

## **USING THREE-COLOURED EMOJI DICES TO IMPROVE YEAR THREE PUPILS' SIMPLE SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**

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### **Abstract**

This study was conducted to improve the Year Three pupils' skills in building simple sentences using the three-coloured emoji dices. I have selected six participants who consisted of one weak learner, three intermediate learners as well as two above average learners. Three-coloured emoji dices strategy was designed to help these pupils learn simple sentence structure using the SVOC pattern through dice rolling which is fun and interactive. The data were collected through observation, document analysis, and interviews. The data collected were analyzed, interpreted, and triangulated to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. Results have shown that this strategy has effectively aided pupils to construct simple sentences progressively as well as improved my teaching practice. The three-coloured emoji dices, however can be further enhanced to teach variety of simple sentence pattern. Therefore, it is suggested this method is used among pupils who require remedial or enrichment activities because this game is an effective tool for underachieving pupils in improving their skills to build simple sentences, while it challenges the advanced pupils to think critically and creatively in building their sentences based on the outcome of the three-coloured emoji dices.

**Keywords:** Three-coloured emoji dices, simple sentences, SVOC sentence pattern, dice rolling

### **Abstrak**

Kajian ini telah dijalankan bagi meningkatkan kemahiran pembinaan ayat tunggal dengan menggunakan dadu emoji tiga warna. Saya telah memilih enam peserta kajian yang terdiri daripada seorang murid yang lemah, tiga orang murid berprestasi sederhana serta dua orang murid berprestasi sederhana ke atas. Strategi dadu emoji tiga warna ini telah direka untuk membantu murid-murid mempelajari struktur ayat tunggal dengan memberi pada pola ayat SVOC dengan cara membalik dadu yang mempunyai unsur keseeronokan dan lebih interaktif. Saya telah mengumpul data melalui pemerhatian, analisis dokumen serta temu bual. Data yang dikumpul telah dianalisis, dan ditriangulasi bagi mewujudkan kredibiliti dan kebolehpercayaan data. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa strategi yang dikemukakan telah membantu murid-murid dalam pembinaan ayat tunggal secara progresif serta menambah baik amalan pengajaran saya. Walau bagaimanapun, dadu emoji tiga warna ini boleh diperbaiki lagi untuk pengajaran pelbagai pola ayat tunggal. Oleh itu, adalah dicadangkan agar strategi ini digunakan dalam aktiviti pemuliharaan atau pengayaan kerana permainan ini merupakan alat permudahcaraan yang efektif bagi menangani kelemahan murid dalam membina ayat tunggal. Sementeralahan itu, ia juga mencabar murid yang berprestasi tinggi untuk berfikir secara kritis dan kreatif dalam pembinaan ayat tunggal mereka berdasarkan hasil dapatan daripada dadu emoji tiga warna.

**Kata kunci:** Dadu emoji tiga warna, ayat tunggal, pola ayat SVOC, membalik dadu

## INTRODUCTION

### Context

I am a student-teacher at the Institute of Teacher's Education in Batu Lintang Campus, Kuching. I am from the Bachelor of Teaching with Honors Degree Programme (PISMP) majoring in English as a Second Language (TESL), minoring in Health Education. In the third phase of practicum from 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017 until 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017, I was assigned to teach English Language in Year Three class of 43 pupils. This time, I was given the opportunity to teach in an urban school at SK Parabolic (pseudonym) in Kuching. For this action research, I have diagnosed my pupils pertaining to simple sentence construction. I focused on the basic literacy skills beforehand in order to build a strong foundation of language skills. If they were to proceed to paragraph writing instead of mastering the basic skills, the outcome will inevitably be futile as the process will be agonizing for the pupils and the product will be unintelligible. Good foundation of sentence building is duly important in this globalized era, so it was indeed prominent to pay close attention to back to basics in writing.

### Research Focus

During my first teaching and learning experiences at SK Lobak (pseudonym) from 15<sup>th</sup> February 2016 until 11<sup>th</sup> March 2016, I had a profound experience regarding my pupils' predicament especially writing simple sentences correctly. This is because they were Level One pupils who focused only on lexis and phrase level of writing. As I have tried several approaches and strategies in exposing them to sentences through rebus activity, however, the outcome of the approach was not authentic as pupils were not able to comprehend the meaning of the text. Not only that, I find that my approach was ineffective as half of my pupils were under the Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS) programme. Despite this fact, I believe that it is important that pupils master the basic skills in writing in order to be competent individuals in the globalizing world.

