

## 'Never Have I Ever Bingo': A Grammar-Learning Innovation for Acquiring the Present Perfect Tense in Writing

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### Abstract

In order to guarantee that their pupils can learn the language effectively, English as a Second Language (ESL) educators have always equipped themselves with various educational approaches and strategies. In spite of this, ESL learners still find the present perfect tense one of the most challenging tenses to master as grammar structures and rules differ from their first language. Nevertheless, the implementation of language games has shown its effects on learners' knowledge, competency and motivation in learning a language, focusing on different targeted language areas and skills such as grammar. Accordingly, this paper aims to describe the design and development of 'Never Have I Bingo' through the ADDIE model as well as study its effectiveness on learners' ability to use the present perfect tense in writing. This empirical study involved 31 Year 6 students in a primary school in Negeri Sembilan. The results of employed pre and post tests demonstrated a significant improvement in students' ability to use the present perfect tense in writing sentences. Interviews and document analysis were also conducted to demonstrate students' perceptions and effectiveness of the game. The study could provide insight to educators in developing and conducting games in grammar learning. Future studies might concentrate on creating games that improve the many grammar structures and rules used in other skills.

**Keywords:** ESL Learners, Language Games, Grammar, Present Perfect Tense

### Introduction

Grammar is one of the important language aspects which are taught to every language learner and cannot be ignored (Savignon, 2018). It is the part and parcel of language acquisition that plays an important role in understanding the language. According to Nassaji & Fotos (2011), the importance of learning English is fundamental to language because without grammar, language does not exist. English is regarded as a second language in

Malaysia and it should be acquired by all Malaysians at school for at least eleven years (Ansari, 2015). In spite of learning grammar so extensively, students are unable to produce grammatically correct sentences. A study by Singh et al (2020) stated that nearly 30% Malaysian ESL learners have difficulties in mastering English grammar involving the use of verb tenses at tertiary level. One of the factors contributing to students' lack of English language proficiency is related to students' motivation and disengagement from their English learning (Tanduklangi et al., 2019). Thus, making it difficult for teachers to convey the lesson. Present Perfect Tense is one of the tenses that is required to learn in the latest Primary Year 6 syllabus. The learning and use of the present perfect tense is one of the common and confusing verb form encountered by ESL learners (Al-Khaleel, 2018; Halik et al., 2022; Moqbel, 2022; Sholeha et al., 2020). It would be relatively difficult for young learners because the concept of "unspecified time" can be very confusing to them. This may pose problems for learners since many languages do not have a similar verb form and makes it difficult to use the correct form of the present perfect tense (Setiawan, 2008). ESL learners may encounter difficulties such as using appropriate tenses in their writing and speaking according to the context. Such difficulties could be overcome by using learning materials that can be engaging for learners to understand and participate in the lesson. As asserted by Baharudin and Yunus (2018), some learners may struggle with understanding grammar rules, thus making language games an effective educational tool to consider by educators.

According to Hadfield (1990), teaching grammar should be a fun and enjoyable activity that involves rules and a specific goal. Similarly, language games are seen as an effective medium for teaching and learning the English language. Not only does it provide both teachers and students with enjoyment and a relaxed learning environment, but it also encourages students to use the language in a creative and communicative way. The use of language games creates a meaningful way of learning English grammar that taps into students' innovation and creativity (Buditama, 2017). By incorporating language games into their lessons, teachers can engage and motivate younger learners to pay closer attention in their lesson. Thus, this paper aims to demonstrate students' perception and the effectiveness of using Never Have I Ever Bingo.

### **Grammar in Malaysian education**

English is formally taught and acquired as a core subject and second language (L2) in all Malaysian public schools (Singh et al., 2020). Since the English language is important and there is a growing need to be better English speakers, the Common European Framework of References for languages (CEFR) was introduced in the revised Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) or the standard-based English language curriculum (SBELC). In 2017, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) adopted the CEFR in order to enhance English proficiency skills as well as to benchmark Malaysian students against international standards (Sidhu et al., 2018).

Under the KSSR, grammar was taught explicitly using a modular approach starting from Year 3 onwards (Curriculum Development Division, 2011). It was taught in a structured and systematic manner, with a focus on the rules of grammar, sentence construction, and vocabulary development. Thus, it enables learners to focus on the development of basic language skills or sub-skills under each module by means of purposeful activities in meaningful contexts.

