USING '3W'S' SUBSTITUTION TABLE TO IMPROVE YEAR FIVE PUPILS' SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN WRITING SIMPLE SENTENCES

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Abstract

This research was conducted during my third phase of practicum in a sub-urban national primary school located in Kuching, Sarawak. The objectives were to improve Year Five pupils' subject verb agreement in writing simple sentences and to improve my teaching practice related to subject verb agreement. A total of six Year Five pupils involved as participants in this research as well as myself, the researcher cum teacher. The '3W's' substitution table was an adaptation of the existing substitution table that is commonly used for grammar drilling purposes. I collected the data through observation (field notes), document analysis and interview with two of the participants. The data collected were analysed and triangulated to ensure the validity of the result obtained. The findings showed that I have improved on my teaching practice and the participants also demonstrated that they were able to identify which verb form (with/without the morpheme '-s') should be chosen to comply with the agreement rule. The use of '3W's' substitution table could be enhanced by focusing on the variety of categories of subjects in sentences.

Keywords: Substitution table, subject-verb agreement, singular, plural, grammar drilling

Abstrak

Kajian ini telah dijalankan semasa saya menjalani praktikum fasa tiga di sebuah sekolah rendah kebangsaan yang terletak di pinggir bandar Kuching, Sarawak. Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk meningkatkan tahap penguasaan 'subject-verb agreement' semasa menulis ayat tunggal dalam kalangan murid Tahun Lima dan memperbaiki amalan pengajaran dan pembelajaran saya berkaitan 'subject-verb agreement'. Terdapat enam murid Tahun Lima terlibat sebagai peserta kajian di samping saya sendiri selaku penyelidik dan guru. Jadual penggantian '3W's' adalah adaptasi daripada jadual penggantian yang sedia ada yang sering digunakan untuk tujuan pengukuhan tatabahasa. Saya telah mengumpul data melalui kaedah pemerhatian (nota lapangan), analisis dokumen, dan temu bual dengan dua orang peserta kajian. Data yang telah dikumpul dianalisis dan di triangulasi untuk memastikan kesahan dapatan yang diperoleh. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa saya telah dapat memperbaiki amalan pengajaran dan pembelajaran dan peserta kajian pula telah menunjukkan kemampuan dalam mengenal pasti bentuk kata kerja yang perlu digunakan untuk mematuhi peraturan tatabahasa. Kegunaan jadual penggantian '3W's' boleh ditingkatkan lagi dengan memberi fokus kepada pelbagai kategori subjek dalam ayat.

Kata kunci: Jadual penggantian, *subject-verb agreement*, *singular*, majmuk, pengulangan tatabahasa

INTRODUCTION

Context

I am a pre-service teacher from the Institute of Teacher Education Batu Lintang Campus, pursuing a Bachelor Degree in Teaching with Honours for the Teaching of English as Second Language in primary schools. Now, I am in my eight semester. I taught at a sub-urban school, SK Rimas, Kuching (pseudonym) during the third phase of practicum that started on 6th February 2017 and ended on 5th May 2017.

I underwent School Based Experience (SBE) during my second until fifth semester of the degree programme in four different schools. Meanwhile, during practicum, I taught English Language for my major subject and Health Education for my minor subject.

Teaching and Learning Reflection

In my previous teaching practice, I found that the pupils in three different schools faced common problem which was having poor grasp on subject-verb agreement rules pertaining to the addition of the morpheme '-s' to the verb to agree to the subject. Previously, I conducted error correction method (Rana & Yousif, 2015) and used correction code techniques (Ferdouse, 2012) to point out pupils' mistakes. However, when I applied similar strategies on the pupils of SK Rimas, my third phase of practicum school, it did not work for them.

I discovered that the pupils' mother tongue has contributed to this problem. As they are all Malay, there is no specific rule to adhere to in writing sentences (Nayan, 2009). Hence, they just applied similar rule as reflected in the Malay Language. This supported by Khazriyati and Tan (2006) (as cited in Nor, Norsimah & Kesumawati 2008) whose research discovered that the absence of inflection in the Malay language causes the occurrence of mistake in 'subject-verb-agreement' (SVA) and copula 'be' in writing sentences.

