

USING PAST TENSE BOARD GAME (PTBG) TO ENHANCE YEAR FOUR PUPILS' MASTERY OF SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN WRITING

IRENE TIONG YING YING
ROSEMARY ANAK LAYAT
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irenetiong0162@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This action research investigated the use of Past Tense Board Game (PTBG) to enhance Year Four pupils' mastery of simple past tense in writing. The research was conducted in a sub-urban national primary school in Tuaran, Sabah. The research participants comprised eight Year Four pupils: five girls and three boys. This research aimed to find out how to enhance their mastery of simple past tense in writing as well as to investigate how PTBG can help to enhance their mastery of simple past tense in writing. McNiff and Whitehead's Action Research Model (2011) was adopted, which consisted of five systematic stages: observe, reflect, act, evaluate and modify. This study consisted of one cycle and three different instruments were utilised to collect data. They were observational field notes, semi-structured interview transcripts and pupils' works. These data were analysed qualitatively. The research findings indicated that pupils had improved in their mastery of simple past tense in writing by using PTBG. Firstly, PTBG had encouraged peer correction. Secondly, exposure to rules via language games had made the acquisition of simple past tense rules more likely. Lastly, infusion of fun elements in the PTBG had also enhanced their mastery of simple past tense in writing. Suggestions for further research include using different types of grammatical items such as irregular verbs and past participle verbs to further enhance pupils' mastery of past tense in writing.

Keywords: PTBG, simple past tense, writing, peer correction, fun, exposure to rules

INTRODUCTION

Undeniably, grammatical items are always looked at as a necessary part of pupils' learning. Despite a minimum of 11 years of learning English, Jantmary Thirusanku and Melor Md Yunus (2014) claimed that students' proficiency level is still below acceptable level and many have not yet mastered the basic grammatical rules specifically tenses. The most significant learning issue that I found throughout my three phases of teaching practicum was that my pupils would misuse past tense in their writing tasks so they failed to construct comprehensible sentences.

Subsequently, I conducted a preliminary investigation to determine whether the Year Four pupils that I taught during my third practicum were weak in the mastery of simple past tense. Based on the quiz results, most of the pupils were having difficulties in writing past tense sentences with the correct usage of simple past tense verbs. As shown in Table 1, 57.2% of the pupils scored relatively badly where their scores were ranged from 0% to 49%. It depicted that these eight pupils could not comprehend the simple past tense rules, so they had applied them wrongly in the quiz. Besides, responses received from the interview with Year Four English teacher confirmed that the pupils did face this problem in their learning. Therefore, I decided to conduct an action research to explore a strategy to enhance their mastery of simple past tense in writing.

Table 1
Results of the quiz

Grade	Percentages (%)	Number of pupils (/14)	Percentages (%)
D	40-49	3	21.4
E	0-39	5	35.8

FOCUS OF INVESTIGATION

Significance of the Study

Grammar is the backbone of a language as it provides learners with the structure that they need in order to organise and put ideas across. Pavan (2015) underscored that the wrong frame of the sentence will change its meaning and it leads to ineffective written communication. Pupils' problems in constructing sentences with the correct usage of simple past tense were on account of their first language interference, which is Malay as it has no tenses where a verb does not indicate time. Due to the different grammar rules in Malay and English language, it creates confusion and results in the wrong usage of simple past tense among the Year Four pupils. Thus, pupils should have mastery of past tense so that they can deliver their messages clearly and enable readers to understand what they write.

Practicality of the Study

Board games are one of the economic resources to teach grammar in ESL classrooms due to its accessibility. Teachers not only can collect constructive ideas for designing the template of board game by accessing the Internet but they also can download different types of board game from the Internet at any time and play the board game in a big class by using projector and laptop. Apart from that, using board game is also practical in the ESL classroom because of its adaptability and versatility. Priscilla (2010) pointed out that many board games can be adapted easily to personalise them to a particular lesson or group of pupils with the modification of the questions.

