

## THE USE OF JAZZ CHANTS TO DEVELOP YEAR 3 PUPILS' ABILITY TO CONSTRUCT SIMPLE SENTENCES

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**ABSTRACT:** This action research attempts to improve teacher's classroom teaching in developing pupils' ability to construct simple sentences. Jazz chanting was adapted to teach writing skills and was used as the intervention. This research aimed to describe the extent the use of jazz chants was able to develop Year 3 pupils' ability to construct simple sentences effectively. Three research participants were chosen among year 3 pupils. The participants were purposefully identified as they had encountered difficulties in constructing simple sentences. Three lessons to exploit the intervention were conducted in this research. The data collection methods that were used in this research to gain insights into the effectiveness of the teacher's teaching strategy were document analysis consisting of worksheets and a pre-test and a post-test, observation and a semi-structured interview with the participants. The research findings revealed that the teaching with the use of the intervention, jazz chanting, was able to positively impact two participants in constructing simple sentences effectively. Meanwhile, triangulation of the various data also indicated that the teaching aided by the intervention failed to have the expected impact on one participant. Discussion of the research findings and conclusion had highlighted the researcher's pertinent reflection and suggestions for further improvement on the intervention and for future research.

**KEYWORDS:** constructing simple sentences, jazz chanting, intervention

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### INTRODUCTION

English language is taught as a second language (L2) in all Malaysian national schools, both primary and secondary, as a Second Language (ESL). Hence, it is very challenging to teach English in many schools, especially those in the rural areas. The writing skill, has always been a difficult skill for individuals especially for ESL students and this is vouched by Nesamalar, Saratha and Teh (2001) who claim that Malaysian students are found to have writing skill deficiencies. This has been a point of major concern too among both teachers and parents because at schools the writing component is given much credit or marks for evaluation. For most students in the rural areas, the exposure and usage to the English language has been very limited, thus English language is considered a foreign language. As a result, those whose exposure and usage of the language is limited to the language classroom tend to have low proficiency in English. Chong, Tan and Mardziah (2011) revealed in their study that a growing number of Malaysian students are unable to produce coherent utterances or written texts in English, even just in the form of simple sentence. In other words, the ability to produce and understand sentences is a prerequisite to learning but many Malaysian students face

serious problems in producing and understanding them. So there is clear evidence that the poor development of the receptive skill tends to impact on the acquisition of the productive skills especially the writing skill.

### **Reflection of Teaching and Learning Experiences**

Based on the teaching and learning experiences throughout my three practicum phases, most of the pupils encountered the same problem which was the writing skill. According to Verspoor and Sauter (2000), simple sentences have only one main verb, one subject and one predicate, though they may include different kinds of modifiers. Yet different kinds of modifiers, coming at the beginning of sentences, in the middle of sentences, and at the end of sentences can be very confusing to non-native learners of English. Thus, pupils had difficulties in getting the correct word order to form simple sentences. As such, some parts of the sentences were missing or the sentences were “hanging”. Therefore, to improve my teaching practice, a jazz chanting technique was innovatively incorporated into my lessons. Thus, this study focused on developing participants’ writing skill, specifically in writing simple sentences.

### **Preliminary Data Collection**

In collecting the necessary preliminary data, a diagnostic test was conducted for a year 3 class. The diagnostic test was aimed to measure students’ mastery of the writing skill in English language, particularly in constructing simple sentences. Based on the diagnostic test results, several students were identified as appropriate participants for this study. Besides, the researcher also carried out an unstructured interview with the English teacher of the class to develop a better understanding of the interviewee’s social reality from the interviewee’s perspectives. In this study, the researcher interviewed her regarding the pupils’ ability to construct simple sentences by referring to the results of the diagnostic test. The cooperating teacher had also pointed out several names who generally had difficulties and problems in the learning of the English subject.

### **RESEARCH FOCUS**

There are numerous reasons for writing to be the last acquired domain of learning English. The main one is that a more detailed and analysed knowledge of a language is needed to write it than to understand it (Bialystok & Bryan, 1985). In line, the researcher aimed to focus on developing pupils’ ability to construct simple sentences as there has been an ongoing problem of writing successfully among ESL students. Since the same writing problem kept surfacing conspicuously during all the three practicum phases, thus the researcher believed that it would be best to focus on the problem on an urgent basis as the participants were still in Level 1. Therefore, special attention needed to be given as by the end of Year 3, the KSSR outlined that pupils will have to master the mechanics of writing and then proceed to develop the skill to write at word, phrase and sentence levels. In other words, there was an urgent need to find a solution to overcome this shortcoming. Hence, this action research was done based on Kurt Lewin’s Action Research Model and the underlying theories that were used to underline the innovation were Habit Formation Theory by Skinner (1974) and Zone Proximal of Development by Lee Vygotsky (1978).