Hence, I tried to cater to their problem by using the substitution table. Luckily, they were familiar with the common substitution table as they had encountered the table previously. Thus, I decided to implement the substitution table in addressing the issue concerned by adapting the table to be more facilitative for the pupils to improve their SVA in writing sentences.

Research Objectives

This research was conducted to fulfil two research objectives which were to describe how '3W's substitution table improve Year Five pupils' SVA in writing simple sentences and to explore how the '3W's' substitution table improves my teaching practice related to SVA in writing simple sentences.

Research Questions

The following questions were guidelines for achieving the stated research objectives.

- How does '3W's' substitution table improve Year Five pupils' SVA in writing simple sentences?
- How does '3W's' substitution table improve my teaching practice related to SVA in writing simple sentences?

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION

Action

This research was conducted based on Lewin (1946) and Laidlaw's (1992) action research model. The action research processes encompassed five stages which are identifying focus, planning, implementing, and observing, then reflection and evaluation.

Firstly, I focused on improving pupils' SVA as it was the identified issue faced by the participants. Ascoli (2015) conducted similar research pertaining to this issue but focusing on complex sentences. I only focused on simple sentences to strengthen the pupils' basic SVA. Then, I planned my action as I proposed to use the substitution table. For my action, I modified the common substitution table in which I labelled each column with "wh-" questions: who, what, where and when. Labels were added as previously its absence had hindered the pupils to better use the table for grammar drilling. This might as well aid their agreement comprehension.

Implementation of Action

Cycle 1: I started by selecting the focus in which I focused on singular subjects. The pronouns **She, He,** and **It** were used as the starter as they take the '-s' inflection. Only subject-verb sentence patterns were used for drilling at first before the sentence patterns were further developed. Then, the '3W's' substitution table and a sentence "He plays football" were being presented (Figure 1). Building familiarization on the table was conducted as the participants were asked to rewrite the phrases on the column which they represent. Fixed "wh-" questions were asked to facilitate understanding on how the table works.
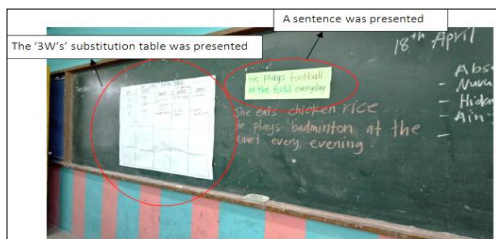

Figure 1. The '3W's' substitution table
and a sentence presented

After that, drilling was done by exploiting the '3W's' substitution table (Figure 2) and using different sentence pattern, such as subject-verb, subject-verb-object and subject-verb-adverb. The subjects as well were changed across the categories, such as names, animals, person, and things.

Figure 2. Participant given laminated '3W's' substitution table

Lastly, worksheets were administered to assess pupils' understanding. The data obtained were then analysed, and reflected on for improvement for the next cycle. As a result, I decided to use pictures for the next cycle.

Cycle 2: I started by revising the singular SVA and introduced the plural SVA rules. Pictures were used to better visualise and differentiate the rules (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Pictures were presented

Next, compound and plural nouns were introduced to bring the participants' attention to the meaning of plural subjects. Again, by using different sentence patterns, they need to identify each element in each sentence that need to be written on the different column in the substitution table. They were reminded to focus on the agreement rule for plural subject when rewriting the sentence in the form of substitution table. Lastly, worksheets were administered to assess their understanding on the newly introduced rules.

METHODOLOGY

Research Participants

I was also one of the participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p 21) in this research as I was involved actively as a researcher cum teacher to improve my practices. The other participants were two boys, Safuan and Alif and four girls, Afrina, Ariyana, Azieha and Fatiha (pseudonyms). All six of

them were from 5 Perdana. They communicate mostly in the Malay Language as they are from similar cultural background. They were selected as participants in this research because they were assessed as having low proficiency in English, in addition with low academic performances. They also showed poor grasp on SVA rules.

Data Collecting Methods

Observation. Through this method, field notes were written to note what I have done for one particular session and also to record my observation of the participants' behaviour, feedback and progress after the "3W's" substitution table was implemented. Apart from that, pictures were also taken as proof of implementing the action in each cycle. Besides my own field notes, I also obtained my critical friend's field notes for data triangulation purposes.

