English Grammar Revolution using Corpus- Based Approach: How do the Students React?

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Abstract

Learning through a corpus-based approach enables students to be exposed with hands-on learning of the English language. This approach encourages students to improve their cognitive thinking as they are motivated to ask questions while finding the patterns within the authentic language use and molding them into natural linguistic researchers. This paper reports on students' perceptions as well as the observations made during teaching and learning interventions using the Corpus of Online Newspaper Articles (CorONAS). Various applications of corpus use such as concordance, colocation and word analysis have been used during the teaching and learning. Participants consisted of 40 Form Two students at a primary school in northern Malaysia. This study was conducted using informal observation and interviews. Observational data and interviews were collected and analyzed using the theme analysis techniques contained in the data. The findings show that there is a positive perception of the use of the corpus in teaching and learning activities in grammar in the classroom. Students are found to be more motivated and cheerful when using this teaching and learning technique.

Keywords: Malaysia; CorONAS**,** corpus-based approach; teaching and learning; interventions.

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, the use of corpora in the classroom has begun to grow in foreign countries. According to Leńko-Szymańska, (2014), "corpus is now widely used in the construction

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of reference materials, especially dictionaries, grammar books and usage manuals". In foreign countries, much research has been conducted to study the effectiveness of corpus linguistics as a teaching technique to highlight how native English speakers use certain forms of language, vocabulary, and expression (Cobb & Bolton, 2015; Mizumoto & Chujo, 2015; Hou, 2014; Jafar pour et al., 2013; Gilquin, 2015). Use of real language examples with students is more beneficial than teacher-created examples or references from the books which does not simulate students' language learning experience in real life use.

Producing students who can master knowledge, skills and technology is the main aim of the Ministry of Education in the Ideas of Y. A. B. Prime Minister of Malaysia (2006). Besides that, mastering technology has also been emphasized in the Secondary School Curriculum Framework (KSSM) implemented in 2017 whereby, the application of knowledge and technology skills is stressed.

Learning through a corpus-based approach enables students to familiarize themselves with hands-on learning of the English language. This approach encourages students to improve their cognitive thinking especially with their natural inquisitive nature that motivates them to find patterns in authentic language use and make them linguistic researchers. The current paper reports on students' perceptions as well as the observations made during teaching and learning interventions based on corpus-based approach by using the Corpus of Online Newspaper Articles (CorONAS) adapted from Hajimia et al., (2019). Various applications of corpus use such as concordance, colocation and word analysis have been used during the teaching and learning.

In this ever-changing era of information technology, various linguistic aspects can be studied by looking at written discourse, especially in the media genre. Newspapers are often chosen as corpus material because they are natural, easily accessible and has a large size and type of data available online and offline (Hajimia et al., 2019). The corpora can be integrated into the classroom to teach students mastering the language at various levels (Ergül, 2014). Even though, corpus linguistics is one of the most technologically advanced tools in teaching, there is lack of studies showing its direct application in the teaching and learning (Leńko-Szymańska, 2014) and there is still a shortage of corpus-based studies, particularly in the field of teaching and learning in Malaysia.

Based on the literature review, it was found that teaching and learning in schools, although conducted using computer, but corpus-based teaching and learning is still poorly practiced. Besides that, most of the studies in Malaysia was conducted for research purposes as shown in a research conducted by Joharry et al. (2014). To achieve the objectives of this study, corpus

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applications in teaching and learning of vocabulary were conducted using the newspaper corpus compiled in CorONAS.

Therefore, the main aim of this research is to address the constraints of corpus use in teaching and learning in the classroom where the focus is on the teaching of two aspects of grammar. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of corpus-based approach in grammar learning among students in a secondary school located in the north of Malaysia. The objective of this study was to study the effectiveness of using corpus tools in teaching and learning of vocabulary for Form 4 students in Malaysian secondary schools

Review of Related Literature

Theories on student-centred learning shows the active involvement of the students themselves, including explanations of ideas, involvement in teaching and learning activities and critical writing outcomes (Syahida, 2015). This method can enhance student achievement in learning something new. An active engagement stimulates the mind and helps students to master the English language, especially in learning of the grammar. The constructivism learning theory plays an important role in the forming of holistic and dynamic learners (Kolb& Kolb, 2009). According to the theory as stated by (Bada & Olusegun, 2015) "learner as an active agent in the process of knowledge acquisition, humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences."