Not only that, in my second phase of practicum from 11<sup>th</sup> July 2016 until 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016, I realized that this issue has been ongoing not only for Level One pupils, but for Level Two pupils as well. I was given the opportunity to educate Year Four class of 16 pupils at SK Kolam (pseudonym) in Bau district. During that phase, I noticed that there were pupils who still could not produce simple sentences correctly in their opinion writing. They could not distinguish the rule that for singular noun, add an "s" to the verb, and remove the "s" from the plural noun. I have utilized another approach in sentence construction whereby pupils were given question cues as a tool in writing simple sentences correctly. From that approach, I realized that it was partially effective as there were few pupils who still could not comprehend the important rules in constructing simple sentences.

As for my third phase of practicum at SK Parabolic from 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017 until 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017, I was given the opportunity to educate Year Three class of 43 pupils. I noticed that my pupils could respond orally but when it comes to writing, however, they could not construct their sentences in a correct structure. They wrote sentences which only made sense to them but less intelligible to others. I realized that my pupils needed further scaffolding in writing sentences, starting from the basic level. They have limited knowledge in using appropriate Subject Verb Agreement (SVA) rule within the target language (Ponmani & Mekala, 2016). Thus, I firmly believe that by incorporating the three-coloured emoji dices strategy into my teaching and learning, it could develop my pupils' writing skills. With the right approach, the teaching of grammar can be made fun and effective, such as by using grammar games (Metom, Tom, & Joe, 2013). Many educators advocated the process approach that aims to get to the heart of the various skills in producing writing while using the second language in effective manner and in appropriate context (Harmer, 2007).

### Initial Data Collection

I have collected my initial data through several methods of data collecting. One of them is from my weekly journals (Figure 1) during my teaching experience as a student teacher. Besides that, I have also identified the issue concerned from their writing performance in the given diagnostic test (Figure 2) to confirm my inference regarding the writing issue raised.

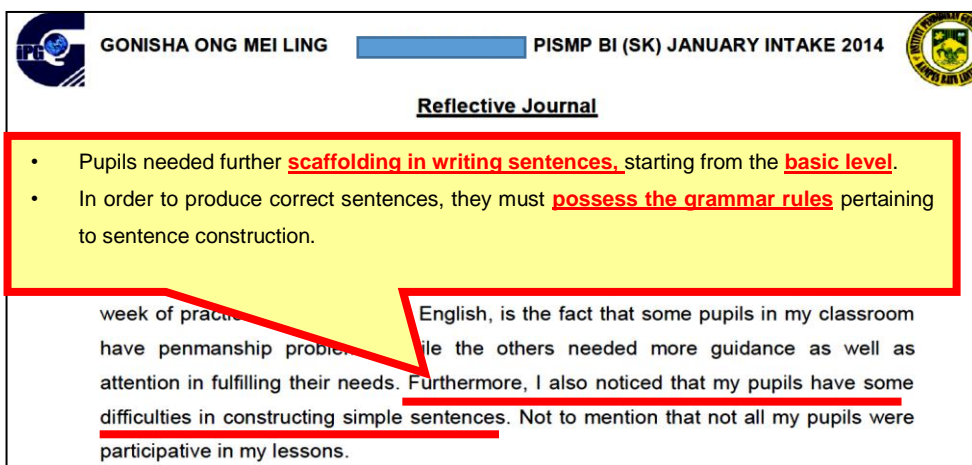


Figure 1. Common issue raised that was related to my research focus in writing skill.

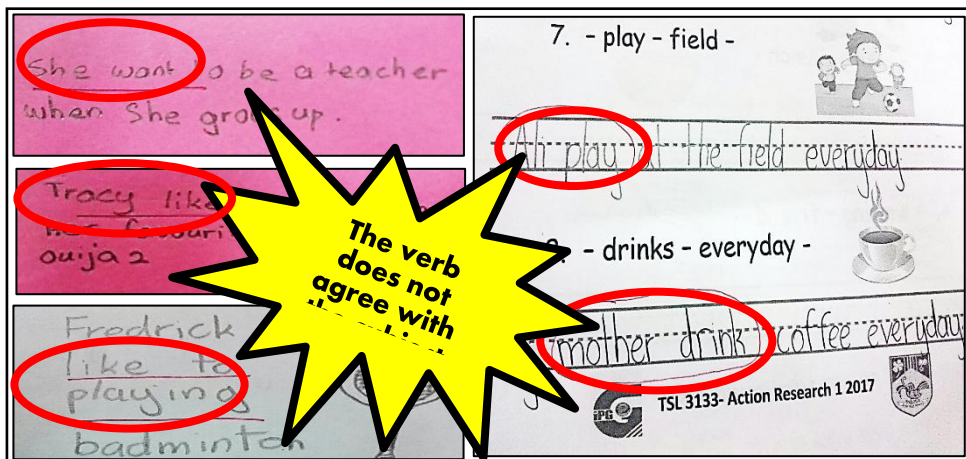


Figure 2. Common errors made by pupils pertaining Subject-Verb-Agreement rule in constructing simple present tense.