Document analysis. At the beginning of the implementation of the research, a table template was given to the participants for building familiarization on the '3W's' substitution table. They were asked to analyze the few sentences provided, then write down each phrases in the column correspond to it. Next, a worksheet was given to each pupil to assess their understanding. Two sets of worksheets were administered in which Worksheet 1 focused on singular subjects whereas Worksheet 2 focused on plural subjects. Worksheet 1 and Worksheet 2 were administered in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 respectively. These worksheets were used to obtain the participants' scores after implementing the action. The scores obtained act as the key measure to show the participants' understanding on SVA. Apart from that, the worksheets were also used to analyse the pattern of mistakes made by the participants.

Interview. I conducted a structured interview with two participants in my research who were Safuan and Afrina. Structured questions were asked to them because they ought to give their opinions on the effects of the '3W's' substitution table on their subject verb agreement in writing simple sentences. Both of them were being interviewed at the same time. The interview session was being audio recorded for reference purposes when transcription was made. Most of the time, the participants responded in Malay Language due to the reason that they could not respond well in English Language. I tolerated the language used to response to my questions as long as they were able to indicate how my action has impacted them personally in improving their subject verb agreement in writing simple sentences

Data Analysis

After the implementation of the action, the data collected were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis of data focused on numerical data. For that reason, the scores obtained by the

participants for the worksheets given were tabulated (Table 1) and all scores were presented in bar graph (Figure 4).

Table 1

Marks for Worksheet 1

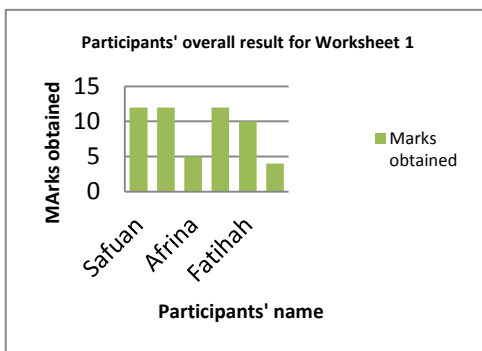| Participant's name	Marks obtained
Safuan	12

* Sample of one participant's mark

Figure 4. Worksheet 1 overall result

Next, the qualitative analysis of data in this research involved two techniques which were content and pattern analysis.

Content analysis. The subjects used for each question in the worksheets were analyzed (Figure 5) during content analysis.
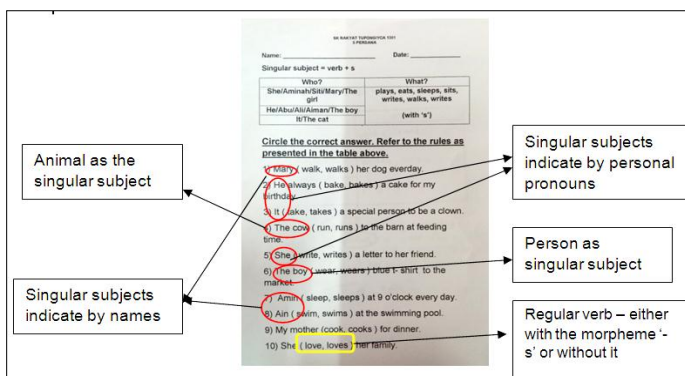
Figure 5. Content Analysis for Worksheet 1

Based on the analysis made, the subjects were categorized into four categories which were "name" (two or more and with other person), "people", "animal" and "personal pronouns". Meanwhile the verb analysed fell into single category which is "regular verb".

Pattern analysis. The participants' answers in each worksheet were analyzed to look for pattern, such as whether the participants gave similar answers for similar category of subjects (Figure 6). Then, their answers were tabulated to check for consistency in their answers (Table 2).
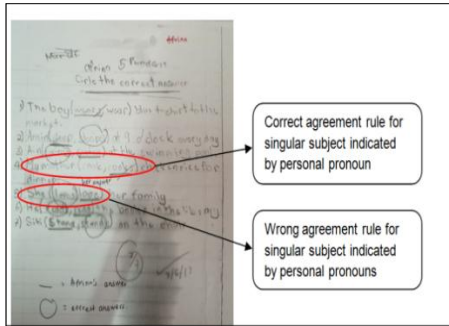
Figure 6. Sample of pattern analysis

Table 2

Consistency in Participant's Answers

The pattern in the answers (Figure 6) showed that the participant gave different answer for similar category of the subject used in the question.

