A Study of Improving the Ability of Using Basic Subject – Verb Agreement among Grade 8 Students: An Action Research with Special Reference to T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa, Trincomalee

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KeyWords
agreement, post-test, pre-test, subject, verb

ABSTRACT
This action research was conducted with the aim of overcoming the difficulties among grade 8 students of T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa in using the basic subject – verb agreement in writing and to improve the ability of using subject – verb agreement. The research setting of this study was T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa and the total population of this study was 62 students in grade 8. Out of the total population, 25 students were randomly selected for data collection. The research instrument of this study was a test which consisted of pre-test and post-test. The test was designed to identify the errors in basic S – V agreement and to see the improvement in basic S – V agreement rule. The data collection method of this study was quantitative. According to the research process, first, a pre-test was conducted. Second, one month teaching process was implemented. Finally, a post-test was conducted. The findings of the data analysis show that 48% of the participants had obtained between 1 - 5 score in the pre-test while just 16% of the participants had obtained between 1 -5 score in the post-test. Likewise, 36% of the participants had obtained between 6 – 10 score in the pre-test while 40% of the participants had obtained between 6 – 10 score. 44% of the participants had obtained between 11 -15 score and 16% of the participants had obtained between 11 -15 score. The ability of using the basic subject – verb agreement in writing can be improved when explicit teaching of basic S– V agreement rule with simple and relevant examples is implemented in the classroom, the textbooks are not focused if they are advanced for students, a number of interesting activities and language games on S – V agreement are used and students are guided to gain the productive skill ‘writing’ through the receptive skill ‘reading’.
Introduction

There are four language skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing. With regard to verbal communication, listening and speaking are regarded as oral communication whereas reading and writing are regarded as written communication. He (2015) states that writing skills in English is considered as an essential component of English learning for EFL students. He (2015) further points out that the problem in the parts of writing such as vocabulary, poor writing organization, and unrelated contents is grammatical. Accordingly, grammar plays a vital role to build the accuracy in writing. As far as speaking is concerned, grammatical accuracy is not expected, instead fluency is expected. However, making grammatical errors has been a common problem among the English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners around the globe. Kho-Yar & Siok (2015) assert that in making sentence, the students do not consider the grammatical rules, it makes the readers get confused and misread the sentence. According to Kho-Yar & Siok (2015), there are many grammatical errors in English, one of the grammatical errors frequently found in students’ writing is subject and verb (S-V) agreement. Most of the ESL/EFL learners get confused with S-V agreement rule. Mistakes on S – V agreement are made by not only beginners but also by advanced learners.

Regarding S-V agreement, Kurniawan & Seprizanna (2016) explain that subject-verb agreement is choosing the correct singular or plural verb after the subject which means that if the subject is singular, so the verb should be singular. According to error analysis, learners might make grammatical mistakes on S-V agreement by inadequate knowledge of S-V agreement, carelessness, faulty hypothesis and over generalization. However, understanding S-V agreement is a crucial thing for both speaking and writing. In Sri Lanka, according to the ESL curriculum, English Language is taught/learnt at government schools in Sri Lanka from grade 3 – 13. Therefore, the basic S-V agreement rule is significant for the students from grade 3. In this sense, in the syllabus of English textbook in grade 3, students are asked to make simple sentences on Primary Auxiliaries: Be- verb, Do- verb and Have- verb. For instance, ‘ I am Maya.’ ‘ I like chocolate.’ ‘ I have two brothers.’ Nevertheless, a large number of students at government schools encounter difficulties in the S-V agreement rules of primary auxiliaries. It has been a problem among most of the students in all grades. Likewise, this problem was observed among most of the students in grade 8 of T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa in Trincomalee District in classroom teaching. Therefore, this study was conducted with the aim of improving the ability of using the subject – verb agreement rule of the grade 8 students.