Based on Figure 1 and Figure 2, we can conclude that the identified research participants could not construct their sentences in a correct structure on par with the SVA rule. With regard to this issue, SVA is related to word order and grammatical rules in ensuring intelligibility of the sentence constructed (Chitravelu, Sithamparam, & Choon, 2005). That evidenced the reason why I had rooted this issue as my research focus to rally on my pupils' writing competence in terms of simple sentence construction.

### Research Objectives

The objectives for my action research were:

- to improve my Year Three pupil's on simple sentence construction by using three-coloured emoji dices; and
- to improve my teaching practices in promoting Year Three pupils' repertoire of sentence construction by using three-coloured emoji dices.

### Research Questions

The research was aimed to answer the following questions.

- To what extend does the use of three-coloured emoji dices help to improve simple sentence building among Year Three pupils?
- How does the use of three-coloured emoji dices help to improve my teaching practices in promoting Year Three pupils' repertoire of sentence construction?

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

For this study, I have selected six participants that consisted of one weak learner, three intermediate learners as well as two above average learners who required constant drills in improving their sentence

construction. I am also the researcher, an insider, as well the onlooker to examine the execution of action as well as the behaviours of pupils throughout the process. Pseudonyms are used to represent the research participants. Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on the common issue faced as stated in my research focus. The rationale behind selecting participants from various proficiency level was to bridge the gap in learning through fun learning strategy in gauging to what extend using three-coloured emoji dices strategy has helped to improve simple sentence building among my pupils as well as my teaching practices in the classroom.

## RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

### Action

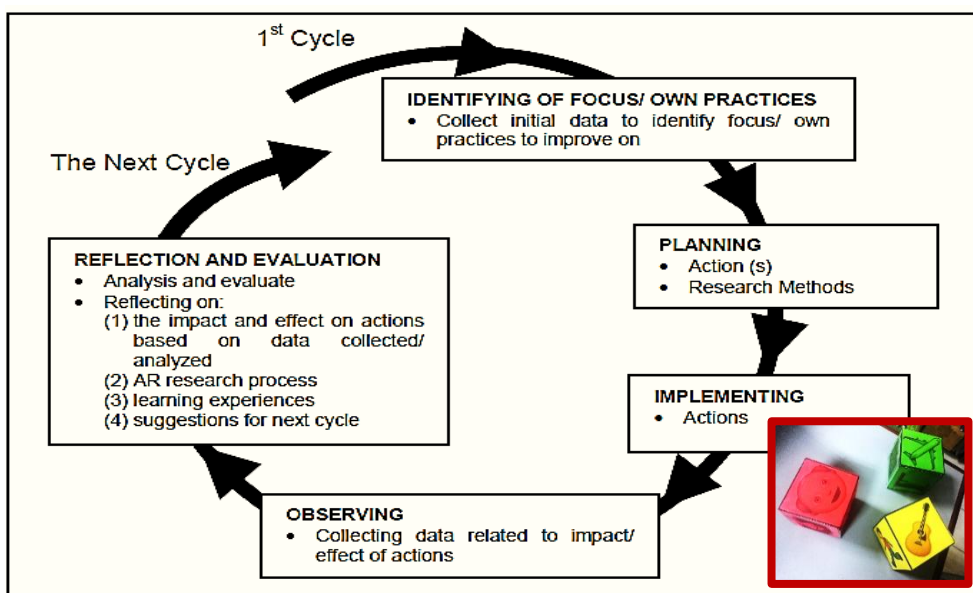


Figure 3. The steps in Lewin (1946) and Laidlaw's (1992) model adopted in this action research

I have used Lewin (1946) and Laidlaw's (1992) model as my guide in this action research as shown in Figure 3. Since my strategy in this research was using three-coloured emoji dices to improve on pupil's simple sentence construction, I firmly believe that this strategy would optimized pupils' language learning when executed with the collaboration of pupils. This is further supported by Hanko (2016), who was of opinion that the children's capacity of learning depends on what and how they are being taught and is of at least equal importance in stimulating children's learning. Ultimately, this model is about a series of interrelated fundamental steps in my action research process. I have implemented all the vital steps of the model in the first and second cycle of my action research.

