

## The Effectiveness of Using Mnemonics Innovation for Learning Preposition of Time

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### ABSTRACT

ESL students often encounter problems when using English prepositions of time due to numerous reasons. In a teaching and learning situation, both teachers and students use different methods to overcome this problem. One such method may be the use of learning strategy such as mnemonic device system. 'Don-atT-MinY' is an innovative mnemonic device which modifies letters from the words time, day, date, month, minute and year to be combined with preposition of time (on, at, in) into keywords (Don-atT-MinY) that can be retrieved from memory. This study uses a questionnaire to survey student's perceived opinion regarding the difficulty of learning English preposition of time. The study also conducted a small intervention study to examine the effectiveness of using 'Don-atT-MinY' that can aid in instilling comprehension and enabling correct applicability of the English preposition of time. 59 primary 6 students from SK Chendering were selected as participants of this study. Data collected from the survey and the pre-post-test study is presented in a simple percentage and frequency form. Findings obtained reveal that mnemonic learning strategy such as 'Don-atT-MinY' is an effective learning method because it provides a novel and different way of learning a component of the English language. This learning strategy may be useful for learners, especially for the lower competency students, educators and educational institutions.

**KEYWORDS:** Effectiveness, Innovative, Preposition, Mnemonic, Learning Strategy.

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a second language can be difficult for students because of component in the English language are made up of elements that are not familiar to them either because the vocabulary is different or because the element has no equivalent in the students' own first language. This is especially true with English language preposition. English as Second Language students often encounter problem with understanding the correct usage of preposition. It is a possibility that students can overcome this problem if they use language learning strategy [3] such as a mnemonic device. 'Don-atT-MinY' is a learning strategy that embeds mnemonic strategy which modifies letters from the words time, day, date, month, minute and year to be combined with preposition of time (at, on, in) into keywords that can be retrieved, especially when students are having uncertainty in using those prepositions. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of using 'Don-atT-MinY' as a device that can help students understand the correct usage for preposition of time.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In [6] describe the difficulty of learning preposition as problematic as numerous analyses of the linguistic output of learners have revealed that prepositional errors of substitution, omission and addition account for the majority of syntactic errors. Furthermore, with regard to the use of preposition in English, rules that govern the usage of preposition limits the usage of certain preposition to be usable only for a certain function. In [2] stated that in English, prepositions appear in adjuncts, they mark the arguments of predicates and they combine with other parts of speech to express new meaning. The preposition and the function is not memorable to students. There are quite a number of them to be memorized with their function. In [9] said that usage errors involving prepositions are among the most common types seen in the writing of non-native English speakers. Furthermore, Bahasa Melayu itself is quite simple and for student of English as a second language. Malay preposition is not quite as complicated as English. Thus, students tend to ignore the rules that govern the use of preposition and in writing, there are frequent errors and mistakes done involving the use of preposition.

The study of preposition, especially preposition of time may actually be made easier if students are actually aware of the rules that govern its usage. One way to make students aware is by using language learning strategy namely the use of mnemonic device. In [2] stated that a learning strategy is an individual's way of organizing and using a particular set of skills to learn content or accomplish other tasks effectively and efficiently in both

academic and non-academic settings. The use of mnemonic is believed to be able to help students learn and memorize things better. In [7] stated that a mnemonic is an instructional strategy designed to help learners improve their memory of important information. This strategy assists the learners to connect new learning to their schemata through the use of visual and/or acoustic cue. This is supported by [4] whose finding supported the claim that mnemonic strategies instruction affect the immediate and delayed information retrieval of vocabulary learning in EFL elementary learners. In [8] reveals finding that shows English as a second language students are able to improve their memory, English vocabulary as well as creativity when using different types of visual, physical and other mnemonic devices when learning English in the classroom. In [1] also highlights the benefits of mnemonic strategy when trying to improve ESL vocabulary especially with regard to its comparison to the effectiveness of just using semantic mapping.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a questionnaire to survey student's perceived opinion regarding the difficulty of learning English preposition of time. The study also conducted a small intervention study to examine the effectiveness of using the mnemonic device 'Don-atT-MinY' as a language learning strategy that can be used as an aid in instilling comprehension regarding the use and function of preposition of time. 59 primary 6 students from SK Chendering were selected as participants of this study. Data collected from the survey and the pre-post-test study is presented in a simple percentage and frequency form.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Perceived difficulty with learning preposition of time**

Perceived Difficulties	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Total
1. There are too many English prepositions to remember.	1	21	15	21	1	59
2. The function of English preposition is different from Bahasa Melayu.	1	19	18	19	2	59
3. The function of some English preposition overlaps	0	11	21	25	2	59
4. Explanation about English preposition in the books I read is too difficult to understand.	9	25	6	17	2	59
5. Teacher's explanation of English preposition is too difficult to understand.	13	31	1	11	3	59
6. There are too many rules to follow when using certain preposition.	1	17	12	21	8	59
7. The rules when using certain preposition are too complex to understand.	2	7	15	35	0	59
8. There are different rules to follow when using different preposition in each sentence.	3	6	8	37	5	59
9. The placement of prepositions are different from Bahasa Melayu sentence structure.	2	14	17	24	2	59
10. English preposition is difficult to use as I do not know the meaning of most prepositions	3	22	12	21	1	59
11. English preposition is difficult to use as I do not understand the meaning of most English words.	8	14	20	14	3	59

From Table 1, participants equally agreed (22, 37.29%) and disagreed (22, 37.29%) that there are too many prepositions to remember. However, they agreed that when using certain preposition there are too many (49.15%) complex rules (59.32%) that they have to follow and understand. When using preposition in each sentence, participants (71.18%) believe there are different rules that they have to apply.

