

Assessing the Effectiveness of Play-Way and Structural Approaches in the Teaching of English Grammar among Selected Creche Schools in Ijebu-Ode Township

Nkopuruk, Imikan N* , Department of Arts Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria.

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*Corresponding author:

Nkopuruk, Imikan, Department of Arts Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria.
imikan.nkopuruk@uniabuja.edu.ng

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Abstract

Objectives: This study set out to compare the effectiveness of the Play-Way and Structural Approaches in the teaching of English language grammar to young learners in selected crèche schools in Ijebu-Ode township.

Methodology: The study employed a quasi-experimental design. Two groups of fifteen pupils each, were selected using a purposive sampling technique. However, in a lesson which lasted for four weeks, pupils in the first group were taught aspects of the English grammar using the Play-Way Approach – an approach that emphasises play-oriented instructional methods. Similarly, others were also taught using the Structural Approach - an approach that focuses on grammar rules and structures. Consequently, the effectiveness of both approaches was assessed through pre-test and post-test evaluations.

Results: Findings revealed that the Structural Approach was more effective for teaching English grammar to crèche students in Ijebu-Ode township compared to the Play-Way Approach. While the Structural Approach demonstrated greater effectiveness in improving grammar proficiency among young learners in this study, the Play-Way Approach still held potential for other aspects of language learning, such as motivation and engagement.

Conclusion: Therefore, on this premise, the study concluded by recommending that a combined teaching strategy that integrates the systematic framework of the Structural Approach with the creativity and engagement of the Play-Way Method be adopted going forward. Regardless of that, the success of such approaches also depends on adequate resources and teacher training to create effective learning environments.

Keywords: Creativity, Faculty Staff, Heads of Departments, Jordanian Universities, University Deans.

تقييم لطريقة اللعب والمنهج البنوي في تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية بين مدارس حضانة مختارة في بلدة إيجو

نوكوبوروك إميكان - جامعة ابوجان، نيجيريا

ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى مقارنة فعالية منهجي "اللعب التعليمي" و"النهج البنوي" في تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية للمتعلمين الصغار في بعض الحضانات المختارة في بلدة إيجو أودي.

الطرق: استخدمت الدراسة تصميماً شبه تجريبي. تم اختيار مجموعتين من خمسة عشر (15) تلميذاً لكل منهما باستخدام تقنية العينة الهادفة. خلال فترة الدرس التي استمرت أربعة (4) أسابيع، تم تعليم المجموعة الأولى جوانب من قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية باستخدام منهج اللعب التعليمي - وهو نهج يركز على أساليب التعليم القائمة على اللعب. بالمثل، تم تعليم المجموعة الأخرى باستخدام النهج البنوي - وهو نهج يركز على قواعد اللغة والهيكل النحوية. وبناءً على ذلك، تم تقييم فعالية كلا النهجين من خلال اختبارات ما قبل وما بعد التجربة.

النتائج: أظهرت النتائج أن النهج البنوي كان أكثر فعالية في تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب الحضانات في بلدة إيجو أودي مقارنةً بمنهج اللعب التعليمي. بينما أظهر النهج البنوي فعالية أكبر في تحسين الكفاءة النحوية بين المتعلمين الصغار في هذه الدراسة، لا يزال منهج اللعب التعليمي يتمتع بإمكانات لتطوير جوانب أخرى من تعلم اللغة، مثل التحفيز والتفاعل.

الخلاصة: بناءً على ذلك، خلصت الدراسة إلى التوصية بتبني استراتيجية تدريس تجمع بين الإطار المنهجي للنهج البنوي والإبداع والتفاعل الذي يميز منهج اللعب التعليمي. ومع ذلك، يعتمد نجاح مثل هذه الأساليب أيضاً على توفر الموارد الكافية وتدريب المعلمين لإنشاء بيئات تعليمية فعالة. الكلمات المفتاحية: منهج اللعب التعليمي، النهج البنوي، قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، حضانات، أساليب التدريس، نظرية البناء المعرفي، علم تعليم اللغة.

Background Issues

Teachers in the early 1900s created the Play-Way Approach in reaction to the inflexible, mechanical teaching techniques of the day. Building on the educational ideas of Friedrich Froebel, who popularized the kindergarten system worldwide, and Maria Montessori, whose method prioritizes child-centered learning, Henry Caldwell Cook further developed this strategy. Cook's 1917 book, *The Play Way*, offered a thorough analysis of teaching via play.

He has a thorough knowledge of both Montessori's emphasis on learning via hands-on activities and autonomous work, as well as Froebel's view of kindergartens as play-focused learning environments (Richards, 2021). The foundation of the Play-Way Approach is the belief that play is essential to a child's growth. It views play as an essential way to engage with the environment rather than only as a kind of relaxation. Children build information, investigate the environment, and participate in practical and cognitive tasks via play, all of which help them develop critical social and cognitive abilities. In promoting active participation, creativity, and teamwork, this approach fosters a learning atmosphere that piques attention and maintains it (Akhtar, 2012). Instructors that employ the Play-Way Approach create curricula that include play into a variety of educational activities. Dörnyei (2019) highlights drama, storytelling, games, and hands-on creation experiences as a few examples of approaches that are meant to make learning engaging and relevant. Nevertheless, blocks, for example, can help children grasp mathematical ideas, while dolls and toys can help children learn languages. This method also acknowledges that children learn better when they are having fun, which improves enrollment, mastery, and information retention over the long run. Its advantages are widely known in early childhood education, where research has demonstrated that it improves kids' attitudes toward learning, social skills, and problem-solving ability (Oxford, 2011). Furthermore, the Play-Way Approach promotes inclusion and diversity in the classroom by accommodating a range of learning preferences.