However, the current CEFR aligned curriculum focuses more on practising and developing skills based on the “can do” statements” and is taught implicitly. The “can do” statements describe a learner’s ability to communicate in second language listening, writing, reading, and speaking skills (Uri & Abd Aziz, 2018). The focus is on using grammar correctly and appropriately in speaking and writing, rather than on memorising grammar rules. Learners are expected to use English grammar correctly, acquire a good working vocabulary, speak fluently, interact appropriately and produce comprehensible and intelligible English (Ministry of Education, 2020). In order for learners to acquire grammatical competence, English language teachers are entrusted with a task of helping learners. Without grammar mastery, it will be difficult to use the language appropriately in appropriate situations.

### **Teaching and learning of grammar in ESL classroom**

Grammar is the basis of the English language, which allows ESL learners to read, write, speak and understand English effectively (Cam & Tran, 2017). For non-native learners, it is challenging to master the use of tenses (Sholeha et al., 2020). Teaching tenses is essential and cannot be ignored, as tenses can help students to master four basic skills of English. Hence, misunderstanding the concept of tenses would hinder ESL learners from advancing their English to a high level (Halliday, 2002). The reason verb tense is so confusing is because it connects two times, the present and the past. ESL learners face difficulties either from the fact that their own language has not led them to look at events in this way, or from the fact that their language contains a verb that looks similar to the English form but operates differently. Students also face trouble in using tenses partly due to limited vocabulary in the language (Misbah et al., 2017; Ang & Tan, 2018). Due to this, the teaching and learning of grammar has been perceived with words like difficult and boring (Prihartini & Halimi, 2016). Teaching and learning of grammar is also considered as uninteresting and frustrating (Tikkha, 2014). Students would get easily bored when learning grammar because of the complexity of the grammar rules. Besides that, students would find it difficult to understand easily and perceive learning grammar as complicated. Teachers might also find it challenging to teach grammar and make it appealing to students. As asserted by Yacob and Yunus (2019), the traditional teaching and learning process referring to chalk-and-talk has become outdated in lessons. Therefore, using language games is an alternative that would make the lesson enjoyable and informative.

### **Teaching and learning of grammar using language games**

There has been a growing interest in using games as opposed to the traditional method of learning language for decades. Language games are language learning through gameplay (Goldwin-Jones, 2014). Goldwin-Jones (2014) asserted that games can offer an immersive environment in which extensive use is made of the target language. Language games have many benefits towards ESL learners such as building up their knowledge by socialising and interacting (Vygotsky, 1962), make the lesson more creative, engaging, fun and beneficial (Paris & Yussof, 2012; Zakaria et al., 2019). In order to make use of language games effectively, learners need to be involved in practical experiences (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018). Based on research by Kamal and Youngkeun (2019), learners who were taught grammar using games performed significantly better than the ones who were taught grammar without the use of games. In addition, it gives learners the assurance that making mistakes and taking risks are acceptable.

### Method & Material

This study explores the adaptation of the ADDIE instructional model in designing and developing a special language game for grammar named 'Never Have I Ever Bingo.' The aims of developing this grammar learning prototype are to provide a new learning experience to students and to address the effectiveness of using a language board game in the learning of the present perfect tense. The framework is divided into five stages which has been useful in helping educators in developing gaming material for language learning as it offers well defined phases for effective implementation (Al Ghawail et al., 2021). The five stages are analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Each stage plays a different role in the development of the game. The ADDIE framework also is a cyclical process that is carried out throughout the planning and implementation stages. Figure 1 shows the researchers applied ADDIE models in innovating Never Have I Ever Bingo.



Figure 1: The five components of the Addie Model

### Analysis

Through an item analysis on their first semester written assessment, it was found that most students faced difficulty in writing sentences about experiences they have and have never done using the present perfect tense. After analysing this particular section in the written assessment, the main reason that led to this problem was their inability to use the verb in the correct form. For instance, pupils would either use the verb in its simple past tense form or forget to use the phrases 'have' or 'have never' in their sentences. This is in line with Kwan and Wong (2016) who assert that one of the challenging constructions for learners to attain in acquiring English as a second or foreign language is the present perfect tense. It was evident that learners had trouble connecting the English present perfect's underlying semantic representation with its grammatical characteristics (Hawkins & Chan, 1997). The teacher clarified that this may come to no surprise as in practice, the English present perfect tense was not introduced to Malaysian primary school learners at an early stage until the introduction of it in the new Academy Stars Year 6 textbooks in 2022.

