

# SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (SVA) HOP TO IMPROVE WRITING SKILLS AMONG YEAR 4 LEARNERS

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UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (SVA) HOP TO IMPROVE WRITING SKILLS  
AMONG YEAR 4 LEARNERS

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## RECOGNITION

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop and determine the effect of Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) Hop on Year 4 learners' writing skills. This study employed mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. A stratified sampling of 30 Year 4 lower intermediate learners was assigned. The treatment was conducted by using SVA Hop for four-week periods. The instrument chosen in this study were a set of pre and post-tests, three sets of worksheets, observation checklists and a semi-structured interview session. Data were analysed by using descriptive and thematic analysis. Descriptive analysis involves SPSS Statistics analysis of mean scores of pre and post-tests and three sets of worksheets while thematic analysis through Nvivo software describes interest in constructing simple sentences among Year 4 learners. The findings showed that there was a significantly difference between pre and post-tests and three sets of worksheets. The participants showed an improvement in constructing simple sentences from given verbs. It was observed that research participants enjoyed SVA Hop and were able to construct at least four sentences correctly based on the pictures given verbally and in written form. Besides, data from semi-structured interview showed that learners were interested in constructing simple sentences after intervention of SVA Hop. The implication of the study indicated that SVA Hop has improved Year 4 learner's basic writing skills in constructing simple sentences by using correct subject-verb agreement. It helps learners in completing their homework, answering quiz and constructing simple sentences in essay writing. In addition, it aids the ESL teachers to conduct grammar lesson in a fun and engaging way. This study reflects that social and conducive environment factors play a large role in empowering the community through social interaction. Overall, the study shows SVA Hop could enhance basic writing skills among ESL learners in an ESL classroom. It helps learners to pick up grammar rules in a conducive environment.

Key words: Subject-verb agreement, SVA Hop, SPSS Statistics, Nvivo Software, sentence writing, grammar rules

## KESAN APLIKASI SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (SVA) HOP TERHADAP KEMAHIRAN MENULIS PADA PEMBELAJARAN TAHUN 4

### ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membangunkan dan menentukan kesan Hop Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) terhadap kemahiran menulis pelajar Tahun 4. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan kuantitatif campuran. Persampelan berstrata 30 pelajar tahun 4 rendah telah diberikan. Rawatan dijalankan dengan menggunakan SVA Hop selama empat minggu. Instrumen yang dipilih dalam kajian ini ialah satu set ujian pra dan pasca, tiga set lembaran kerja, senarai semak pemerhatian dan sesi temu bual separa berstruktur. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis deskriptif dan tematik. Analisis deskriptif melibatkan analisis Statistik SPSS bagi skor min ujian pra dan pasca serta tiga set lembaran kerja manakala analisis tematik melalui perisian Nvivo menggambarkan minat membina ayat mudah dalam kalangan pelajar Tahun 4. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara ujian pra dan pasca dan tiga set lembaran kerja. Para peserta menunjukkan peningkatan dalam membina ayat mudah daripada kata kerja yang diberi. Diperhatikan bahawa peserta kajian menggemari SVA Hop dan dapat membina sekurang-kurangnya empat ayat dengan betul berdasarkan gambar yang diberikan secara lisan dan dalam bentuk bertulis. Selain itu, data daripada temu bual separa berstruktur menunjukkan bahawa pelajar berminat untuk membina ayat mudah selepas intervensi SVA Hop. Implikasi kajian menunjukkan bahawa SVA Hop telah meningkatkan kemahiran asas menulis murid Tahun 4 dalam membina ayat mudah dengan menggunakan persetujuan subjek-kata kerja yang betul. Ia membantu pelajar dalam menyiapkan kerja rumah mereka, menjawab kuiz dan membina ayat mudah dalam penulisan esei. Di samping itu, ia membantu guru ESL menjalankan pelajaran tatabahasa dengan cara yang menyeronokkan dan menarik. Kajian ini menggambarkan faktor persekitaran sosial dan kondusif memainkan peranan yang besar dalam memperkasakan masyarakat melalui interaksi sosial. Secara keseluruhannya, kajian menunjukkan SVA Hop boleh meningkatkan kemahiran asas menulis dalam kalangan pelajar ESL dalam bilik darjah ESL. Para pelajar berminat untuk bermain SVA Hop. Ia membantu pelajar untuk mengambil peraturan tatabahasa dalam persekitaran yang kondusif.