## Steps in Implementing Action

### Pre-action



Figure 4. The pre-action phase that took place both inside and outside of the classroom.

I have drilled the pupils regarding the SVA rule. In developing the knowledge of sentence structure, the grammar of the sentence was the main focus that acted as an important component of text-building. Figure 4 portrays the drilling session that took place before the execution of action. Grammar instruction is most effective when mini-lessons are taught that target specific errors in student writing. It has been strongly suggested by some researchers that this is the most beneficial way of helping students to improve their command for grammar in writing (e.g. Robinson & Feng, 2016). That was why, it was essential that pupils master the basic structure in sentence construction before heading on towards creative writing.

Besides that, I have also taken the opportunity to introduce the concept of my strategy in visualized manner via PowerPoint slides. This was done to enable my pupils to fathom on how the steps in my strategy worked efficiently with the aid of colours used in constructing simple sentences systematically. These colours were based on the traffic light system and in line with the SVA rule.

### Cycle One Action

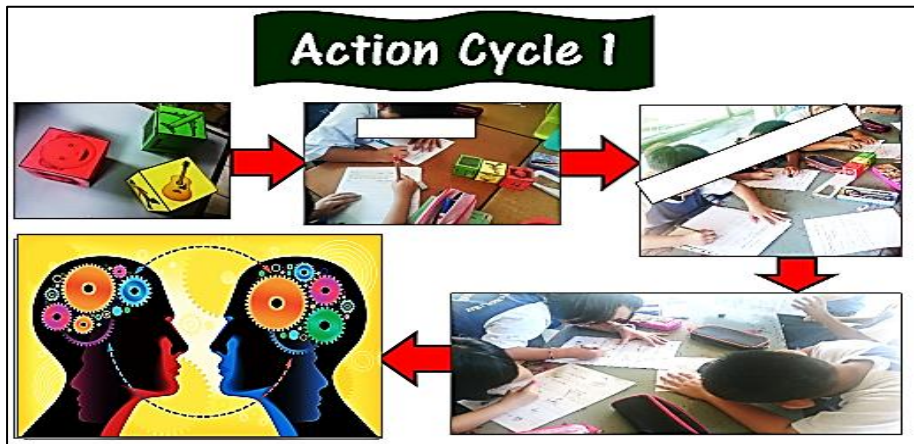


Figure 5. First cycle of action: Research participants utilized three-coloured emoji dices to construct simple sentences

This phase was carried out in the classroom whereby the six selected pupils were assigned to sit together and participate in the activity. Rules and regulations were briefed so that pupils were accustomed with the routine of turn taking during execution of the game as shown in Figure 6.

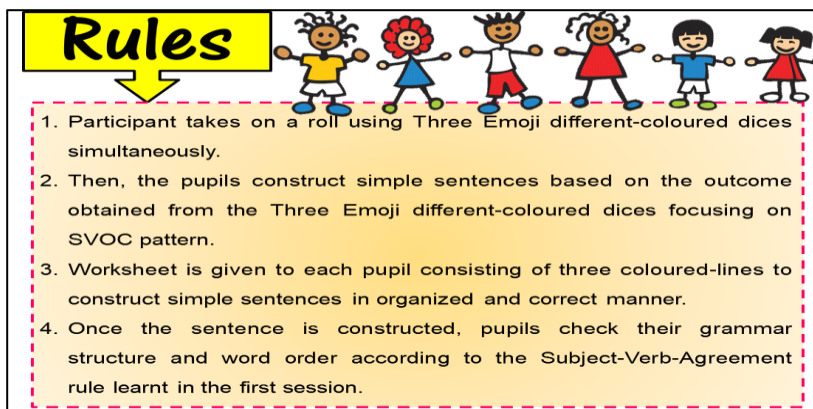


Figure 6. Steps involved in utilizing Three-coloured Emoji Dices

According to Gustafsson, Eriksson, Räisänen, Stenberg, Jacobs, Wright, Birch and Winberg (2011), effective integration of content and language requires collaborative delivery. It can facilitate students' achievement in context of widening participation, and in some interventions we can see how it is used to enhance disciplinary discourse depth and confidence. Each pupil was given a worksheet to work on the sentence building resulting from their throw of dices. This can be observed clearly as shown in Figure 5.