### Design

Once the root cause was identified, the question becomes how to solve the problem (McArdle, 1998). Since the problem lied in pupils' inadequacy to use the verbs in the correct form, the researchers looked into ways that could possibly help students remember the present perfect tense verbs and apply it in their writing. In order to help pupils become more adept at using the present perfect tense in writing, the game 'Never Have I Ever Bingo' was created. To facilitate effective practice in writing using the present perfect form, the following objectives of the game were determined: (a) acquire vocabulary (verbs in the present perfect form) and (b) use said vocabulary in constructing sentences.

After reviewing past games, the researchers came across a popular party game called ‘Never Have I Ever.’ The game entails its players to announce things that they have never done starting with the phrase “Never have I ever...” to which the other players respond with an action to indicate whether they have or have never done the action before. Since this was mostly a verbal game, the researchers also decided to include and adapt the game of Bingo. Instead of saying the things they have never done, students precede in writing sentences about their past experiences to completely fill their bingo sheet before covering the sentences to determine whether they have or have never done the action in response to the ‘Never Have I Ever’ cards being read. To further illustrate the game mechanics, the materials needed involved in developing ‘Never Have I Ever Bingo’ are presented in the images that follow.



Figure 2: ‘I have’/ ‘I have never’ chips

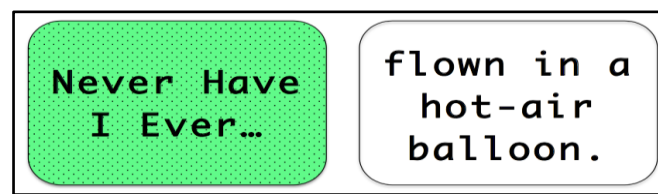


Figure 3: ‘Never Have I Ever’ playing cards

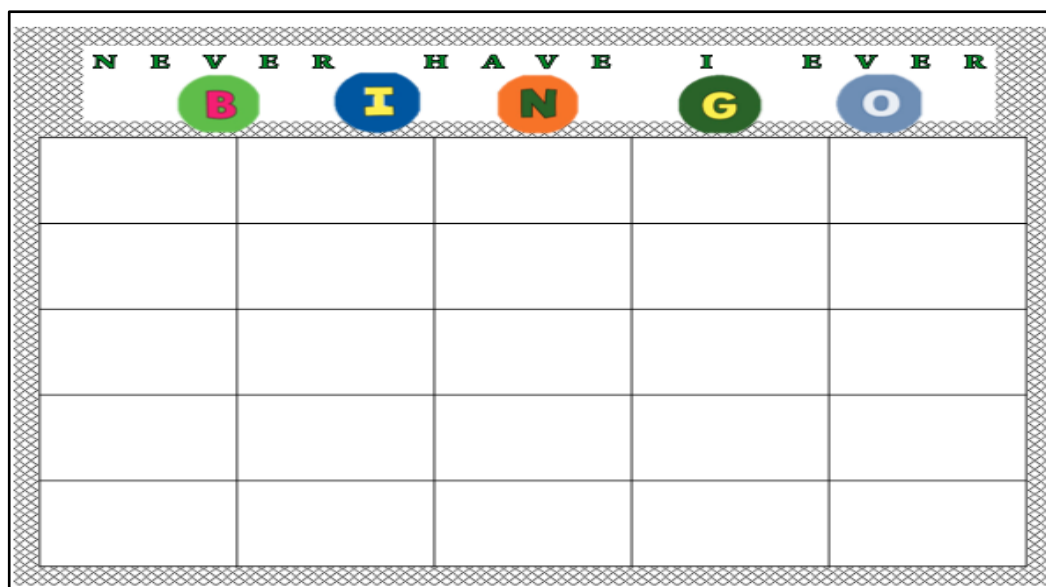


Figure 3: ‘Never Have I Ever BINGO’ sheet

**Development**

In this phase, the materials needed for this game were created on Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint. The development focused on the overall look of the Bingo sheet,

playing cards and chips. No cost was incurred as the researchers printed all the necessary materials at their own expense. All the materials were printed, cut and pasted by hand before being placed in a box. Although the materials were limited, variations of the game were identified prior to implementation to tackle the foreseen problem of insufficient resources. 'Never Have I Ever Bingo' was then introduced to two experts in the field in order to gauge their perception as well as obtain their approval and commentary on the innovation and its applicability. The two experts, a School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+) language district officer and a Learning Materials Adaptation (LMA) Master Trainer, were administered with a questionnaire in the subject of instructional design. The instrument assessment is adapted from Suartama (2016), as cited in Anggraini & Putra (2021) and had a total of 9 items represented as indicators as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Instrument Assessment Indicators*