The Structural approach to language teaching especially as applied to the teaching of English grammar found prominence in the middle of the 20th century. This was due to the influence of other linguists, especially Leonard Bloomfield, and structural linguistics movement, which encouraged systematic scientific investigation of language structures (Long, 2017). This

approach was later on advanced and incorporated in the language teaching methodologies which are characterized by the spots or regularities in the language used (Harmer, 2017). The Structural Approach was a reaction to the more liberal and naturalistic approaches to language learning in the classroom to offer more formative approach. The Structural Approach of language Teaching and learning was developed on the belief that language had a fixed number of Structures that could be taught and learnt. This method can be described as grammatical-linguistic because it focuses on Rules and patterns of acquired language. Other principles include the presentation of language content in linear fashion where the idea is inculcated in the learner in the increasing order of form (Gu, 2013; Long, 2019). For Allwright (2014) the approach has it that the developmental focus should remain in syntax and morphology with an understanding that the learners master simply elementary foundations of the language before moving to intermediate and advanced level. Structural Approach in practice therefore entails the organization of curriculum in a very structured manner, this approach to language acquisition covers different steps in which students are taught structures of language. In order to reinforce learnt attitudes, this frequently entails the use of pattern drills, sentence repetition, and substitution exercises. For instance, learners might use the verb tenses through formation of sentences in order to fix in their mind various grammatical forms a particular verb may take (Alvarez and Garcia, 2014). However, it has been most useful in instances where the method has to be systematic and precise and this is whether it is in teaching English to learners who are learners who have another first language. Thus, facilitating the organization of information for learners and ensuring that there is a clear structure and expected patterns, which may be particularly helpful for the development of building basic language knowledge (Lee & Kwon, 2017). Despite the fact that the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach are not significantly dissimilar when on their own the two concepts are actually best used with one another in mind. The main advantage of the Play-Way Approach is that students in their early age possess the desire to learn and participate in interesting and creative play. This has great benefits to development as it fosters comprehensive development of the child focusing on the cognitive, social as well as the emotional domain. On this hand the Structural Approach provides the clear-cut, sharp edge necessary for teaching the structural or the formal part of language enabling the learner to acquire the grammatical

correctness that is necessary in any communication (Brown & Taylor, 2018).

Therefore, learning strategies are a blend of formal and fun procedures in the integrating process. For example, when explaining verb conjugations, which refer to the structural approach element, teachers can use games, songs and storytelling, which belongs to the Play-Way Approach in the classroom. This mixed-style intervention can be especially beneficial at the developmental stage of learning where students' attention has to be constantly reinforced, and understanding re-established (Wang & Chen, 2016). It is possible to plan to use a particular activity whereby linguistic patterns are incorporated as children play before organizing special activities that would hone the ideas presented. In the present study, it is proposed that by synthesizing the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach, a more stimulating and beneficial learning process can be achieved. When integrated together along with the appropriate blending of the two approaches, the teaching and learning process can be fun as well as academically productive. The use of both strategies also benefits different learners by catering for their learning modes / profiles and making sure that learners not just find learning interesting, but are also adept in the language (Smith & Jones, 2020). As the said kinds of approaches have been proved by research, the consequent cognitive benefits include improvements in learners' mental abilities as well as their knowledge acquisition and recall, not mentioning the beneficial impact on perceptions towards learning.

Although the Play Way Approach and the Structural Approach can have some potential benefits to some they can also be challenging to bring together. The big challenge is how to make sure the 'playful' does not kill need for systematic learning. Play must be carefully designed such that it is purposeful while still engaging and closely related to objectives (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2014). Educators may additionally need training to ready to combine the methodology, since it includes a move from customary educating rehearses to progressively dynamic and adaptable methodology. The educational context also affects the implementation of an integrated approach successfully. However, due to class size, resources, or teacher and student's educational background, this approach may not be effective. Material and training resources may be difficult to put in place in resource limited settings (Nguyen et al., 2019). In the case where standardized testing and measurable outcomes have high priority, the structural approach may prevail, prohibiting play-based learning (Lee & Kwon, 2017). Importantly, success depends on its adaptation to best fit the needs and constraints of a particular educational environment. The appearance of the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach as such is quite a milestone in the educational practice. All of the methods have their own specific principles and their own strengths, that come individually to support the learning process. The Play-Way Approach encourages natural,

enjoyable learning through play, and with this, develops the entire aspect of the child and keeps him or her engaged. The structural Approach is systematic, rigorous in its treatments of language structures, wherein the grammar is correct and the language knowledge is basic (Lee & Kwon, 2017). When these methods are interwoven, educators can produce a well-balanced and successful educational product that meets the different needs of learners. However, the challenges associated with this integrative approach open up a perennial promise for improving the quality of education and creating a love for learning that lasts a lifetime.

The Play-Way Approach is a pedagogical approach, which integrates learning through play activities, which satisfy the developmental needs and interests of young learners. For example, as, in case of grammar learning for creche pupils, this approach focuses on creating such ambience in which language, in the form of grammar, is learned naturally especially after playing with the children, storytelling, singing and creative activities in which grammar concepts are indirectly taught to the children so that they learn in a most enjoyable and interesting way (Malik, Altaf & Gull, 2020; Wang & Chen, 2016). Teachers might instead infuse grammar features into educational games such as a treasure hunt during which children look for objects that are described using prepositions, or in role playing scenarios that require the use of various verb tenses. The Play Way Approach centres on immersing pupils in interactive experiences which promotes language growth naturally as children learn grammar concepts intuitively by navigating their way through various playful experiences. In contrast, the structural approach to grammar learning employed by Zhou & Niu (2015) is based on a more systematic, formal grammar learning method with explicit instruction and practice of grammatical rules and structures. This approach is based on breaking down the grammar concepts into manageable units and presenting them sequentially to the children, lesson contents may include drills, exercises and worksheets that reinforce particular grammar rules, such as sentence structure, parts of speech, and syntax (Matamoros-González, Rojas, Romero, Vera-Quiñonez & Soto (2017).

The structural approach involves using visual aids, charts and manipulatives to show grammar concepts and for hands on learning. While this method may appear more traditional compared to the play-way approach, it offers a structured framework for young learners to build a solid foundation in grammar skills. Through the systematical introduction and practicing of grammar rules, the structural approach helps creche pupils develop language proficiency and lays the groundwork for their future language acquisition and literacy skills. Nevertheless, it is believed of this study that instead of focusing solely on teaching a language to their students in a rapidly changing world, language teachers should urge them to think critically about the emerging problems of the world such as environmental and social concerns.