After the pupils have constructed five simple sentences based on the outcome obtained using the three different-coloured emoji dices, I would be able to analyze the progress of the research participants in creating SVOC sentence pattern aligned with the SVA rule. After that, I reflected on the results of conducting the sessions and then decided to conduct another cycle since the result obtained based on the reflection was not satisfactory. Thus, the second cycle was conducted to obtain pupils' progress in their sentence construction. During this cycle, the action was modified and further adapted to cater to the students' needs in learning.

### Cycle Two Action

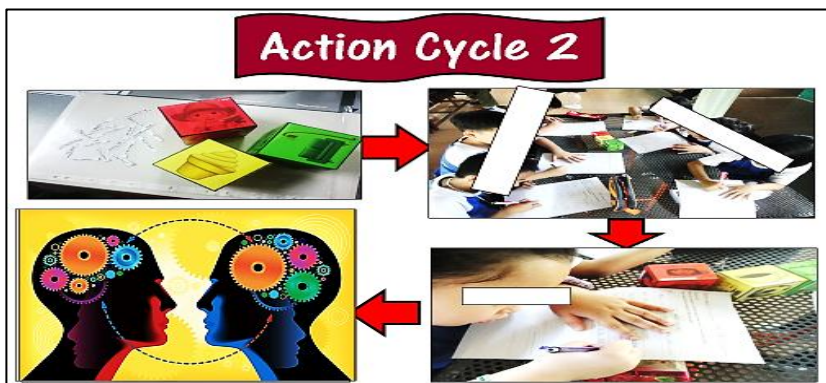


Figure 5. Second cycle: Research participants utilized three-coloured emoji dices to construct simple sentences

The steps of the action were carried similarly as in the first cycle. However, the tools of the approach were modified whereby the structure was written on each dice as shown in Figure 5. Since my aim was to ensure that the pupils mastered the SVA rule in writing simple sentences, the approach has been made simpler where the pupils ought to roll the dice and write their sentences with the given structure as co-reference to the picture itself. The data obtained were recorded using the same instruments as in Cycle One to support my findings towards the end of this research. The effects and impact of the action as well as the attainment of overall findings were further discussed. Critical reflection is vital in this research as it is quite simply, the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions (Brookfield, 2017).

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data for this research were collected from **field notes** on events taken place during the action phase. Not only that, I also sought feedback from my critical friend who observed the implementation of the action in order to gather evidences for this research. Besides that, the **pupils' worksheets** are another source of evidence. The worksheet was designed consisted three different coloured-lines. The purpose of such design was to



enable the pupils to construct simple sentences with guidance in an organized and correct manner. Correspondingly, Myers (2006) (as cited in Kurt & Osueke, 2014) claimed that the use of colours act as moderate stimulus in increasing memory retention. Another form of **worksheet** was also given to the pupils before and after the implementation of the action. This served as one of the ways to study the progress of the pupils' achievement and the effect of the strategy used.

During the implementation of the action, **visual recording** was also carried out. A **feedback form** was also given to the pupils to find out to what extent the pupils have achieved the required goals related to improvement of sentence construction. Important aspects of sentence construction were listed so that pupils would know their progress in sentence construction. I also **interviewed** my mentor regarding the selected pupils' progress as well as to explore the effect of my teaching in relation to implementing the approach. Pre-determined questions were posed during the semi-structured interview.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

In this action research, I have utilized both qualitative and quantitative approach in analyzing the data collected. For qualitative analysis, I have used pattern analysis to scrutinize the relationship between pupils' initial data with the current data from the worksheet given, field notes, visual recordings as well as interview transcripts. Firstly, I studied the data obtained carefully and underlined significant points in the **pupils' worksheets** that are regarded as important and related to my research focus. For each session conducted during my action, the events that happened during each session were jotted down in my **field notes**. In my analysis, I looked for patterns related to the effect of action data by extracting patterns that depicted the same theme in my field notes. Apart from that, the same form of method in analysis was used for my **critical friend's field notes**. Besides that, I also did retrospective data analysis using the same form of analysis method after revisiting the **visual recordings** captured, thus adopted an "open-minded" stance. This acute analysis has provided me with permanence and denser linguistic information. Pupils' facial expressions have tallied with what was observed from the visual recordings (pictures and videos captured). Last but not least, the responses obtained from the semi-structured **interviews** that I have conducted with my mentor and participants were also analyzed and categorized using pattern analysis in the interview transcript. Coding these responses and identifying a theme has helped me to formulate the findings for this research.