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
Content	Curriculum	In line with learning objectives
		Suitable with students' grade level
		Useful resource for teaching
Learning and instructional design	Strategy	Attract students' interest
		Able to motivate the students
		Give chance for students to learn independently
	Technical	Simplicity of instructions and rules
	Text	Suitable font style
		Suitable font size

Experts could award each item up to five points once they reviewed the overall look and tried out the Never Have I Ever prototype. Data was analysed in order to decide on the product's quality and suitability based on the calculation of each component in the instrument assessment tool. The validators' awarded percentage for Never Have I Ever Bingo are shown in the table below.



Table 2

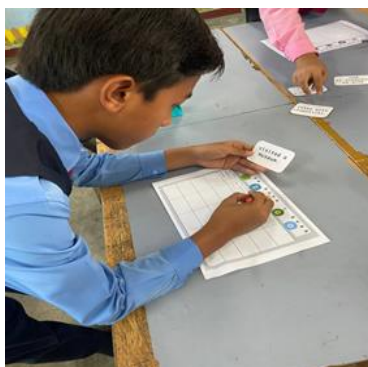
*Results of instrument assessment*

Validators	Percentage
Expert 1	84%
Expert 2	88%

The results in Table 2 show that both experts evaluated the game at more than 80%. In addition to this, the experts’ remarks and comments were taken into consideration to make the necessary amendments to the ‘Never Have I Ever Bingo’ prototype before its implementation.

**Implementation**

‘Never Have I Ever Bingo’ was implemented through purposive sampling to a total of 30 Year 6 students in a primary school in Negeri Sembilan. The students were first given a pre-test to assess their understanding of the use of the present perfect tense. The pre-test results will be discussed during the evaluation phase, where they will be compared to the post-test results obtained after implementing the treatment for three cycles to get a more accurate result of the treatment. Students were interviewed to see how they viewed this board game in learning the present perfect tense.



<p>Students write sentences on activities they have or have never done using the present perfect tense by referring to random ‘Never Have I Ever’ playing cards chosen.</p>	<p>Students continue writing until they have entirely filled up the boxes in their ‘Never Have I Ever Bingo’ sheet.</p>	<p>Students then shuffle the ‘Never Have I Ever’ playing cards and place the deck in the middle so every member can reach it.</p>
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Students take turns reading aloud the phrases of the card at the top of the deck beginning with the phrase 'Never Have I Ever.'

Students place a 'Never Have I Ever Bingo' chip on their bingo sheet if they have written the sentence read aloud.

Students continue playing until someone gets five chips in a row and shouts "Bingo!"

The fastest one to do so wins the game.

Figure 5: Implementation of 'Never Have I Ever Bingo' in class

## Evaluation

### Pre and post tests

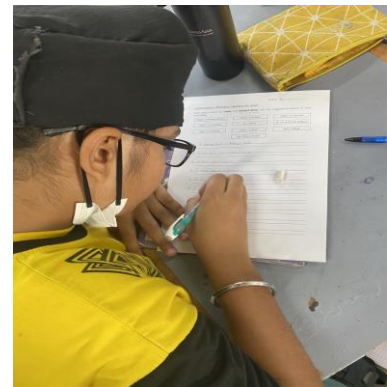
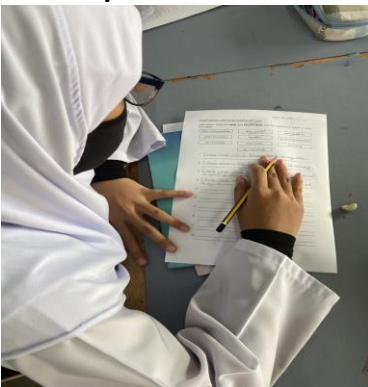


Figure 6: Pre and post tests

The same test was implemented for both pre and post tests. In the pre and post tests, students were required to write sentences using the present perfect tense to describe activities they have done or have never done throughout their lives. The test included 10 phrasal verbs as a stimulus and students were given the option to choose the phrasal verbs provided in the worksheet. Students were also encouraged to use their own ideas if they wanted to.