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research objective of this study is:

To describe the extent the use of jazz chants is able to develop Year 3 pupils’ ability to construct simple sentences effectively.

The research question is:

To what extent can the use of jazz chants enable the teacher to develop Year 3 pupils’ ability to construct simple sentences effectively?

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

In this study, the teacher, who was conducting the study, was the researcher. She became part of the research subject as she involved directly throughout the study. It evolved in the context of her daily practice in her own class. Besides, in this study, there were three participants -two boys and a girl. The participants were Malays and none of them were from English speaking family backgrounds. Particularly in the English subject, they were weaker pupils who had very limited English vocabulary and were not aware of the need to learn English. This to some extent had impacted on their efforts to want to acquire the language and it had compounded in them acquiring the productive skill of writing, which has been frequently envisaged as the most difficult skill.

**Table 1**

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY	LEARNING BEHAVIOUR & UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS	Description of Each Participant
A	Male	Low	Passive learner, often isolate himself and reserved	
B	Male	Low	Active learner, showing attempts to participate in the class by asking and answering questions.	
C	Female	Low	Passive learner, easily distracted and reserved.	

**IMP**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION**

**Table 2**  
*The Intervention Plan*

Lesson	Activities
Lesson 1 (60 minutes)	Teacher began the lesson by conducting a charade activity. Teacher showed flashcards and pictures. Teacher introduced jazz chants and taught subject verb agreement. The participants rearranged the jumbled up words in their respective group. The participants completed their worksheet by writing simple sentences based on the given pictures and verbs.
Lesson 2 (60 minutes)	The same steps were conducted as in Lesson 1. Group activity – the participants were required to write simple sentences based on the given picture and verb. The participants then were needed to write simple sentences based on the given words in the worksheet.
Lesson 3 (60 minutes)	The same steps were conducted as in Lesson 1 and 2. Group activity – the participants were required to write simple sentences based on the given verbs. The participants then were needed to write simple sentences based on the given pictures in the worksheet.

**Data Gathering Methods**

The first data gathering method used was document analysis .Participants’ worksheetsand their pre-test and post-test were analyzed. It was aimed to measure the degree of change occurring as a result of the intervention. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Besides, participant-observation was also used to study the

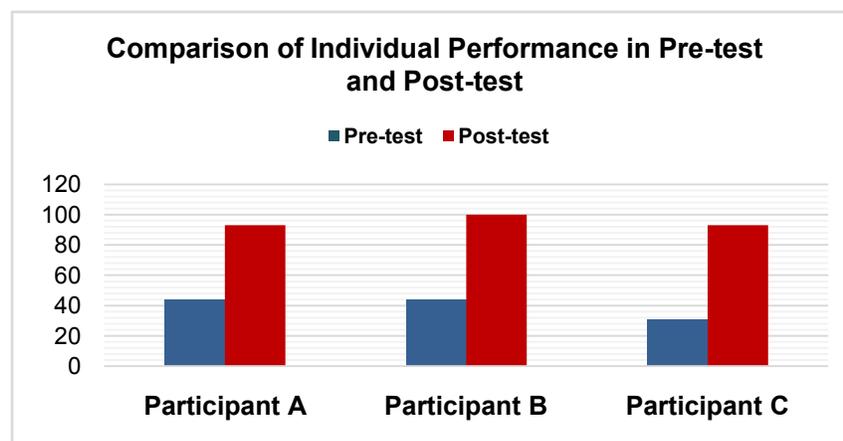
participants' behaviours and performance during the lessons (Cresswell, 2014). The checklist together with the field notes were used to record their behaviour and participation during the jazz chanting. Lastly, the researcher used semi-structured interview with the participants which used a protocol of open-ended questions that were guided by the research question. (Bryman, 2001). It was intended to find out how the teaching and the intervention had impacted on the development of the participants' ability to construct simple sentences .

### Data Analysis Procedures

After the data had been collected with the instruments and various sources, the researcher analysed the data both qualitatively and quantitatively.

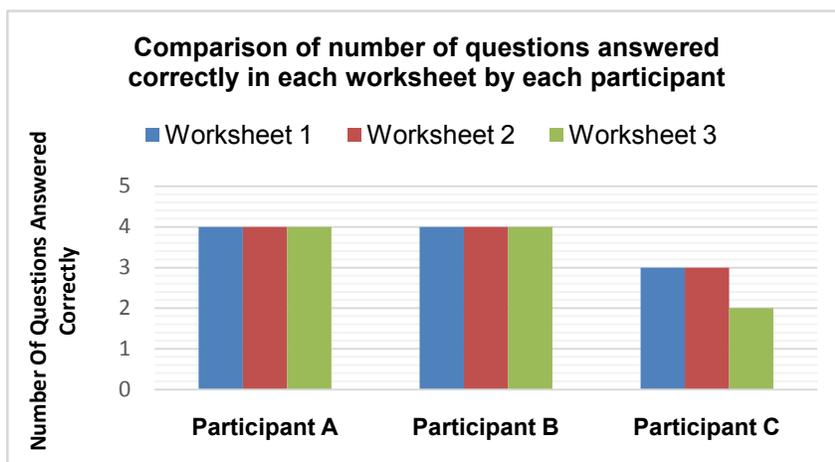
#### Data Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test

