



Exploring perspectives on the approach for teaching ablaut principles to English L2 learners: a case study in South African secondary schools

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Abstract

Although regular and irregular verb morphological processes in the simple past are invaluable approaches for enhancing communication, the formation of irregular verbs, including the ablaut principles, suppletion principles, and backformation, for example, pose challenges to the majority of English second language (L2) learners. Also, most teachers experience difficulties in teaching ablaut principles to their learners. The irregular verb morphological processes in the simple past tense are a challenge to many. The present study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on the approach for teaching ablaut principles to L2 learners. A qualitative research approach with a case study design was espoused because it provides an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon. Four purposively sampled teachers were interviewed and observed when teaching Grade 8 English L2 learners at Dzindi Circuit, South Africa. A Delve Thematic Analysis Software Version 22.0 was utilised because it uses and codes, identifies, and summarises perceptions within interview transcripts. Preliminary investigation indicated that learners were incompetent in using the ablaut principles. After employing game-based teaching approaches, learners performed outstandingly. The study acclaims using the identified approaches in the teaching and learning of the ablaut principle in the simple past tense, and further research is encouraged on the current topic.

Keywords: English second language learners; game-based teaching; irregular verbs; morphological processes; simple past tense; teaching ablaut principle

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Introduction

Morphological processes of regular and irregular verbs in the study of English sharpen effective communication because it entails changing the form and function of a word to fit a context, sometimes to the extent of changing the meaning or grammatical function. As the English language is used internationally, basic knowledge of mechanics, morphology, phonology, semantics, and syntax is a requirement. Fitri (2021) claims that learning involves gaining knowledge in the activity because it is a lifelong process of transforming information and experience into behaviours and attitudes. However, English second language (L2) teachers may experience difficulties if adequate training in the rudiments of the language is not received, and they have not fully mastered approaches for teaching the ablaut principles.

Irregular verbs refer to verbs in which the past tense is not formed by adding the usual *-ed* and *-d* endings. Instead, the other forms of irregular verb formations such as the ablaut principles and zero-marking are used, for example, *sing* and *go* (present tense)/*sang* and *went* (past tense). The ablaut principles entail *the processes whereby the core vowels are either lengthened or altered* to produce another sound (Song, 2020) while the zero-marking process has no change in the verb morphemes. Game-based teaching as *an active teaching technique that uses games to improve student learning* (Paulichi et al., 2020) can enhance the learning of the ablaut principles. The simple past tense expresses an activity or a state that occurred *before* the time at which the statement is being made. In this situation, the simple present tense represents an action/event that took place in the past and allows the user to refer to the actions that occurred in the past without reference to the present.

Although regular verb inflection is incongruent with the ablaut principles in the present study, indicating how they are formed is necessary. For example, regular verb formation involves adding the consonant *-d* ending in the root of verbs (Barak et al., 2023) as in *participate/participated*. Moreover, the *-ed* suffix is used to form the regular verb (Kruk & Pawlak, 2023) such as *deliver/delivered*. Therefore, in the formation of regular verbs, a regular patterning of a verb form is followed in the simple past tense. On the other hand, irregular verbs are generally formed differently from regular verbs using various methods of vowels and consonant change, as indicated in the subsequent examples (Rimikis et al., 2023). The other verb forms can take different spellings such as *drive/drove*, or similar forms like *thrust/thrust*.

Additionally, irregular verbs can be formed by changing *-y* into *-ied* (Grigoryan & Huichun, 2023), as in *try/tried*. Therefore, they follow the usual patterning of the verb formations. In this situation, Ayoola and Ogunleye (2023) add that irregular verbs can be formed using numerous ways, including verbs that undergo a vowel change and add consonants like *sleep/slept*, and verbs that undergo an internal vowel change for a past tense but have no distinct form of the past participle as in *find/found* (Tarigan & Sembiring, 2023); verbs that undergo internal vowel change for past tense and for the past participle like *drink/drank*.

The ablaut principle's morphological processes entail a systematic dissimilarity of vowels in the same base or related affixes, usually duplicated by differences in use or meaning (Tarigan & Sembiring, 2023). Also, it involves a sound change in a word indicating an inflectional morpheme of the irregular verb and represented as internal vowel interchanges to form the new word, as in *sing, sang, sung* but not *singed, sanged, or sunged* instead of adding any suffix or prefix to the stem. In this regard, these dissimilarities of vowels and sound changes in words are difficult for English L2 learners to use appropriately (Rimikis et al., 2023) during morphological processes in the simple past tense. However, if suitable approaches for teaching them are identified, such difficulties can be alleviated.