In other words, new approaches to language teaching according to Nkopuruk (2024) and Celce-Murcia (2021) should encourage each student to develop the cognitive and social skills necessary to handle the sophisticated problems of our time and turn them into critical agents responsible for their own learning. English language proficiency is crucial for academic success and societal integration. However, in early childhood education, particularly in creche schools, the methods employed in teaching English grammar can significantly impact learning outcomes. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of two teaching methodologies, namely the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach, in enhancing English grammar acquisition among young learners in creche schools located in Ijebu Ode.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As crucial early childhood education institutions, creche schools have a massive role to play in the acquisition of the English grammar by children. Nevertheless, a well-known gap exists in the state of knowledge surrounding the most effective methods to which have been applied to these configurations. In conventional creche environment, pedagogical approach often includes rote memorisation techniques or passive learning which may not support the needs of active learning of young children. This incongruity clearly necessitates going into other teaching methods that are active with students and give a fine understanding of grammar concepts. In addition, due to the age and cognitive abilities of creche pupils, the ways of memorizing and repetition they used in conventional methods may not achieve development of their linguistic skills fully. Subjecting young learners to environments that challenge their curiosity, promote exploration, and yield to their natural disposition for playing and interacting, is precisely what they thrive in. Consequently, now it becomes imperative to review pedagogical practices in creche settings as it must shift to methods that exploit children's natural tendency towards active learning and experiential ways.

Further, in adopting playful and storytelling, music and hands on techniques, educators in creche settings can develop immersive learning experiences based on the developmental requirements and learning tendencies of the creche pupils. They do not just help us memorize grammar concepts, but rather create a love for learning the language in an early age. Additionally, in scaffolding the learning experiences within the sociocultural context of the creche environment, educators create a rich linguistic ecosystem, where children can explore, experiment and make meaning together. All these raise questions in relation to the teaching of English grammar in creche schools; hence, in view of these concerns, the resort to alternative methodologies for the teaching of English grammar in creche schools stems from the fact that conventional methods are incapable of satisfying the requisite of young children. For this reason, this paper seeks to measure the efficiency of two teaching strategies that is, the Play-Way Approach and the Structural

Approach for the excellent improvement of English grammar understanding among young learners at creche schools in Ijebu Ode. In accepting pedagogical strategies that focus on the active engagement, experiential learning, and sociocultural relevance, educators, then, can construct enriching linguistic experiences that establish a solid bedrock for children's language development and eventual lifelong learning.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study intends to assess the effectiveness of Structural and Play-Way approaches when teaching and learning English grammar in selected creche schools in Ijebu-Ode township. However, the specific objectives include:

- i. To evaluate the effectiveness of the Play-Way Approach in teaching English grammar among creche school students in Ijebu Ode township.
- ii. To assess the effectiveness of the Structural Approach in teaching English grammar among creche school students in Ijebu Ode township.
- iii. To compare the learning outcomes achieved through the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach.
- iv. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of each methodology in facilitating English grammar acquisition among young learners.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

The study will be guided by the following hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the English grammar achievement of creche school students taught using traditional methods (structural) compared to those taught using the Play-Way Approach for Creche 1.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in learning outcomes between the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach for Creche 2.

2.0 Literature Review

A number of scholars have expended efforts in carrying out studies on the effectiveness of Play-Way and Structural Approaches in the teaching and learning of English grammar. However, this section shall explore some of such studies, the findings, and implication to the present study. Smith and Jones (2020) in a study entitled "Comparative Analysis of Play-Based Learning and Traditional Teaching Methods in Early Childhood Education", sought to compare the effectiveness of play-based learning and traditional teaching methods in early childhood education, particularly in language acquisition and cognitive development. The researchers employed a quasi-experimental design with two groups: one experiencing play-based learning and the other subjected to traditional teaching methods. There were two groups of 60 preschool children each included in the sample. This was gathered through observation, standardized language tests and cognitive development assessments over a six-month period. But the study still found that children in the play-based learning group displayed markedly better improvements in language skills and cognitive development than the traditional teaching

group. Key factors in the observed improvements were engagement, creativity and social interaction, and these were all enhanced through the play-based method.

Brown & Taylor's (2018) research work looked at vocabulary acquisition and grammar comprehension in relation to how structured play activities interact. With 50 preschool children engaged in structured play activities aimed at improving language skills, a longitudinal study was performed. For instance, the standard curriculum, with no additional structured play, serves as a control group of 50 children. A pre and post intervention language tests measured language development. We found that children taking part in structured play activities saw greater improvements in vocabulary and grammar comprehension. The conclusion of the study was that structured play offers an environment that supports language learning through the means of combining educational content in playful contexts. Nguyen & Tran (2019) explored the effectiveness of the Play-Way Approach in teaching English grammar to early learners, and assess the efficacy of a traditional grammar approach. In this experimental study, there were 80 children divided into experimental or control groups from four different preschools. Grammar was taught to the experimental group through the Play Way Approach and to the control group using conventional methods. Grammar skills were assessed with a pre and posttest. It was found that the Play-Way Approach is better in helping early learners to improve their grammatical skills. The experimental group of children thrived in the grammar tests, holding onto and using the grammatical rules better than did the control group. In their study, Lee & Kwon (2017) found structured play vs. unstructured play on language acquisition in very young children, by examining expressive and receptive language skills. A randomized controlled trial was carried out on 100 children aged 3 to 5 years that were randomly assigned to structured play group, or to unstructured play group. Standardized language assessments were used initially at the beginning of a three-month intervention period and again at the end to assess language skills. In the play group program, expressive and receptive language skill gains were more substantial. The study further found that unstructured play is not as effective at language development as structured play activities which are intentionally designed to meet specific language outcome.

In a study, "Influence of Play-Based Learning on Literacy and Numeracy Skills in Early Childhood" Wang & Chen (2016) looked at the effects of play based learning on literacy and numeracy skills for early childhood learners, mainly language development. 70 children from two preschools were involved in a mixed methods approach. The play based learning activities were performed by the experimental group while the control group was followed the standard curriculum. Literacy and numeracy assessments, teacher and parent interviews were collected as data. It is much more than what can be achieved in a play-based learning group.

