Assessing the Grammar Skills of Grade 8 Junior High School Students: Basis for Developing Learning Resource Materials

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Abstract: The study was conducted to assess the grammar skills of the Grade 8 students, which will serve as the main basis in developing appropriate learning resource materials. The descriptive method, which employs objective and summative needs analysis, was used by the researcher for this purpose. Two sets of questionnaires were used in the study. The first questionnaire was the 75-item diagnostic test. The second was the test-questionnaire, which listed 25 identified vital grammar points. The participants in this study were divided into two groups: 86 selected Grade 8 students from Parada National High School (PNHS) in Parada, Santa Maria, Bulacan, during the 2018-2019 school year, and six English 8 teachers who answered the test-questionnaire. The data collected were encoded and entered into the matrix through the computer software of Microsoft Excel. The statistical procedures employed were frequency distribution, percentage score, mean, total mean, and standard deviation. The study recommends that English teachers in Grade 8 and other levels may use the results of the needs analysis in developing contextualized drills in English grammar. That way, the poor level of grammar skills of the students will be addressed. For their part, school administrators should initiate trainings, programs, seminars, and workshops about the development of contextualized instructional materials and using them in grammar instruction. And finally, curriculum developers will do well to emphasize the grammar points mentioned in this study because this is where students are weakest in. The results of this study may well serve as their basis in revisiting the present curricula.

Keywords— grammar skills, needs analysis, learning resource materials, contextualization, material development

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's modern world, every individual requires skills and knowledge to confront and overcome obstacles. Recognizing this, the Department of Education (DepEd) is constantly ready to adapt to Filipino students' needs. Indeed, the Department of Education (DepEd) has started its most recent educational reform by implementing the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum (EBEC), often known as the K-12 curriculum, which promotes lifetime learning.

Undoubtedly, language skills are among the vital skills needed in any undertaking. Fortunately, the Philippines has been named the world's top country in terms of business English proficiency for not one, but two years in a row. Only the Philippines received a score of over 7.0 on the Business English Index (BEI) Report in 2012, putting the nation in a category of high competence that demonstrates the ability to conduct business discussions and accomplish difficult activities. However, the country has been falling behind in the EF English Proficiency Index for the past years. The country's ranking has slipped further in the previous three years: from 14th in 2018, 20th in 2019, and 27th in 2020, compared to 13th

in 2016, and 15th in 2017 (Magsambol, 2018). These papers stress the necessity of aiding Filipino students in obtaining English proficiency as well as developing new strategies to increase Filipinos' English ability.

Furthermore, the researcher has observed that majority of students find grammar difficult to learn and they fail to learn it because it is associated with mind-numbing rules. As a result, students struggle to write grammatically correct sentences, which leads to poor performance in written and performance tasks. One of the reasons students are disinterested in studying and learning English grammar is due to the instructional materials used in their classrooms by teachers. Undoubtedly, teachers have employed materials that have been decontextualized. In an article on language teaching, Rhalmi (2016) said that drilling is still used by many teachers although it has been discredited with the advent of modern methods. Drilling is used to have practice in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation but he enumerated problems with drills: (1) they are not meaningful; (2) they are mechanical; (3.) they do not convey much meaning; and (4.) they are decontextualized. However, Aicart (2018) defended grammar drills as important like other language learning activities. Since grammar is a vital element of language, language learning necessarily involves grammar learning. Moreover, Morales (2017) bewailed that materials needed to teach the subject and cover the competencies included in the curriculum guide are still unavailable.

Summing up, the researchers chose to assess the grammar skills of Junior High School students because it will serve as the primary basis for developing appropriate learning

resource materials that may arrest the overarching issue in English grammar.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The main goal of this study is to assess the grammar skills of all Grade 8 Junior High School Students of Parada National High School, which is vital data for developing learning resource materials?

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of grammar skills of the respondents as revealed by results of the needs analysis?
2. What grammatical points have been recognized as the least and most mastered?
3. What possible learning resource materials may be developed based on the needs analysis?

