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DEVELOPMENT OF IM YUNIC FOR SVA LEARNING DEVICE FOR GRAMMATICAL PROFICIENCY

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Abstract

The study developed the IM YUnIC for SVA in response to a desire to offer an interactive, modern-inspired traditional learning device for teaching subject and verb agreement (SVA) among Grade 7 students. Adopting the descriptive research design, data were obtained from the interview with the cooperating teacher, the classroom observation using the device in two randomly chosen Grade 7 sections composed of 76 students of Nicolas L. Galvez Memorial National High School (NLGNHS) in Bay, Laguna, the test, and the survey. Data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Findings revealed that, based on the teacher's assessment and periodical test, the students' level of grammatical proficiency was "developing" with grammar being taught implicitly using teacher-made materials. With its interactive features

to enhance knowledge on subject and verb agreement, IM YUnIC for SVA was developed and presented to teachers and students. It earned positive feedback in terms of its appearance, impact, utility, and content. A ten-item test was then administered, and results showed that students mean scores were 5.51 and 5.05, suggesting that students need more practice. Hence, IM YUnIC for SVA may not easily develop students' grammatical proficiency, but it can offer potential benefits.

Keywords

Grammatical Proficiency, Grammar Instruction, Subject and Verb Agreement, Learning Device

1. Introduction

The role of instructional materials in grammar instruction has been central to the goal of enhancing the students' learning experience. As a form of support to communicative approaches in language teaching, various materials (i.e. text-based, task-based, regalia-based, and technology-supported) have been produced and used to improve the quality of classroom interaction and promote real communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Computers have become the most convenient resource in grammar teaching, and with the advances in modern technology, access to a wide variety of online materials to create a dynamic learning atmosphere has made teaching a lot less complicated.

A wealth of materials to establish the relationship between grammar instruction and computer-mediated instructional materials has reported varying results (Al-Jarf, 2005, Chen, 2006; NGU & Rethinasamy, 2006; Mohammad, 2009 as cited in Chien, 2011). Nutta (1998, as cited in Chien, 2011) found that computer-based instruction is more effective than teacher-directed instruction among post-secondary ESL students' acquisition of selected English structures. Nagata (1998, as cited in Chien, 2011) in his study on the relative effectiveness of computer-assisted comprehension practice and production practice in the acquisition of a second language revealed that output-focused program with grammatical instruction and production exercises is better than the input-focused program providing students with explicit grammatical instruction and comprehension exercises.

In the study of Abuse leek and Rabab'ah (2007), both computer-based grammar and teacher-driven grammar (chalk and talk) instructional methods are effective in teaching verb

tenses in EFL context. Chien (2011) indicated that CALL instruction was as effective as traditional classroom teacher-directed instruction for teaching grammar to students of different levels of English proficiency. Similarly et al., (2010, as cited in Arikan, 2014) found that English teachers can teach grammar adequately using either computer-based or paper-based materials. Computers are more effective in teaching listening, but when it comes to writing, paper-based materials are better than computers. Schools with sufficient resources to support an environment where students' learning can be individualized have witnessed improved outcomes (Abuseileek & Rabab'ah, 2007). While online access of activities for grammar teaching has become a worldwide phenomenon, Arikan (2014) reported that some online activities are still traditional in nature.

As grammar instruction is imperative in English as a second language (ESL) classroom, the role of instructional materials has continually been emphasized (Chien, 2011). In the Philippines, despite the growing attention to modern educational technology, the use of computer in grammar instruction in most of the public secondary schools is yet to be witnessed. Consequently, to translate the curriculum into concrete learning experiences, teachers, in the absence of computers, resort to the most common instructional materials that hardly help the students in improving what Richards and Reppen (2014) termed as grammatical knowledge and grammatical ability. Materials used for grammar learning do not motivate or encourage learners to remember and use what they learn. Structural activities, which are meant to be a component of pre-communicative activities for students to develop communicative competence, are presented most usually in pen and paper format that is unappealing to them. Hence, the lack of grammatical proficiency, especially in subject and verb agreement both in speaking and writing, has not been fully addressed.

To date, little is known about grammar instruction and the use of an interactive, modern-inspired instructional device using traditional materials for students in public secondary schools who have difficulty in subject and verb agreement. This study, therefore, aimed to develop a simple learning device, as an alternative to computer, for the grammatical proficiency of Grade 7 students in Nicolas L. Galvez Memorial National High School (NLGNHS) for A.Y. 2014-2015. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the current level of grammatical proficiency of the students based on the

assessment of the teacher and grades they obtained in the periodical test?

- What are the strategies and materials used by the English teachers in teaching grammar?
- What features of the learning device must be developed to enhance the level of students' proficiency in subject-verb agreement?
- What are the perceptions of the students and teachers toward using the IM YUnIC for SVA?

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The descriptive research design was adopted for this study. To obtain essential information and describe the status of the target respondents, the study used the combined qualitative and quantitative methods in developing the learning device for grammatical proficiency. It was conducted in Nicolas L. Galvez Memorial National High School (NLGNHS), a public school in Barangay San Antonio et al. The participants of the study were the 76 students from the two heterogeneous sections of Grade 7, randomly selected out of the four sections handled by the cooperating teacher.

