

Role Play & Visual Storytelling as an Innovative Solution to Overcome English Grammar Learning for Sixth-Grade Students of SDN 064037 Medan Tembung on Comparative Adjectives and Prepositions Material

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the various challenges experienced by students in understanding two important aspects of English grammar, namely comparative adjectives and prepositions. Based on the results of observations and interviews, it was found that the main obstacle for students lies in the lack of conceptual understanding due to teaching methods that are too theoretical and the minimal use of supporting visual media. In addition, the differences in language structure between Indonesian and English also become obstacles in the learning process. To answer these problems, this study developed and implemented a contextual learning strategy that combines role play and visual storytelling approaches to create an interactive, communicative, and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Through this approach, students not only find it easier to understand the function and use of comparative adjectives and prepositions, but also show significant improvements in active participation, confident when speaking in English, and overall grammar understanding. This study uses a qualitative method with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews and documentation, thus providing a complete picture of the effectiveness of this innovative learning strategy in the context of elementary schools.

Keywords: *grammar, role play, visual storytelling, comparative adjectives, prepositions, contextual learning*

Introduction

English language proficiency from an early age is an important need in the era of globalization, where the ability to communicate across languages is one of the main competencies of the 21st century. At the elementary school level, English learning not only aims to build basic vocabulary, but also to introduce language structures (grammar) gradually so that students are able to form sentences correctly and communicatively. However, in practice, the grammar aspect is still a major challenge in learning English in elementary schools, especially in materials that require abstract understanding and logical processing of language that is different from the student's mother tongue.

One of the materials that often causes difficulties is comparative adjectives and prepositions. Comparative adjectives require an understanding of the form of

comparison between two things, both in regular form (eg: taller, smarter) and irregular (eg: better, worse). Meanwhile, prepositions such as in, on, and at, especially in the context of time and place, require the ability to associate position or time in linguistic space which often does not have a direct equivalent in Indonesian. The results of interviews and documentation at SDN 064037 Medan Tembung show that students have difficulty in applying these rules appropriately, both in written and oral forms. They tend to memorize without understanding the context, so that their use becomes inappropriate when applied in conversation or writing.

This condition is exacerbated by the conventional teaching approach, where teachers tend to deliver material directly through theoretical explanations and mechanistic exercises. The lack of active student involvement, as well as the lack of use of visual media and contextual activities, makes grammar learning boring and less meaningful. In fact, at the cognitive development stage of elementary school students, concrete, visual, and interactive approaches are more effective in building understanding of abstract concepts.

To overcome this problem, innovative, adaptive learning strategies are needed that are in accordance with children's learning characteristics. One approach that has great potential is the combination of role play and visual storytelling. Role play allows students to enter into communicative situations that resemble real life, where they can use grammar structures naturally and contextually in the dialogues they act out. Role-play activities are dynamic and versatile tools for teaching English language or foreign languages. They immerse students in real-world situations, fostering language skills and building confidence" (Sanako, 2023). Role playing allows students to picture themselves in actual scenarios and practice using English before they have to use it in real life (Quinteros-Villacís & Fajardo-Dack, 2022). This method not only activates the cognitive, but also the affective and psychomotor aspects of students, thereby increasing involvement and confidence in using language.

Meanwhile, Visual storytelling is an approach that utilizes the power of visual narratives, such as sequential images, educational comics, interactive illustrations, and short videos, to convey grammatical concepts in a more interesting and understandable way. The interactive blended approach greatly enhances students' ability to acquire knowledge and skills. Students' responses and perceptions are very positive towards the blended technique compared to the other two methods (Islam et al., 2014). Through this media, students can build connections between language forms and meanings in real contexts that are relevant to their lives. The use of visual stories also strengthens memory and helps students internalize language patterns intuitively.

The integration of these two approaches forms a learning strategy that is not only contextual and communicative, but also creative and fun. By creating role scenarios based on visual stories that are tailored to the learning theme, teachers can direct students to learn grammar not as a rigid rule, but as a tool to express ideas and interact functionally. This approach also opens up space for collaboration, exploration, and reflection, all of which are important to encourage meaningful and sustainable learning.

Through this research, it is hoped that role play and visual storytelling strategies can be alternative solutions in presenting English grammar learning that is more effective, humanistic, and in accordance with the cognitive development of elementary school students, especially in the material on comparative adjectives and prepositions. In addition, this approach can also be an innovative learning model that can be adapted by other teachers in various elementary education contexts.

Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to understand the difficulties sixth-grade students faced in learning comparative adjectives and prepositions, and to evaluate the effectiveness of role-playing and visual storytelling strategies. The subjects were 30 sixth-grade students and one English teacher at SDN 064037 Medan Tembung, the study location. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and field notes. The research instruments included an observation guide, an interview guide, and documentation sheets. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to the effectiveness of innovative learning strategies.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 6th grade English teachers who were directly involved in the learning process. The purpose of this interview was to explore information about the difficulties experienced by students, the teaching strategies commonly used, and the teachers' responses to the effectiveness of the role play and visual storytelling approaches applied in this study. The interviews were semi-structured to remain flexible but focused on relevant topics.

According to Arikunto (2019), documentation is a way of collecting data by viewing or recording documents that support the research. This documentation includes evidence of teacher observations regarding student learning barriers, examples of common student errors in using grammar, and classroom conditions before the implementation of innovative learning strategies. This documentation is used as supporting data to strengthen the thematic analysis carried out on the learning process and outcomes during the research.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of interviews with English teachers of grade 6 SDN 064037 Medan Tembung and learning documentation, it is known that students experience various obstacles in understanding English grammar, especially the material on comparative adjectives and prepositions. This difficulty is evident in the inability of students to distinguish the correct comparative form and the context of using prepositions in everyday sentences. The teacher explained that before the implementation of the new strategy, grammar learning tended to be theoretical, minimal practice, and not accompanied by concrete visual aids, so that students found it difficult to imagine the application of grammar in real contexts.