The results were then analysed and evaluated in the findings and discussion to demonstrate the effectiveness of the 'Never Have I Ever Bingo' game on the students' ability to use the present perfect tense when describing activities they have or have never experienced.



### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted on three students who made the biggest improvement in scores from the pretest to the posttest. The interviews would help to shed light on students' perceptions on both the implementation and the effect of 'Never Have I Ever Bingo'. The interviews were brief and consisted of questions pertaining to their favourite features of 'Never Have I Ever Bingo' and their opinions on how the game had helped them improve in writing sentences using the present perfect tense. The responses recorded were analysed and discussed in the findings section to demonstrate students' perceptions and effectiveness of the game.

### Document Analysis

Similarly, a document analysis was done on students' pre-test and post-test products which were the sentences constructed. The document analysis focused on the same three students' answers in the tests to determine in which area the improvements were made. Samples of answers were taken and used to triangulate the findings in determining 'Never Have I Ever Bingo's' effectiveness and students' perceptions of it.

### Findings

As mentioned above, both pre-test and post-test were administered to gather data on the effectiveness of this game. The results for range scores for both completed tests are shown in the table below. Additionally, a bar graph is included to illustrate how noticeable the change is.

Table 3

*Results before and after the implementation of Never Have I Ever Bingo*

Range of scores	Number of students	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1 - 5	8	0
6 - 10	19	2
11 - 15	3	1
16 - 20	0	3
21 - 25	1	6
26 - 30	0	19