Participants are not sure of the differences of the function of preposition in English and Bahasa Melayu as the result shows 33.90% disagreed, 30.51% neutral and 35.59% agreed. However, they agreed (44.06%) the placement of prepositions are different from Bahasa Melayu. They also agreed (45.76%) that some prepositions function overlaps.

In learning preposition of time, participants disagreed that it is too difficult to understand (37.29%) and use (42.37%) the preposition. The explanation from the lecturers (74.58%) and books (57.63%) is not too difficult to understand.

**Table 2: Interested in using the mnemonic in learning**

	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Yes	57/59	96.61
No	1/59	1.69
Neutral	1/59	1.69

From the table above, there are 96.61% participants are positively interested in using the mnemonic device in learning English.

**Table 3: Learning strategy**

	Preferred Learning Activity	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Language Games (word puzzles, etc.)	38/59	64.41
2.	Mnemonic device	44/59	74.58
3.	Drills exercise	46/59	77.97
4.	Lecture	29/59	49.15
5.	Online exercise	26/59	44.07
6.	Songs	29/59	49.15
7.	Memorization	35/59	59.32
8.	Discussion with peers	52/59	88.14
9.	Diagram/Picture Association	48/59	81.36
10.	Role play	12/59	20.34

In answering Question 3 on learning strategy, 88.14% participants preferred to discuss with peers, followed by using diagram/picture association in learning 81.26%, drills exercise 77.97%, 74.58% preferred in using mnemonic device, some preferred to use language games such as word puzzles in learning. The least preferred learning activity is using role play in learning English. Mnemonic device ranked fourth in terms of preferences of the students.

**Table 4: Pre-test- post test results**

Effect	Number of Participants, n = 59		Differences in Pre-Post Test, n = 10	
Increase	1	42 (71.19%)	6 (60%)	
	3		5 (50%)	
	4		4 (40%)	
	9		3 (30%)	
	11		2 (20%)	
	14		1 (10%)	
Decrease	1	9 (15.25%)	-4 (40%)	
	1		-3 (30%)	
	4		-2 (20%)	
	3		-1	
Unchanged	8	8 (13.56%)	0	

From Table 4, it could be seen that out of 59 participants 42 (71.19%), participants scored well in the post tests. This group form the majority of the result. It shows positive outcome from the conducted interference using the intended mnemonic device. The possibility here is that the participants were able to use the formula when answering questions involving prepositions of time and the post-test question were more answerable with the aid of the device. However, the result gathered also shows that 9 (15.25%) participants were unable to do well in the post test despite being taught the mnemonic formula. It is not certain why they were not able to perform well, but this could be due to their carelessness and weakness in reading the questions as all the questions are in English. So other factors such as that affect ESL learning could be at play. Furthermore, only 8 or 13.56% of participants' results remained unchanged. Therefore, we could conclude that there is a possibility that using mnemonic learning strategy such as 'Don-atT-MinY' to teach students preposition of time (on, at, in) is an effective approach in learning English preposition of time.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this is an important innovation that will help student learn English preposition involving time more effectively. Mnemonic learning strategy such as Don-atT-MinY is a potentially effective learning method because it provides a novel and different way of learning component as of English language. The use of this learning method should be encouraged in the classroom as this learning strategy is useful for learners, educators and educational institutions. As a formula, it is catchy and simple and that makes it easy for student to remember and that fits the reason why people can turn to mnemonic device as part of their learning strategy. Usage of mnemonic device is part of metacognitive learning strategy. Research has shown that learning how to learn such as using mnemonic device to assist learning can be beneficial. Study by [5] examines the effect of such strategies on university students' language learning ability provide evidence that metacognitive strategies work. In addition, the finding of this study has also supported the finding by [4, 8, 1], mainly on the effects of mnemonic strategies in improving both ESL and EFL vocabularies acquisition. Although other factors could potentially affect the success of this method, it is worth to note that while there may not be one big solution that solve all problems, discovering a small one is a step towards the right direction. Furthermore, while this study is a preliminary study that tries to examine the effectiveness of using mnemonic device as an aid in learning how to

use preposition of time correctly, further study should be done to further examine and identify what other mnemonic devices could potentially help students in acquiring their second language. Studies with invention or innovation of formula such as this would benefit not just the literature of research on learning strategies but is also applicable in a real classroom.

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