Children in this group showed marked improvements in literacy and numeracy skills and substantial improvements in language development. Results from interviews of the qualitative data showed that children in experimental group were more motivated and enthusiastic to learn. Likewise, the efficacy of the Play-Way Approach has been compared with conventional teaching methods to advance the preschool child's English language skill (Rodriguez & Smith, 2021). A comparative design was used in the study with two groups of preschoolers; one group taught using the Play-Way Approach and the other with regular methods. The sample consisted of 60 children and language proficiency tests were imposed pre and post intervention. Results suggested that the Play-Way Approach was significantly superior in increasing English language skills, but specifically at both grammar and vocabulary acquisition. Children in the Play-Way group scored higher on the tests taken and had more frequent use of language in everyday interactions.

Next, Alvarez and Garcia (2022) investigated the function of structured play in the development of young children's early childhood literacy, including reading and writing skills. A cohort of 80 preschool children was divided into two groups: an engaged player who participated in structured play activities and a free play player. Reading and writing tests that monitor literacy development were administered over six months. Children who played in a structured group, rather than in a free play group, made significantly better progress in reading and writing skills. Structured play not only supports literacy development but also helps with kids' overall academic readiness, the study showed. Although there are plenty of studies that attest to the advantages of play based learning and structured learning for language development and cognitive enhancement in young preschoolers, yet little is understood how play-based learning should be tweaked to optimize language acquisition, especially in grammar instruction. Previous studies have found the effectiveness of play based approaches in improving overall language skills, and were lacking the explicit study of the role of play based approaches in grammar acquisition and retention. One gap in knowledge in this continuum of data analysis, however, has been the efficacy of a play-based approach used for English grammar instruction with early learners, in relation to identifying strategies that improve acquisition and retention of grammar skills.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: The Constructivist Theory of Learning

The Constructivist learning theory will suit as a perfect theoretical framework for study which examines how effective the Play-Way and the structural approaches are in teaching and learning English grammar at selected creche schools in Ijebu Ode. One theory is constructivist theory who advocate that we learn by creating our own knowledge about the world through the experience and reflecting on those experiences (Gergen, 2019). And this theory is developed greatly and still has

a big contribution to the practices of education. Constructivist learning theory is historically received in root to the early 20th century. Proposals that children progress through stages of cognitive development and construct knowledge as they interact with their environment (Fosnot, 2016) have laid the groundwork for Jean Piaget's work. Later Lev Vygotsky elaborated on this, stressing the social nature of learning, proposing the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), that is the difference between what a learner is able to do at his or her own accord and what s/he can do when lectured and is supported by a skilled partner. Further developed by Jerome Bruner were these ideas, and he called for discovery learning and scaffolding to be integral parts of the learning process (Jonassen, 2021).

Constructivist principles are more or less in frequent use in contemporary education and it applies to numerous forms of teaching methodology. An example of constructivist approach embodied in the Play-Way Approach is the emphasis on active, hands-on learning of children through play and exploration. In this method, children directly become active actors in their learning process through engendering interest and creativity to undertake things that interest them. The traditional structural approach to teaching grammar can also be viewed within a constructivist framework, as such pedagogy can provide graded instruction that rely on developing on existing prior knowledge in order to scaffold learners' understanding of grammatical concepts and help them form a more complete concept of each grammatical point (Kirschner, Sweller & Clark (2016). The social interactions approach to learning, which is a basis of constructivist theory, provides the roots from which to develop the Play Way Approach. This method is characterized with collaborative activities and playing with other group members as part of group play which makes it possible for the children to learn from and with each other (Mertova, 2016). The social and communicative nature of teaching grammar especially comes out strongly in the constructivist approach — the constructivist approach highlights the role of social interactions and language in cognitive development — particularly Vygotsky's theory.

Constructivist learning theory builds on Bruner's and Vygotsky's ZPD based concept of scaffolding. The term scaffolding is used to describe the provision of temporary support structures within temporary structures to enable learners to progress up the levels of understanding (Papert, 2020). Structural approach is highly useful in teaching English grammar, it provides a step-by-step framework to help young students become gradually more complex with grammatical structure. Structured support like this enables learners to learn their grammatical knowledge systematically so that they get a well laid core to emerge strong with more advanced skills. In addition, constructivism focuses on contextual learning, i.e. knowledge is constructed in meaning contexts (Prawat, 2016). The Play Way Approach combines learning in interesting and relevant contexts for

children, thus letting the learning flow in a natural and effective way. When children play in an activity, how they can relate how this activity pertains to what they are learning, what they are wanting to learn or perhaps what they should learn, is much better than having children reading out instructions without meaning. It gives the benefit of contextualized learning that helps you retain what you are reading and apply it to real life.

Because the structural approach offers the scaffolding that is needed coupled with the opportunity for building knowledge, it is compatible with constructivist principles. Structural approach emphasizes systematic instruction and can be adapted to constructivism by adding construct that focusing on how learners build on the earlier knowledge to learn new concepts. This way allows the learner to move from simple to complex structures, because they understand grammar more deeply through guided discovery and through incremental learning. Constructive theory of learning is at the center of the educational process that is essential for the structural approach and play way approach (Windschitl, 2022). On the basis of the learner's active engagement and his or her need, these methods focus on that, in order to increase the learner's understanding as well as ability to use English grammar effectively. A constructivist classroom is one in which the teacher serves as a facilitator -- she guides and supports the learner in his or her exploration and construct of a knowledge. As a result, this study is well aligned with the Constructivist Learning Theory because it provides an emphasis on the active, contextual and socially interactive learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Both concepts are characteristic for the Play-Way Approach and for the structural one, but constructivism is a versatile approach for analysing and evaluating the efficacy of these lessons. Using the constructivist principles, the study can provide useful views into how youngsters in Ijebu Ode have formed the way of reasoning about English grammar in diverse ways of instruction.