Corpora is believed to be useful in language teaching, especially due to its authentic language input (Manvender et al., 2010). In contrast to the illusory and artificial language used in most textbooks and dictionaries, the examples in the corpora represent the actual language used by native speakers. As a result, the corpora have been used for language teaching and for pedagogical purposes for more than two decades. There is growing interest in conducting corpus-based teaching in English teaching. English is an important language in Malaysia and in general, across the whole globe. The focus of research has been the teaching methods and techniques (Abbas et al., 2011; Abbas et al., 2011; Chohan et al., 2018) as well as the psychological aspects of language learning especially the language attitude of the learners (Abbas, & Iqbal, 2018; Abbas, et al., 2019). Corpus based studies have emerged as a recent addition to the area and have brought depth and breadth to the area as an important research area.

In Malaysia, a study conducted by Joharry and Rahim (2014) shows the that corpus studies in Malaysia from between 1996 and 2012 covers the English language use in Malaysia, Malaysian English learner language, Malaysian textbook content, Malay language and lexicography and Corpora development from research purpose. Some of the studies in corpus in Malaysia are, for example, Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2012) conducted a study on how articles (a, an, the) are

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presented in all the five English Language textbooks and that their frequency of occurrences has an increasing trend from Form 1 to Form 5. Kader, Begi, & Vaseghi (2013) used the Malaysian Corpus of Students' Argumentative Writing (MCSAW) and analysed the frequency and functions of English modals of Form 4 and College students' argumentative compositions. Manokaran, Ramalingam, & Adriana (2013) analysed the Use of Past Tense Auxiliary" Be" in Argumentative Essays of Malaysian ESL Learners. Hajimia et al. (2019) analysed the frequency and distributional patterns of discourse markers in newspaper from ESP perspective compiled in Corpus of Online Newspaper Articles (CorONAS).

In Malaysia there is a longstanding DBP corpus database for Malay language. It is widely used for the purpose of studying words and producing dictionaries but has not been applied in teaching and learning (Isam et al., 2017). For example, the studies of Shahriman et al. (2015), Suhaimi (2010), Yusof (2009), Shaari (2009), and Ghani and Darois (2001). There are many studies showing the use of corpus in teaching and learning especially in grammar mastery. Examples are studies conducted by Ergül (2014) where most of the studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of using corpus-based activities in learning English grammar to students when combined with traditional techniques such as textbooks and dictionaries. In addition, he also studied the perceptions of students and corpus-based activists. About 30 students from Turkey were used in this quasi-experimental study. The results of this study show that using corpus-based activities is more effective than textbook use. In addition, this study also showed that students' perception of corpus-based activity was positive

Isam, Mutalib and Ahmad, (2017) recommend a study on computer-aided teaching and learning procedures in Malaysia. This study focuses on the use of free word list program software available in google search engine, *antconc* software. This software is used to analyze corpus-based language data that is also available free of charge in the Library and Library Corpus Database System. However, it is found that the study of Isam (2017) is still not practically applied in the classroom and empirical studies in the context of vocabulary teaching and learning have scarcely been conducted in Malaysia.

Methodology
Research Sample
The study sample consisted of 40 students from a Form Two class at a primary school in northern Malaysia. This sample is based on purposive sampling recommended by Creswell (2012) to meet the aims and objectives of this study. To maintain research ethics, during the analysis of the study data, these students were given appropriate codes of P1 (representing the first student) to P40 (representing the 40th in the class). During the course of this study, the student's real name was not used in any document.

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Corpus

Corpus of Online Newspaper Articles (CorONAS) adapted from Hajimia et al. (2019) consisting 30 newspaper articles from Malaysian newspaper was used in this study.

Research Design

A quasi-experimental study was conducted for eight (8) weeks. The first six (6) weeks was intervention then followed by two (2) weeks of teaching and learning outside of class time, as reinforcement. During the intervention period, a series of informal observation and interview sessions were conducted. Each observation session lasts for 40 minutes while the informal interview takes place approximately 2 to 3 minutes by randomly selecting student. The qualitative data obtained from these observations and interviews were analyzed using theme analysis.

Results and Findings

This study was conducted using informal observation and interviews. Data from observation and interviews were collected and analysed using the theme analysis techniques obtained from the data. From the analysis of themes to observational and interview data, three main themes were identified:

   a. Understanding of corpus tools and applications
   b. Interest in the use of the corpus in teaching and learning activities
   c. Encourage self-directed learning

1. Understanding of Corpus Tools and Applications

The theme of 'understanding of corpus tools and applications' is derived from the observations made on the student's in the experimental group when using information technology. Part of the observations was to see if the students were having problems operating the computer and downloading the corpus tools related to the use of corpus in teaching and learning after the instructional session by their teacher.