Data Checking

The data collected were then triangulated through time and person triangulation.

Time triangulation. Worksheet 1 was administered in Cycle 1 (27th April 2017) and administered again on 3rd August 2017 (Figure 7). Time triangulation was used to cross check whether the action implemented has positive impact on the participants. For that reason, I administered the worksheet on similar topic or focus at different time. This was done to check for similarities of answers given in similar worksheet.
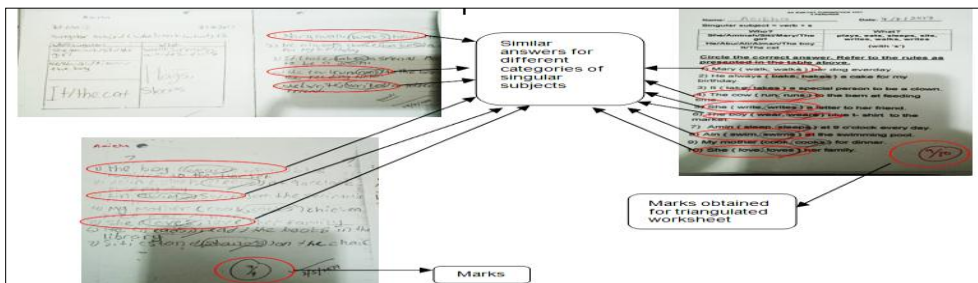

Figure 7. Cross checked of answers in both worksheets (Worksheet 1)

Person triangulation. I asked Muhd. Mirzan (real name with permission) to be my critical friend and obtained his field notes based on what he had observed during the particular session he attended when I implemented my action. Then, I cross checked my own field notes and his field notes for that session (Figure 8). This was done to identify similarities and differences of our observation.

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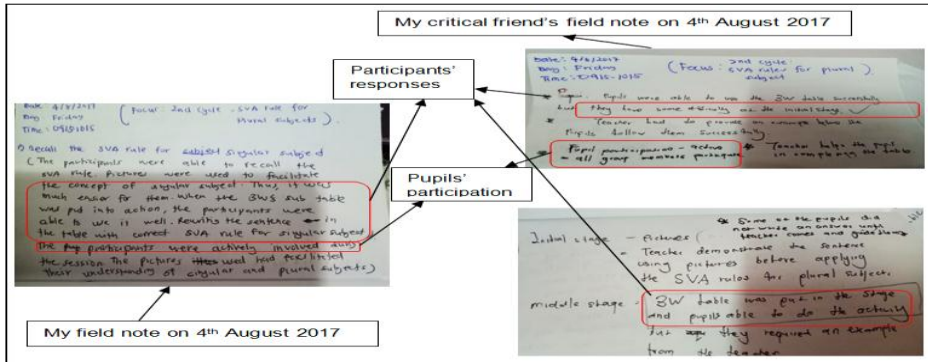

Figure 8. Cross checked of my own and critical friend's field notes

Based on my critical friend's observation, he supported that the action implemented was able to facilitate the participants' SVA rules. Positive feedback were also obtained when the pictures were displayed to illustrate either singular or plural subject.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- **How does '3W's' substitution table improve Year Five pupils' SVA in writing simple sentences?**

Implementing the SVA table helped the participants to improve their SVA in writing simple sentences in the sense that the participants were able to recognise the correct verb form to agree to the subject by identifying the number of subject. Figure 9 shows the interview transcription with one of the participants, Safuan.
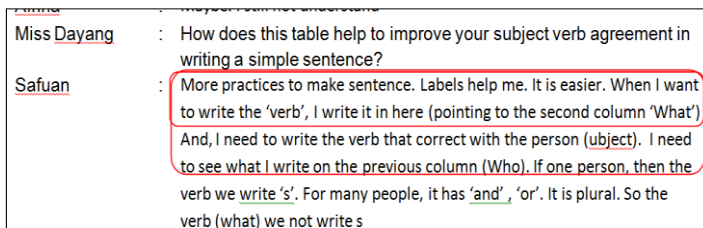

Figure 9. Interview transcript with Safuan

During the interview, Safuan responded positively towards the labels placed on each column because the labels facilitated his focus in recognizing whether the subject is singular or plural. He indicated that if the subject is singular, the morpheme '-s' should be added to the verb to agree to the singular subject.