Problem Statement

Grammar is an important component of English Language to build the accuracy in both writing and speaking. Primary auxiliaries and its S – V agreement are the basic pillars of English Grammar. As far as the ESL learners at government schools in Sri Lanka are concerned, numerous students make grammatical errors in basic S – V agreement in their writing. They misuse the S – V agreement rule in sentence. Likewise, in classroom teaching, grade 8 students of T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa were observed that most of them misuse the S – V agreement in their writing. They make errors in basic S – V agreement rule. For instance, regarding Do- verb, instead of writing a sentence ‘He plays cricket’, was written as ‘He play cricket’. Regarding Have- verb, instead of writing a sentence ‘John has round face’, was written as ‘John have round face’. And, regarding Be- verb, instead of writing a sentence in simple past tense ‘We were at home yesterday’, was written as ‘We was at home yesterday’. Therefore, to overcome the problems and to improve the knowledge of basic S – V agreement rule, this action research was conducted.

Objectives of the Study

• To overcome the difficulties encountered by the grade 8 students of T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa in using basic subject verb agreement in writing
• To teach to the basic S – V rule of primary auxiliaries through explicit explanation and different interesting practices and activities
• To improve the ability of using basic S – V agreement rule in constructing simple sentences

Hypotheses of the Study
Due to lack of basic knowledge of primary auxiliaries, most of the students make grammatical errors in basic S–V agreement.

Most of the students’ negative attitude and disinterest are key factors for facing difficulties in basic S–V agreement in writing.

Explicit teaching of basic S–V agreement rule and continuous practice can improve the ability of using S–V agreement rule appropriately in writing.

Limitations of the Study

Considering English grammar, it seems a very vast area of study. There are number of subcomponents in English grammar. Investigating the problems in English grammar is a difficult task to identify the specific problem. Therefore, to identify a specific problem, this study was limited with basic Subject–Verb agreement in simple sentence. Moreover, students in several schools in the Kinniya Education Zone make grammatical errors in basic S–V agreement but to limit the research setting, T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa was selected as research setting. And also, there are number of grades at T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa. Despite, only grade 8 students were selected as the population. There are 62 students in grade 8. Out of them, 25 students were randomly selected to limit this study.

Theoretical Review

Since this study was carried out with the aim of overcoming the difficulties in using the basic S–V agreement in writing and to improve the ability of using the basic S–V agreement, agreement in sentence is focused to support the current study. Accordingly, in a similar study, Dyedahl et al (2015) explain that the subject must agree in three features: tense, person and number in English Language. Likewise, Bock & Miller (1881), Dyedahl et al (2015) explain that subject-verb agreement and its rule is simple: a singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb. Further, Eastwood (2002) explains that subject-verb agreement is the correspondence of a verb with its subject in person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural). It is also called as subject-verb concord in English grammar.

However, Al Murshidi (2014) asserts that students get confused in the application of subject-verb agreement rules and their lack of knowledge of the rules of the target language seems the main factor in causing errors in writing. Using subject – verb agreement appropriately in writing is the major issue for most of the ESL/EFL learners. Moreover, as reviewing an international study, Bahiyah & Wijayasuria (1888) find in their study that Malay learners have difficulty in the subject-verb agreement because Bahasa Malaysia does not differentiate between persons. Verbs must agree with the subject. Therefore, using of subject – verb agreement in writing is a major issue among most of the ESL/EFL learners. Particularly, the grade 8 students face difficulties in using basic subject – verb agreement.