2. RELATED WORKS

According to Altun (2015), many educators have assessed the term "communicative competence." But what seems to stand out is the definition of Canale and Swain (1980), that communicative competence is the primary system of knowledge, skill, and vocabulary in using the sociolinguistic features of a given language. They both reinforce the notion that communicative competence comprises knowledge and skill to process acquired knowledge, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Subsequently, Canale (1983) restructured the model he had with Swain. He added discourse competence and came up with a four-dimensional version of communicative competence. According to him, grammatical competence refers to a good command of language rules including the correct use and application of vocabulary rules, formation of words and sentences, spelling, and pronunciation. Simply put, it refers to knowledge of the language code. Sociolinguistic competence refers to using language appropriately in a given situation. Discourse competence is the ability to use language comprehensibly. Strategic competence is the use of verbal and nonverbal communication skills to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur. Among the four components of communicative competence, the researcher opted to focus on grammar competence. This competence allows learners to skillfully manipulate various language rules to construct meaningful sentences in an appropriate context.

Feng (2013) explained that functional grammar emphasizes the way written and spoken language operates in various situations. In particular, it focuses on how words work together to create meanings. Furthermore, functional grammar connects grammatical categories to the communicative functions they serve. It is more sociological in orientation. For Lamsal (2011), grammar focuses on functional aspects of language. He holds that grammar rules cannot be normative, for they are to be determined on the basis of the use of native speakers. According to him, functional grammar is a universal theory of the organization of natural language as developed by Dik and others.

One of the hypotheses of Krashen (1981) about language is the monitor hypothesis. He believed that language should be acquired through natural exposure and that there is no need to teach grammar explicitly because it only contributes to the growth of declarative knowledge rather than procedural ability to use target forms. Students can learn grammatical forms as they receive comprehensible input. According to Moreen and Soneni (2015), the acquisition system becomes the utterance initiator, while the learning system acts the role of the monitor. Therefore, the functions of the monitor are planning, correcting, and editing where three given conditions are met: (1) the learner has enough time at his disposal, (2) the learner concentrates on forms, and (3) the learner recognizes the rule. Moreover, Krashen's model theory of second language acquisition plays a vital role in teaching and learning English grammar.

Baker, Hope, and Karandjeff (2009) defined contextualization as a means of advancing student success by stimulating interest and motivation, enhancing skills, and innovating ways of learning. Thus, contextualization can stimulate a student's brain to develop patterns and create meaning by linking experience and sensory stimuli to new language through a real-life application. In other words, students learn more effectively when they are taught in real-life and specific context rather than in an abstract manner.

In the same light, Rance (2017) explained that the key to any successful lesson is to make the content relevant to the learners. Lessons for teenage students will always be more interesting if the teacher goes out of his way to find materials that students will immediately connect with.

It is beyond dispute that drills play a vital role in teaching and learning English grammar. Thus, incorporating contextualization in drills in the process of language learning is considered as a strong foundation in the development of the material. As stated earlier, the core goal of this study is to help every student acquires a measure of competence in using English.

Priyono, Wena, and Rahardjo (2017) view ABT as an instructional approach that highlights students' active learning through various activities to enhance the three domains of learning (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) equally. It encourages students' active participation in learning theories or concepts through various activities and hands-on experiences in varied learning environments inside and outside of school. It emphasizes the development of students' creativity and active participation. It aims to promote the holistic development of students and highlight that students should not only be smart but also well-mannered and skilled. Relatedly, Limbu (2012) stressed that students learn by doing since it is well proved that the more the senses are stimulated, the more a person learns, and the longer he/she

retains information. Students must be given enough materials to focus on their thinking and interaction in the lesson, as well as to analyze the information intelligently. For their part, teachers need to be actively involved in guiding the students' analysis.

This type of learning is a process whereby learning is formed through experience. It takes a more holistic approach and emphasizes how experiences, including cognition, environmental factors, and emotions, influence the learning process (Cheery, 2018).

In the same light, Asiabanpour (2016) explained that an individual starts to develop his learning style from infancy. People are affected by every experience and influence that surrounds them, from their parents to the physical environment. Naturally, it makes sense to help students learn in the same fashion as they grow up. The process of learning is a dynamic experience that results from continual learning experiences, and teachers must continue to provide these experiences to today's youth to keep teaching effective.