The participants' performances before and after the action also supported the finding as shown in the sample answer (Figure 10).
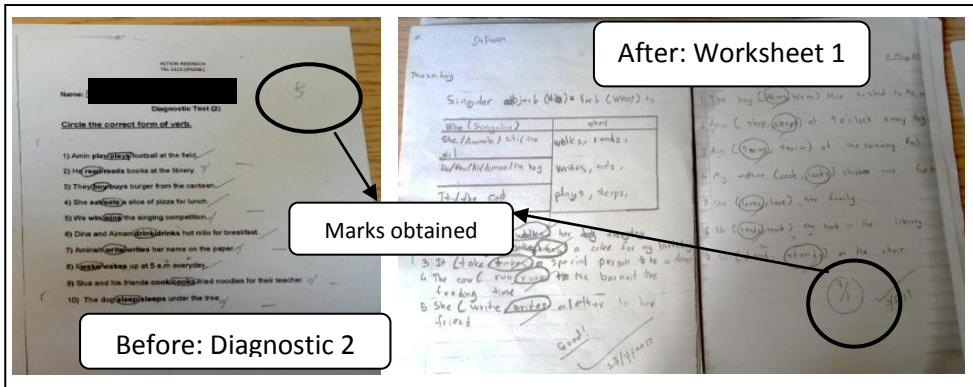
Figure 10. Sample of participant's worksheet (before and after action)

The increase in the number of correct answers after using '3W's' table showed improvement of the pupils' SVA in writing sentence (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3

Before the Action (Diagnostic 2)

Participants' name	Question number									
	1 (sing.)	2 (sing.)	3 (plu.)	4 (sing.)	5 (plu.)	6 (plu.)	7 (sing.)	8 (sin.)	9 (plu.)	10 (sing.)
Safuan	/	✗	/	/	✗	/	✗	/	✗	✗

Table 4

After the Action (Worksheet 1)

Participants' name	Question number											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Safuan	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

My field notes noted similar improvement as shown in Figure 11.
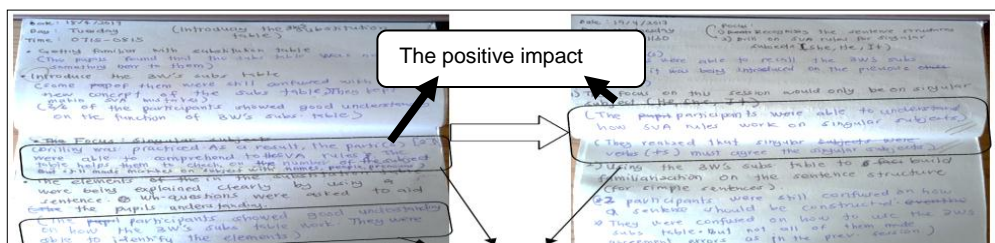

Figure 11. Sample of field notes on two different sessions

- **How does '3W's' substitution table improve my teaching practice related to SVA in writing simple sentences?**

The '3W's' substitution table used in this action research improved my teaching practice related to SVA in various aspects such as improving the existing substitution table, establishing a more organised SVA drilling, creating a more interesting SVA teaching, providing sufficient SVA drilling and enhancing of SVA drilling strategy.

Improvement of the substitution table. The '3W's' substitution table is a modification made to the existing substitution table in which each columns were labelled with "wh-" questions (Figure 12). The labels were "Who", "What", "Where" and "When".
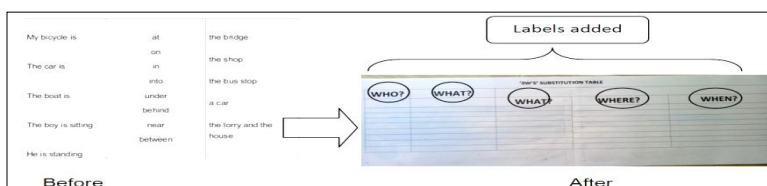

