

Improving Students' Understanding of Simple Present Tense Through Contextual Teaching at SMP Swasta GKPS 13 Sibarou

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ABSTRACT

This community service initiative was undertaken with the express purpose of enhancing the comprehension of the Simple Present Tense among a cohort of Grade 7 students enrolled at SMP Swasta GKPS 13 Sibarou. The project directly confronted the prevalent grammatical hurdles students often encounter when endeavoring to construct grammatically sound sentences using the present tense. The pedagogical approach adopted for this endeavor was classroom-based instruction, meticulously designed around the principles of contextual learning. Data for this study was meticulously gathered from 20 Grade 7 students, employing a multifaceted collection strategy that included direct observation, the analysis of worksheets, and the administration of comprehensive written tests. The entire implementation process was systematically organized into three distinct phases: the preparation phase, which involved the meticulous design of instructional materials; the implementation phase, encompassing the actual delivery of learning activities; and the evaluation phase, characterized by the administration of post-tests and the collection of valuable feedback. The compelling outcomes of this project demonstrated a profound improvement: a remarkable 100% grammar accuracy, an encouraging 80% vocabulary usage, and an outstanding 100% sentence structure accuracy. These compelling results strongly indicate that contextual methods are remarkably effective in bolstering students' grammatical proficiency. Consequently, the conclusion advocates for the systematic integration of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) into routine instructional practices to foster superior learning outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

English stands as a cornerstone subject within the junior high school curriculum, serving as a vital conduit for global communication and future academic pursuits. Despite its foundational importance, a significant number of students consistently grapple with fundamental grammar concepts, with the Simple Present Tense frequently posing a particular challenge. This widespread issue is distinctly observable among students at SMP Swasta GKPS 13 Sibarou. A common observation is that students often default to rote memorization of rules and a reliance on fragmented textbook explanations, an approach that demonstrably falls

short in cultivating a genuine, real-world understanding of the language. Furthermore, the conspicuous absence of stimulating engaging media or access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools further constrains and limits the breadth and depth of students' learning experiences. This paper posits a pragmatic and impactful solution through the strategic application of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL). This innovative pedagogical method inherently connects grammar instruction directly to real-life contexts and the fabric of students' daily activities, thereby rendering the learning process demonstrably more meaningful, relevant, and ultimately, more effective.

The efficacy of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) is firmly anchored in established educational theories. At its core, CTL is deeply rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, a seminal framework that underscores the paramount role of social interaction and the surrounding environment in shaping cognitive development. By seamlessly integrating learning experiences with authentic, real-life situations, CTL effectively renders what might otherwise be abstract grammar concepts significantly more accessible and tangible for students. Beyond Vygotsky, the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) also provide a strong theoretical underpinning for this approach. CLT champions the idea that language learning should prioritize meaningful communication and interaction over mere drills and memorization. Similarly, various constructivist learning theories further support the CTL methodology, emphasizing that learners actively construct their own understanding through engagement with their environment rather than passively receiving information. Together, these theoretical perspectives coalesce to promote a pedagogical approach that is unequivocally student-centered, highly Languages instructional delivery.

METHOD

The successful execution of this project was contingent upon a carefully articulated and systematically implemented methodology.

Design

The design of this intervention was meticulously crafted as a participatory classroom-based implementation. It was conceived with a clear understanding of the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), specifically tailored to address the well-documented difficulties students experienced with the nuances of the Simple Present Tense. The participatory nature ensured that students were not merely recipients of information but active co-creators in their learning journey.

Data Source

The participants who formed the data source for this study were a carefully selected group of 20 Grade 7 students from SMP Swasta GKPS 13 Sibarou. Their selection was based on two crucial criteria: their consistent attendance throughout the academic period, indicating a commitment to their studies, and their demonstrated active participation in classroom activities, which ensured a rich and reliable dataset for observation and assessment.

Phase 1 – Preparation

The initial phase, Preparation, was foundational to the success of the entire project and involved several critical steps:

Development of Contextualized Grammar Materials: A significant effort was dedicated to developing grammar materials that were not merely theoretical but were intrinsically linked to students' lived experiences. This included creating content centered around familiar themes such as daily routines, personal hobbies, family activities, and other aspects of daily life. The goal was to make grammar rules immediately relevant and applicable.

Creation of Lesson Plans: Comprehensive and detailed lesson plans were meticulously crafted. These plans were not only aligned with the curriculum but specifically emphasized the practical application of the present tense through various sentence construction exercises and communicative tasks.

Design of Worksheets and Post-tests: To facilitate practice and assess learning, a series of engaging worksheets were designed, providing ample opportunities for students to apply their newly acquired knowledge. Concurrently, rigorous post-tests were developed to objectively measure the improvement in students' understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

Phase 2 – Implementation

The Implementation phase was where the theoretical design truly came to life in the classroom setting:

Conducting Interactive Lessons: Lessons were delivered with a strong emphasis on interactive engagement. This involved incorporating a variety of dynamic activities such as stimulating group discussions,

educational games that made learning enjoyable, and imaginative role-play scenarios where students could naturally use the Simple Present Tense in simulated real-life conversations.