3.0 Methodology

Quasi experimental research design was used thus identifying two groups of creche schools which used play way and other using structural approach in teaching English grammar. The grammar proficiency was measured before and after intervention using pre-tests and the post-tests, enabling a realistic comparison between two teaching methods. Since early childhood constitutes a period which is necessary for language acquisition, the entire population was made up of all the pupils in creche schools in Ijebu-Ode. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 15 students from each school on the basis of differing teaching methodology to ensure sufficient numbers to allow for in depth analysis, making a total of thirty (30) pupils for the sample, in a teaching exercise that lasted for four (4) weeks. Structured observation checklists were used to collect qualitative information on classroom dynamics, whilst pre-test posttest assessments were used to capture quantitative data on learning outcomes. The instruments

were expert reviewed and pilot tested to ensure validity and reliability. Thematic analysis of qualitative observations and statistical analysis of test scores, using descriptive statistics and paired t-tests, was used to analyze the data to evaluate the effectiveness of the Play way and Structural approaches to improve English grammar learning.

4.0 Results and Discussions

The outcome and the research of data gathered to assess the efficiency of the Play-Way and Structural Approaches to instruction of English grammar in this section shown. The study is framed with a

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of Respondents' Gender

S/N	Creche	Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Creche 1	Male	8	53.3%
		Female	7	46.7%
	Total	15	100%	
2	Creche 2	Male	11	73.3%
		Female	4	26.7%
	Total	15	100%	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' gender in the selected two creches. In Creche 1, there are 8 males (53.3%) and 7 females (46.7%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. In contrast, Creche 2 has a higher proportion of males, with 11 males (73.3%) and 4 females (26.7%), showing a significant gender imbalance. The implications of this distribution suggest that any gender-based analysis of the pretest and post-test results should consider the potential influence of the more balanced gender ratio in Creche 1 compared to the male-dominant

comprehensive mixed-methods approach that integrates the qualitative to the quantitative. Moreover, thematic analysis is applied to qualitative data from structured observation checklists to determine the patterns in teacher student interaction and student engagement. Quantitative data from pre-test and post-test assessments is analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize test scores and inferential statistics, including paired and independent t-tests, to compare performance gains between groups. Out of the two (2) creches selected for this study, fifteen (15) pupils each were sampled for the pre-test and post-test.

composition of Creche 2. This could impact the comparative effectiveness of the teaching methods if gender differences in learning styles or outcomes are significant.

Pre-Test/Post-Test Assessments

(a) Pre-test Analysis

The following are the pretest scores for the 30 pupils from the two creches (15 pupils each). Ten (10) questions were administered, each question carried 1 mark, making a total of 10 marks as presented below:

Table 2: Pretest Scores for Creche 1 and 2

Creche 1	Test Score	Creche 2	Test Score
Pupil One	6	Pupil One	5
Pupil Two	7	Pupil Two	6
Pupil Three	8	Pupil Three	6
Pupil Four	5	Pupil Four	5
Pupil Five	6	Pupil Five	7
Pupil Six	7	Pupil Six	8
Pupil Seven	6	Pupil Seven	7
Pupil Eight	5	Pupil Eight	6
Pupil Nine	8	Pupil Nine	5
Pupil Ten	7	Pupil Ten	6
Pupil Eleven	6	Pupil Eleven	8
Pupil Twelve	6	Pupil Twelve	7
Pupil Thirteen	5	Pupil Thirteen	6
Pupil Fourteen	8	Pupil Fourteen	7
Pupil Fifteen	7	Pupil Fifteen	5

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Calculation of Mean and Standard Deviation

Mean

The mean (μ) is calculated using the formula:

Mean = Sum of observations / Number of observations

For Creche 1:

μ Creche 1 = $(6+7+8+5+6+7+6+5+8+7+6+6+5+8+7) / 15 =$

$101 / 15 = 6.73$

For Creche 2:

μ Creche 2 = $(5+6+6+5+7+8+7+6+5+6+8+7+6+7+5) / 15 =$
 $99 / 15 = 6.60$

Standard Deviation

The standard deviation (σ) is calculated using the formula:

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \mu)^2}{n - 1}}$$

Where: σ is the symbol that denotes standard deviation.
 n is the number of observations in a data set.
 x_i is the i th number of observations in the data set.
 μ is the mean of the sample.
 V is the variance.
 $\sum x$ is the sum of all values in a data set.

Standard Deviation analysis for Creche 1:

$$\sqrt{\frac{(6 - 6.73)^2 + (7 - 6.73)^2 + (8 - 6.73)^2 + \dots + (7 - 6.73)^2}{14}} = \sqrt{\frac{9.33}{14}}$$

Standard Deviation analysis for Creche 2:

$$\sqrt{\frac{(5 - 6.60)^2 + (6 - 6.60)^2 + (6 - 6.60)^2 + \dots + (5 - 6.60)^2}{14}} = \sqrt{\frac{11.20}{14}}$$

Therefore, the outcome of the calculated mean score and standard deviation for Creche 1 and 2 are

summarised as follows:

Table 3: Summary of Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Creche 1 and 2

Creche	Mean Score (μ)	Standard Deviation (σ)
Creche 1	6.73	6.73
Creche 2	6.60	6.60

Source: Field Survey (2024)

From the results presented in the table, we can observe that the mean score for Creche 1 is 6.73, slightly higher than Creche 2's mean score of 6.60. This suggests that, on average, pupils from Creche 1 performed marginally better than those from Creche 2 in the pretest. The standard deviation for Creche 1 is 0.81, while for Creche 2, it is 0.89. The standard deviation measures the spread of scores around the mean. A higher standard deviation in Creche 2 indicates that the scores were more spread out compared to Creche 1. This means there was more variability in the test scores of Creche 2 pupils. By implication, the slight differences in mean scores suggest that both creches have similar performance levels in terms of grammar proficiency before the intervention.