Workability of the Study

The use of board games in helping pupils learn English has been proven effective through some researches conducted. Andrew, Betteridge and Buckby (2012) mentioned that board games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. Their research shows that interesting board game is effective to internalise the language easily as the content chosen is related to learners' life. Hence, positive engagement in learning and internalisation of language enable learners to remember the content learned over a long period of time. Furthermore, Dewi's (2010) research in utilising board game in the ESL classroom as a means to improve pupils' understanding of simple past tense also revealed that the research participants understand the use and change of sentences based on the time signal of past event after playing the board game.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Objectives

Firstly, this action research aimed to explore a strategy to assist the Year Four pupils to enhance their mastery of simple past tense in writing. Secondly, this action research also intended to examine how the usage of PTBG can help to enhance the mastery of simple past tense in writing among the Year Four pupils.

Research Questions

- i. How can I enhance the Year Four pupils’ mastery of simple past tense in writing?
- ii. How can Past Tense Board Game enhance the Year Four pupils’ mastery of simple past tense in writing?

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The eight research participants are from a Year Four class with the age of eleven years in a sub-urban national primary school in Tuaran, Sabah. Five of them are females and three of them are males. These pupils were selected using purposive sampling method based on three major criteria. First, they had low English proficiency level and always learned at a slower rate compared to their peers. Second, they often use Dusun language as their medium of interaction in their daily life. Third, all of them come from low socio-economic background.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Plan of Action

In this research, I adapted McNiff and Whitehead’s Action Research Model (2011) as I found that it encouraged me to look into the weaknesses of the strategy then make constant modification. I had conducted one research cycle and three English lessons were implemented. The adapted model is shown in Figure 1 whereas the research procedures can be seen in Table 2.

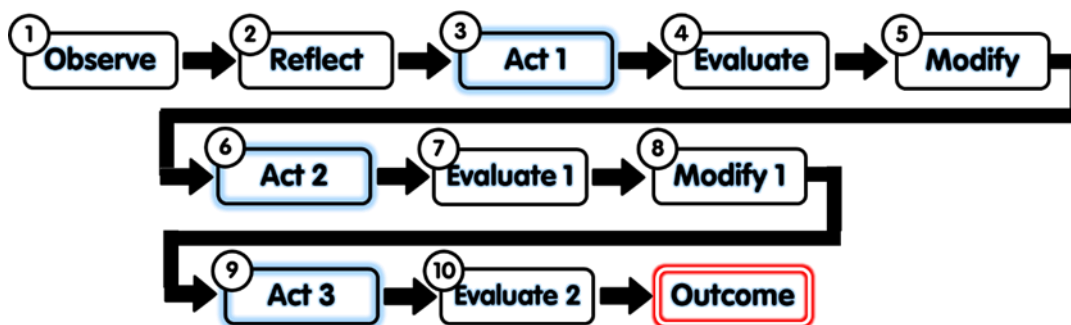


Figure 1. Adapted McNiff and Whitehead’s Action Research Model

Table 2
Procedures of research

Steps	Action(s)
Observe	I observed the most prevalent issue in English learning and collected the preliminary data.
Reflect	I reflected on the issue of concern (simple past tense problem) and planned the strategy to be used to solve this issue.
Act 1	I conducted the first lesson with the implementation of PTBG. I also distributed Worksheet A during the production stage. 1 st lesson: 60-minutes (Introducing the simple past tense rules)
Evaluate	I evaluated the data collected from observational field note, semi-structured interview and pupils’ work to identify whether the PTBG had helped to enhance the pupils’ mastery of simple past tense in writing.

Modify	I identified the strengths and weaknesses of using the PTBG and decided to modify the implementation of action plan 2
Act 2	I conducted the second lesson with the implementation of PTBG. I also distributed Worksheet B during the production stage. 2 nd lesson: 60-minutes (Constructing past tense sentences using keywords given)
Evaluate 1	I evaluated the data collected from observational field note and pupils' work to identify whether the PTBG had helped to enhance the pupils' mastery of simple past tense in writing.
Modify 1	I modified and increased the difficulty level of the questions pertaining to the simple past tense in each language games (e.g. In "Write it" game, fill in the blanks activity was replaced by writing sentences with keywords or verbs given.)
Act 3	I conducted the third lesson with the implementation of PTBG. I also distributed Worksheet C during the production stage. 3 rd lesson: 60-minutes (Constructing past tense sentences using verbs provided)
Evaluate	I evaluated the data collected from observational field note and semi-structured interview to identify whether the PTBG had helped to enhance the pupils' mastery of simple past tense in writing.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

In this research, the data was collected simultaneously using three different types of instruments namely 1) observational field notes, 2) semi-structured interview transcripts, and 3) pupils' works. The data from all three instruments were triangulated and analysed qualitatively.