The researcher had compiled the scores of the pre-test and post-test in a bar graph (refer Figure 1). Difference in scores can be seen clearly in the graph and the tremendous improvement by the participants after the intervention had been implemented which was indicated by the red bar. Hence, this indicated that the intervention was effective in developing the participants' ability to write simple sentences correctly



*Figure 1: Comparison of achievement of the participants in the tests*

### Data Analysis of Observation (Worksheets)



**Figure 2: Comparison of number of questions answered correctly in each worksheet by each participant.**

Based on the graph, it is evident that the participants had improved in their ability in constructing simple sentences through changes in the teacher’s teaching that employed jazz chants innovatively as they were able to show improvement and development in answering the questions set which were set at a higher level of difficulty. Both Participants A and B consistently maintained their good results in the worksheets and in their learning. Meanwhile, the results seem to be lowered between worksheet 2 and worksheet 3 for Participant C.

### Data Analysis of Observation (Checklist and Field Notes)

#### Criteria 1: Participants’ Participation

Overall, participants A and B showed tremendous change throughout the three days they were observed. These two participants actively participated and reflected gradual but obvious improvement. They participated actively from the beginning until the end of the lessons. Hence, the observation indicated that except for Participant C, the teacher’s innovative strategy to use jazz chants enabled the two participants to be more enthusiastic and be active during the class throughout the three lessons that were conducted.

#### Criteria 2: Participants’ Body language

All in all, the two participants, A and B, managed to show some conspicuous and positive changes during the lessons. Participant C remained unmotivated during the lesson due to her bad health especially during the second lesson. Even on the last day, she still portrayed negative body language in the class even though she was not sick anymore.

#### Criteria 3: Participants’ Cooperation with the Group Members

All in all, both participants A and B, managed to cooperate well with the members in completing the task in which Participant B managed to become the group leader and Participant A also managed to perform the jazz chants well with the members. On the contrary, participant C refused to work with the group members and started crying as the peers kept teasing her for being too silent in the group. This resulted in her being more quiet and passive in the next lesson.

#### Criteria 4: Participants’ Ability to Remain Focused

Throughout the three lessons, both participants A and B managed to remain focused. Change was obvious in the case of participant A as during the last lesson, he managed to complete the task. However, throughout the three lessons too, participant C was seen to be easily distracted by the people passing the class or by the sound of the birds or she was day-dreaming in class.

### **Data Analysis of Semi-structured Interview with the Participants**

Participant A: He revealed that jazz chanting helped him a lot as he was able to know the pattern of the construction of simple sentences which made it easier to remember. This showed that the intervention had impacted positively on him because the strategy of drilling while teaching using the intervention enabled him to construct simple sentences correctly.

Participant B: He responded fast as there were no inhibitions or hesitations saying that jazz chanting was very enjoyable and the use of the same words repeatedly helped him in constructing simple sentences correctly. Thus, it can be said that the teacher's teaching through the use of the intervention really worked for him.

Participant C: She found that the learning of English was really difficult. Her body language suggested that English was not something she found easy and she claimed that jazz chanting was embarrassing. Through the responses, it can be deduced that the researcher's efforts to teach writing aided with the intervention had no considerable impact on her.

### **Data Checking Procedures**

The researcher used data triangulation to "compare, contrast, and cross-check" (Burns, 2010, p. 96) the various data to determine convergence or divergence, which can then be substantially important to answer the research question and achieve the research objective.

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Firstly, the researcher made comparisons between the data collected from the document analysis, which are the pre-test and post-test and the worksheets, with the observation data. In cross-checking, the researcher found that all the data supported each other to a large extent. The data from the tests showed that the participants improved positively as they managed to construct simple sentences correctly. Similarly, at the end of the observation for each lesson too, participant A and participant B enjoyed jazz chanting. This was also supported through the data obtained from the analysis of the participants' worksheets during the three lessons.

In contrast, there was slight discrepancy in the data obtained through these data for participant C. Data obtained through document analysis that is the results from the pre-test and post-test showed that the participant improved tremendously from 31% to 93%. However, the observation data highlighted that participant C was very passive, refused to participate in the activities and was uncooperative with the group members in completing the tasks. Moreover, the results of the worksheets seemed to have dipped in Worksheets 2 and 3. This indicated that the participant had digressed in her learning and the researcher consequently was not able to conclusively state if the intervention had impacted on participant C positively.