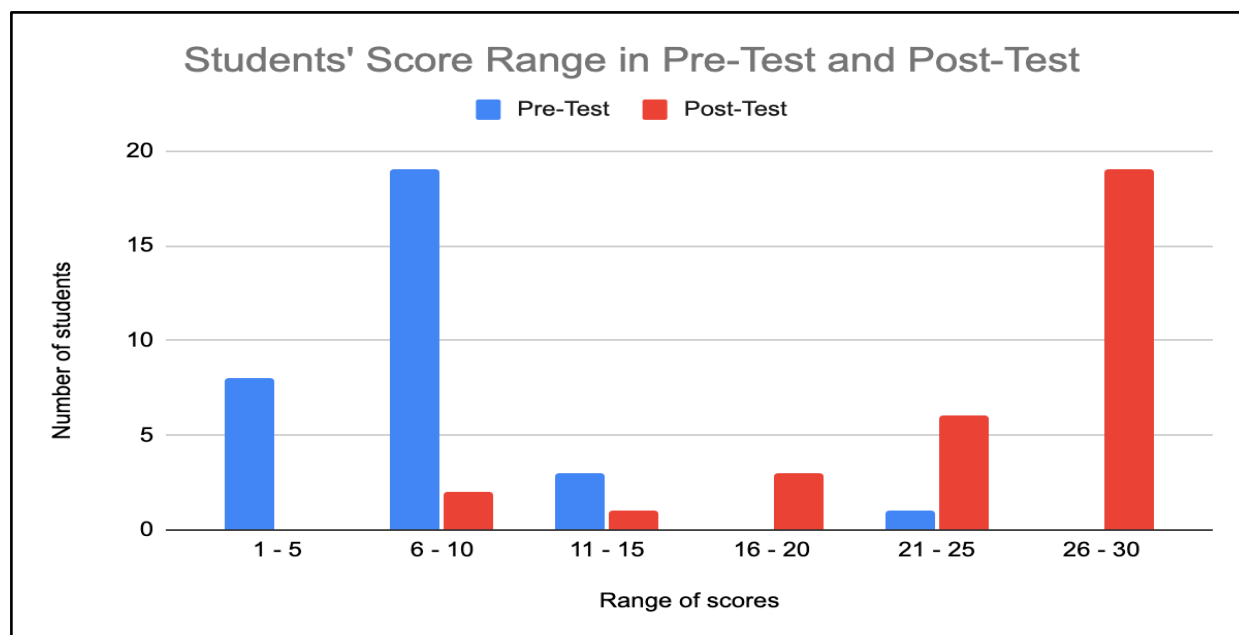


Figure 7: Students' Range of Scores in Pre-test and Post-test

The table and bar graph compares the pupils' obtained range scores both before and after the implementation of 'Never Have I Ever Bingo'. Results of the post-test in Table 3 and Figure 7 showed a significant improvement in pupils' ability to construct sentences using the present perfect tense. There was an obvious leap for the amount of students who scored in the range of 26 to 30. Prior to the implementation, none of the pupils were able to achieve this range, yet 19 of them were able to do so after playing Never Have I Ever Bingo. Only one student scored in the 21 to 25 range in the pre-test, while in the post-test, there were 6 who managed to be in this range. None of the students were able to score in the range of 16 to 20 in the pre-test, but the number of students who got into this range increased by 3. While the number of students scoring in the top half rose, there was an apparent drop in students scoring in the bottom half of the range. In the pre-test, 3 pupils scored in the range of 11 to 15, but only one student was in this score range for the post-test. The most significant difference was seen in the 6 to 10 range of scores as a staggering number of 19 students fell under this range for the pre-test while the number decreased to only 2 students in the post-test. Finally, pre-test results placed 8 students in the lowest score range from 1 to 5. However, none of the students obtained this score range in the post-test. This indicates that Never Have I Ever Bingo had a considerable impact on improving students' proficiency when constructing sentences in the present perfect tense. According to Yacob and Yunus (2019), language games are an effective and advantageous option for learners, particularly those who are noncooperative in learning grammar, because language games provide engagement, connection, and in-context learning.

When interviewing the pupils, the researchers found that there were three recurring themes in their responses: fun and different approach to learning, memory into practice, stimulation of creativity.

First, it was discovered that students particularly liked the game because it was fun and entertaining. One of the students, S1, stated *"I like this game because it helps us learn by playing games."* Another student mentioned that they enjoyed the game as *"the writing part didn't feel like work because it was just something I had to do to get Bingo."* Most of the

students also showed preference as it differed from the way they would often learn, through their textbooks. This is evident S1 later added that the best part about Never Have I Ever was the fact that *"I don't have to read the textbook, I could do the sentences myself just by looking at the cards."* This is in line with S3's response stating, *"Sometimes the answers are not in the textbook so it's not very helpful. I can only know when my teacher tells me if my sentence is right or wrong."* One of the main reasons for this is that the textbook only explains the grammar rule and structure without providing the verbs in the present perfect form. According to Halim et al (2020) students gain confidence in using English when they learn the language in a fun way.

This leads to the next point where it was also found that most students enjoyed the fact that the phrasal verbs in the playing cards had already provided them with the correct present perfect tense form. For instance, the words worn and ridden were used in the playing cards and students did not need to change them. S3 asserted that the reason his scores improved was *"I just remembered the words in the game and used them in the test."* This was then supported by S1's response, *"Before the game, I couldn't remember any of the words but after playing the game, I can write sentences I wrote in the game."* The students claimed that they were able to remember the phrasal verbs from the game and put it into practice by writing the same sentences in the post-test. This can be seen from the all three students' sentences taken from the post-test below. All three students were observed to write sentences using the phrasal verbs they remembered from the game. This is in line with a review done by Yacob and Yunus (2019) as they claim that language games are fun anti-stress activities that eventually pique students' interest and boost their confidence in improving sentence construction by helping them remember information faster and better. This is also supported by Sahathenvan and Yamat (2020) in their study on learning simple sentence construction using colourful 'Jenga' blocks found that students will become more familiar with sentence structures through the use of language games, they will be able to construct grammatically correct sentences on their own. This proves that language games is beneficial in helping students learn.