Figure 12. Modification made to the existing table

More organized SVA drilling. The labels placed on each column aided the drilling purposes in which the label became the key word for prompting questions to comprehend the functions of the '3W's' substitution table. This also facilitated the teaching of SVA (Figure 13) in a more organized way. In addition to that, the participants' attention was also diverted to one column at a time when fixed questions were prompted.
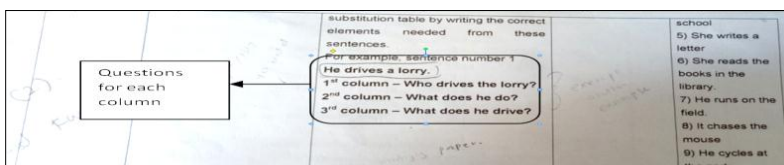

Figure 13. Sample of organized procedure during drilling

More interesting SVA teaching. The '3W's' substitution table also received positive responses from the participants. They were interested to learn SVA and they were actively involved in the session as shown in my field notes and reflection (Figure 14).
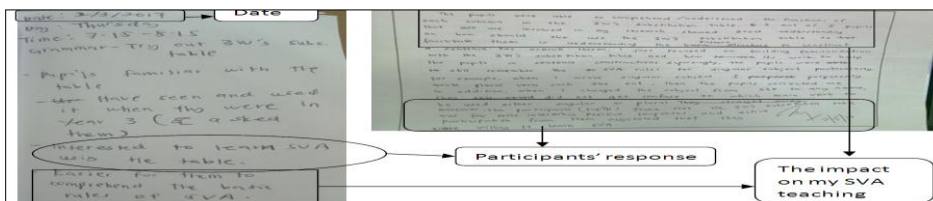

Figure 14. My field note (2nd March) and reflection on one of the sessions

Provided sufficient SVA drilling. Throughout the sessions, sufficient SVA practices during drilling were provided (Figure 15) to the pupils.
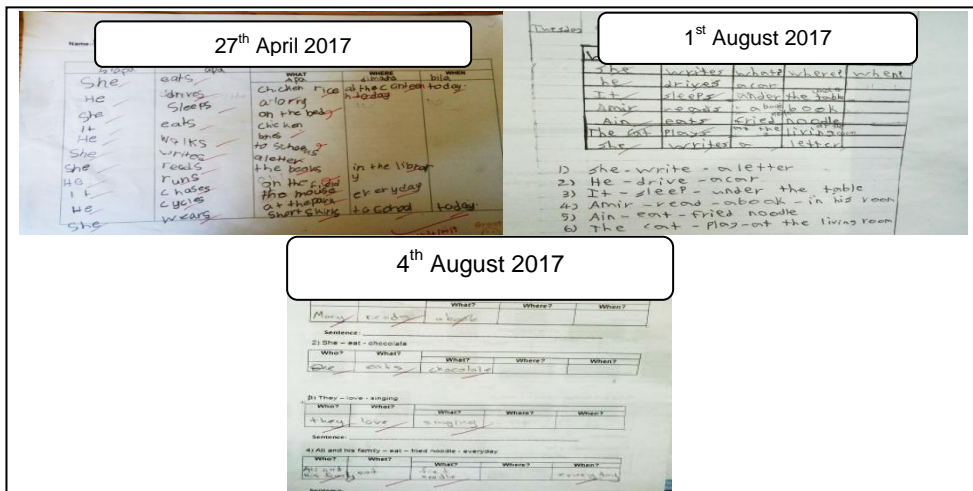

Figure 15. Different SVA practices given

These practices were given to the pupils starting from building familiarization with the '3W's' substitution table (27th April), then reviewing on the agreement rules for the singular subjects (1st August), and ending with the overall practices on the agreement rules for both singular and plural subjects (4th August).