The variability in scores (as indicated by the standard deviations) also points to a slightly more consistent performance in Creche 1 compared to Creche 2. This could imply that pupils in Creche 1 had a more uniform level of understanding of grammar concepts tested in the pretest. These initial findings set the stage for a more detailed analysis after the post-test, where changes in performance can be attributed to the different teaching methods employed.

b) Post-test Analysis

The following are the post-test scores for the 30 pupils from the two creches (15 pupils each). Ten (10) questions were administered, each question carried 1 mark, making a total of 10 marks as presented below:

Table 4: Post-test scores for Creche 1 and 2

Creche 1	Test Score	Creche 2	Test Score
Pupil One	8	Pupil One	7
Pupil Two	7	Pupil Two	6
Pupil Three	9	Pupil Three	7
Pupil Four	8	Pupil Four	6
Pupil Five	7	Pupil Five	8
Pupil Six	8	Pupil Six	6
Pupil Seven	9	Pupil Seven	7
Pupil Eight	9	Pupil Eight	8
Pupil Nine	8	Pupil Nine	7
Pupil Ten	7	Pupil Ten	6
Pupil Eleven	8	Pupil Eleven	7
Pupil Twelve	9	Pupil Twelve	6
Pupil Thirteen	7	Pupil Thirteen	8
Pupil Fourteen	9	Pupil Fourteen	7
Pupil Fifteen	8	Pupil Fifteen	6

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Calculation of Mean and Standard Deviation

Formulas:

1) Mean (Average)

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\sum x_i}{n}$$

where xi is each score, and n is the number of scores.

2) Standard Deviation (SD)

$$\text{SD} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(x_i - \text{Mean})^2}{n}}$$

Mean Calculation:

Creche 1:

$$\frac{7 + 6 + 7 + 6 + 8 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 7 + 6 + 7 + 6 + 8 + 7 + 6}{15} = \frac{90}{15}$$

Standard Deviation Calculation:

$$\sqrt{\frac{(7 - 6)^2 + (6 - 6)^2 + (7 - 6)^2 + \dots + (6 - 6)^2}{15}} = \sqrt{\frac{1 + 0 + 1 + 0 + 4 + 0 + 1}{15}}$$

score and standard deviation for Creche 1 and 2 are summarised as follows: Therefore, the outcome of the calculated mean

Table 5: Summary of Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Creche 1 and 2

Creche	Mean Score (μ)	Standard Deviation (σ)
Creche 1	8.00	0.73
Creche 2	6.00	1.10

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Post test data shows a higher mean in creche 1 (8.00) compared to Creche 2 (6.00). On average, the post-test pupils of Creche 1 did better than those of Creche 2, which means that the comparison set could be used. But Creche 1 has a smaller standard deviation (0.73) than Creche 2 (1.10). This indicates that the test scores in Creche 1 achieved a more even level of performance because there was less variability surrounding the mean test score. Creche 2, on the other hand, had more variation in test scores (a wider spread of performance levels). In addition, the descriptive statistics on the posttest show that Creche 1 had both the higher mean and

less variability than Creche 2, meaning this structural approach to teaching grammar appeared more effective than the one in Creche 2. On the other hand, Creche 2, with a lower mean and higher variability, shows that the Play-Way Approach might have had less consistent impact on grammar proficiency among the pupils. Therefore, the results support the effectiveness of the structural approach in enhancing grammar proficiency compared to the Play-Way Approach, consistent with the general outcome favoring the structural approach. Structured Observation Checklist (SOC) Report

Table 6: Report of the SOC

Item	Observation	Detailed Comment
Teacher-Student Interactions	High	❖ Frequency of teacher-initiated interactions with students.
	Constructive	❖ Nature of feedback provided by the teacher (positive/constructive/neutral).
	Medium	❖ Instances of teacher facilitating group activities/discussions.
	Low	❖ Use of instructional aids and materials by the teacher.
Item	Observation	Detailed Comment
Pupils' Engagement	Low	❖ Number of students actively participating in activities.
	Low	❖ Frequency of student-initiated interactions/questions.
	Medium	❖ Level of student enthusiasm and interest during the lesson.
	Medium	❖ Instances of on-task versus off-task behavior among students.
Adherence to Teaching Methods	Medium	❖ Degree to which the Play-Way Approach is implemented (use of games, role-playing, interactive activities).
	High	❖ Degree to which the Structural Approach is implemented (focus on grammar rules, structured exercises, repetition).
Immediate Impact	Positive	❖ Instances of positive behavioral changes during the lesson
	Neutral	❖ Examples of increased participation or attention span
	Positive	❖ Observable improvements in student understanding and interaction

Source: Field Survey (2024)

During the data collection, the structured observation checklist revealed several critical insights into the effectiveness of the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach for teaching grammar. The checklist detailed various aspects of teacher-student interactions, pupil engagement, adherence to teaching methods, and immediate impact on students. The teacher-student interactions were notably high, with frequent teacher-initiated interactions observed. The feedback provided by the teachers was generally constructive, fostering a supportive learning environment. The teacher facilitated group activity and discussions at a medium level only. Furthermore, the teachers showed relatively low usage of instructional aids and materials thus, may be something to improve in enriching the instructional experience. Various indicators of pupil engagement were assessed. Students were minimal participating in activity of the students, such as interactions between students and questions from students. With participation level so low, this may signal a need to make sure students are truly participating in lessons. Nonetheless, there was a medium level of student enthusiasm and interest as students learned, implying however that though not all the students were fully involved, some interest was demonstrated in the activities. A medium level was also observed for the observation of on task vs. off task behavior, which suggested students were moderately oriented to the lessons.

Another of key observations was in terms of adherence to the teaching methods. The Play-Way Approach (which uses games, role playing and interactive activities) was implemented at a medium level. Therefore, though some of the Play-Way Approach elements were there, it was not that well adopted into the teaching process. However, the Structural Approach was

implemented at high level focusing on grammar rules, structured exercises and repetition. Such commitment to Structural Approach implies that grammar is taught more systematically and also rules based. Generally, the lessons were observed to have a generally positive immediate impact on students. Positive behavioral changes during the lessons were occasionally noted, i.e., increased participation and attention span. Moreover, the methods had a positive effect on the students' learning outcomes evidenced by a noticeable increase in student understanding, and interaction of students with peers and with tutors too. The high level of implementation of the Structural Approach, coupled with the positive immediate impact observed, indicates that the Structural Approach may be more effective than the Transformational Grammar approach in teaching grammar. This approach's focus is on grammar rules, structured exercises, and repetition appears to provide a more effective framework for improving students' grammar proficiency compared to the medium-level implementation and engagement observed with the Play-Way Approach.