Kata kunci: subjek-kata kerja, SVA Hop, Statistik SPSS, Perisian Nvivo, penulisan ayat, peraturan tatabahasa

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ESL	English as Second Language
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
M.I.	Multiple Intelligence
MOE	Malaysian Ministry of Education
RECORECH	Read, Count and Recall Approach
SPSS	<i>Statistical Packages for The Social Science</i>
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering And Mathematics
SVA	Subject-Verb Agreement
WOG	Wheel of Grammar

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Background

In today's era of globalization, the English language is one of the most spoken languages around the world. It is an official language in 52 countries (UiTM, 2017). With the support of advanced technology, English language plays vital roles in many sectors such as medicine, engineering, education and international business world. In addition, this language places many people in a better position to secure work and also communicate more effectively with the people around the globe (Nishanthi, 2018). Language learning has been a part of academic curriculum. Learners are expected to practice and apply the language in communication.

In Malaysia, English language is considered as a second language and delivery of English language lessons are strengthened through grouping learners based on their skill levels and up skilling of all English language subject teachers which is in line

with Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013). English curriculum comprises listening skills, speaking skills, writing skills, and reading skills. Writing has been considered as an essential skill in English as it assists to strengthen vocabulary, grammar, thinking, planning, editing and revising. According to Dunsmuir and his team (2015), the areas of writing focus on ideas development, vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Chappell (2011) stated that writing fosters communication and get the learners prepared for future employment.

Writing is also one of the difficult skills for the learners to master skills such as organizing and developing ideas and information, selecting accurate vocabulary and grammatical items in every piece of writing (Nik, Hamzah & Rafidee, 2010).

Furthermore, writing is a recursive process that involves at least four distinct steps (Bailey, 2019). In order to write effectively, there are several steps. According to Rao (2018), writing is a process which first starts with taking ideas and then transforming them into sentences. Trisnaningsih (2017) also claimed that writing is a process consisting thinking which is also known as collecting ideas, drafting, and revising that require all the skills. Goctu (2017) supported that writing is a complex combination that involves a series of producing a piece of writing but with the beginning of prewriting stage that comprises mastery of grammar rules. Maharani, Fauziati and Supriyadi (2018) disserted that writing comprises process and product. Therefore, writing skills is considered being mastered by learners when the pieces of writing starting from simple sentences are understandable to the readers.



Langan (2014) mentioned there are few basic principles for the learners to write effectively. Learners should start with a clear idea, good choice of words and also correct rules of SVA. In linguistics, grammar is a set of structural rules that influence the composition of words, clauses and phrases (Chomsky, 2009). Grammar rules help learners in developing thinking habit logically and clearly. When a message is delivered clearly without grammatical errors, misunderstanding and conflict can be avoided. A good grammar may lead to effective writing skills (Chomsky, 2009). In short, writing is an important skill as communication is not just about oral but writing. Writing is one of the most challenging skills in learning second language. Therefore, the basic principles play an important role in writing skills (Di Carlo, 2017).

Writing is a cognitive process that tests memories, thinking ability and express ideas successfully by using non-verbal command (Rico, 2014). However, learners face writing problems at different stages of learning. Rao (2018) stated that singular subjects have to agree with singular verbs and plural subjects have to agree with plural verbs. It is also in-line with Chomsky's concept of generative grammar that suggests that a set of rules can be applied to construct correct sentences. Chomsky (2009) also added that rules of grammar should be mastered by learners in writing skills.

However, findings revealed that Malaysian ESL learners face some problems in writing tasks (Nordin, Razak & Kassim, 2020). In Year 2019, UPSR results showed that 23% of candidates failed English Language Writing papers. Education director-general, It was found that the learners struggled in writing tasks and tests due to insufficient linguistic competence (Free Malaysia Today, 2020). He added that





writing skills were found to be less emphasized in the curriculum. These issues raised the awareness of teachers and parents.

A study from Michigan State University in Sweden established that writing errors are likely to arise among ESL elementary learners when the occurrence of agreement is not affected by the length of the post modifier (Pawliczak, 2015). For example, the sentence of “The paper, which contains ten items, allows us variety”. The subject for the sentence is „the paper“ but the learners tend to mix up with the modifiers and they confuse with singular and plural nouns. Frey’s study (2018) observed similar issues faced by the ESL learners. According to Jovanovic (2014), subject-verb agreement errors are typical mistake made by ESL learners. A similar finding occurred when 18% of the errors made by a Swedish ESL learner were SVA.

This is supported by Jamil’s study (2016) revealing that learners often commit SVA errors especially in essay section.