During participation observations, I used observational field notes as an instrument to take notes about important details. According to Creswell (2014), field notes should contain descriptive and reflective information. Thus, I observed and jotted down pupils' responses, changes in their behaviours and any other important occurrences by watching to the videos recording of the lessons. I then thematic coding to organise and coded the data collected into a few themes to answer the research questions.

In the semi-structured interviews, I had interviewed the research participants with a list of questions prepared earlier and added questions spontaneously after the implementation of action plan 1 and action plan 3. The use of semi-structured interview allows interviewees to express their views freely using their own terms so it can provide reliable qualitative data (Cohen, 2013). The interview session was audio taped to ease the process of transcribing. I then transcribed and translated the interview from the audio tapes and presented it in table form. I used colour coding to code the important themes that were helpful in answering the two research questions.

As for the document analysis, I had distributed three different worksheets, namely Worksheet A, B and C after the implementation of the PTBG. Different types of items related to simple past tense in the worksheets were specifically designed to suit each lesson starting from the simpler items to the more difficult ones. These worksheets with different difficulty level allowed me to see development of pupils regarding their usage of simple past tense in writing. After marking the worksheets, I analysed the marks obtained by each research participant and presented them using

tables and charts. This was because Creswell (2014) highlighted that developing a table of sources can help to organise data for further comparison.

Data Interpretation Methods

In this research, I used method triangulation for interpreting my data. The rationale of using method triangulation is to overcome the bias inherent in single-method research studies or counterbalance the shortcomings evident in using a single research strategy as proposed by Thurmond (2001). Moreover, method triangulation is also effective to yield more comprehensive and insightful data to validate the results.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: How can I enhance the Year Four pupils' mastery of simple past tense in writing?

1. Implementation of the PTBG

Based on my findings, it revealed that the Year Four pupils had learnt better on the simple past tense rules with the implementation of the PTBG. Table 3 shows the pupils had shown positive development in their usage of simple past tense in writing.

Table 3

Excerpts of researcher's field notes on pupils' responses

Theme: Using PTBG to enhance mastery of simple past tense

OB1:FN1 'Most of the pupils managed to **write down the correct answer** pertaining to the questions provided.'

'Pupil A quickly shouted "wrong!" and was able to give her answer immediately when she realised her peer failed to do so. She said, "***tulis d di belakang live baru betul lah...***'

Observational Field Note 1/ July 12th,2017

OB2:FN2 'Pupil D could **write down at least seven verbs in past tense form precisely** before writing the sentences.'

Observational Field Note 2/ August 2nd ,2017

As shown in Table 4, positive responses given by the research participants proves that the use of PTBG had helped them to master the rules of simple past tense.

Table 4

Excerpt of Interview Transcript 1 (INT:1) with the pupils on the use of PTBG

Theme: Using PTBG to enhance mastery of simple past tense rules

Interview Question No. 1: Do you think the Past Tense Board Game help you to master the rules of simple past tense? Why?

Pupils	Interview answers	Translated interview answers (in English)
PA	Yes. <i>Ada empat tu yg baru belajar</i>	Yes. There are four rules that I

	<i>tadi. ada -d, ed... Sia dapat 2 markah utk kumpulan semasa jawab soalan di board game ni.</i>	learned just now such as <u>-d, -ed</u> . I <u>earned two marks</u> for my group members when answering the questions in the board game.
PD	<i>Ya. Senang ja.</i>	Yes. It was <u>easy</u> .
PH	<i>Ya. Sia dapat bina ayat lengkap yg betul. Tapi perlu bantuanlah.</i>	Yes. I <u>could write full sentence</u> but I needed guidance.

