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Using “SuPerMan GAMLET Kit” to Improve Malaysian Primary ESL Learners’ Mastery of Simple Present Tense

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Abstract

Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) is significant in English to construct error-free sentences. However, most of ESL learners find it difficult to learn, particularly simple present tense. The integration of mastery learning and gamification in a flipped ESL classroom has proven effective in constructing grammatical knowledge. Thus, this action research was done to overcome their problems in mastering SVA due to their mother tongue interference, resulting in their sense of inferiority and reluctance in learning English. This action research used pre-test and post-test, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to measure their differences in scores and attitude towards learning English respectively. Five pupils who had problems in mastering SVA were chosen as research participants via convenience sampling. They were involved in using ‘SuPerMan GAMLET Kit’ that encompassed both in-class and at-home activities with self-composed song, digital storybooks and online games to consolidate their SVA mastery. The results depicted that they demonstrated improvement on their SVA competency after the intervention. Thus, it was evidenced that ‘SuPerMan GAMLET Kit’ successfully developed their SVA competence. The findings of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews also portrayed positive perceptions towards learning English amongst them. Further studies can explore the effects of ‘SuPerMan GAMLET Kit’ in acquiring other English grammatical items.

Keywords: Subject-verb AGREEMENT, SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE, SuPerMan GAMLET Kit, ESL Learners, Action Research

Reflection on Teaching and Learning

Grammar refers to the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to make the language meaningful. It is essential to recognise how a language works (Saaristo, 2015). Thus, it is significant to obtain adequate English grammatical knowledge for

an ESL learner to deliver the language to some degree of proficiency accurately. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that the ESL learners' failure to master the knowledge of Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) results in weak competence in English as their second language as identified by (James, 2013). It became worse as all educational institutions in Malaysia were shut down thrice which were on March 18, 2020, October 14, 2020 and May 8, 2021 due to a surge in COVID-19 cases in the country throughout the lockdown period as an alternative to avoid coronavirus spread during the pandemic (Tan, 2021). This resulted in the formation of learning gap and learning loss among Malaysian primary ESL learners as told by Deputy Education Minister, Dato' Dr. Mah Hang Soon (Zahari, 2021).

The observations done during the English lessons showed that most of them had not mastered simple present tense. This scenario is relevant to the study conducted by Kong (2013) that examined the verb errors committed by Malaysian Chinese ESL learners in a school in their written work. They tended to ignore grammatical rules of simple present tense by writing the root verb regardless of whether it comes with singular or plural noun as illustrated in Figure 1 and 2.