All in all, the researcher found that the data collected from the document analysis concurred with the data collected through the observation. This is because most of the elements of the two data converged for both Participants A and B. However, the data sets clearly diverged in the case of Participant C.

Next, the researcher also compared the observation data and data from the semi-structured interview with the participants. The observation revealed that the use of jazz chants helped in developing the participants'

ability to construct simple sentences especially for Participants A and B. This supported the data that arose from the interview as well. Both participants realised that the use of jazz chants helped them in constructing simple sentences through the repetition of words and drilling of sentence patterns. Thus, this supported that the intervention really impacted on participants A and B. However, for participant C, the observation data in the classroom and upon analysis of the worksheets together with the semi-structured interview data indicated that the intervention failed to have considerable or the expected impact on the participant.

Thus, the researcher's efforts to teach with the intervention has helped participants A and B and this also facilitated the researcher in answering the research question and in achieving the aim of the study to a great extent. However, for Participant C, the intervention had failed to impact on the participant's ability in constructing simple sentences conclusively.

Thirdly, the researcher also compared the data from the semi-structured interviews and the data based on the document analysis of the pre-test and post-test. The comparison showed similarities in terms of participants' improvement in the construction of simple sentences through the use of jazz chants. Especially for Participants A and B, both data clearly showed that the participants improved in their ability to construct sentences. In the post-test, both the participants showed vast improvements. Similarly, the interviews revealed that participants A and B enjoyed and realised that the intervention had worked on them and helped them in developing their writing ability to construct simple sentences correctly and effectively.

However, there was also discrepancy in the two sets of data discussed earlier and this was very clear in the case of Participant C. While the results of the participant's post-test showed tremendous improvement as compared with the results in the pre-test, the participant failed to answer the questions asked by the researcher during the semi-structured interview well. She claimed that she did not enjoy the jazz chants, and the researcher failed to get her to respond to the questions on how the intervention helped her in constructing the simple sentences.

Therefore, based on the data findings above, it was evident that teaching with the use of jazz chanting was able to positively impact participants A and B in constructing simple sentences correctly. Meanwhile, the results of all the data triangulated above showed that the intervention had failed to work conclusively for participant C.

## **REFLECTION**

Throughout the whole process, the researcher observed that the use of jazz chanting was able to inject a lot of fun in the learning experience of the year 3 pupils who were young learners. The researcher has become convinced that jazz chanting is a viable and a fun activity. Graham (2006) supported that the efficacy of jazz chants as they are motivating, fun and the rhythm supports the remembering of the lines easily. In effect, the participants were able to translate the 'knowledge' appropriately to eventually construct simple sentences.

Moreover, the researcher also found that the intervention had impacted positively on the participants as well because the jazz chanting activities involved lots of drilling and practice. According to Harmer (2007) the purpose of drills was to establish language habits through repetition of correct sentences supported by positive feedback and encouragement. Therefore, the oral productive skill had directly scaffolded the participants written productive skill in an integrative, meaningful and constructive manner.

However, the study revealed that the intervention as used by the researcher had somehow not impacted on one participant in developing her ability to construct simple sentences effectively. The researcher believes that it could be due to the limited time or and perhaps, the participant needed longer time to adjust to the new learning environment and get used to the jazz chants that were rather new to her. Thus the researcher believed that ideally the time for working with the jazz chants should have been extended if we deal with a whole class of pupils of varying language proficiency levels and learning styles as has been emphasised by Gardner (2006).

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION

The first suggestion for further action in this action research that exploits this intervention is to teach other sentence patterns, such as subject-verb-object-adverb (SVOA) because it facilitates extensive drilling. According to Peralta (2010) jazz chants add variety to lessons while they reduce anxiety and motivate learners. Participants tend to be relaxed and it would then be easier to get used to the rules of the language resulting in them to be able to write the target sentence patterns effectively.

The next suggestion for future action is this intervention can be made into an interactive digital software to keep up with the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom pedagogy for young learners. As such, moving pictures and animation can be included in exploiting the jazz chants to the students. As a result too, the participants' critical and creative thinking and ICT skills can be developed which are crucial in preparing them to face the ever-challenging education system and in meeting the demands of this dynamic era of globalisation.

Moreover, jazz chanting can also be used to teach pronunciation. Roach (2009) explains that the integration of pronunciation in ESL classrooms can be highly beneficial for learners to learn aspects of rhythm, stress and intonation patterns. Repetition and drilling can make correct forms of pronunciation to be modelled by teachers and acquired by the students. Therefore, jazz chanting can also be used as an intervention to teach students pronunciation skills while developing the pertinent skills in the target language.

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