2.2 Instruments

The study utilized the following instruments: 1) the interview guide to obtain information from the Cooperating Teacher and English Coordinator regarding the teaching strategies, instructional materials, grammar activities commonly used in the classroom, and the grammar proficiency of the Grade 7 students; 2) classroom observation; 3) IM YUnIC for SVA learning device; 4) the questionnaire to determine the teachers and the students' perception toward the device; and 5) the ten-item test to assess the target skill.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering was conducted from November 2014 to January 2015. A letter was forwarded to the principal of NLGNHS. The researchers interviewed the Grade 7 Cooperating Teacher and English coordinator to identify the most common problem that students encounter in using the English language and the teaching strategies and instructional materials employed in teaching grammar. The learning guide provided by the Department of Education (DepEd) was reviewed for the five rules in subject-verb agreement lesson.

The plan for the format, content, grammar usage, organization, and style of presentation of the learning device was submitted to the high school English coordinator (EC) in the locale and to the two English professors from Let ran for validation. Classroom size, font, color, wood, paper, and board among others were considered for the design.

Once the learning device was ready, the researchers presented the IM YUnIC for SVa to the teachers. Then, with the consent of the principal, it was introduced to the two Grade 7 sections. After the presentation, a test was given and questionnaires presented using the Likert scale were distributed to determine their perception toward the device. Their feedback served as the bases to address the parts of the device that should be retained, modified, or revised.

2.4 Treatment of Data

Data from the interview were transcribed, analyzed, and categorized. Test and survey results were tallied and tabulated for the mean and percentage.

3. Findings

3.1 Level of Grammatical Proficiency

According to the Cooperating Teacher (CT) and English Coordinator (EC), grammar lessons are very complicated for they have several rules to follow. Rules must be clear enough for students to use the language appropriately in a particular situation. However, whenever teachers explain the essential grammar points, students would find the grammar lessons less interesting. As a result, they would have difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences. Teachers would often check the students' error, particularly subject and verb agreement.

Results of the first periodical test in English grammar showed that the mean grades of both sections were 77.49 and 77.85 respectively. DepEd described their proficiency level as "developing," implying that they "possess the minimum knowledge and skills and core understanding, but need help throughout the performance of authentic tasks".

3.2 Strategies used by the English Teachers

The CT shared that the method they use in teaching grammar is implicit, a method that avoids the met linguistic discussion and minimizes any interruptions to communicate the meaning (Doughty & William, 1998; Brown, 2007). She stressed that through teacher-student interaction, new concepts are introduced in student-centered manner (Ellis, 2009). Teachers

provide activities indicated by the K to 12 ready-made lesson plans like popular songs, dialogues, role playing, descriptions, graphic organizers, and groupings or partnerships. Since students love to play, teachers would divert the ordinary grammar lessons into games to enhance the attention and interest of the students. They encourage students to use the English language through interacting and communicating with their peers. As observed, the teachers used the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, with emphasis on how to use grammatical principles into the context of effective language communication (Hall, 2011).

3.3 Materials used in teaching grammar

In NLGNHS, teachers primarily use the learning guide, which contains activities that need audio-visual equipment. Unfortunately, the school could not make it available for classroom use. Moreover, they were also given 240 books to be shared by the nine sections in Grade 7 but only few were left since they were soft-bound and prone to damage.

Thus, teachers had to be creative and resourceful; they had to develop their own material to make the grammar lesson interesting. Although teachers claimed that they create varied materials, the most common materials displayed in the classroom were the chalk and board, Manila paper, pictures, maps, charts, and hand-outs.

3.4 Features of IM YUnIC for SVA

IM YUnIC for SVA is a simple modern-inspired, traditional instructional material that aims to teach the five basic rules of subject-verb agreement (SVA), such as the sentences with intervening phrase, the singular indefinite pronouns, the plural indefinite pronouns, the dependent indefinite pronouns and the either – or, neither – nor sentence structure, to satisfy and assist the students to learn with ease, and to support the development of their 21st century skills and knowledge (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Its lesson is anchored on the K-12 curriculum structure of lesson plan known as 4As (Activity, Analysis, Abstraction, and Application).

IM YUnIC for SVA is a complete learning device that features the motivation, lesson, drills, and activities. The items presented in the whirling wheel expose students to real life language since they are asked to provide the subject and the verb. A springboard story that observes the five rules in subject-verb agreement is created with illustration. The lesson emphasizes the five rules since this is what the students need to learn to improve their grammatical knowledge and ability.

Activities, logically arranged from easy, average, to difficult, are incorporated to provide practice of the skill. The first activity is identifying the correct verb to be used. The sentences are written on the strips of paper and are placed on the sentence pocket holder, above the two rotating wheels. The second activity is determining whether the sentence is grammatical or ungrammatical. The students choose their answer by switching on the light above their chosen answer for immediate feedback. The disco light with twinkle bell sound serves as the positive feedback and reward to the student while the red light with the grounded sound serves as the negative feedback and punishment. The second activity is determining whether the sentence is grammatical or ungrammatical. The drill part can be played by one player, by pair, or even by group. The teacher may design the mechanics and variation of the game depending on the learners' needs or the strategy that the teacher wants to employ.

