compared: one taught using the Apron Storytelling Approach, and the other using the Rule-Driven Approach. Pre-tests and post-tests are





administered to measure the effectiveness of each teaching approach. The design lacks random assignment but ensures a comparative analysis of the approaches in terms of grammar performance and student engagement.

**Semi-Structured Interviews:** In this study, semi-structured interviews are conducted with students to explore their perceptions of both the Apron Storytelling Approach and the Rule-Driven Approach. These interviews provide qualitative data, allowing for a deeper understanding of student preferences, engagement levels, and insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each teaching approach.

**Pre-Tests and Post-tests:** Pre-tests and post-tests are integral to this study's quasi-experimental design. The pre-test assesses students' baseline grammar proficiency before the intervention, while the post-test measures any changes in performance after the use of the Apron Storytelling Approach and the Rule-Driven Approach. The difference in scores helps determine the relative effectiveness of the two teaching approaches.

**Teaching Grammar:** In this study, teaching grammar refers to the instructional strategies used to improve ESL learners' understanding of English grammar. The two approaches examined are the Apron Storytelling Approach, which integrates narrative and visual elements to facilitate grammar learning, and the Rule-Driven Approach, which emphasises explicit rule instruction followed by examples. Both approaches aim to enhance students' ability to comprehend and apply grammatical structures, with the research focusing on which approach yields better outcomes in terms of grammar acquisition and student engagement.





## 1.11 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher outlines the study's background, beginning with a historical overview of English education in Malaysia. It details the implementation of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) curriculum within the current educational system and discusses prevailing issues in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms. The chapter presents a clear problem statement and defines the primary objective of the research. Additionally, the theoretical framework is elaborated, highlighting how social constructivism and cognitive theory underpin the Apron Storytelling Approach used in the study. The chapter also addresses the study's limitations, offering insights for future research. Finally, it provides operational definitions of key terms used throughout the research, ensuring clarity and consistency.