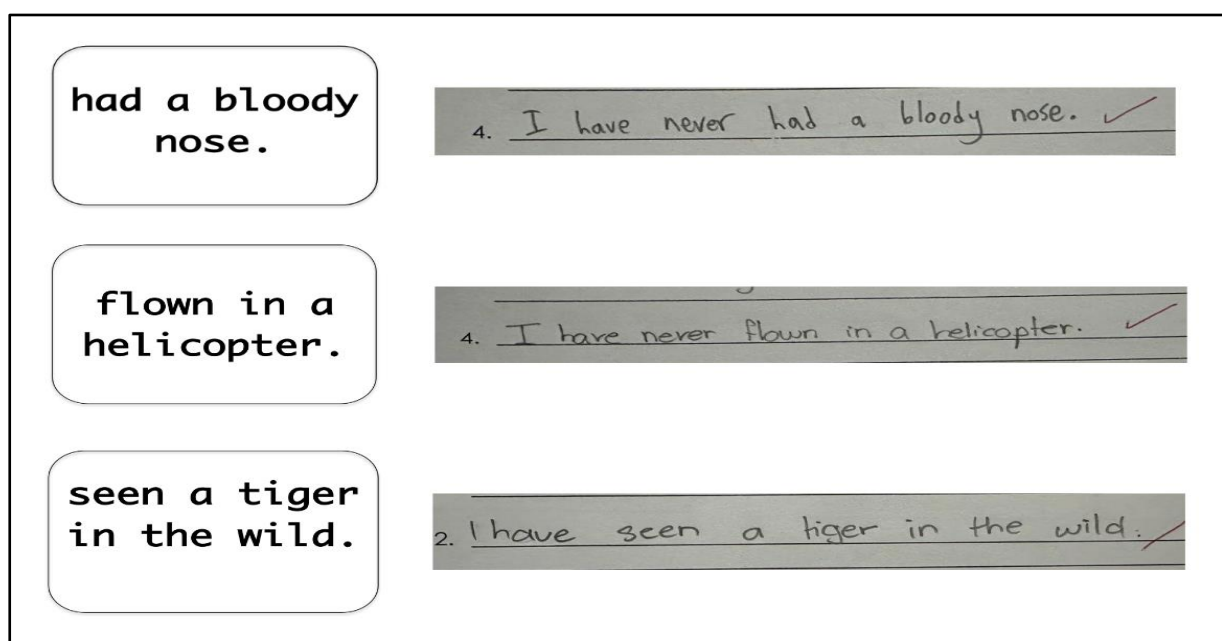


Figure 8: Post-test excerpts compared against 'Never Have I Ever' playing cards

In addition to this, the students were also motivated to write sentences creatively. However, the students still relied on the present tense verbs given as they did not want to make errors. One of the students, S2, revealed that *"I wanted to write using my own ideas but I didn't want to get it wrong so I used the words I remembered on the playing cards."* In a way, it is clear that the game stimulated creative thinking and not just rote memorisation of the verbs. When asked why the student attempted to write as many sentences using their own ideas, S1 responds that *"I didn't want the same answers as my friend because I knew they would use the same sentences from the game."* This is in line with Roberts and Inman (2021) on differentiated learning where they highlight that each student is learning at appropriately challenging levels and students definitely are making continuous progress in their own way, be it advanced or weak learners. The three students' post-tests showed that all of them either wrote sentences using their own phrasal verbs or made an attempt at it, at least once. These students' sentences show that though they used their own phrasal verbs, the first verbs always remained constantly taken from the game. Despite this, any effort to be creative was still commended as to encourage it.