In Malaysia, writing is considered the most difficult skill among listening, speaking, reading and writing to be mastered by ESL learners (Deane, 2018). Learners feel it is challenging in order to produce a good quality piece of writing. In 2018, a study related to grammatical errors in English essay writing was conducted in one of the universities in Malaysia. According to Christzer, secondary level learners had difficulty in using proper English grammar in writing pieces (2018). They also claimed that usage of SVA was one of the most frequent errors found in writing since primary level. This problem happened even though the learners had gone through six years of English learning in primary level. They found that academic writing training was less engaging than other subjects that directly develop their professional skills.



Besides, an English Language study showed that majority of trainees in a training college from northern state of Malaysia committed basic subject-verb agreement errors in 2019. Trainees were found in facing problems in writing grammatically correct in terms of subject-verb agreement (SVA). The main problems comprised coordinated subject, agreement with preceding noun or clause and also notional agreement and proximity (Moses & Mohamead, 2019). In short, problems in subject verb agreement (SVA) occur since primary levels.

A clear understanding of SVA rules is important in constructing simple sentences. Learners are usually confused with rules of SVA. It is because learners tend to translate directly from their mother tongue. Table 1.1 shows the examples:

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*Direct translation from Malay language to English*

Malay Language	English
Siti pergi ke sekolah	Siti go to school.

According to Munawar and Chaudhary (2019), novice learners are not used to using interactive or imagining in perceptions, interests and requirements. The sentence in the table is directly translated without considering the grammar rules. Singh (2017) specified that the learners' first language has always caused negative transfer in the learning of the second language in constructing sentence. As a result, learners rely on their mother tongue by translating from their mother tongue into English when they write. Based on Li and Razali's research in Year 2019, the dominant reason of SVA



error is interlingua transfer which is also known as direct translation from their mother tongue. They also elaborated that learners tend to translate directly from the language that they know regardless their age and language background.

According to Ibnian (2017), drilling as a technique should be implemented in order to accomplish learning objectives in the classroom. Ien (2017) supported that drilling of basic structural patterns and grammatical rules of a language helps to train the learners. However, memorising the same grammar rules and same sentence patterns may demotivate the learners (Iaremenko, 2017). Bell (2016) supported that repetition in drilling makes the lesson boring. There will be limitations and specifications to what is being drilled in the class. In addition, memorization of grammar rules is not in line as Malaysian Education Blueprint stated that syllabus is required to be taught in context and more meaningful way (Ministry of Education, 2019).

There are many ways in teaching grammar in an ESL classroom. Alsied, Ibrahim and Pathan (2018) stated that different ways in teaching grammar helps learners to overcome grammar difficulties. Therefore, the choice of activity is important in order to deliver a certain grammar rule. According to Bell (2016), materials in the classroom provide a stimulus to the learners as the materials help to organize the teaching and learning process by providing clear structure that guides the learners throughout the activities. Nunan's Model (2004) showed that the goals of the activities must be clear. He pointed that goals are related to the task and the elements in curriculum. Nunan (2004) also added that the activities carried out must be in line with the real world. It is to ensure learners combine their knowledge, production and



interaction in learning. Thus, the rationale for conducting this study is to investigate the importance of SVA in enhancing learner's writing skills.

Writing skills in this research refers to the ability to construct simple sentences without any Subject-verb agreement (SVA) error. SVA Hop was being chosen in this study over other language games such as snake and leader, finding partners and memory games because SVA Hop focused on movements and drilling of basic SVA rules. This game suited primary learners who were active and sporty but needed drilling SVA rules.

In Malaysia, writing is considered the most difficult skill among listening, speaking, reading and writing to be mastered by ESL learners (Toprak, 2019). Learners feel it is challenging in order to produce a good quality piece of writing. In 2018, there was a study related to grammatical errors in English essay writing conducted in UiTM. According to Yusof (2018), tertiary level learners had difficulty in using proper English grammar in writing pieces. They also claimed that usage of SVA was one of the most frequent errors found in writing. The researcher faced the same problem whereby Year 4 learners faced problem in constructing simple sentences that involve subject-verb agreement. This problem happened even though the learners had gone through six years of English learning in primary level.



Researcher found that academic writing training was less engaging than other subjects that directly develop their professional skills.