From the observation, can be seen that students were able to understand the teaching method used by their teacher. There were some students who request from the teacher to repeat the instructions given. However, most of the students continue to operate computer systems in the classroom and begin their corpus-based learning activities without the help of their teachers. These students were guided by the instructional modules on corpus tools provided by the teacher. They were well-versed and understood what is required in the module and continue to practice based on it.

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During the interview session, the students said they were *'good at using computers'* (P6) and *'used to using computers at home'* (P21) before being taught by their teachers. Some also stated that the instructions in the module *'clear and easy to follow'* (P13) and *'just follow the steps'* (P28). Students also said that they found the corpus tool *'very good'* (P11) and *'best and very interesting'* (P15). When asked if they encountered any problems while using the corpus tool in learning and teacher's teaching process, some responded *'feel good'* (P8), 'have this book (while pointing to the teaching module) '*easy to follow'* and *'will be difficult if cannot understand'* (P20).

2. **Interest in the Use of the Corpus in Teaching and Learning Activities**

The theme of 'interest in the use of the corpus in teaching and learning' is also reflected in the observations and interviews conducted. Students show positive interest in the use of the corpus in teaching and learning activities in the classroom. During the learning activities, students appear cheerful and highly motivated. From the observations, can be seen that the students were happy with the use of computers in classroom learning activities. Students were found to interact with each other during the corpus-based exercises, where students often asked each other about the computer's operations and corpus tools. The learning environment was vibrant and interactive. The most interesting was, the students were checking with each other the answers obtained from corpus analysis. This can foster positive relationships between the students.

During the interview session, many students indicated that they liked and enjoyed the teaching technique used by their teacher in this lesson. There are those who say they *'like it ... like a scientist'* (P6), *'this is best ... I like this'* (P13),' *I enjoy it ... I love using computers'* (P28) and *'I feel happy* '(P11). When asked about their interest in the corpus and the application of the corpus in learning of English language, many responded positively, for example; *'Really interested'* (P1), *'I like this because it's a new technique'* (P9), *'interest ... can learn like that'* (P30) and *'I think I like ... I like this corpus*' (P15).

3. **Encourage in Self-directed Learning**

The theme 'self-directed learning' can be seen through observations and interviews conducted especially when students are asked to complete reinforcement exercises. Many students attended the after-hours sessions so that they can use the computers in the classroom. During these sessions, the teacher is seen only as a facilitator who helps the students when they are in need of guidance. From the observations, many students were seen trying to complete the assignment given in the teaching module without the help of their teacher whereas, their teacher was just walking and observing the students doing the reinforcement exercises.

During the interview, the students said that they were comfortable with their own learning where they *'did what is in the module'* (P7). Some students say, *'I like to do it myself ... if don't*

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understand then I'm asking the teacher' (P16). There are also students who say that they also try to do the exercises outside the classroom. The student stated that "*I was trying to do it at home… it was fun too" (P*10). However, the student also said that *'if I do not understand ... difficult to ask teacher ... have to wait tomorrow'* (P2).

There are also some students who say they like to practice from the module itself because they *'already know how to do it'* (P10), *'can do it myself because i'm good at using this corpus'* (P19) and' *can try on my own ... try to find other words'* (P24). Many students agree that using corpus-based teaching and learning modules is useful for creating and completing assignments outside of school period. Among the responses received were *'I think this module is very useful ... can follow and do it'* (P22), *'this book is good ... I refer to this book a lot* (referring to the teaching module provided)' (P27) and *'if don't have this module it is difficult to understand how to use this corpus'* (P26).

Conclusion

Past studies indicate that the constructivism approach in teaching and learning is particularly important in terms of generating the skills of using the knowledge learned in the classroom. This approach has been the basis of this research. The study was conducted with the purpose of exposing students, especially the Form 4 students in Malaysian secondary schools, to corpus-based learning.

The findings reveal that there is a positive perception of the use of corpus in grammar teaching and learning activities in the classroom. The results of this study indicate that when students are given challenging activities that require the use of technology skills, they become more productive and creative. This study found that students became cheerful when asked to conduct a corpus study in which students were able to become 'young scientists'. This study also shows that students in today's generation are more competent with the information technology knowledge than previous generations students. Traditional teaching techniques are often boring to students. Through this corpus-based teaching and learning technique, students are found to be more motivated, excited, positive and cheerful when learning the English language.

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