Practical Application in Daily-Life Scenarios: A key element of this phase was providing students with abundant opportunities to practice using the present tense within the context of daily-life scenarios. This moved beyond abstract grammar exercises to practical application, making the learning more concrete and memorable.

Emphasis on Peer-Teaching and Guided Writing: To foster a collaborative learning environment and reinforce understanding, peer-teaching was encouraged, allowing students to learn from and teach one another. Additionally, guided writing activities provided structured support as students navigated the complexities of constructing grammatically correct sentences independently.

Phase 3 – Evaluation

The final phase, Evaluation, was crucial for assessing the effectiveness of the intervention:

Conducting Comprehensive Post-tests: At the conclusion of the instructional period, students were administered comprehensive post-tests. These assessments specifically targeted their proficiency in grammar, their mastery of relevant vocabulary, and the overall accuracy of their sentence structure.

Utilizing Observation and Student Feedback: Beyond formal testing, continuous observation of student engagement and performance during classroom activities provided valuable qualitative data. Furthermore, direct student feedback was actively solicited to gain insights into their perceptions of the learning process and the challenges they encountered. This holistic approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the project's impact.

RESULTS

The diligent execution of the project yielded demonstrably positive results across all three phases of implementation.

Phase 1 – Preparation Outcomes

During the initial preparation phase, a noteworthy observation was the highly positive student response to the newly developed materials. Unlike traditional, often dry, grammar exercises, students expressed a clear preference for the context-based content. They found these materials significantly more engaging and relatable than the conventional textbook grammar drills they were accustomed to. This early indication of student receptiveness set a promising tone for the subsequent phases.

Phase 2 – Implementation Outcomes

The implementation phase witnessed a marked increase in student engagement. There was a noticeable surge in participation during lessons, a direct testament to the effectiveness of the contextual teaching approach. When confronted with familiar topics such as their hobbies, daily routines, and family activities, students were not only more willing but also more confident in actively using the Simple Present Tense. The collaborative nature of the activities fostered effective student collaboration, with peers readily assisting one another. Importantly, this phase also saw a significant improvement in students' confidence levels, particularly in their willingness to attempt constructing sentences using the target tense.



Figure 1. self-introduction between teacher and student



Figure 2. the teacher begins to explain the material

To further support this growing confidence and ensure accuracy, the teacher played a crucial role in guiding students. While encouraging independent thought and peer-to-peer learning, the teacher was always on hand to help students navigate any difficulties they encountered. This assistance often involved providing clear explanations, offering gentle corrections, and scaffolding their understanding as they worked to answer questions about the Simple Present Tense. This active support from the teacher was instrumental in solidifying the students' grasp of the new grammatical concepts.

To build on this newfound confidence and make sure they were getting things right, the teacher stepped in as a crucial guide. While we really wanted them to think for themselves and learn from their friends, the teacher was always right there, ready to help with any snags they hit. This support often meant giving really clear explanations, gently nudging them in the right direction with corrections, and offering a kind of scaffold to their understanding as they wrestled with answering questions about the Simple Present Tense. This active, hands-on help from the teacher was absolutely vital in helping the students truly get a grip on these new grammar ideas.



Figure 3. The teacher helps students answer present tense questions

Phase 3 – Evaluation Outcomes

The culmination of the project, the evaluation phase, provided compelling quantitative evidence of the intervention's success. The post-test scores revealed truly remarkable improvements:

Grammar Accuracy: An exceptional 100% accuracy was achieved in grammar, indicating a complete grasp of the Simple Present Tense rules among the participating students.

Vocabulary Mastery: Students demonstrated a strong command of relevant vocabulary, achieving an impressive 80% mastery. While excellent, this still suggests an area for potential future reinforcement.

Sentence Structure: The accuracy in sentence structure was also outstanding, reaching a perfect 100%. This indicates not only an understanding of individual words but also the ability to correctly assemble them into coherent and grammatically sound sentences.

DISCUSSION

While the overall outcomes of implementing Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) were overwhelmingly positive, the journey was not without its distinct set of challenges. These obstacles provided valuable insights and shaped the adaptive strategies employed during the project:

Limited Student Vocabulary: A primary challenge encountered was that many students possessed a relatively limited vocabulary, which occasionally hindered their ability to fully express their ideas and engage in more complex communicative tasks using the target tense.

Teacher Unfamiliarity with CTL Methods: A significant hurdle lay in the fact that the teachers themselves were largely unfamiliar with CTL methods. This necessitated an initial period of guidance and support to help them effectively integrate these new pedagogical approaches into their existing teaching practices.