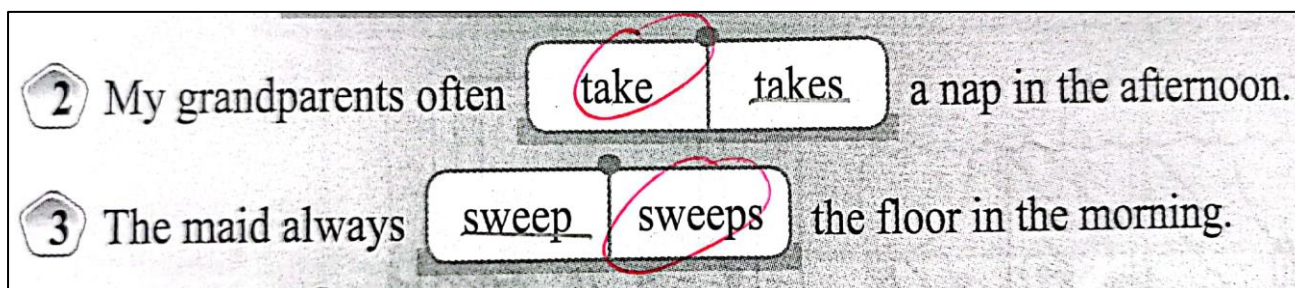


Figure 1: Grammatical errors committed by pupils

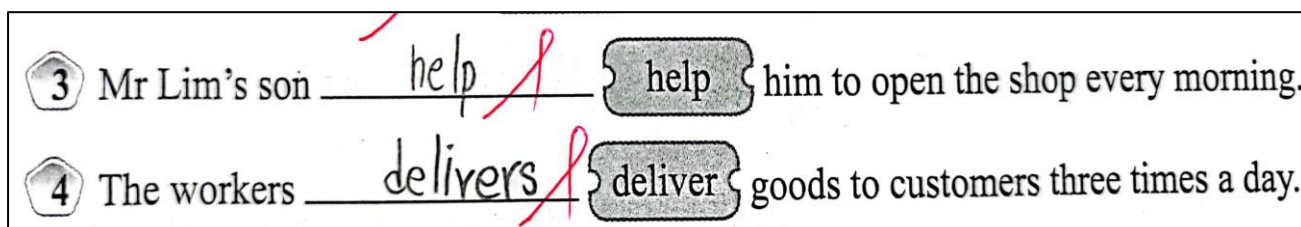


Figure 2: Grammatical errors committed by pupils

Figure 1 showed some committed errors in their language production (written work) including simple present tense, which is the fundamental of the SVA. Thus, this action research was conducted to reduce their errors of simple present tense committed in their work and enhance their level of interest and motivation towards learning English as well.

Research Focus and Objectives

This focus of this research was to improve the understanding of simple present tense among pupils of SJKC Peay Min, Teluk Ramunia. The action research was aimed to address the following objectives namely:

1. To assist pupils in identifying the correct verbs in simple present tense for singular and plural nouns accurately

2. To develop positive perceptions towards learning English among pupils after receiving the intervention for this action research

Research Methodology

Research Design

Action research design was used in this study as it involves the process of studying a real school or classroom situation to understand and improve the quality of actions or instruction (Johnson, 2012). This action research was conducted using Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) model that involved four main processes namely observe, reflect, plan and act. This study was conducted in one cycle where the pupils showed improvement after the intervention.

Research Sample

This action research involved five pupils in a Chinese national-type primary school. Convenience sampling, a type of non-probability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, was adopted due to the limited sample size in the school setting and easily accessible by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). The sample of this study was identified according to the analysis on observations, their previous test results, and preliminary study.

Research Instrument

As an attempt to answer both research questions in this study, there were three instruments used in this study, namely pre-test and post-test, questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. First, pre-test and post-test were administered to the participants before and after the intervention respectively. A comparison of mean and standard deviation was made via SPSS version 26 to determine whether there was a significant difference between the scores.

A questionnaire adapted from Teo et al (2021) with nine items was given to the participants after the intervention to obtain their perceptions towards "SuPerMan GAMLET Kit" quantitatively. Raw data for the Likert-items in the distributed questionnaires were processed and analysed using SPSS version 26 to obtain the frequency and percentage of each item as an indicator of the dispersion or spread of the scores.

Moreover, semi-structured interview was conducted with the pupils to elicit their perceptions towards the intervention qualitatively. Thematic analysis was done to highlight commonalities and patterns in the participant's responses with reference to their perception towards "SuPerMan GAMLET Kit".

Analysis of the Study

1. Issue Identification

Based on the participants' written work, it was noticed that the absence of simple present tense in Mandarin language leads Chinese primary ESL learners ignore the rule of addition of 's' and 'es' after the verb followed by a singular noun. This caused them making mistakes in the sentences constructed by them. In order to identify and investigate this issue in an in-depth manner, observation and self-reflective inquiry were also conducted in this study.

Observation

During the English lessons conducted by the researcher, it was noticed that most of the pupils still failed to master SVA rules in their written and spoken tasks. In their written work, they

tended to subconsciously omit 's' and 'es' for all verbs in their speech and writing regardless of whether it came with either singular or plural nouns. They rather used verb root for all verbs regardless of the tenses or nouns due to their mother tongue interference. In Mandarin language, there was no difference of the form of verbs based on neither the number of nouns nor the time settings. Hence, SuPerMan GAMLET Kit as discussed in the following subtopic, had been devised in order to rectify this problem.

Self-narrative Inquiry

Based on the observation and analysis on the participants' written work in their exercise and writing books, self-narrative inquiry was conducted using a list of questions validated by three subject matter experts. The findings of the inquiry were the pupils made such errors due to their inability to include the appropriate SVA results in the participants' dilemma in forming the sentences correctly. It was also noticeable that the participants faced problems in agreement as they could not make the subjects and verbs agree because the verbs did not follow their subjects closely, yet the number of subjects was unclear to them. Consequently, they wrongly matched singular subject with plural verb and vice versa. Therefore, the 'SuPerMan' concept was embedded with Gamified Home-Based Learning Model (GAMLET) to produce "SuPerMan GAMLET Kit" which aimed to improve their SVA competence, specifically simple present tense.