Millrood (2014) posited that grammar competence in the context of learning a foreign language is a set of theoretical knowledge and language skills that are necessary for students to write correct sentences, to monitor grammar errors, and to perform language tasks. According to Mabuan (2015), the errors in tenses, verbs, prepositions, articles, pronouns, morphology, and subject-verb agreement committed by students in their blog posts may be attributed to some factors such as first language interference and negative transfer from L1 to L2. These errors revealed that while students know that these forms exist in English grammar, they still have not mastered the rules governing them.

The development of grammar competence is a necessary part of second language acquisition. EFL teachers are advised to use techniques for teaching grammar such as games, pictures, videos, and visualization to pique students' interest and generate positive feelings. These help EFL learners overcome the frustrations and barriers that may arise from grammar classes (Zamani, 2015). It may be inferred that learners learn grammar in different ways or that some target structures may not need instruction at all.

In relation to grammar skills, needs analysis is a crucial requirement of ESL teaching. Failing to assess the needs of students, teachers can never produce the right materials which will yield the desired impact on language learners (Daciri, 2016). Definitely, the results of needs analysis help instructors define students' needs and deficiencies in terms of language skills (Ulum, 2015).

Brown, cited in Khansir (2016) argued that needs analysis is the systematic collection and analysis of all the relevant information necessary to meet the requirements of language learning. Moreover, Todea and Demarcsek (2017) asserted that a needs analysis will benefit all groups involved. Teachers will benefit because it will simplify their efforts and make it easier to work with their students. Similarly, students will benefit because activities will be better tailored to their needs, knowledge, abilities, and skills. In the present study,

needs analysis was conducted through a validated diagnostic test which the subject participants answered.

In an article on language teaching, Rhalmi (2016) said that drilling is still used by many teachers although it has been discredited with the advent of modern methods. Drilling is used to practice grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, but he identified several issues with drills, including: (1) they are not meaningful; (2) they are mechanical; (3) they do not convey much meaning; and (4) they are decontextualized. However, Aicart (2018) defended grammar drills as important like other language learning activities. Since grammar is a vital element of language, language learning necessarily involves grammar learning. With the observation that drills currently in use are decontextualized, the researcher was challenged to develop contextualized drills to enhance the grammar skills of students.

According to Olawale (2017), the importance of instructional materials in any teaching and learning process cannot be overemphasized, because instructional materials can enhance, facilitate, and make learning easy, interesting, and enjoyable. Therefore, to address the needs of students trying to learn the English language, the development of materials plays an essential role. With this in mind, the researcher anchored his contextualized drills on The Reference Guide for Instructional Design and Development which prescribes the following steps:

Assess learners' needs. Through needs analysis, the writer of instructional materials identifies the needs of students which will serve as his starting point in developing materials.

Analyze learners. This phase characterizes the target learners by their ability, interest, knowledge, and cultural boundaries. It emphasizes the students' experiences and interests.

Write learning objectives. A learning objective is the concise description of what learners are expected to do and achieve at the end of a given period. In writing the learning objectives, the writer must see that learning targets provide information on what students will know, acquire, or develop at the end of each lesson.

Select an instructional strategy. In this phase, the developer uses different forms of media like graphics, quotations, and pictures to build the context in each lesson. The following strategies should be included in the instruction: (1) increase attention and notify learners of targets, (2) activate previous knowledge, (3) present the subject, (4) provide activities that facilitate learning, (5) draw out learning/ performance, (6) offer response, (7) evaluate learning, and (8) improve and transfer.