The inflectional morpheme suffixes entail sound variations occurring grammatically (Tarigan & Sembiring, 2023). A vowel interchange indicates variations between the present and the past tense in the pair (Mi-ing, 2023), such as in *ring/rang*. Also, it signals the relationship between verb forms based on variations in base vowels occurring in a change from the simple to the past tense forms, as in the vowel including 'i' to 'u', 'i' to 'o', '-i' to '-a', and 'a' to 'i' *vis-a-vis* 'umlaut' involving symbol written over vowels to signal pronunciation while the German language has ä, ö or ü (Mir & Sultan, 2023).

Numerous investigations have investigated the formation of the ablaut principles in the simple past tense. For example, Fathi (2023) investigated a set of vowel alternations in the verbal system of Cairene Arabic relating to the coherent ablaut principles and found that although the system is organised, the learners faced numerous challenges during the linguistic changes. Likewise, in Greece, Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (2023) investigated irregular verb formation in the simple past tense and found that root allomorphs can be changed using vowel alteration within the consonants. Rimikis et al. (2023) studied whether morphophonological patterns impact the language production of individuals with acquired language impairment and found that errors such as *runned* and *swunged* occurred frequently in phonologically similar verbs.

In Turkey, Uygun et al. (2023) studied Heritage speakers regarding inflectional irregular morphology to get further insight into the inflectional process regarding the ablaut principle. They found that speakers utilised both similarity-based and rule-based mechanisms for the morphological generalisation of the Turkish aorist. Dashti et al. (2023) investigated the effect of morphosemantic treatment on the inflection of regular and irregular verbs in the past, present, and future tenses in Persian-speaking agrammatic participants and found that learners had significant improvement in learning the ablaut principle.

In South Africa, Lambani and Maluleke (2019) studied the proficiency of 25 First-year level English university students in the use of irregular verbs, including suppletion, zero-marking, change in the stem vowel, and terminal consonant phoneme changes in the simple past tense. Findings reveal that although most of the students were competent in using irregular verbs in common usage, they were incompetent with zero-marking, ablaut, and terminal consonant phoneme changes.

Although the study by Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (2023), Dashti et al. (2023), Fathi (2023), Lambani and Maluleke (2019), Rimikis et al. (2023), and Uygun et al. (2023) have been conducted regarding approaches for teaching irregular verb morphological processes in the English language, minimal attention was paid to the full realisation of the teaching processes. Some of the teachers may experience difficulties in teaching the ablaut principles and, in this regard, an appropriate approach is required in teaching morphological processes in the simple past tense to English L2 learners.

The objectives of the current study were to identify viable approaches for teaching the ablaut principle to Grade 8 English L2 learners at Dzindi Circuit, South Africa. Moreover, it sought to describe the identified approaches suitable for teaching the processes already mentioned in the first objective. In this sense, the use of suitable approaches for teaching the ablaut principles to learners, in

context, is of paramount importance because the challenges faced by Grade 8 English L2 learners can be alleviated. As most studies that have already been mentioned in the paragraph discussion failed to achieve the full realisation of the teaching of irregular verb morphological processes, the next research questions can enhance the teaching of the ablaut principle to Grade 8 English L2 learners:

- (1) What approaches are suitable for teaching ablaut principles to Grade 8 English L2 learners?
- (2) How can the identified approaches for teaching ablaut principles to Grade 8 English L2 learners be described?

Literature review

Tense concept

Tense formation entails changing the verb form influenced by the time and nature of the event and indicates whether an action took place in the past, takes place in the present, or will take place in the future. It is, therefore, a grammatical category that locates reference time (Michaelis, 2020). Furthermore, tense entails the relationship between the form of the verb and the time of the action or state it describes. In this regard, Fitri (2021) postulates that tense relation with time is divided into present, past, and future. However, tense has a relation with perfection level. The four types of these tenses are indefinite, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous. In this study, the focus was on the simple past tense.

Simple past tense

Simple past tense involves an activity or situation that began and ended at a particular time in the past. Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (2023) postulate that the simple past tense or preterite is the grammatical term used for describing statements and questions referring to completed actions that occurred in or are related to the past. Ordinarily, statements or questions that use the past tense have no connection to the present (Kruk & Pawlak, 2023). When English L2 learners use the simple past tense, they sometimes make some errors in the changing verbs as there is no changing of verb forms in their native languages.