Moreover, Arfah (1888) state that although simple rules of the subject-verb agreement are introduced in the beginning stage, they still pose problems for the ESL learners at all levels or proficiency. As stated above, numerous learners make errors in basic subject – verb agreement, the grade 8 students of T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa are among those who make errors in basic S – V agreement in writing simple sentences. In a similar study, Nurjanah (2017) points out that the students’ frequent errors in writing are in the form of Subject and Verb agreement. The errors are found even in the simple sentences in writing. He further asserts that they are not aware that subject must agree with its verb. According to Dulay et al (1882) & Fauziati (2008), there are two other classifications of errors viewed from the perspective of their effect on the listener or reader namely global errors and local errors. As Dulay et al (1882) & Fauziati (2008) stated above, most of the students make errors in the element of S- V agreement rule although the other part of sentences are correct. On the other hand, some students make errors in all the elements of the sentence. Therefore, it is common that ESL/EFL learners make both global and local errors. Moreover, based on those problems faced by the grade 8 students, Brown (2000) classifies errors into four categories: inter-lingual transfer, intra-lingual transfer, context of learning, and communication strategies. The above errors influence the difficulties in using S–V agreement in writing.
Methodology

This study was conducted with the aim of overcoming the errors made by the grade 8 students in the basic S – V agreement in writing and to improve the ability of using the S – V agreement. Based on the aim of this study, some objectives were selected. Moreover, this study was an action research and quantitative method was used for data collection. The research setting of this study was T/Kin/Meera Nagar Muslim Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa and the total population of this study was 62 students. Out of them, 25 students were randomly selected as sample population for data collection. Based on the problem of this study, a test was selected as research instrument which was a quantitative instrument. This test consisted of pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was designed to identify the participants’ difficulties and errors in the basic S – V agreement in writing. It consisted of 15 questions which were based on basic S – V agreement in primary auxiliaries (Be, Do and Have verb), one marks was given for each question. The post-test on the other hand was designed to compare both tests’ score, to evaluate the participants’ improvement in the S – V agreement rule in writing and to find the improvement after the implementation of teaching process. This test also consists of the same 15 questions.

With regard to research process, a pre-test was conducted among the participants before the implementation of teaching to identify the errors and difficulties in using the basic S – V agreement in writing. After then, one month of teaching of S – V agreement rule was implemented for the selected participants in the classroom. 12 periods were allocated for the implementation of teaching. Finally, the post-test was conducted to evaluate the ability of using S – V agreement in writing and to compare the pre-test and post-test score of the participants. After the data collection is over, both pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using statistical data analysis method.

Research Findings and Discussion

Before implementing teaching process in the classroom, a pre-test was conducted among the selected participants with the aim of testing the level of students in the rule of basic S – V agreement in writing and identifying the errors made by the students. According to the analysis of the pre-test, 12 of the participants (48%) obtained 1 – 5 score, 8 of the participants (36%) obtained 6 – 10 score and 4 of the participants (16%) obtained 11 – 15 score. The findings show that a large number of participants (48%) had obtained very lower score because most of them are unaware of the basic S – V agreement rule in primary auxiliaries. On the other hand, some of the students made mistakes by forgetting, carelessness, overgeneralization and insufficient knowledge of basic S – V agreement rule. For instance, most of the participants had written the sentence “We were at home” as “We was at home” Likewise, a sentence “Marry writes a letter” was written as “Marry write letter”.

These errors might be caused by insufficient knowledge of the rule of S – V agreement, carelessness, overgeneralization or forgetting. However, the participants encountered difficulties in using S – V agreement in their writing. The following graph (Fig. 4.1) shows the pre-test score of the participants.

![Pre-test Score of the Participants](image-url)
After the teaching process was implemented in the classroom, a post-test was conducted among the participants. As far as the post-test score is concerned, the post-test score seemed increased than the pre-test score. Therefore, according to the analysis of the post-test score, out of 25 participants, just 4 of the participants (16%) obtained 1 – 5 score. Likewise, 10 of the participants (40%) obtained 6 – 10 score. And, 11 of the participants (44%) obtained 11 – 15 score. The findings show that 44% of the participants obtained between 11 – 15 score and 40% of the participants obtained 6 – 10 score. For instance, the participants had written the sentence “We were at home” correctly. Likewise, the sentence “Marry writes a letter” had been written correctly in the post-test.