Planning of Intervention

The intervention was done using an innovation product named SuPerMan GAMLET Kit, which was the product of the combination of both the 'SuPerMan' concept and Gamified Home-Based Learning Model (GAMLET) to improve the targeted pupils' SVA competence, specifically simple present tense; it is a learning kit which is designed for Malaysian Chinese primary ESL learners who could not grasp the grammatical rules of simple present tense by introducing it in various forms such as song, storytelling as well as gamification which had been proven by various educational research that these could help the learners acquire a grammatical item better compared to chalk-and-talk method.

The 'SuPerMan' concept consisted of two main fundamental principles of simple present tense which are (1) the singular noun has no much power so that the "SuPerMan" plays a role by adding the 's' or 'es' behind the verb, (2) the plural noun is so powerful that can defeat the "SuPerMan" so that the 's' or 'es' behind the verb with plural noun will run away. It is believed that integrating this strategy in the SuPerMan GAMLET Kit may enhance the pupils' learning of SVA rules in context as well as promote their motivation (Liu et al., 2018), learning autonomy (Kim, 2014), and engagement in learning (Niemi & Multisilta, 2016).

The GAMLET Model was devised (IP Registration No.: LY2021E04282) with the integration of flipped learning and gamified learning as shown in Figure 3. With the gamification of in-class activities in flipped classroom approach, active learning could be fostered (Teo et al., 2021). Through past studies that investigated gamified learning in flipped classroom approach, positive outcomes on learners' motivation and learning achievement could be observed compared to the other learning approaches (Lo & Hew, 2018; Zainuddin, 2018).

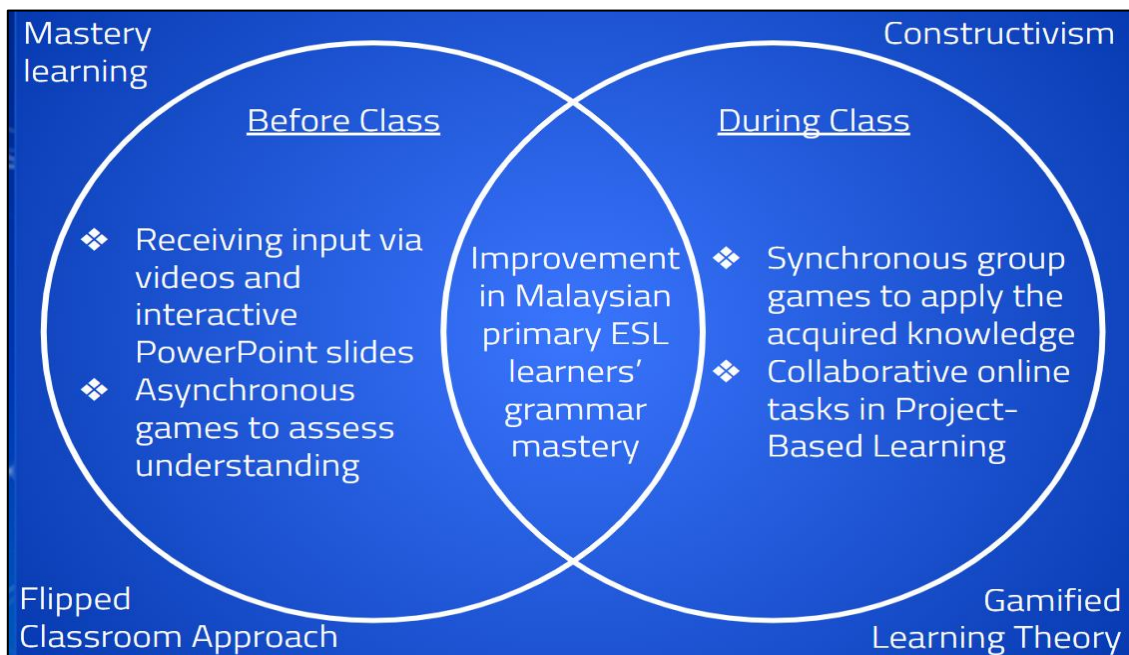


Figure 3: The framework of Gamified Flipped Home-Based Learning (GAMLET) Model (Teo et al., 2021)

Implementation of Intervention

In brief, the intervention took a duration of 4 weeks to be implemented using SuPerMan GAMLET Kit at both school and home from May to June 2022. The intervention was conducted during the English lessons of the month. This intervention had taken the constraints faced by the pupils who lived in rural and suburban areas such as internet coverage and availability of mobile device were taken into consideration. Therefore, SuPerMan GAMLET Kit is produced in a form of booklet which consists of 7 step-by-step guide that is arranged in a systematic order, which leads users to be self-directed towards their learning. Throughout the process of implementation, the pupils were given adequate guidance and technical support on either face-to-face interaction or the online helpdesk. The detailed implementation process of SuPerMan GAMLET Kit to enhance pupils' mastery of simple present tense is elaborated as in Table 1.