Meanwhile, for quantitative analysis, the **pupils' worksheets** were also used to analyze accuracy in conjunction with the SVA rule. In the analysis of the pupils' worksheets, the accuracy of the sentence was

measured based on the SVA rule as a result of using the three-coloured emoji dices. For the **final assessment** in cycle one, another form of **worksheet** was given to measure the effect of action. The final assessment was conducted to report on the progressive improvement in the pupils' sentence construction. Besides that, I have also utilized the **feedback form** in the form of bar graph to present the pupils' progress. The bar graphs were formed based on the accumulated frequency obtained from the participants throughout the two cycles.

### Data Checking Techniques

To establish trustworthiness of the data, I conducted triangulation. I have utilized **person triangulation** in my research to validate two of my data collecting methods namely field notes and document analysis. For field notes, I was able to jot down and record the observable information during my sessions with the participants. To further validate the information that took place during the sessions, I had the help of my critical friend who jotted down her observable experience into her field notes.

Besides that, I have also used **time triangulation** in verifying the obtained data. After a period of time, I administered the same form of assessment worksheet used as diagnostic test. I managed to triangulate all the six participants' sentence writing. As for **method triangulation**, I triangulated data from the pupils' feedback forms with the pupils' worksheets. Findings from both sources were compared for validity and reliability.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

- To what extent does using three-coloured emoji dices strategy help to improve simple sentence building among Year Three pupils?

### Forming sentences anatomically

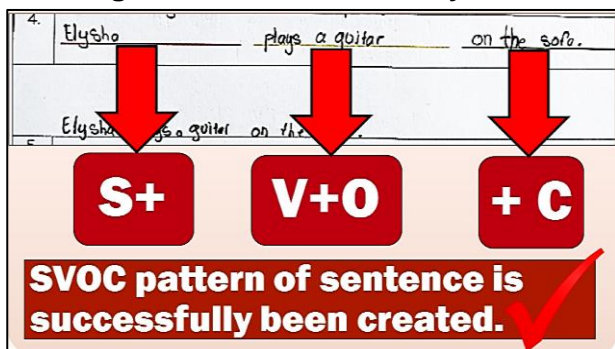


Figure 6. Outcome of the first cycle of action (12<sup>th</sup> April 2017).

The participants were able to build sentences step by step based on the outcome of the dices (Figure 6). They were able to generate ideas and vocabulary from the outcome of each coloured emoji dice. The dices enabled them to think of words easily to be placed on each coloured line in the worksheet given according to the traffic light system (red, yellow and green colour). This is further supported by my critical friend's and my own field related to the sessions as shown in Figure 7.

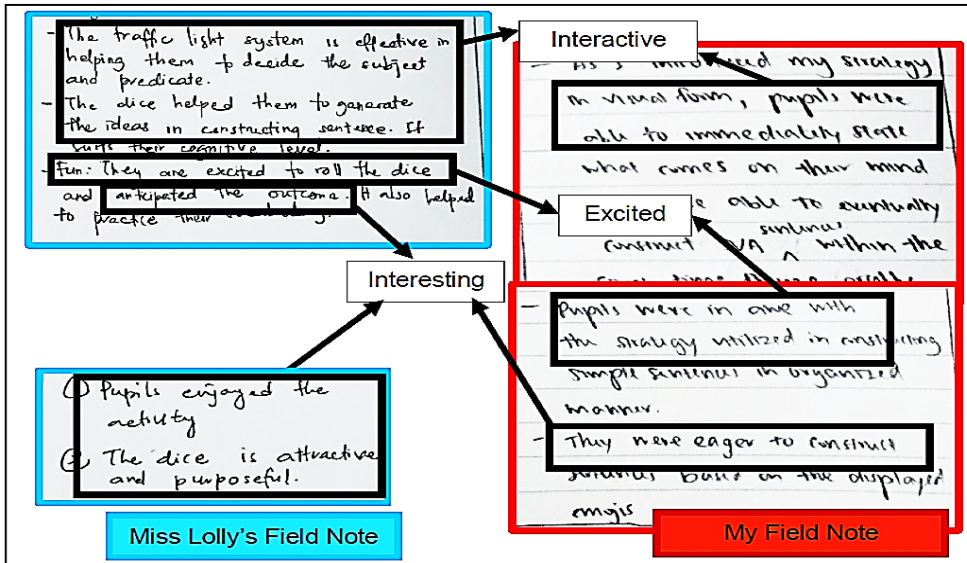


Figure 7. Excerpts from two different field notes showed positive responses  
**Improvement on sentence accuracy**