An English Language study showed that majority of trainees in a training college from northern state in Malaysia committed subject-verb agreement errors in 2017. Trainees were found in facing problems in writing grammatically correct in terms of subject-verb agreement (SVA). The main problems comprised coordinated subject, agreement with preceding noun or clause and also notional agreement and proximity (Singh, 2017). The same problem occurred among the researcher's Year 4 learners as they could not identify singular or plural verbs that take after a singular or plural subject. They tend to mix up both. The researcher and Year 4 English teachers found out the problem through learners' writing pieces, tests and examination. After drilling of SVA worksheets in the classroom, the problem of subject-verb agreement (SVA) still exists. Therefore, SVA is being focused in this study in order to solve the same problem faced by Year 4 learners.

Activities that have goals and rules are important for learners to acquire the language while they are having their fun time (Sato & Oyanedel, 2019). Language game is one of the most important components primary school. The advantages of games include increase learning motivation and encourage creative use of language (Akdogan, 2017). It also encourages learners to interact and communicate with each other. Due, Riggs and Mandara (2015) also supported that creativity in learners can be stimulated by fun when their minds are more relaxed and less being tied by rules.

Besides, language games create a meaningful context for language use. Iqbal, Akhbar and Ahmed (2017) stated that learners achieve higher levels of cognition and







make connections with what they are experiencing when they are engaged in the games. Lin (2016) mentioned that learning through fun creates a natural affiliation among the learners. Fun is often linked to laughter and play that brings effect to human beings (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016). The change of lesson pace helps to keep learners motivated (Hang, 2017). Prasada and Martin (2019) explained that there is a hidden practice of grammatical patterns are provided through language games.

According to Lin (2016), there are few types of hopscotch games. „Hop“ implies jumping whereas „scotch“ refers to the lines in the game. During the past time, hopscotch game was conducted by throwing small things like pebbles, stones and marbles into the squares. Then, the players started to hop. Mitchell and Jennifer (2016) mentioned that hopscotch is a good game as it involves multiple different ways.

Toprak (2019) supported that hopscotch helps learners to master body control and manage body rhythm while picking up basic grammar rules.

The previous research showed that hopscotch game improved vocabulary and speaking skills of learners from primary to tertiary levels respectively. The results showed positive findings. However, writing skill by hopscotch game was not focused by any researcher before. Therefore, this research focused on hopscotch game in enhancing writing skills. It aimed to examine the effectiveness of language game, SVA Hop helps in enhancing primary school learners' writing skills as it was not done in any levels of education.





In short, problems in subject verb agreement (SVA) occur from primary level among ESL learners. Therefore, SVA Hop is conducted in this study in order to improve learners' writing skills.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

In this research, the significance value focuses more on language game in helping writing skills. It is considered essential in curriculum as writing skill is one of the core skills. It also suggests one of the best games in enhancing writing skills. Language games bring a lot of benefits to the learners. The intervention, SVA Hop in this study is derived from hopscotch. It combines movement with pictures and grammar rules.

Therefore, it comes with a purpose of exploring a new intervention in order to teach subject-verb agreement (SVA). This intervention aims to improve learners' understanding in SVA rules.

In this research, it brought out the importance of aiding learners in identifying significant grammatical errors in SVA and also to help teachers in conducting suitable intervention in introducing SVA rules. According to Gardner (2006), games are related to a variety of intelligences. In this study, SVA Hop combines body movement and also SVA rules. Therefore, it involved kinaesthetic intelligence and verbal linguistics. Gardner (2006) proposed that a learner most probably possess a range of ability if he or she has the chance in participating activities that promotes any intelligence.



In addition, games aid teachers in creating useful and meaningful context (Toprak, 2019). In this research, when the learners are doing hopscotch, they tend to pick up grammar rules through play. This may create a positive learning environment and change learners' attitude in learning grammar. Moreover, it is hoped that the findings of this intervention would be in line with Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 stating that skill levels of learners and up skilling of all English language subject teachers will be strengthened (Ministry of Education, 2013). Therefore, SVA Hop was chosen as it was able to create a positive learning environment for young learners.

Finally, it is hoped that this intervention could be considered and implemented in the teaching and learning of subject-verb agreement (SVA) in order to create a conducive and fun learning environment.

#### 1.4 Purpose of Study

In this era of globalisation, language games are often used in a language classroom. Language games are often used as warm-up and also enrichment activities in an ESL classroom. It aims to create a meaningful context for language use in order for learners to interact and communicate. Language game of SVA Hop was chosen in this study. The reason of choosing language game in this study was due to the activeness of Year 4 learners. They were very active and sporty especially in games and it is hoped that their rules of SVA is improved through language game, SVA Hop. Therefore, the purpose of study was to investigate if SVA Hop helps in enhancing



Year 4 learners' writing skills. It also aimed to study if SVA Hop improves Year 4 learners' interest in writing.