Table 1

The Process of Intervention Using SuPerMan GAMLET Kit

Week	Activities Done	Mode
1	a. The SuPerMan GAMLET Kit was devised and produced in booklets. b. Pupils were briefed about the ways to use the SuPerMan GAMLET Kit.	Face-to-face
	Pupils sat for the online pre-test.	Online
2	a. Pupils learnt the SuPerMan concept via storytelling and song. b. Pupils participated in pupil-centred activities during the first face-to-face interaction to enhance the mastery of SuPerMan concept.	Face-to-face
	Pupils completed at-home task 1 with teacher's guidance.	Online
3	a. Pupils presented their mind map constructed in at-home task 1. b. Pupils played collaborative language games to apply the previously learnt knowledge.	Face-to-face
	Pupils completed at-home task 2 with teacher's guidance.	Online
4	a. Pupils read the sentences constructed in at-home task 2. b. Pupils played language games in group to consolidate the previously learnt knowledge.	Face-to-face
	Pupils sat for the online post-test at home to assess the kit's effectiveness.	Online

Reobservation

As an effort to introduce the "SuPerMan" concept and engaging them in the digital storytelling and singing, the researcher had adopted a song named "I You We They No Superman" and devised an e-storybook with the integration of main principles of "SuPerMan" concept. It was noticed that the participants were highly engaged in the digital storytelling and singing activities. The participants who were used to be passive in the classroom would attempt to pose questions to the teacher after the storytelling and singing activity. The interactive elements in the digital storybook benefited the participants comprehending the concept of "SuPerMan" concept and they managed to demonstrate their understanding via the *Kahoot!* quiz after the digital storytelling activity as well. In terms of singing activity, most pupils were able to fill in the gaps correctly with minimal guidance of the researcher.

Due to the participants' low socioeconomic status, the participants faced the barriers of device and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competence in completing the language games at home in a hassle-free manner. Thankfully, the headmistress allowed the participants to borrow a laptop to complete the intervention. Through language games, the pupils were highly engaged in the games designed by the researcher. Intrinsic motivation was formed among them as they were willing to attempt more than five times for each game to attain higher scores. Therefore, they managed to master the targeted grammatical item which was simple present tense. After that, they also consolidated their learning via mind mapping and pupil-centred activities during the face-to-face English lessons. With the researcher's guidance, they managed to apply the "SuPerMan" concept learnt via digital storytelling and singing in the tasks assigned by the teacher as portrayed in Figure 4 and 5. As the intervention progressed, the participants committed less and less errors in total in their written work.