Enhancement of the SVA drilling strategy. Verbal drilling conducted previously in teaching the agreement rules was enhanced by incorporating the strategy with written drilling as shown in my field notes (Figure 16).
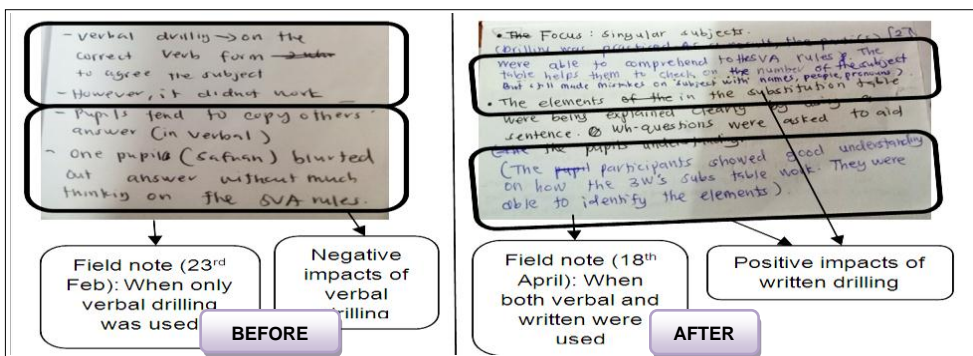

Figure 16. Sample of my field notes (before and after action)

The two excerpts in Figure 16 indicated changes from negative to positive impact on participants' understanding of the agreement rules as they could practice what they had learned in written form.

REFLECTION

Through the action implemented in this research, I discovered that the '3W's' substitution table has benefitted both participants and I, as the researcher cum teacher.

Pertaining to the participants' self motivation in learning grammar, they were more motivated when the action was implemented as it was more interesting and informative. Ruin (1996) (as cited in Johannson, 2010) emphasized the importance of motivation in terms of learning style and how prior knowledge matters for learning. This research suggested that the participants were familiar with the substitution table which facilitated the SVA rules learning. As verbal and written drilling on grammar was practiced throughout the research, the integrated strategy successfully catered to different learning styles which increased their motivation to learn.

Apart from that, the 21st century skills related to critical thinking was integrated through this research. This was reflected through how the '3W's' substitution table had provided sufficient SVA drilling which improved my teaching practices. Lipman (1988) (as cited in Muhammad, 2000) was of opinion that critical language learners must be able to justify their answers and adapt to constraints and this was reflected in my research. Whenever, the participants encountered singular or plural subject, they critically justify their choices in their answers.

In relation to my SVA teaching practices, I was able not only improved the pupils' SVA understanding but as well as assisted them in revising their knowledge on nouns.

Furthermore, the findings also suggested that more organized SVA drilling strategy resulted from the label introduced provided opportunities for the participants to do self questioning when they write or rewrite their sentences. Dyah and Hoa (2017) defined self-questioning as a continuous process in which readers monitor their reading by asking themselves questions. They mentioned that as students asked themselves through self-questioning, they would develop interest in the topic which guides their thinking while reading (Rosenshine, Mesiter, & Chapman, 1996).

Last but not least, I focused more on how I manipulated the '3W's' substitution table and was able to give ample practice on SVA to the participants. Hence, a task-based language teaching was practiced to further utilize the improvised teaching aids in the course of improving my teaching practices as well as the participants' SVA. It is a communicative task-based approach. José and Gloria (2012) suggested that the communicative approach attempts to deal with grammar teaching in improving the learners' communicative skills. The role of grammar in task-

based learning was further explained in which focused-on-form version of this approach is necessary to make the students learn grammar.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTIONS

The findings obtained had suggested some recommendations for further actions. Firstly, I, the teacher should focus on one area each time, considering the participants' English proficiency. For instance, focus on using names and people as the subject first, then animals and other possible subjects to ensure the pupils are able to see the differences. As for the object, I could focus on either adverbial phrase, prepositional phrase or adjectival phrase each time for drilling purposes. This might facilitate the participants to better understand the function of each sub-column for the third 'W'.

Next, when pictures were used to facilitate the participants' understanding on the subject, they showed better performance. Thus, I, the teacher should continuously do self-reflection on teaching strategies that could be used in improving the action implemented to facilitate the pupils' SVA understanding. As a teacher, I also need to consider the variety of learning styles. Verbal and written drilling that was applied in this research might work for some, but others might need different method to improve. As there are many researches done on different learning styles, I, as the teacher need to read more to further improve the implemented action.

Apart from that, I, the teacher ought to vary the structure of the assessment administered to explore the effect of the action implemented. Other suitable test items for assessing SVA need to be considered to ensure the validity of the result obtain and as well as the practicality and workability of the action implemented.

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