The last activity is sentence construction. Inside the mini door of the learning device, behind the sentence pocket holder, are ten strips of papers with five-letter words. The activity is to create a sentence that makes sense out of the initials of the given word. In order to make this game more challenging, the teacher decides whether this activity is played individually or by group.

In the study of Gaines and Curry (2011), colors impact student behavior within the physical learning environment. Thus, this device used yellow to easily catch the learners' attention, red to promote excitement, happiness, and positive reaction, and blue to signify a calming effect on the heart rate.

Using this device partially supports the task-based teaching approach, featuring fun activities for greater motivation, more opportunities for practice and repetition without boredom, and collaborative learning since it is similar to game-based strategy, which could be used for pair and group activity.

3.5 Teachers' perception toward using IM YUnIC for SVA

3.5.1 Appearance and Impact

The four Grade 7 English teachers found the device attractive because of its combination of colors used. They believed that it is a good enhancement tool since it can be used in conjunction with other approaches. Teachers, though, became aware that they must show

competence in English and mastery of grammar rules since answers to items are not readily provided. Interestingly, it should be emphasized that the knowledge of the teacher in using the instructional material is important because it needs a skillful teaching to make it more effective (Boiser, 2000 as cited in Adalin-Delicano, 2012).

3.5.2 Utility

For years, teaching entirely depends on textbooks, chalk, and board. With this device, the teachers found an alternative to enhance their teaching even in other subject areas. Since the material used was common and available in the school, the teachers could manipulate, change, or modify the topic to be discussed

3.5.3 Content

The content was aligned to the learning guide and the 4As (Activity, Analysis, Abstraction, Application) structure of K-12 curriculum. The teachers agreed that the activities presented in IM YUnIC for SVA were very appropriate and motivating to the kind of students they have.

3.6 Students' perception toward using IM YUnIC for SVA

3.6.1 Appearance

Majority of the students (55%) agreed that the fonts and letters of the device were readable and the warm colors were attractive (66%). Since the material could not provide animations and effects, the labels were manually manipulated by the teachers. However, there might be a need to modify the labels since only 47% of the students agreed that the labels were clear.

3.6.2 Impact

Majority of the students (62%) agreed that they felt motivated to study grammar because of its appearance, colorful paints, and design. Half of the respondents (50%) strongly agreed that the device was enjoyable to use because of its interactive feature. It was observed however that some students seemingly lost their interest due to the very long explanation of the teacher. This is where teacher training matters since one of the teacher's roles in a task-based teaching is to efficiently organize the activity (Van de Branden, 2006 as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

3.6.3 Utility

In terms of usage, students (46%) strongly agreed that the device was easy to use and also very

interactive (47%). Feedback was immediately given by turning on the lights that correspond to their answer and by pressing the button for final answer.

3.6.4 Content

Well-developed instructional materials must not only be attractive, motivating, and enjoyable; it must also have a relevant lesson. Balandó (2008) stressed that the vocabulary and concept level of materials should relate to the rest of the subject; moreover, materials should also contain enough content so that there is a greater chance for a student to learn something and not simply be exposed to something. Adhering to the goal of CLT, which is to teach “real-life” language (Hall, 2011), the device provided real life examples to align with the school’s method of teaching. Thus, students were given a ten-item test to determine if they were able to understand the lesson presented.

Results showed that majority of the respondents (60%) agreed that they were able to understand the rules in subject-verb agreement, and that students (47%) were able to relate with real-life examples used in the material. Finally, they (55%) believed that IM YUnIC for SVA is better than the instructional materials their teachers use.

3.7 Test after using the IM YUnIC for SVA

After using IM YUnIC for SVA, a ten- item test was given to the students, and results indicated that the mean scores of both sections were 5.51 and 5.05 respectively. Students had the same level of grammatical proficiency based on DepEd description, which was “developing”.

4. Conclusion

The study concluded that Grade 7 students’ level of grammatical proficiency was “developing.” Teachers supported the aims of communicative approach by employing implicit instruction in grammar instruction. However, with limited instructional materials, teachers resort to pen and paper alone for their structural activities as pre-communicative activities for their lesson. Thus, the lack of grammatical proficiency, specifically subject and verb agreement was partially addressed.

The modern-inspired IM YUnIC for SVA, as a pedagogical tool, provided a game-based learning activity with interactive features that could enhance the motivation, interest, and attention of the students. It was generally acceptable in terms of its impact, appearance, utility,

and content, and it could be used in the K-12 curriculum because it follows the 4As structure of lesson plan. Test results indicated the same level of grammatical proficiency based on DepEd description, which was “developing”. This implies that SVA rules appear complex to students; thus, students need more time to learn and master the lesson. IM YUnIC for SVA may not easily develop the students’ grammatical proficiency given a brief exposure, but through constant practice, it can offer potential benefits.

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