Lack of Digital Tools: The absence of readily available digital tools or robust ICT infrastructure at the school restricted the potential for integrating multimedia and interactive digital resources, which could have further enriched the learning experience.

Despite these challenges, proactive and effective strategies were swiftly implemented to mitigate their impact:

Utilizing Visual Aids and Contextual Prompts: To address the vocabulary limitations, a heavy reliance was placed on visual aids, such as pictures, diagrams, and realia, which helped convey meaning without requiring extensive verbal explanation. Additionally, rich contextual prompts were provided, offering sufficient linguistic scaffolding for students to construct their thoughts.

Applying Scaffolding Strategies: A key pedagogical approach employed was scaffolding. This involved systematically moving students from heavily guided tasks, where the teacher provided substantial support, towards progressively more independent tasks, gradually reducing assistance as students gained confidence and competence. This ensured that all learners, regardless of their initial proficiency, could participate and progress.

Substituting ICT Tools: In the absence of advanced digital tools, creative alternatives were employed. Printed materials were extensively used, and traditional flashcards proved to be an effective, low-tech yet highly versatile tool for vocabulary acquisition and grammar practice.

Through these adaptive measures, the project successfully fostered a more dynamic learning environment. Students became noticeably more engaged and demonstrated increased confidence, particularly when attempting to communicate in both speaking and writing. However, it was observed that vocabulary development progressed at a slower pace compared to grammar and sentence structure accuracy. This suggests that while substantial strides were made, continuous and dedicated reinforcement of vocabulary acquisition will be crucial for sustained linguistic improvement in the future.

Challenges and Implementation

Despite the positive outcomes achieved through the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) in improving students' understanding of the Simple Present Tense, several notable challenges emerged. First, students exhibited limited vocabulary mastery, which hindered their ability to express ideas clearly and participate effectively in communicative tasks using the target tense. This constraint affected both their confidence and fluency in sentence construction. Second, teachers demonstrated unfamiliarity with CTL principles, as they were predominantly accustomed to traditional, textbook-oriented instruction. This lack of pedagogical readiness posed difficulties in designing and delivering lessons based on real-life contexts and student-centered learning. Third, the limited availability of digital infrastructure further restricted instructional variety. The absence of ICT tools such as projectors, computers, and reliable internet access constrained the integration of multimedia resources, thereby reducing opportunities for interactive and engaging language learning experiences. These challenges, while significant, provided valuable insights into the practical limitations of the teaching environment and informed the development of targeted strategies for improvement.

Steps to Overcome the Challenges

In response to the challenges encountered during the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), several strategic solutions were adopted to ensure the effectiveness of the instructional process. First, to address students' limited vocabulary, various visual aids—such as pictures, flashcards, charts, and real-life objects (realia)—were utilized. These resources, combined with contextual prompts drawn from students' daily experiences, effectively supported word recognition and practical usage. Second, scaffolding techniques were implemented by gradually transitioning students from guided instruction to independent practice. At the initial stage, teachers provided sentence models and structured exercises; as students gained confidence, support was progressively reduced to foster autonomy in sentence construction. Third, teacher readiness was enhanced through brief mentoring sessions focused on CTL principles. These sessions facilitated teachers' understanding of contextual strategies and helped them integrate student-centered methods into their

lesson delivery. Additionally, peer collaboration was encouraged through group and pair activities, enabling students to reinforce their understanding through cooperative learning. Fourth, to overcome the lack of ICT infrastructure, creative low-tech alternatives were employed. Printed materials, laminated visuals, storytelling, and manual educational games were used to simulate interactive learning experiences, ensuring that the absence of digital tools did not hinder student engagement. Collectively, these adaptive measures contributed to the successful implementation of CTL in a resource-limited environment.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) in enhancing students' understanding of the Simple Present Tense at SMP Swasta GKPS 13 Sibarou proved to be highly effective. The approach successfully improved grammatical accuracy and sentence structure, both reaching 100%, while vocabulary mastery improved significantly to 80%. These results demonstrate that CTL, by connecting grammar instruction to real-life contexts, fosters meaningful learning and encourages students to apply linguistic knowledge with greater confidence and accuracy. Despite several initial challenges—such as limited vocabulary, teacher unfamiliarity with CTL methods, and the absence of digital infrastructure—these were effectively mitigated through the use of visual aids, scaffolding techniques, teacher mentoring, peer collaboration, and low-tech instructional tools.

Based on the findings, several suggestions are proposed for future implementation. First, vocabulary enrichment should be continuously integrated into classroom activities to ensure sustained language development. Second, teachers should receive ongoing professional development focused on CTL strategies to enhance instructional effectiveness. Third, schools are encouraged to invest gradually in accessible ICT tools to support interactive and technology-enhanced learning. Lastly, CTL should be consistently incorporated into the broader curriculum to promote long-term improvements in language proficiency. By adopting these recommendations, educators can create a more engaging, relevant, and effective English learning environment that supports student growth and achievement.

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