"Smart Crate'': Verbal Mastery Kit To Enhance English Speaking Skills In An ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has led to unregulated shifts in education, altering both learning and teaching approaches. "Smart Crate" represents an innovative approach to teaching and learning, aiming to transform traditional educational practices. This concept involves a tangible or physical box filled with diverse, interactive tools and resources that engage learners in a dynamic and immersive educational experience. It is essential to focus on developing learners' skills, especially in speaking. Unfortunately, learners frequently lack proficiency in speaking and exhibit a lack of confidence when using the target language, English. The employment of traditional teaching approaches also plays a role in causing learners to feel uninterested and struggle during speaking tasks. Furthermore, the "Smart Crate" aims to serve as a catalyst for nurturing creativity within students. By offering a diverse array of resources and tools, it encourages learners to explore, experiment, and express their ideas freely and strengthen their skills, especially speaking. This innovation fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation for various subjects, encouraging students to view learning as a lifelong pursuit rather than a confined classroom activity. The "Smart Crate" encourages teachers to embrace a new paradigm in teaching, redefining the boundaries of traditional classrooms and inspiring a love for lifelong learning. It challenges the conventional boundaries of classrooms, urging teachers to adopt innovative
approaches that inspire a passion for learning.

1.0   Introduction

In the 21st century, learners' academic preferences differ from previous generations, characterised by increased realism and personal interest in the learning process, as highlighted by (Kozinski, 2017). Academic achievement is crucial for everyone in order to upgrade or level up ourselves in every aspect such as knowledge, cognitive skills, critical thinking, problem solving and so on. Due to that, the teachers play important roles in educating these young learners by planning and designing the suitable and effective activities or teaching aids that suit the pupils' competencies. As educators at the elementary school level, teachers play an important role in shaping students' potential by providing stimulus or stimulation in the learning process (Damayanti & Anando, 2021). It is paramount for the teachers to think of a suitable and effective approach for the pupils to ensure the Teaching and Learning (T&L) sessions can be done successfully and meaningfully.

However, every pupil is different from one to another. Owing to that, it is a must for the teachers to get to know each of every pupil very well before producing or designing the best and suitable teaching aids for their pupils. Based on the Practicum phase I at one of the primary schools in Perlis, there are some of the Year 2 pupils who seem to have low interest in learning English. This may happen due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) being too long because of COVID-19. The consequences can be seen when certain of these pupils tend to feel demotivated in their studies. To be more detailed, when it comes to English language subject, they seem not comfortable learning and speaking English. In other words, they did not have the courage to speak English throughout the (T&L) session. As a result, it has become the obstacles for the teachers to attract these pupils' attention and interest to stay focused throughout the English language classes. Not only that, they also have short attention spans during English classes. They also tend to get easily bored with traditional materials like textbooks, flashcards, worksheets, and more. Due to all these issues, the teacher needs to figure out the best and effective initiative in order to overcome the mentioned issues.

Regarding the "Smart Crate" innovation, it is produced to expand pupils' mastery level especially in speaking in English Language better and wider. It also aims to lead the (T&L) sessions to be more fun, engaging and meaningful by the end of the day. Not only that, the goal of this innovation is also to stimulate pupils' curiosity and critical thinking in learning English. Last but not least, it also helps the pupils to level up their problem solving skills in completing the activities prepared in that particular box

2.0 Literature review
2.1 Pupils' motivation in acquiring speaking skill

English language is one of the crucial subjects that needs to be learned by every pupil in the primary classroom. Not only that, according to Thirunsaku and Yunus (2012), English also plays an important role in the Malaysian education system. It is because our country formally used English as a second language after our mother tongue, Malay language. Owing to that, every pupil should obtain English language knowledge at school for at least eleven years (Ansari, 2015). Based on English language subjects in the Malaysian education system, each pupil should know and be able to acquire four major skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, among all these skills, speaking has been one of the big and serious problems in the teaching and learning sessions. Not to mention, Bueno, Madrid and McLaren (2006) once highlighted that speaking is one of the most difficult skills language learners must face. Speaking involves actively generating, receiving, and interpreting information in the presence of both speaker and listener to convey emotions, ideas, and viewpoints (Sharma, 2018; Wong, 2021). Most of the pupils felt hesitant to speak because they were afraid of speaking in English (Nijat et al., 2019). These pupils refused to speak in their target language due to their fear of making mistakes throughout the learning process. Not only that, there is a study by Shen (2019) in Yahaya (2021) agreed that ESL learners face hardships in using English as they are afraid of making errors. Other than that, they also may feel fear of speaking in English due to their high level of anxiety which is caused by the feeling of being evaluated, the educator's teaching method and learners' culture. As a result, it can affect the pupils' motivation to keep learning English in the class. Suleimenova (2013) mentioned that ESL pupils tend to say they have 'mental block' against language learning. With that, it is proven that anxiety can decrease pupils' motivation to learn English as their second language.