Interview Transcript 2/ August 9th, 2017

Furthermore, they had shown improvement in their results even though the difficulty level of the worksheets was adjusted. All of them managed to achieve 80% and above in Worksheet C after the strategy was implemented (refer to Figure 2). In short, the use of PTBG had enhanced the pupils' mastery of simple past tense in their writing tasks.

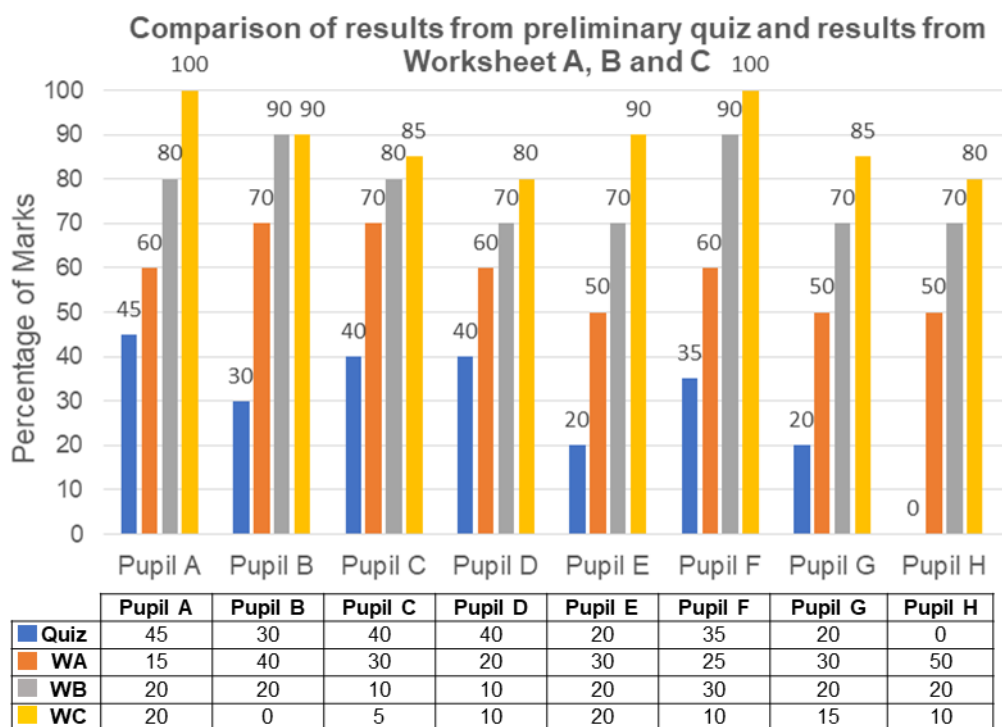


Figure 2. Comparison of results (Difference in percentage) from preliminary quiz and results from Worksheet A, B and C after implementing PTBG

Research Question 2: How can Past Tense Board Game enhance Year Four pupils' mastery of simple past tense in writing?

1. Initiation of Peer Correction

When implementing PTBG, peer correction initiated during interaction among the pupils helped to enhance their mastery of simple past tense rules in writing. With reference to Table 5, Pupil C who had mastered the past tense rules would automatically provide verbal guidance to correct the mistakes made by others. Meanwhile, the pupil being corrected would accept the correction sincerely and did not repeat the same mistake in her other worksheets.

Table 5

Excerpt of Field Note 2 on pupils' interaction when playing "Bingo"

Theme: Initiation of peer correction	
OB2:FN2	Pupil C took over the Bingo paper from his peer and said, " <i>tukar y tu kepada i dulu baru simpan –ed. Hahaha... bukan tambah ed terus di belakang.</i> " While she said, " <i>Alaaaaa, sia lupa sudah... Mesti ingat!</i> "
Observational Field Note 2/ August 2nd ,2017	

In addition, as shown in Table 6, pupils who had better mastery of simple past tense corrected the mistakes made by the weaker pupils. The weaker pupils managed to learn from their peers and avoided making the mistakes in their worksheets through peer interaction.