Test of Hypotheses

In order to compare the pre-test and post-test scores within each group to determine the extent of improvement in grammar proficiency and also to ascertain which method was more effective, this study adopts the paired t-tests. The following hypotheses therefore will be tested accordingly.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the English grammar achievement of creche school students taught using traditional methods (structural) compared to those taught using the Play-Way Approach for Creche

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in learning outcomes between the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach for Creche 2.

Table 7: Pretest and Post-test Scores presentation for Paired T-tests Analysis

Pupil	Pre-Test Scores		Post-Test Scores	
	Creche1 (Structural Approach)	Creche2 (Play-Way Approach)	Creche1 (Structural Approach)	Creche2 (Play-Way Approach)
1	6	5	8	7
2	7	6	7	6
3	8	6	9	7
4	5	5	8	6
5	6	7	7	8
6	7	8	8	6
7	6	7	9	7
8	5	6	9	8
9	8	5	8	7
10	7	6	7	6
11	6	8	8	7
12	6	7	9	6
13	5	6	7	8
14	8	7	9	7
15	7	5	8	6

Source: Field Survey (2024)

It is imperative to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each creche's pre-test and post-test scores, then perform paired t-tests to determine if there are significant differences.

Mean and Standard Deviation Calculations

Pre-Test Scores:

Creche 1: Mean = 101=6.73, SD = 1.16 15

Creche 2: Mean = 99=6.60, SD = 1.12 15

Post-Test Scores:

Creche 1: Mean = 120=8.00, SD = 0.73 15

Creche 2: Mean = 90=6.00, SD = 1.10 15

PAIRED T-TEST

To perform the paired t-test, the differences between pre-test and post-test scores for each pupil in both creches will be used.

Calculation of Differences

Table 8: the differences between pre-test and post-test scores for each pupil in both creches

Pupil	Difference (Creche1)	Difference (Creche2)
1	2	2
2	0	0
3	1	1
4	3	1
5	1	1
6	1	-2
7	3	0
8	4	2
9	0	2
10	0	0
11	2	-1
12	3	-1
13	2	2
14	1	0
15	1	1

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Paired t-Test Statistics

$$1) \text{ Mean Difference: Mean Difference (Creche 1) } = \frac{\sum \text{Differences (Creche 1)}}{n} = \frac{24}{15} = 1.60$$

$$\text{Mean Difference (Creche 2)} = \frac{\sum \text{Differences (Creche 1)}}{n} = \frac{8}{15} = 0.53$$

2) **Standard Deviation of Differences:**
SD (Creche 1) \approx 1.12, SD (Creche 2) \approx 1.16

$$t = \frac{\bar{d}}{s_d / \sqrt{n}}$$

3) **t-Statistic Calculation:**

$$t = \frac{1.60}{1.12 / \sqrt{15}} \approx 4.87$$

For Creche 1:

$$t = \frac{0.53}{1.16 / \sqrt{15}} \approx 1.61$$

For Creche 2:

4) **Degrees of Freedom:** $df = n - 1 = 15 - 1 = 14$

5) **Critical t-Value ($\alpha = 0.05$, two-tailed):**

$$t_{critical} \approx 2.145$$

As presented in the analysis above, for Creche 1, $t = 4.87$ is greater than $t_{critical} = 2.145$. Therefore, we reject H_0 , concluding that there is a significant difference in the English grammar achievement of creche school students taught using traditional methods (structural) compared to those taught using the Play-Way Approach. For Creche 2, $t = 1.61$ is less than $t_{critical} = 2.145$. Therefore, we fail to reject H_0 , concluding that there is no significant difference in learning outcomes between the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach. Based on the analysis, the Structural Approach (traditional methods) appears to be more effective in improving grammar proficiency among creche students in Ijebu Ode.

In discussing the findings further, it is imperative to note that the present study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach in teaching English grammar to creche students in Ijebu-Ode township. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzed both qualitative data from structured observation checklists and quantitative data from pre-test and post-test assessments. The results were such that it was established that Structural Approach (traditional methods) was more effective in bringing about grammar proficiency among creche students in Ijebu Ode. Results show significant differences in the pre-test and post-test scores for those pupils taught by the structural way, while the play way showed no significant difference in learning outcome.

These findings are compared to other studies in order to put the effectiveness of these teaching methods in perspective. Smith and Jones (2020) determine that

play based learning has greatly boosted language skills and cognitive development among preschool children when compared with traditional means of teaching. However, these findings contrast with the current study, where improvement using the Play Way Approach was not significantly higher than that with the Structural Approach. Brown and Taylor (2018) also showed that the structure play activities had a positive effect on vocabulary acquisition and grammar comprehension and thus, play could also be used in educational contexts. The Play-Way Approach was found to be effective in promoting grammar skills of young learners in which children in the experimental group made significant improvements in grammar test (Nguyen & Tran, 2019). Such conclusions are inconsistent with those of the present study, where the Play-Way Approach did not lead to superior grammar proficiency compared to the Structural Approach. In addition, Lee and Kwon (2017) report that structured play activities were more successful in fostering language learning than unstructured play, reflecting that the inventiveness of educational play activities encourages more successful learning of language. Overall, Wang and Chen (2016) asserted that play based learning leads to the promotion of literacy and numeracy, with particularly gratifying results in the area of language development. In line with general consensus on the subject in the literature, this finding corroborates with the idea that play based learning is able to promote some aspects of early childhood education. Their conclusion was that the Play Way Approach had a significant greater impact on the elevation of English Language Skills most especially in grammar and vocabulary acquisition. Other studies in addition to this one point out the beneficial traits of language learning with play based methods, which the current study has failed to replicate in Ijebu Ode.

Finally, Alvarez and Garcia (2022) indicated that structured play greatly helps boost early childhood literacy, especially in children involved in it since they generally make better progress in reading and writing skills. This suggests that playing should be folded within educational strategies for supporting literacy development. Though previous studies have emphasized the advantages of play based learning and structured play activities in early childhood education, the present study reveals that the Structural Approach was preferable to teaching the English grammar to creche students in Ijebu Ode. They may be due to contextual differences, implementation variations and particular educational environments. It needs further research to investigate in what situations which teaching methods are more effective and on which they are less effective.