2.2 Traditional vs Modern Teaching Methods

The differences between the traditional and modern classroom are not only differences of the teaching methods, but also the collision of new ideas and olds concepts. According to Suzana & Raman (2020), in their research they cited that in recent years, higher education teaching has experienced a pedagogical shift, adopting new strategies to boost student motivation, independence, and success (Sim, 2012). Historically, traditional teaching methods have been the cornerstone of education, emphasizing lectures, textbooks, and rote memorization. In existing

studies, it has been stated that the collision between the two methods has brought the significance ideas of the new methods in teaching and process. In the old ways, it was more fixate on the teacher centered whereby teacher play the role of the one that responsible for the guidance and text-centered. Most of the time, form of lecture was used or "Chalk and Talk" somehow limits pupils' ability to be fully engaged in classroom activities. Al-Mahna (2018) suggested that modern teaching methods differ based on various teaching trends. Each teaching method has its own strengths and weaknesses. When comparing the effectiveness of traditional and modern teaching approaches, we primarily assess them from three viewpoints: the teaching technique or approach, the diverse forms of teaching, and the bias or emphasis in learning. To teach effectively is to use different teaching methods in teaching and learning (Mustafa, 2014). According to Raop (2018) educators should establish a captivating and cohesive learning atmosphere that piques student interest while maintaining a professional approach and nurturing good student interactions. As modern teaching methods focus on the student-centered methods, its offers a great number of various instructional methods.

3.0 Methodology

The research design of this paper is through observation and semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview has been referred to as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984). An observation was done in a classroom consisting of 25 pupils of Year 2 class. The population consisted of pupils out of which a sample of 25 pupils was taken for the study. Data was collected with the help of a set of structured interview questions aligned with the main objectives of the innovation conducted during the teaching and learning session. The study also encompasses various variables such as exploration, collaboration, immediate feedback, surprises and activities.

3.1 Observation

To assess the interaction between the fun and pupil's participation during the teaching and learning activities, we adopted validated measures where there would be an observation with the supervisors or the teacher during the teaching. This involved conducting observations alongside supervisors or teachers during instructional sessions. The aim was to closely observe and assess both pupils' participation levels and their demonstrated learning skills in these situations. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how enjoyment factors into students' active involvement and their ability to acquire and apply new knowledge. By closely observing these dynamics during teaching and learning (T&L), we aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the correlation between pupil's enjoyment and their level of engagement. This involved looking not only at their active involvement but also at how their enjoyment or sense of fun contributed to their ability to acquire, retain and apply new knowledge and skills.

3.2 Semi-structured interview

To strengthen the quantitative data, we administered semi-structured interviews. To ensure validity and reliability of the data from the interviews, Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) suggestions and procedures were applied. Semi-structured interview questions-lead the respondents to be more focused. Data attained was analysed using coding strategies (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).Other than the observation method, we also used a semi-structured interview method. (Magaldi and Berler, 2020) defined the semi-structured interview as an exploratory interview. They also explained that semi-structured interviews usually focus on the main topic that provides a general pattern. With the use of this method, the teacher can know and see their pupils' comprehension and knowledge level towards the lesson. At this point, the teacher should be prepared by providing several High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions to evaluate pupils' understanding from time to time. This method encouraged the pupils to be active learners during English classes whereby they will be asked several questions by their teacher. Through the Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions, the teacher can know and identify their pupils' achievement level towards the lesson better. This method also helps the teacher a lot in attracting the pupils' attention and interest to stay focused throughout the (T&L) sessions.