Lagos (2014) asserted that learning language focusing on form and meaning is the ultimate goal of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Knowledge of grammar is important in SLA as it enables students to communicate accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. She concluded that there is a direct positive relation between grammar awareness and output, and that students who engage in drills can produce

comprehensible output. The cloze test conducted by Seidel (2013) revealed that students committed errors mostly in tenses, agreement, verb choice, and structure. Such errors were committed in the form of misclassification, approximation, and substitution. Based on findings in substitution errors, it would appear that the absence of equivalent "ay" in English affects learners' use of verbs. Learners show that their first language is still dominant. To minimize interference of the first language in the target language, she suggested that students be exposed to real language models for them to feel at ease with the language. Similarly, learners should be provided with language practice for adequate reinforcement especially in subject-verb agreement. According to her, teaching English as a second language is not only about presenting lessons as teachers are required, but it should involve a realistic assessment of the needs and abilities of students to help them learn the language.

Durante (2013) found that his teacher-respondents fell within the "poor" category. He came up with the following recommendations: (1.) when teachers are made aware of their level of grammar proficiency and discourse competence in English, they can use this knowledge to focus on areas where they need further training. Just as Castillo (1997) found, the results of grammar test show that the most problematic grammar items to English, mathematics and science teachers requiring general improvement are tense consistency, prepositions, the use of passive voice, subject-verb agreement and parallelism and (2.) grammar items problematic to Filipinos as revealed in this study should be emphasized in the school curriculum, and modules and books should be created, developed, or improved to address these difficulties and help learners attain grammar competence.

Lumabao (2013) compared the scores of students in four grammar areas tests before and after cooperative learning activities. The four areas were tenses of verbs, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, and voice of verbs. The students' competencies in pronoun-antecedents agreement, tenses of verbs, and voice of verbs were found to be fair. Only in subject-verb agreement were the students found deficient. Through the use of cooperative learning, the students' competencies were improved. This may be because students were better motivated to participate in class activities when they were given the opportunity to work with peers.

In the same light, Heeffer (2010) affirmed that both students and teachers consider grammar as absolutely necessary in the eventual mastery of English. Interestingly, results of his study revealed that little or no communication about teaching methods exists between teacher and students. Students are not aware of their teacher's methods and the rationale behind them. To address this issue, the researcher called for greater transparency about teaching methods. Available pedagogical research might be tapped to raise students' awareness about language teaching and learning. Gamboa (2017), who developed materials following Tomlinson's model, recommended that all instructions must be targeted towards students' needs and development to

provide what is lacking and improve on what is deficient, ensure that what is lacking can be filled, and what is deficient can be improved. She stressed that instructional materials must fit students' needs and provide stimulating, meaningful, and useful activities to engage learners. Bauza (2017), developed learning materials in reading for Grade 7 students of Obando National High School, stressing that materials development plays a vital role in language teaching and learning. She said that although it cannot be denied that available materials show considerable professional knowhow, they are intended for the general market and the classroom teacher sometimes has to adapt or develop materials of her own. The materials Bauza (2017) developed have a portion called "Make Meanings" where students ask questions, share ideas and occasionally argue about the text, and despite their young age, analyze attitudes and interest as well as confer values and attitudes. The materials were validated by eight specialists who rated them Excellent in all categories: objectives, content, language and style, usefulness, and organization and presentation. For Tongol (2017), teachers, who wish to implement contextualization should come up with activities and materials which learners can relate to, help them develop the required skills, and allow them to participate in their own learning. More instructional materials should be provided by the Department of Education for students' use for they supplement and enhance learning and help learners understand concepts more easily. In sum, the foregoing related literature and studies affirm the need to assess the level of grammar skills of students and to find ways to develop them, and that is through developing different learning resource materials.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

The researcher used the descriptive-method of research, since this study aims to assess the grammar skills of Grade 8 Junior High School Students. According to Pedraza (2014), the descriptive method of research presents characteristics of a particular individual or event. It discovers new meanings, describes what exists, determines the frequency with which something occurs, and categorizes the information. It aims to acquire accurate, factual, and systematic data.

3.2 Respondents

The study was conducted at Parada National High School which is located in Parada, Santa Maria, Bulacan. The participants were composed of 22 sections in Grade 8 during School Year 2018-2019. 86 Grade 8 students were subjected to this study to ensure reliability and validity.

3.3 Instrument of the Study

To determine the level of grammar skills of Grade 8 students of PNHS, the researcher administered a 75-item teacher-made diagnostic test. The questionnaire was in the form of a cloze test. The following essays were used: "A Strong and Beautiful People" and "The Revolutionaries" by H. P.