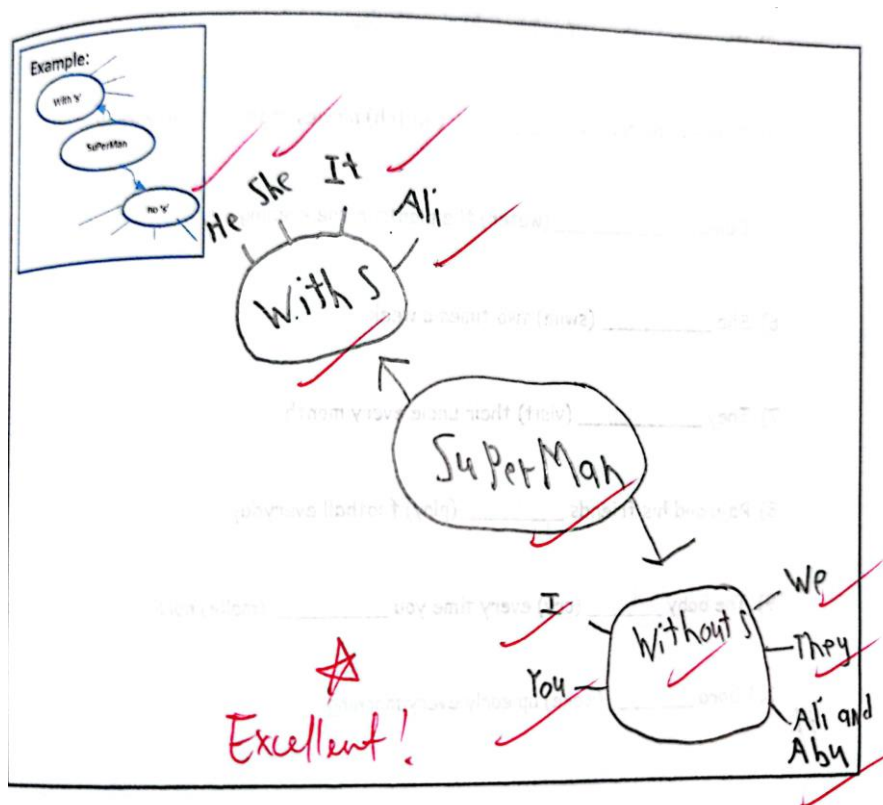


Figure 4: Sample work produced by the research participants

With 's'uperman	No 's'uperman
Example: <u>He</u> eats <u>an</u> apple. She drinks water. He goes to the beach.	Example: <u>They</u> play badminton. They play football. We sing a song.

Figure 5: Sample work produced by the research participants

Reflection

The intervention enhanced the pupils' learning of simple present tense in context as well as promoted their motivation (Liu et al., 2018), learning autonomy (Kim, 2014), and engagement in learning English (Niemi & Multisilta, 2016). They were highly motivated by the activities in the kit. These had activated their Language Acquisition Device (LAD) as proposed by Stephen Krashen (1982) in his proposed theory named affective filter hypothesis. So, they were able to comprehend and demonstrate understanding on the "SuPerMan" concept through their performance in the quiz test.

The integration of gamification also resulted in the participants’ success in applying the “SuPerMan” concept in their assigned tasks. Eventually, they managed to construct simple sentences in simple present tense accurately. During their presentation in the mind-mapping and collaborative tasks in face-to-face English lessons, they were conscious and attentive on their pronunciation of verbs such as emphasis of the ‘s’ or ‘es’ when it came with singular nouns. This had proven that their level of awareness towards the grammatical rules of simple present tense had been formulated.

Finding and Discussion

Research Objective 1: To assist pupils in identifying the correct verbs in simple present tense for singular and plural nouns accurately

Pre-test and post-test were administered before and after the implementation of intervention to measure whether the pupils portrayed an improvement in their mastery of simple present tense after receiving the intervention. Table 2 and Figure 6 illustrate pupils’ scores obtained before and after the implementation.

Table 2
Pupils' Scores Before and After the Intervention

	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>Difference</i>
<i>Pupil A</i>	10%	65%	+55
<i>Pupil B</i>	25%	75%	+50
<i>Pupil C</i>	15%	85%	+70
<i>Pupil D</i>	30%	95%	+65
<i>Pupil E</i>	20%	90%	+70

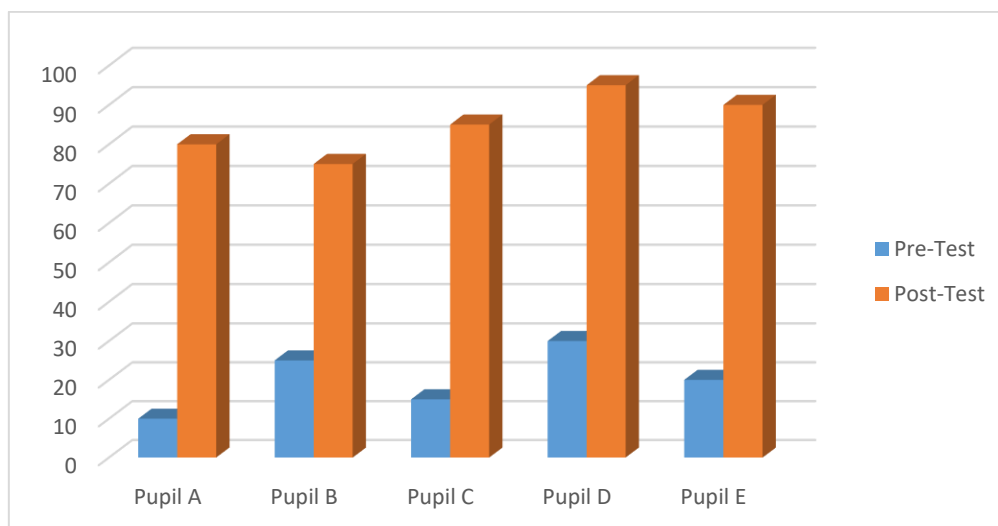


Figure 6: *Pupils' Achievement Before and After the Implementation of Intervention*