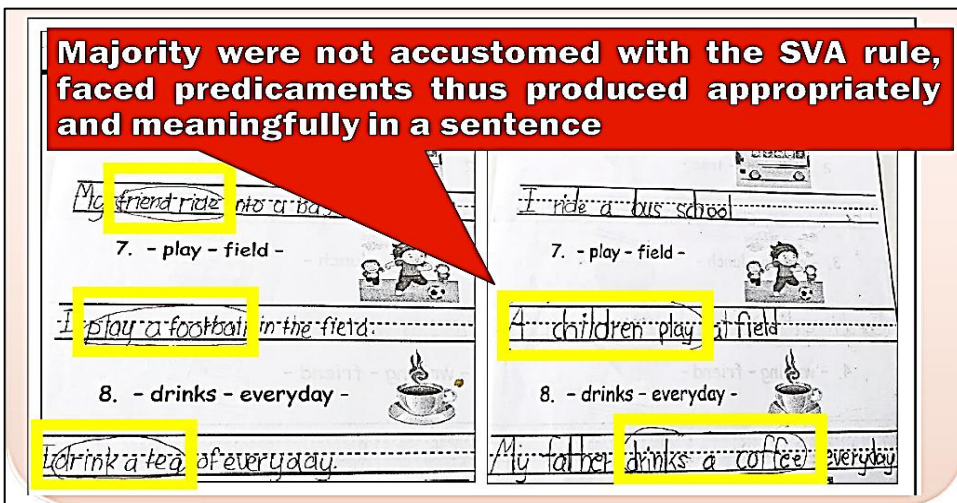


Figure 8. Outcome of pupils' diagnostic test on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017 (initial data or before action data)

The diagnostic test conducted with my participants before the implementation of action showed that most of them were quite weak in the SVA rule. Some of them could not discern the importance of using the right form of verb based on the subjects given in the task as shown in Figure 8. After the implementation of the action, there was a major change in the participants' results as shown in the final assessment for Cycle One. The participants managed to form simple sentences correctly in line with the SVA rule, using the correct structure as well as savvy in part of the speech (Figure 9) as well as in the final assessment for Cycle two as evidenced in Figure 10.

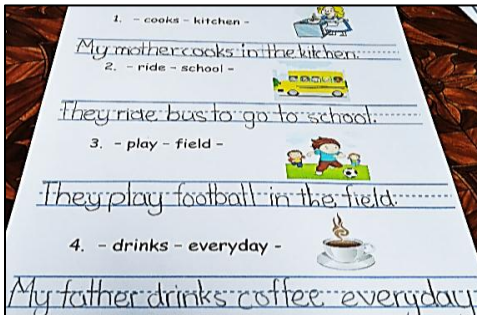


Figure 9. Outcome of pupils' final assessment on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2017 (Cycle 1)

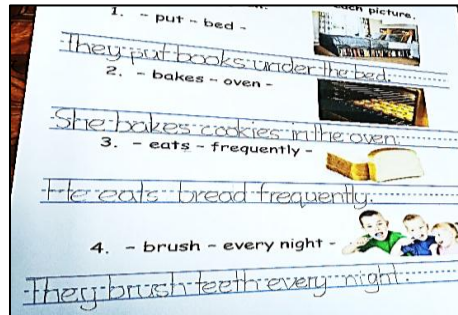


Figure 10. Outcome of pupils' assessment on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017 (Cycle 2)

- **How does using three-coloured emoji dices strategy help to improve my teaching practices in promoting Year Three pupils' repertoire of sentence construction?**

### Improvement of teaching aids

In my action research, I have improved my own teaching practice through the adaptation of the teaching aids that I used in teaching my level one pupils to write sentences. From the rebus activity in Figure 11 used in Year 2016, I have gotten less impact from pupils as they were quick to get bored if the same pictures were being used in the same passage. Henceforth, I have innovated my approach for better impact and thus, came up with this three-coloured emoji dices (Figure 12) in constructing simple sentences in a complete manner.