Ladera and "Why are Filipinos so Poor?" and "Why Freedom?" by F. Sionil Jose.

Another questionnaire was used to assess teachers' perception on grammar needs of student-participants. The grammar points were taken from K to 12 curriculum guide for English 8; Afro-Asian Literature written by Nicolas M. Galvez, Michael Angelo Maliksi and Lourdes Ribo (2013); English Communication Arts and Skills through Afro-Asian Literature written by Milagros Lapid and Josephine Serrano (2015); and Afro-Asian Literature 8 written by Paul Anthony B. Mendoza and Marlon B. Santos (2016). The test questionnaire checklist was composed of the following grammar points: modals, parallel structure, subject and verb agreement, sentence patterns, simple past tense, simple future tense, simple present tense, active and passive voice, direct and reported speech, conjunctions, subject, object, and possessive pronouns, pronouns and antecedents, definite, indefinite, and null articles, prepositions, formulating who, what, when, where, why, and how questions, infinitives, relative pronouns, modifiers, possessive case, adjectives in different degrees of comparison, grammatical signals, gerunds, progressive tenses of verbs, prefixes, and suffixes. Selected English 8 teachers answered the test-questionnaire checklist.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

Statistical treatments of data included the use of frequency distribution and percentage score, mean, grand mean, standard deviation, and spearman rho. The computed weighted mean was used to analyze and interpret the level of acceptability of the contextualized drills as evaluated by selected specialists.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher personally delivered a letter to the Superintendent of Schools in Bulacan requesting permission to conduct a study on the development of contextualized drills for improving the grammar skills of Parada National High School Grade 8 students.

The researcher then asked the school principal for information about the school's history and the total population of Grade 8 students. The researcher prepared a questionnaire- checklist and diagnostic test to assess the level of grammar skills of students and the grammar lessons that should be taught with the use of contextualized drills.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Part I. The Level of Grammar Skills of Grade 8 Students

The level of grammar skills of the students is presented in the frequency and distribution of their scores in the 75- item diagnostic test. The items were derived from the curriculum guide for Grade 8 and selected K to 12 English 8 compliant books. Data in Table 4 show the clustered scores obtained by the student- participants in the diagnostic test in English grammar. The Table reveals that nobody got a score in the range of 61-75.

Table 4
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Grammar Skills of Student-Participants

Scores	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Verbal Interpretation
61-75	0	0	-
46-60	1	1.16%	Skilled
31-45	20	23.26%	Moderately Skilled
16-30	64	74.42%	Lacking Skills
0-15	1	1 .16%	Without Skills
Total	86	100%	-
Mean Score	26.66		**Lacking Skills**
Standard Deviation	7.21		

As indicated, the highest score is within 46-60 obtained by one student, interpreted as skilled, while 1 (1%) of the student-participant got the lowest score within 0-15 range. Majority of the participants (64 or 74.42%) got scores from 16-30, interpreted as lacking skills in grammar. These results factually confirm a common observation that students are not good in grammar, strongly indicating the need for materials that may remedy their deficiency. Barman (2014) said as much when he commented that students remain weak in grammar despite years of effort. Because of this, they fail to write and speak English correctly, and this weakness persists when they enter the workforce later. It is the teachers' responsibility to equip students with skills in using the English language accurately. According to Paystrup (2014), grammar today is especially worse than it was in the past. It is different because of fast and easy texting, messaging and the brevity of Twitter. This technological onslaught makes it all the more imperative to teach grammar in school.

Part II. Least and Most Mastered Grammar Points

To identify the grammar lessons that should be taught, a test questionnaire- checklist was administered to six English 8 teachers.