### 1.5 Research Objectives

- To investigate if SVA Hop helps in enhancing learners' basic SVA rules in constructing simple sentences.
- To determine interest of learners in writing.

### 1.6 Research Questions



- Is there a significant difference in scores of the tests before and after conducting SVA Hop?
- How does SVA Hop affect Year 4 learners' interest in writing?

### 1.7 Hypotheses

- Null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): SVA Hop and writing skills are not related.
- Alternate hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): SVA Hop and writing skills are related.



## 1.8 Limitation of Study

There were limitations in this study. First, the intervention of SVA Hop ignored individual perspective and learning experiences as they were selected based on their proficiency level. In addition, they were chosen to determine the effect of SVA Hop despite their learning interest in classroom.

The second limitation is they did not represent the whole population of Year 4 learners in Malaysia. This study was conducted in a primary school in an urban area but not rural areas. Therefore, rural learners have fewer educational opportunities and exposure than urban learners (Baharudin & Yunus, 2018).

## 1.9 Definition of terms

In this study, three terms were used. They were subject-verb agreement (SVA), English as second language (ESL) and Subject-verb Agreement Hop (SVA Hop).

### 1.9.1 Subject-verb Agreement (SVA)

Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number. If the subject is singular, its verb must be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must be plural. There are different rules in subject-verb agreement. However, in this study, basic rule of

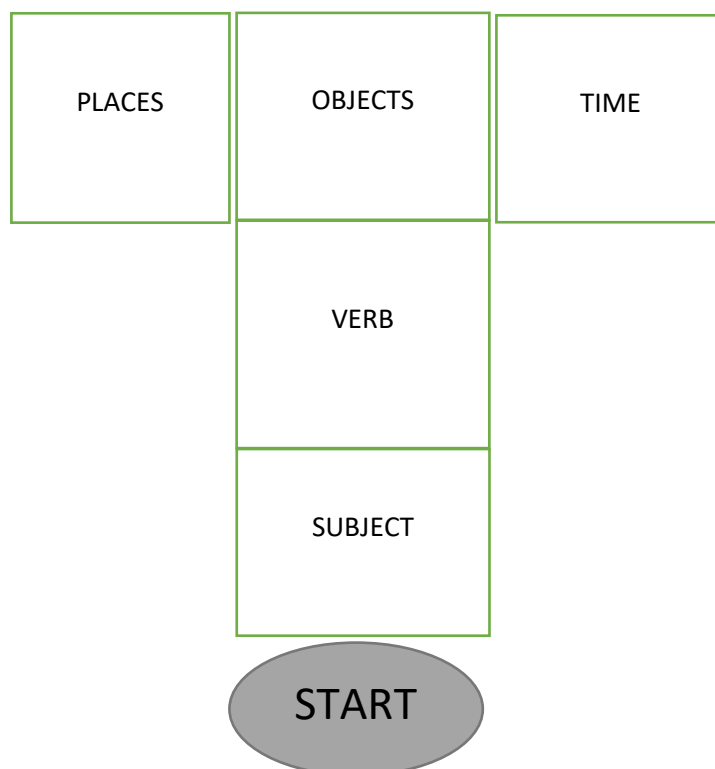
subject-verb agreement is being focused. A singular subject matches a singular verb whereas a plural subject matches with plural verb.

### 1.9.2 English as Second Language (ESL)

English as second language refers to learning English in a certain country where English is the main language and it is dominantly spoken. In Malaysia, all learners speak English as second language. Their mother tongues are Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. Therefore, it is quite confusing for second language learners to pick up grammar rules as they tend to mix up with their first languages. Most of them tend to direct translate from their mother tongue.

### 1.9.3 SVA Hop

Hopscotch game is widely used among young learners. In this study, hopscotch game incorporated with grammar rules. Therefore, SVA Hop was used in this study. Throughout this game, learners had to hop on the square written nouns, verbs and subjects. While hopping, pictures were shown by the researcher and they had to construct simple sentences verbally. Detailed picture of the game is shown in Figure 1.1.



*Figure 1.1.* Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) Hop

### 1.10 Summary

English plays a vital role in all sectors especially in education. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are essential skill in English. Integration of these four main skills helps to foster effective communication. Language games have been used in language classroom in order to aid learners in learning four main skills especially writing skills. It creates a positive learning environment for both teachers and learners. Therefore, it is hoped that SVA Hop can be considered and implemented in the teaching and learning of subject-verb agreement (SVA) in order to create a conducive and fun learning environment.