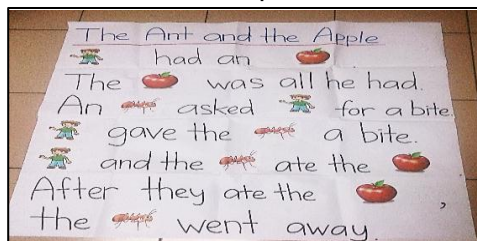


Figure 11. Rebus activity

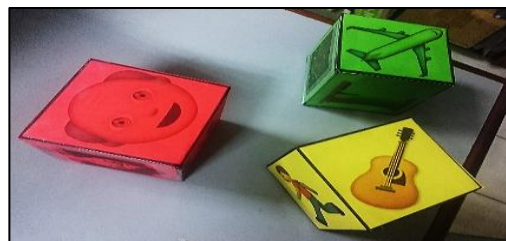


Figure 12. Three-coloured emoji dices

### Improvement of follow up activities

I have also improved my own teaching practice through the introduction of a follow-up action, particularly in relation to the accuracy of the sentences created. In order to assess my pupils' sentence construction in line with the SVA rule, I have made an adjustment to the approach and make it simpler where I have added structures to the dices as shown in Figure 13. This was done to facilitate the pupils in narrowing down their focus to enable accuracy of sentence construction.

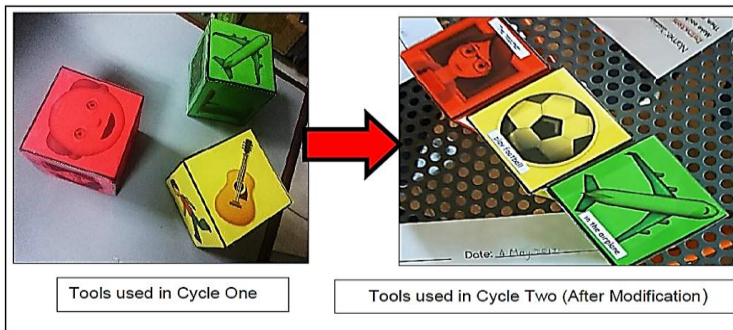


Figure 13. Transformation of the tools used in my action

Thanks to this initiative, my participants were more confident and ever ready to construct correct sentences based on the outcome of the dices with the structures given. They not only were able to construct complete sentences, but they also took active roles in making sure the tenses used were correct and agreed on the subjects given in the red-coloured emoji dice. This eventually made them more confident in constructing sentences independently as shown in Figure 14 where they showed progressive responses at the end of each cycle.

5	I can write simple sentences confidently and in an appropriate manner.	2	3	3	3	2	3	<b>Before Action</b>
↓								
5	I can write simple sentences confidently and in an appropriate manner.	4	5	5	3	3	4	<b>End of Cycle 1</b>
↓								
5	I can write simple sentences confidently and in an appropriate manner.	4	5	5	5	5	5	<b>End of Cycle 2</b>

Figure 14. Participants' progressive feedback throughout this research

## **REFLECTION**

Based on my previous practices, I barely see the importance of polishing simple sentences before proceeding to other complex writing activities. It was then I realized that the root in producing good writing is to build a strong foundation of language skills. Majority of the pupils were not accustomed with the SVA rule, and thus faced predicaments in organizing words appropriately and meaningfully in a sentence. The findings of this research has suggested that the use of three-coloured emoji dices has brought enormous impact to both myself as the researcher and also my participants. For example, the approach has improved my teaching practice whereby writing simple complete sentences has become a fun activity for pupils. The key to a successful language game is that the rules are clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun (Mubaslat, 2012). In addition, this approach has also brought productivity in pupils where they have improved themselves in terms of sentence construction as well as accurate with the SVA rule. Pupils gained more confidence in writing sentences the moment they got accustomed with the SVA rule.

As pupils have the prior knowledge regarding the colours of traffic light, it was duly effective that the infusion of colour elements in the dices have empowered pupils to remember better the steps in writing proper sentences in terms of the SVOC pattern. Sentence structure is the order of elements in a sentence, a group of words that expresses a complete thought. It provides the most common way of communicating in written English (Demirezen, 2012).

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Since the research participants have showed improvements in their mastery of simple present tense in the SVA rule as shown in the assessment worksheets, I have decided to enhance my approach where pupils demonstrate their SVA rule understanding with present continuous tense in the next cycle. The structure written on each dice will be elicited to enhance complexity of sentence construction. Besides that, this action can be further adopted by teachers in school where they can use more than three dices, such as adding the adjectives and adverb in enhancing their teaching practices. The bright pupils can create complex sentences and thus, adding more coloured dices could make the activity more challenging with more surprising outcomes and possibilities.

In conclusion, conducting this action research had made me realize that the teaching field is full of possibilities and opportunities. It not only could contribute to the betterment of the pupils' learning but also to the betterment of teachers' practices in the effort of delivering knowledge to the

young learners, especially in writing simple sentences based on the SVA rule focusing on the SVOC pattern.

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