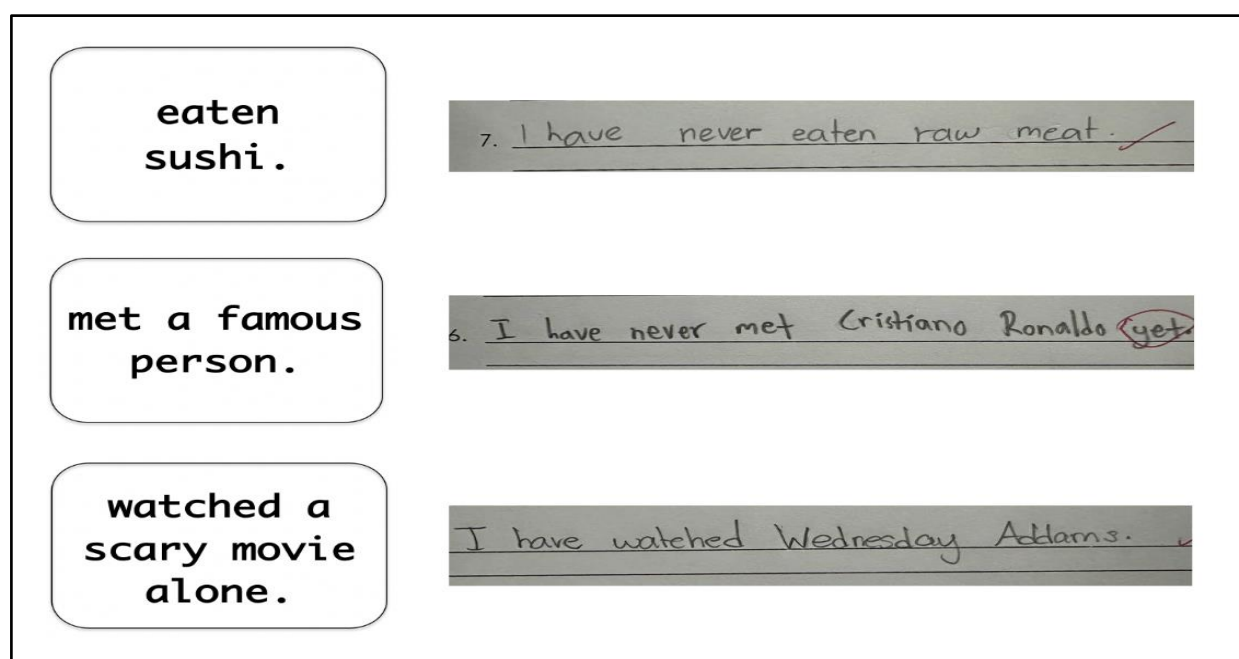


Figure 9: Post-test excerpts compared against 'Never Have I Ever' playing cards

### Discussion

The results indicated that the use of Never Have I Ever Bingo in learning the Present Perfect Tense did show promising effects on students' use and understanding of the tense among Year 6 students. It is also proven that a non-digital game can be fully utilized when learning the present perfect tense. Students were able to construct grammatically correct sentences using their own chosen verbs, showing that students were confident and engaged in the lesson hence, helping the teacher to create the lesson to be more fun, interactive and effective. It also saves time as students are directly exposed to using the present perfect tense in context and developing fluency in constructing sentences. Through Never Have I Ever Bingo, students' interest to take part in an active learning was clearly seen and it encouraged them to interact with each other during the game, thus, resulting in better acquisition and

understanding of the tense. It was also proven through the findings that students are more confident to use the words learnt in context as it is learned through cooperative learning and in a fun environment. This is in line with the previous study conducted by Halim et al (2020) who found that students gain confidence in using English when they learn the language in a fun way.

Never Have I Ever Bingo also does not only enhance students' understanding in using the present perfect tense but it also promotes meaningful learning among students as it enhances students' creativity in constructing sentences. Students were able to construct sentences without referring to verbs on the shuffled cards and proved that students were able to recall back what they have learnt and able to apply it in their writing almost instantly. The anti stress element in language games which incorporate fun would eventually boost student's confidence in trying to be better and faster in remembering the structure of the present perfect tense. Sahathevan and Yamat (2020) also explain that when students were encountered with familiar sentence structures repeatedly in language games, students would eventually be capable of constructing sentences independently that are grammatically correct.

Never Have I Ever Bingo also caters to students with different levels and needs as initially, it could be seen that some students were still struggling in grasping the use of the present perfect tense. Later on they did show good improvement in constructing sentences. This is supported by Chambers and Yunus (2017) when they assert that different classroom activities and learning strategies are crucial in assisting learners with various needs as these would encourage students to participate and engage in learning grammar specifically.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the use of the Never Have I Ever language game managed to increase the achievement of Year 6 learners in learning the present perfect tense. The results of both the pre and post tests have shown significant outcome as the learners experienced gradual progress in the usage of present perfect tenses. Besides the increasing mastery, the use of language games also changed student's attitudes from negative to positive. Students showed improvement in using present perfect form in writing, increased motivation and enhanced the understanding of the present perfect tense in a fun learning environment. Therefore, the use of Never Have I Ever Bingo as a tool in the teaching and learning facilitated effective practice in teaching the present perfect form. The design and development of this game as well as the study might help instructors create and use games for grammar instruction. Despite some suggestions that may be modified further, this teaching toolbox is an excellent way to help upper primary students understand how and practise the use of the present perfect tense in writing. A recommendation for future research would be to focus on developing games that enhance the various language structures and rules that are employed in other skills.

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