Table 6

Excerpts of Interview Transcript 1 (INT:1)

Theme: Initiation of peer correction		
Interview Question No. 5: Did you discuss the answer with your friends when playing the board game just now?		
Pupils	Interview answers	Translated interview answers (in English)
PA, PD	Ya.	<u>Yes.</u>
Interview Question No. 6: Did you correct your friends when playing the board game?		
PE	Miss... <i>saya.. saya demo macam mana mau tulis ayat tu. Lepas tu dia akan buat sendiri.</i>	Miss, I try to <u>demonstrate the way to write the sentence first.</u> Then, he will do on his own.
Interview Transcript 1/ July 19th ,2017		

2. Exposure to Rules via Language Games Enhances Learning

Engaging language games played important roles to increase pupils' interest and willingness to learn the past tense rules. Findings shown in Table 7 indicated that Pupil F could apply the rules when writing sentences correctly.

Table 7

Excerpt of Field Note 2 on pupils' responses when playing "Pictionary"

Theme: Exposure to rules via language games enhances learning	
OB2:FN2	'Pupil F spelled aloud the verb in past tense form instead of writing it on the whiteboard. She also managed to write a sentence using the verb provided correctly. '
Observational Field Note 2/ August 2nd ,2017	

Table 8 shows the implementation of a variety of simple past tense language games had offered more opportunities for pupils to practise their usage of simple past tense in writing. Eventually, they could write simple past tense sentences accurately.

Table 8

Excerpt of interview with pupils on carrying out different language games

Theme: Exposure to rules via language games enhances learning

Interview Question No. 2: Do you think language games help you to master the simple past tense rules better? Why?

Pupils	Interview answers	Translated interview answers (in English)
PC	<i>Ya. Selepas main, sia belajar.. boleh menguasai ed ,d tu...</i>	Yes. I can <u>master the (-ed, d) better after playing games.</u>

Interview Transcript 2/ August 9th, 2017

3. Infusion of fun elements

The implementation of PTBG brought fun and enjoyment in learning the past tense rules. Based on Table 9, pupils were having fun while playing the PTBG because of their positive reactions (eagerness to try and interested) as well as gesture such as clapping hands shown throughout the implementation of the strategy.

Table 9

Excerpt of Field Note 1 on the pupils' responses

Theme: Infusion of fun elements

OB1:FN1 'Pupil D and Pupil C **could not wait to start playing the game.** Pupil A shouted **"Wow!"** and **wanted to try it out** when "Pictionary" and "Charade" activities were introduced. At the same time, all pupils **sang the song loudly** while Pupil H **clapped her hands.** However, Pupil D managed to **act out the action even though she was a bit shy initially.**

Observational Field Note 1/ July 19th, 2017

Similarly, data extracted from Interview Transcript 1 (refer to Table 10) depicts that pupils loved to play PTBG as they exhibited positive body language (smiling and nodding heads) when sharing their feedbacks. Besides, they also uttered words such as "fun", "interesting" and "happy" during the interview session. It could be concluded that the infusion of fun elements in PTBG had enhanced their mastery of simple past tense in writing.

Table 10

Excerpt of Interview Transcript 1 (INT:1) on sharing opinions regarding the PTBG

Theme: Infusion of fun elements

Interview Question No. 1: Do you enjoy the lesson which Past Tense Board Game was used? Why?

Pupils	Interview answers	Translated interview answers (in English)
PB	Yes, Miss. <i>Syok dan tidak boring. Mau lagi.</i>	Yes, Miss. It is <u>interesting and not bored</u> . I want to play it again.
PH	Ya. Fun. (While smiling)	Yes. <u>Fun</u> . (While smiling)
PA, PE	(Nodding their heads)	(Nodding their heads)
PF	<i>Ya! faham sudah... macam mana guna past tense tu tuk bina ayat... bolehlah..</i>	Yes! I understood... <u>how to use past tense to construct sentence</u> ... Okay la.
PG	<i>Gembira. Sia suka buat aksi... di depan...</i>	<u>Happy</u> . I like to act... in front...