A. Problems in Learning Grammar

1. Use of Comparative Adjectives

- a. Students tend to mix up regular and irregular comparatives, for example: more tall (instead of taller), or more good (instead of better).
- b. Lack of understanding of adjective change patterns causes students to be unable to generalize rules, such as adding “-er” to one-syllable words, or using “more” for long adjectives.
- c. The absence of contextualization of word use causes students not to understand the function of comparison in real life.

2. Use of Prepositions

a. Students are confused in distinguishing prepositions for time (on Monday, at 5 p.m., in July) and place (on the table, in the box, at school).

b. The inability to understand spatial and temporal relationships concretely causes the use of prepositions to be random and out of context.

3. Conventional Learning Methods

a. The teacher explained that the previous method was dominated by written explanations on the board, memorizing grammar forms, and practicing questions in workbooks without visual support or oral practice.

b. The class is passive, students only take notes and do assignments, without the opportunity to use grammar actively and naturally.

B. Based on the descriptive qualitative method using classroom observation and interviews, the following findings were obtained related to the research topic:

1. Observation Findings

Classroom observations revealed significant differences in student engagement before and after the implementation of the new strategy. Initially, students appeared passive and disengaged, primarily focusing on copying notes or completing written exercises.

After applying the Role Play and Visual Storytelling strategies, students showed increased participation and a more active role in learning. They began expressing comparative sentences and using prepositions correctly when guided by visual materials and activities.

Sample observation notes:

"Before the strategy was implemented, most students just took notes and couldn't answer when asked. They looked passive and uninterested."

"After using role play and visual storytelling, students became more active. They confidently used comparative sentences like 'The giraffe is taller than the zebra' while pointing to visual aids."

"When asked to place location cards and say 'on the tree' or 'in the cage,' most students responded correctly and confidently."

2. Interview Findings

Interviews with the English teacher provided deeper insight into students' learning difficulties and the impact of the innovative strategy.

Direct interview quotes:

"Previously, students only memorized the rules without knowing when and how to apply them in real-life situations."

"They were often confused between 'on,' 'in,' and 'at' because they never saw the actual contexts where these are used."

"With role play and pictures, they started to understand the difference. For example, when shown a picture of a bird in a cage, they correctly said 'The bird is in the cage.'"

C. Solution: Implementation of Role Play and Visual Storytelling Strategies

In response to these problems, teachers implement innovative learning strategies based on Role Play and Visual Storytelling. This strategy is designed to:

1. Bringing grammar learning to life through real-life narratives and simulations.

2. Provide visual and motion context so that students can understand grammar concepts comprehensively, not just by memorizing them.

This strategy can be applied during three meetings with the following activity flow:

D. Stages of Implementing Innovation

1. Thematic Design: "Vacation to the Zoo"

- a) This theme was chosen because it is closely related to children's experiences and allows exploration of various objects, properties and places.
- b) Students are invited to compose and act out short scenarios based on pictures of locations and animal characters.

2. Integration of Grammar Material

a) Comparative Adjectives:

- 1) The introduction of the material is done through pictures of two different animals: giraffe and zebra.
- 2) The teacher explains the basic concepts of comparison (-er, more, and irregular forms) with the help of visual tables and direct examples.
- 3) Students are asked to compare animals based on height, speed, size, etc., for example:
 - a. The giraffe is taller than the zebra.
 - b. The lion is more dangerous than the monkey.
 - c. The elephant is heavier than the horse.

b) Prepositions:

- 1) The teacher introduces prepositions of place and time with pictures and miniature locations such as: zoos, cages, trees, etc.
- 2) Students practice the sentences:
 - a. The monkey is on the tree.
 - b. The bird is in the cage.

3. Role Play Activities

- a) Students are divided into small groups and given paper dolls and pictures of locations.
- b) They compose short dialogues based on visual narratives and act them out in front of the class.
- c) Each group performs and the teacher provides direct feedback on their use of grammar.

4. Visual and Kinesthetic Reinforcement

- a) Visualization through homemade props, colored printed images, and interactive media such as cardboard maps or mini stage backdrops.
- b) Kinesthetic activities are carried out by asking students to move pictures, stick object cards, or walk to certain positions according to commands in English, for example: "Stand in front of the giraffe cage."

E. Additional Innovations That Can Be Applied

As a further development of this strategy, several innovations can be adapted:

1. Making visual comics, namely students drawing short stories that use comparatives and prepositions.
2. Video role play, namely recording students' mini dramas as homework to practice speaking skills and grammar understanding.
3. Grammar board game, namely creating a simple board game that requires students to compose sentences based on pictures or commands.
4. Interactive wall display, namely attaching a large map or background image as an interactive space for sentence practice.

Conclusion

English grammar learning, especially comparative adjectives and prepositions, is still a challenge for elementary school students, as found in SDN 064037 Medan Tembung. This difficulty is not only caused by the complexity of language structures that are different from their mother tongue, but also by teaching methods that are still conventional, lack contextualization, and do not actively involve students. In response to these problems, the Role Play and Visual Storytelling approaches are offered as innovative solutions that are more in line with the characteristics of cognitive development and learning needs of elementary school students. Role Play allows students to apply grammar communicatively and contextually in real situations, while Visual Storytelling helps convey grammar concepts in a concrete, interesting, and meaningful way through visual and narrative media.

The integration of these two approaches is able to create a learning process that is not only effective and enjoyable, but also encourages deep understanding, emotional involvement, and increased student confidence in using English. Thus, this strategy can be a humanistic, adaptive, and sustainable grammar learning model to be applied in various elementary education contexts.

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