4.0 Conclusions

The study was to determine the effectiveness of the Play-Way Approach and the Structural Approach in teaching creche students in Ijebu-Ode township, English grammar. It used a comprehensive mixed methods approach combining qualitative data collected from pre and posttest assessments and structured observation

checklists. Two creches were used with 30 pupils used for the study. Teacher student interactions and student engagement were examined in the qualitative analysis and the pretest and posttest performance was compared using descriptive and inferential statistics (paired and independent t tests) in the quantitative analysis. The data on gender demography showed that in Creche 1, in terms of their gender distribution was relatively balanced, whereas in Creche 2, there were more males than females. However, the pretest results indicated similar performance levels in the two creches, although the mean score in Creche 1 was higher and the variability in test scores smaller than in Creche 2. The post test revealed that Creche 1 (which used the Structural Approach), performed significantly better than the other three Creches in grammar proficiency in that the mean score was higher and the standard deviation, lower meaning that there were fewer wide swings in its performance. On the other hand, Creche 2 which was based on Play way Approach had lower mean score and higher variability, implying that there was lack of steady improvement in development. The Structured Observation Checklist also gave us some insight into how the teaching methods worked. Although group activities and instructional aides were not regularly used, teacher-student interactions were occurring frequently and constructively. Active participation pupils had low engagement while pupils showing enthusiasm and showing interests had medium levels of engagement. The play way approach was moderately implemented, while the structural approach was highly implemented. Findings revealed that the Structural Approach was more effective to enhancing grammar proficiency as there was a difference between pretest and post test scores whereas in Play-Way Approach there was no difference in learning outcome. The major findings are:

- i. Mean post-test score observed in Creche 2 was lower than that observed in Creche 1.
 - ii. The better performance improvements in both cases appeared to be a byproduct of the Structural Approach.
 - iii. Student performance with the Play Way Approach was more variable.
 - iv. They were generally constructive, frequent teacher-student interactions.
- v. It has been found that the Structural Approach improves grammar proficiency more than the Play-Way Approach.

Finally, it is concluded that there is need for intentionality in creche setting when selecting and implementing grammar teaching approaches. Since when it comes to the young learners on the formative years, they are more benefited when they are taught in a structured and purposeful manner that suits their developmental stage. To ensure alignment of teaching strategies with educational goals on one hand and students' cognitive and emotional stages on the other hand, there is intentional use of certain grammar approaches. For this study, it shows that the Structural Approach outperforms the Play-Way Approach on the

creche students in teaching English grammar in Ijebu-Ode township. The study emphasizes the need for choosing suitable methods of teaching depending on their efficiency in the attainment of the educational objectives. However, the Structural Approach is clearly the superior method where proficiency in grammatical concept is concerned, lending the ideal way to teach basic language skills. The result is that educational strategies should emphasize well structured, rule-based instruction to foster consistency and effectiveness in learning outcomes. However, future research may also investigate whether the benefits of using elements of the Play-Way Approach could be augmented while minimizing the limitations by integrating some elements from the Guided Practice Approach.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. The Structural Approach has been found effective in increasing grammar competence and educators in creche settings are recommended to use the structural approach.
- ii. Elements of the Play-Way Approach (interactive activities) may be integrated to ensure that balance is achieved in terms of learning and engagement: various learning styles are taken into consideration.
- iii. To ensure success, teacher training and resources focused on the Structural Approach should be prioritized, promoting active student participation.
- iv. Regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching methods are essential for identifying areas of improvement and maintaining effectiveness.
- v. Lastly, fostering frequent and constructive teacher-student interactions will enhance grammar learning through active engagement and personalized feedback.

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I. APPENDIXES STRUCTURED OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

This Structured Observation Checklist aims to systematically document the implementation of the Play-Way and Structural Approaches in teaching English grammar in real-time classroom settings.

Item	Observation	Detailed Comment
Teacher-Student Interactions	High/ Medium/ Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Frequency of teacher-initiated interactions with students. ❖ Nature of feedback provided by the teacher (positive/constructive/neutral). ❖ Instances of teacher facilitating group activities/discussions. ❖ Use of instructional aids and materials by the teacher.
Pupils' Engagement	High/ Medium/ Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Number of students actively participating in activities. ❖ Frequency of student-initiated interactions/questions. ❖ Level of student enthusiasm and interest during the lesson. ❖ Instances of on-task versus off-task behavior among students.
Adherence to Teaching Methods	High/ Medium/ Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Degree to which the Play-Way Approach is implemented (use of games, role-playing, interactive activities). ❖ Degree to which the Structural Approach is implemented (focus on grammar rules, structured exercises, repetition).
Immediate Impact	Positive / Neutral / Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Instances of positive behavioral changes during the lesson ❖ Examples of increased participation or attention span ❖ Observable improvements in student understanding and interaction

II. PRE-TEST/POST-TEST ASSESSMENTS

These Pre-Test and Post-Test Assessment serves to measure the English grammar proficiency of creche school students before and after the intervention. Each test item is designed to assess specific grammar skills and concepts. The pre-test and post-test contain the same items to measure the learning gains accurately.

- 1) **Identify the correct noun:** The cat is under the table.
A) cat B) is C) under D) table
- 2) **Fill in the blank with the correct verb form:** She _____ (to run) to school every day. A) runs B) run C) running D) ran
- 3) **Choose the correct article for the sentence:** I saw _____ elephant at the zoo. A) a B) an C) the D) no article
- 4) **Select the correct preposition:** The book is _____ the table. A) on B) in C) at D) under
- 5) **Correctly match the subject with the verb:** The dogs _____ (to bark) loudly. A) bark B) barks C) barking D) barked
- 6) **Choose the correct pronoun to complete the sentence:** _____ is my best friend. A) You B) She C) It D) They

- 7) **Identify the adjective in the sentence:** The sky is very blue today. A) sky B) is C) blue D) today
- 8) **Choose the correct conjunction to join the sentences:** I want to play, _____ it is raining. A) and B) but C) so D) or
- 9) **Select the correct tense for the sentence:** They _____ (to eat) dinner when the phone rang. A) were eating B) eat C) ate D) are eating
- 10) **Fill in the blank with the correct form of the adjective:** This puzzle is _____ than that one. A) easy B) easier C) easiest D) most easy