It is obvious that before teaching the rule of basic S – V agreement and practice a number of activities, a large number of students obtained lower score whereas after the teaching process was implemented for one month, a large number of students obtained higher score. Therefore, errors among the students caused by insufficient knowledge of the basic S – V agreement rule and overgeneralization. Moreover, another significant factor for finding difficulties in using S – V agreement in writing is, lack of practice. When the students do not have basic knowledge of English like reading and basic writing mechanism, they face huge challenges in constructing even a single sentence which consists of four/five words. Likewise, some students do have basic knowledge but due to lack of knowledge about basic S- V agreement rule, they make errors and mistakes. The following graph (Fig. 4.2) shows the post-test score of the participants.

The findings of the pre-test and post-test score show that post-test score after the implementation of teaching process was higher when comparing the pre-test. Accordingly, 48% of the participants had obtained between 1 -5 score in the pre-test whereas just 16% of the participants had obtained between 1 -5 score in the post-test. Here, the percentage obtaining between 1 -5 score seemed reduced by 32%. Likewise, 36% of the participants had obtained between 6 – 10 score in the pre-test whereas 40% of the participants had obtained between 6 – 10 score. Therefore, the percentage obtaining 6 -10 score seems increased by 4%. Moreover, 44% of the participants had obtained between 11 -15 score and 16% of the participants had obtained between 11 -15 score. Here, the percentage obtaining 11 – 15 score has been increased by 28%.

According the comparison of both pre-test and post-test, most of the students had improved their basic knowledge of S – V agreement in constructing sentences and other writing. To give a clear picture, the following graph (Fig. 4.3) shows the comparison of pre-test and post-test score.
Conclusion

The students in grade of T/Kin/Meera Nagar Vidyalayam, Thampalagamuwa were observed in classroom teaching that most of the students made errors and mistakes in using the basic S – V agreement in writing appropriately. Therefore, this study was aimed at overcoming the difficulties in using basic S – V agreement in writing and improving the ability of using S – V agreement in writing. The primary data among the selected 25 students in grade 8 were collected based on the problem of this study. According to the analysis of pre-test and post-test score of the participants, the findings show that 48% of the participants had obtained between 1 - 5 score in the pre-test while just 16% of the participants had obtained between 1 - 5 score in the post-test. Likewise, 36% of the participants had obtained between 6 – 10 score in the pre-test while 40% of the participants had obtained between 6 – 10 score in the pre-test while 40% of the participants had obtained between 6 – 10 score. 44% of the participants had obtained between 11 - 15 score and 16% of the participants had obtained between 11 - 15 score.

Therefore, when the both tests are compared, a large number of students had obtained higher score in the post-test than the pre-test score. The primary reason for the improvement is, proper instruction and explanation about the rule of basic S – V agreement and a number of practice. Further, the findings show that due to lack of basic English knowledge and insufficient knowledge of the rule of basic S – V agreement, most of the students make errors and mistakes in S – V agreement in their writing.

The difficulties in using the basic S – V agreement in writing can be overcome and the ability of using S – V agreement in writing can be improved when the following recommendations are implemented in the classroom by the teachers and students. They are as follow:

- Explicit teaching of basic S – V agreement rule with simple and relevant examples should be implemented in the classroom. Based on the level of the students, examples should be given.
- The ESL teacher should not focus the textbooks in the classroom if the textbooks are advanced for them.
- A number of interesting activities and language games on S – V agreement should be used to improve the ability of using the basic S – V agreement in sentence and writing. When the students are given too much of writing activities, they will improve not only the S – V agreement rule in sentence but also the writing ability.
- Students should be guided to gain the productive skill ‘writing’ through the receptive skill ‘reading’. When the students read English paragraphs and essays a lot, their grammatical accuracy and writing ability can be improved.

Fig 4.3 (Comparison of pre-test and post-test score)
References

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