Irregular verbs

Since verbs change form to show the time of the action, two kinds of verbs in the simple past tense are regular and irregular verbs. Mouri (2020) claims that learners make recurrent mistakes during irregular verb formation as they

consciously or unconsciously learn the wrong form of verbs and guess the verb forms. Consequently, English L2 learners experience difficulties in memorising the changes that occur during the irregularisation of verbs in the simple past tense (Ulvi, 2021). Astiantih (2023) adds that some English L2 learners lack an understanding of the verb form in the formula pattern of the simple past tense. In this situation, Megah and Afifah (2019) argue that the simple past tense confuses English L2 learners because they sometimes fail to change the verb forms from present tense to past tense forms accordingly. Hence, strategies for improving learners' competence in the use of the ablaut principles are a necessity, as indicated in the subsequent discussion.

Game-based teaching approaches

Game-based teaching approaches (GBT) approaches use the power of games to support learning outcomes by bringing the strategies, rules, and social experiences of playing a game into the classroom (Rajeswari & Madhavi, 2023). Several games, including role-playing, verb wheel, jeopardy, index cards, and video games, are playable in the classroom environment. Therefore, more immersive and collaborative learning opportunities are enhanced using these approaches. Several games, including role-playing, verb wheel, jeopardy, index cards, and video games, are playable in the classroom environment. GBT approaches are active as they use games to improve student learning (Paulichi et al., 2020). Therefore, some teachers struggle to smoothly incorporate games into lessons due to social, economic, psychological, technological, and challenges related to the school environment (Ali et al., 2023).

Hannig et al. (2023) add that teachers and learners cannot customize long lists of irregular verbs. Conversely, suppose teachers' professional knowledge and learners' approach to learning is empowered. In that case, both teachers and learners can understand contemporary educational practices, such as the use of the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach for teaching the ablaut principle (Rajeswari & Madhavi, 2023). One of the best strategies to enhance memorisation of irregular verbs is to group common irregular verbs in the simple past tense instead of teaching all irregular verbs in alphabetical order.

The formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense does not follow a regular pattern, although the regular verbs do. Various irregular verb groupings include those that 'remain the same in the present, past and past participle forms, e.g., *cost, cost, cost*'; 'are similar only in the past forms as in *breed, bred, bred*'; and 'end in *-en* in the past participle' such as *speak, spoke, spoken* (Hannig et al., 2023). In teaching and learning, the GBT approaches can be implemented better by determining their purpose, making sure they align with learning goals, ensuring

they meet expectations from parents, deciding the time for consistent 'in-class play,' and assessing learners' progress all the time. Thus, GTB approaches are useful in the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense.

In *Macmillan's irregular verb wheel game approach*, the following procedures for playing irregular verb wheels are followed. When the wheel is rotated, the player gets 1 point for every correct answer plus a bonus of 10 points for every verb. The player gets 100% total scores by playing all five verb forms. The correct verbs are chosen randomly from the edge of the wheel. By matching each verb form from the five possibilities, verbs are chosen several times before the time runs out. Then, it guards against unfair play and records the results from each turn-taking.

Method

Design

The current study adopted a qualitative research method because it provided in-depth knowledge and understanding of a particular phenomenon. Also, the qualitative research approach gathered non-numerical data to produce insights that deal with the participants' feelings, ideas, or experiences (Ugwu & Eze, 2023) and obtained testable hypotheses using data collection frequently done in narrative form. A case study research design (Yin, 2014) was employed in this research as it involved an in-depth investigation of a contemporary, real-life phenomenon. Also, we wanted to see a relationship between phenomena, context, and teachers due to its flexibility to collect data using various means.

Participants

A demographic profile was included in this study to define the conformity of the English L2 teachers to the standards set for a qualitative research approach to indicate the information of the research participants in more detail. Even if the findings in this section do not directly answer the posed questions, their performance built the credibility of the sought responses. In this study, the demographic profile was attained from a case study involving Grade 8 English L2 teachers in the academic year 2022 at the Dzindi Circuit, South Africa. The demographic information of the research participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographic profile of Grade 8 English L2 teachers (n=4)*

Participants (English L2 teachers)	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	Educational background	English proficiency	Approachability
Teacher A	Male	6	Bachelor of Arts	Excellent	Good
Teacher B	Female	10	Doctoral degree	Excellent	Good
Teacher C	Male	5	Master's degree	Moderate	Good
Teacher D	Female	7	Bachelor of Arts	Excellent	Good