Table 5
Grammar Needs of Student- Participants

	Grammar Lessons	Teachers' Perception	Diagnostic Test Results	Total	Rank
1	Modals	5.5	1	3.25	1
2	Parallel Structure	5.5	2	3.75	2
3	Subject and Verb Agreement	1	7	4.00	3

4	Sentence Patterns	3	5.5	4.25	4
5	Simple Past Tense	9	3	6.00	5
6	Direct and Reported Speech	3	9.5	6.25	6
7	Simple Future Tense	9	4	6.50	7
8	Simple Present Tense	9	5.5	7.25	8
9	Active and Passive Voice	9	8	8.50	9
10	Conjunction	3	14.5	8.75	10
11	Subject, Object, and Possessive Pronouns	9	13	11.00	11
12	Pronouns and Antecedents	13	11.5	12.25	12
13	Articles	15.5	9.5	12.50	13
14	Prepositions	17	11.5	14.25	14
15	Wh-Questions	15.5	14.5	15.00	15
16	Infinitives	19.5	16	17.75	16
17	Relative pronouns	13	24	18.50	17
18	Modifiers	13	25	19.00	18
19	Possessive Case	19.5	19	19.25	19
20	Degrees of Comparison	18	22	20.00	20.5
21	Grammatical Signals	22.5	17.5	20.00	20.5
22	Gerunds	21	20.5	20.75	22
23	Prefixes	24.5	17.5	21.00	23
24	Progressive Tenses of Verbs	22.5	20.5	21.50	24
25	Suffixes	24.5	23	23.75	25

Shown in Table 5 are the grammar needs of Grade 8 students as perceived by teachers and as revealed by the diagnostic test. The test questionnaire- checklist was composed of 25 grammar derived from the curriculum guide issued by the Department of Education and from selected English 8 books. The researcher ranked needs from least mastered grammar points. Using the Spearman Rho correlation, 7/10 learning competencies relate to one another based on needs as perceived by the teachers and as revealed by the diagnostic test. Therefore, the top 15 grammar points would be the subject matter of the planned contextualized drills. According to Zafar, cited in Amparo (2015), it is important to identify the needs of

students through the errors they make. Teachers and students are alerted on which errors occur more frequently and why they occur. With needs analysis, a concrete picture of the learners' knowledge and learning styles could be drawn as starting point for teachers to develop the needed materials.

Modals; parallelism; subject and verb agreement; sentence patterns; simple past tense; direct and reported speech; simple future tense; simple present tense; active and passive voice; conjunctions; subject, object, and possessive pronouns; pronouns and antecedents; articles; prepositions; and formulating *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why* and *how* emerged as the subject matter of contextualized drills proposed to be developed.

Part III. Proposed Learning Resource Materials

Results of the diagnostic test revealed that the Grade 8 students lack grammar skills. Therefore, they need to improve on this before they move to a higher grade level where language lessons are complex. An effective way to enhance their grammar skills, deficient as yet, is through developing instructional materials that will address their needs in ways they can learn best. As Olawale (2013) mentioned, instructional materials can break language barriers and can make the lesson more meaningful and significant. They save time and enable students to grasp ideas faster and more effectively. Similarly, Rigo and Sekelj (2011) emphasized that instructional materials should be motivating and stimulating to make learners involved in language learning activities conducted in class.

The researcher strongly believes that through contextualization, students can enhance their skills in English grammar. As MacFarlane (2015) found, teaching grammar in context is the most preferred method among his student-rparticipants. For his part, Rohayati (2013) stressed that teachers who believe in the virtues of contextualization need to choose appropriate material based on students' experiences and in the process create a lively classroom atmosphere attuned to their nature.

In all humility, the researcher believes that contextualized drills he developed are of great help to teachers, and most especially to students, if only because there is no existing book in grammar for Grade 8. Hopefully, these contextualized drills will stimulate students' interest to learn grammar forms and rules and apply them in their oral and written communication. Hopefully, too, atrocious grammar will be a thing of the past.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are humbly and respectfully offered:

1. English teachers in Grade 8 and other levels may use the results of the needs analysis in developing contextualized drills in English grammar. That way, the poor level of grammar skills of the students will be addressed.

2. School administrators should initiate trainings, programs, seminars, and workshops about the development of contextualized instructional materials and using them in grammar instruction.

3. Curriculum developers will do well to emphasize the grammar points mentioned in this study because this is where students are weakest in. The results of this study may well serve as their basis in revisiting the present curricula.

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