Interview Transcript 1/ July 19th ,2017

DISCUSSION

Discussion on the Use of Past Tense Board Game to Enhance the Year Four Pupils' Mastery of Simple Past Tense in Writing

My findings revealed that the Year Four pupils had portrayed vast improvement in terms of writing sentences using correct simple past tense verbs when PTBG was implemented in the lessons. PTBG had provided a platform for the pupils to practise frequently then enhance their mastery of simple past tense in writing. My findings is supported by Jeremy (2010) as he highlighted there is a need to focus on accuracy during certain task types by exposing learners with intensive practice.

Furthermore, I noticed the pupils were able to perform well in answering the worksheets consisting of a variety of questions with different difficult levels. This implied that they could understand the simple past tense rules and eventually transfer the knowledge gained to complete the worksheets after participating actively in the PTBG. According to Andrew, Betteridge and Buckby (2010), language games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. I confer with them because I had incorporated different kinds of language games which served as channels to help my pupils experience language through hands-on activities rather than merely study it through traditional chalk-and-talk method.

Moreover, I also realised that the internalisation of past tense rules among the Year Four pupils after I implemented the PTBG had successfully helped them in writing meaningful past tense sentences because they were able to apply the rules precisely in their writing tasks. This is verified by Hawanum (2014) who agreed that board game provides meaningful learning as it will lead to better long-term retention of targeted language item than rote learning.

Discussion on How Past Tense Board Game Enhances Year Four Pupils' Mastery of Simple Past Tense in Writing

From my findings, PTBG had enhanced the pupils' mastery of simple past tense in writing when peer correction took place in their learning. I found that pupils took the initiative to check their sentence construction and corrected the mistakes made with each other when writing sentences. They felt more comfortable when they were being corrected by their peers. Rollinson (2005) justified peer feedback is less threatening than teacher feedback so it evokes less anxiety among the learners. Additionally, I had given autonomy to the pupils to correct their errors as Dong (2016) asserted the involvement of peers in the correction process makes the classroom atmosphere more supportive. Thus, pupils were motivated in their learning.

Apart from that, it appeared that exposure to rules via language games also enhanced the pupils' usage of past tense verbs in their writing tasks. I reflected that the pupils participated actively throughout the implementation of the PTBG. Osae (2016) revealed that games are effective to grab pupils' attention and actively immerse them in English. In addition, the pupils could grasp the simple past tense rules better after taking part in these language games. Spolsky (2010) explained that pupils with higher interest are likely to learn more and learn quickly than pupils who are less interested. Consequently, the pupils in my research were found to show excellent performance in answering the worksheets.

On top of that, my findings confirmed that PTBG had brought enjoyment in my pupils' learning as they could comprehend the simple past tense rules easily which is the foundation to construct meaningful past tense sentences. According to Duff (2008), children will learn better if they are in a relaxed and enjoyable state. Krashen (1992) further explained that if the language acquirer is relaxed, it will be easy to learn the second language. I agree with them as the existence of fun elements in PTBG had promoted active learning among the pupils. My pupils were able to perform well in completing tasks that required them to use the correct usage of simple past tense. This was validated from pupils' improved scores in the worksheets.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The first suggestion is to carry out this research over a longer period of time frame as the proficient usage of simple past tense cannot be achieved in a short time. Therefore, a teacher-researcher may conduct this research as a half year effort in order to ensure pupils can work on their accuracy in constructing intelligible sentences. The second suggestion is to include a variety of grammatical items such as irregular verbs and past participle verbs to further enhance their mastery of past tense so that they are able to write different types of sentences with the correct usage of tenses. Lastly, it is also suggested that the strategy be used in a Year Three class, as teaching grammar for national school begins at Year Three in order to build up strong mastery of simple past tense for the purpose of improving the quality of their writing.

CONCLUSION

From this research, several conclusions can be drawn about the significance of using PTBG to enhance the pupils' mastery of simple past tense in writing. The study indicated the PTBG provided a platform for peer correction that had helped them to internalise the past tense rules easily. In addition, exposure to rules via language games enhanced their learning as well. Not only that, my findings also showed that the infusion of fun elements in the PTBG had helped the pupils to retain past tense rules so that they could apply the rules precisely in their writing tasks.

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