Based on the data shown in Figure 5, the pupils’ score had shown a drastic improvement with an increase of 50 to 70 marks after the implementation of intervention. This illustrated a significant difference between the pupils’ level of mastery on simple present tense before and after the intervention. It was evidenced that despite some of the pupils required technical support to receive the intervention, the results still corresponded to the findings of previous

studies which claimed that the integration of constructivist approach, task-based learning, digital storytelling and gamification was effective and feasible to be implemented in teaching English grammar (Ahmad et al., 2021; Dragobuzhda, 2020).

Research Objective 2: To develop positive perceptions towards learning English among pupils after receiving the intervention

Table 2 shows the findings obtained from the questionnaire to investigate the pupils' opinions on the implementation.

Table 3

Pupils' Perceptions on the SuPerMan GAMLET Kit

Item	Yes	Not Sure	No
Section A: Mastery Level of Simple Present Tense After SuPerMan GAMLET Kit			
1. I can differentiate between when to add or not to add 's' or 'es' to a verb.	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. I can add suffix 's' or 'es' to a verb with singular noun.	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3. I am aware of that I do not need to add suffix 's' or 'es' to a verb with plural noun.	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4. I can construct sentences in correct simple present tense.	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)
Section B: Pupils' Perceptions towards SuPerMan GAMLET Kit			
1. I had fun while using SuPerMan GAMLET Kit.	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. I understand the rules of simple present tense better after using SuPerMan GAMLET Kit.	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3. I can apply the learnt the rules of simple present tense better after using SuPerMan GAMLET Kit.	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)
4. I like learning English after using SuPerMan GAMLET Kit.	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
5. I wish to use SuPerMan GAMLET Kit in my upcoming English lessons.	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The findings of the questionnaire illustrated in Table 3 depicted that most participants held positive perceptions towards learning SVA via the SuPerMan GAMLET Kit. The participants had a better understanding on SVA as 80% of them found themselves able to apply the knowledge after the intervention which is pertinent to their improvement of test scores. So, the pupils' understanding on simple present tense improved as asserted by (Kim and Li, 2021). Also, all of them found the kit fun, effective and enjoyable and they wish to use the kit in future as introducing the grammatical concept via digital storytelling and gamification lowered the pupils' affective filter in grasping the grammatical knowledge. This proved that incorporation of flipped learning and gamification would lead to an active learning environment among pupils.

Based on the findings of semi-structured interviews, most participants expressed that they favoured the SuPerMan GAMLET Kit very much as they perceive that the learning kit has simplified the complex grammatical rules in an easier way for them to comprehend and apply in their written work. They found the games engaging and attractive for them to learn English as well. This shows that the intervention managed to encourage ESL learners to be told through personal experiences alongside others facilitate appropriate learning material (Grabe & Grabe, 1998). The tasks embedded in the Kit also promoted active interaction among learners through communicative tasks and activities as stated by (Yildiz and Senel, 2017). Moreover, through these tasks, learners picked up the target language naturally even if they did not know the grammar structures (Dragobuzhda, 2020), resulting in the formation of positive perceptions towards acquiring English grammar amongst ESL learners. However, there was one pupil who expressed his obstacles in joining the activities in the kit as it relied on internet connection to access both the online materials and online games.

Conclusion

To sum up, based on the findings, it is shown that SuPerMan GAMLET Kit is feasible in rectifying the target pupils' problems in learning Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA), particularly simple present tense. It consists of many advantages such as cost-effective, user-friendly, self-directive, and most importantly, effective in developing the pupils' SVA competence. Based on the findings from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews conducted to the target pupils, the pupils hold positive perceptions towards learning SVA via SuPerMan GAMLET Kit and they are also more interested and intrinsically motivated in learning English. Thus, it is hoped that SuPerMan GAMLET Kit could be disseminated all over Malaysia in order to assist Malaysian primary ESL learners acquiring English language better. Further studies are recommended to investigate the effects of 'SuPerMan GAMLET Kit' in acquiring other English grammatical items such as simple past tense and past continuous tense.

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