4.0   Discussion of analysis and findings

During the observation of the Year 2 classroom session employing the innovative "Smart Crate" teaching aids, notable results emerged. The interaction between the pupils and the innovation "Smart Crate" showcased a significant improvement in their engagement and participation during learning. Pupils demonstrated a level of curiosity and enthusiasm and actively explored the given resources. Moreover, collaboration among the pupils between each other and the resources were observed, indicating an enhanced collaborative learning environment and their ability to gain new knowledge from the session. This can be seen during the hands-on session, most of the pupils are able to write more than 2 simple sentences and this has made them achieve their objectives and passed the key areas for the teaching and learning session. Not only that, the pupils also portrayed such a good improvement when they managed to answer the questions prepared in English. They are also able to speak fluently and confidently with the teacher's guidance very well. Despite that, the "Smart Crate" have successfully led these pupils to sharpen their speaking skills better from time to time.

Insights gathered from semi-structured interviews with pupils have shown positive results as it indicates that most pupils really enjoy the teaching and learning session. Pupils expressed a heightened interest in learning, particularly noting the element of surprise and hands-on experiences offered by the innovation. Moreover, pupils also highlighted an improvement in understanding of the subject learned due to the incorporation of diverse activities facilitated by the "Smart Crate." The combined findings from the observation and semi-structured interviews indicates tangible positive impact of using the "Smart Crate" innovation in bolstering pupils' engagement and learning experiences of the subject. It successfully promoted exploration, collaboration and immediate feedback within the classroom.

Learning methods that are able to arouse students' interest in learning and free from boredom or boredom created by the teacher are fun learning concepts (Widiasworo, 2018, p. 15). The innovative approach using the "Smart Crate" as the teaching aids really helps the teacher in enhancing the pupil's learning. This was shown by the result of the conducted methodology whereby most of the pupils experienced the fun and the measured learning. It is notable that most of the pupils in the Year 2 classroom are remedial pupils where only certain of them know how to read and write. But, their motivation and interest in learning has made the teacher use this innovative approach by creating an innovation that can help all the pupils to enjoy the learning session despite their level of proficiencies. Relating to the reality of the classroom, Copland et al., (2014) pointed out that among the difficulties in teaching writing for ESL young learners revolve around grammar, spelling and sentence construction. Since the English language has always been thought of as a killer subject in schools, the pupils tend to avoid using English and are afraid of learning the subject. However, through the implementation of a teaching approach like "Smart Crate" that infused enjoyment into the learning process, pupils' enthusiasm for learning the subject appeared to have improved.

One of the most significant outcomes observed was the successful achievement of learning objectives by a majority of pupils. The interactive and immersive nature of the "Smart Crate" facilitated a deeper understanding of subject matter, enabling students to grasp learning objectives more effectively. This enhanced comprehension was complemented by heightened engagement and active participation among pupils, indicative of the innovation's efficacy in cultivating an environment conducive to learning. Through the observation and semi-structured interview that was done, it can be concluded that pupils' curiosity can be sparked by using this kind of innovative approach in learning. From the start of teaching, the pupils seem to show their interest in learning the topic of the subject. Their engagement and ability to complete the hands-on activities at the end of the lesson really show how the innovative approach of using "Smart Crate" as teaching aids really enhance their motivation and interest in learning. When asking the

pupils in semi-structured interviews, their feedback is mostly positive as they really enjoy the teaching and learning session.

5.0 Conclusion and future research

In addition to the immediate benefits observed in current (T&L) sessions, the "Smart Crate" innovation holds immense potential for future research and development in educational technology. Further exploration could focus on refining and expanding the functionalities of the Smart Crate to cater to a broader range of subjects and learning styles. Collaborative features could be integrated to promote group activities, fostering teamwork and communication skills among students.

Furthermore, future research could delve into assessing the long-term impact of the Smart Crate on students' retention of knowledge and overall academic performance. Comparative studies with traditional teaching methods could provide valuable insights into the sustained effectiveness of this innovative tool. Moreover, exploring the scalability and affordability of the Smart Crate for widespread implementation in diverse educational settings would be crucial for its integration into mainstream education. Continued research and development in this field hold the potential to revolutionize teaching and learning methodologies, creating a more dynamic and engaging educational landscape for students worldwide.

Author Contributions

Nur Athirah Anis Mohamad: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing- Original Draft Preparation; **Nurul Ain Nadiah Arisham**: Data Analysis, Validation, Editing; **Talha Taufik**: Product Evaluation, Supervision, and Writing-Reviewing.

Conflicts of Interest

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its Submission and declare no conflict of interest in the manuscript.

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