Table 1 reveals that all four purposively sampled teachers (Teachers A, B, C, and D) taught Grade 8 English L2 learners. The inclusion criterion for sampled teachers in the post-test was based on having taught English L2 for five years or more and being easily approachable. The exclusion criterion was based on having less than five years of English teaching experience and similar characteristics with the entire population. The information depicted in Table 1 satisfies the research population requirement that prescribes that these teachers were under study in the Dzindi Circuit, South Africa. In Table 1, the participants were observed while engaging their learners in the classroom observations and semi-structured interviews (Rif et al., 2023) conducted with those participants. However, to comply with the ethical realities, we asked for permission from the Department of Education in Limpopo Province, Dzindi Circuit, principals for the selected secondary schools, and the parents or guardians of the participants who were underage during which the study was conducted. All the participants signed the consent form to participate in the study.

Data collection

Data were collected from four classroom observation lessons conducted by Grade 8 English L2 teachers at the selected secondary schools. There were four excerpts and four semi-structured interviews (Rif et al., 2023) based on the use of the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach to indicate how irregular verbs can be formed in the simple past tense. During the pre-classroom observation meetings, the participants were informed about the purpose of an investigation to make them aware of what the lesson was all about. Representative samples were best selected according to the participants' rural traditional characteristics

and the treatment group's size. The pilot study results revealed that learners were incompetent in the use of the ablaut principle.

An initial classroom observation was conducted for 10 minutes on four teachers to assess the best approach for the ablaut principles at schools in Dzindi Circuit. Each actual classroom observation was conducted for 25 minutes. Audio recordings, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires were utilised to collect data. Also, learners' participation, the challenges faced, and how they were resolved were observed.

Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted on four secondary school teachers using a person-to-person interview (Rif et al., 2023). A total of six open-ended interview questions regarding the teachers' perceptions of the approaches for teaching ablaut principles to English L2 learners were employed. The aim was to get different opinions regarding the teaching of the ablaut principle morphological processes. Interviews were conducted for a period not exceeding 10 minutes to accommodate enough perceptions for using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach using the three developed themes. Voice recorders were utilised during the interview processes. The teachers' effectiveness was examined to collect data.

Coding reliability was used to necessitate multiple coders since themes were gathered across numerous comments. Intercoder reliability was used to code and sort the codes. The interview transcripts were arranged according to the analysis for discussion, interpretation, and presentation of the results that could match similar codes. The discovered codes were sorted after the recording was done. The code that reduced subjectivity and bias, namely, 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree', and 'Strongly Disagree', was utilised to logically describe and illustrate, condense, recap, evaluate, and analyse data using the identified software. We collaboratively took field notes, which assisted in the writing of a narrative. In addition, we established camaraderie with the sampled teachers in their respective schools to draw their full participation in the study.

Data analysis

Data obtained from the classroom observations and teachers' transcribed interviews were analysed using a Delve Thematic Analysis Software Version 22.0 as it uses codes assigned to a text and identifies and summarises imperative perceptions within a set of interview transcripts. It unpacks different themes, creates and names new codes as well as labels the concepts for attaching data to each data segment. An inductive thematic analysis was employed using teachers' semi-structured interviews, meaning generation, and creation of themes without preconceptions (Crosley, 2021).

Initial notes were examined to familiarise us with themes (Kranke et al., 2023) emanating from learners' ability to get the correct answer from spinning the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*. Also, an overview of data emanating from teachers' perspectives obtained from the semi-structured interviews was examined before individual items were analysed. Learners' answers from the rotated irregular wheel and the results from every interview's transcript matching the relevant codes were highlighted in different colours to create shorthand labels describing the answers. The findings were placed in column A while the codes, including 'teachers' willingness to use the wheel game', and 'learners' correct and incorrect irregular verb answers' were placed in another.

As we went through, codes were continuously added and collated together into groups to gain a condensed overview of the main points and common meanings recurring throughout the data. We reviewed the identified patterns and themes, such as the ability to correctly form verbs from the rotating wheel game and teachers' interview transcripts, to find useful and accurate representations of data. We then returned to the data set and compared them against the data. Relevant themes were incorporated, while the irrelevant ones were removed (Peebles et al., 2023). Themes were named to produce succinct and understandable names for each theme and to define data interpretation. A narrative was written using the introduction to establish the research question, research aims, methodology, data collection, and thematic analysis (Zisopoulos et al., 2022). Furthermore, the findings section addressed each theme, its frequency, and meaning as evidence while the conclusion explained the main takeaways and indicated how the analysis has answered the research question.

Trustworthiness

In the present study, several measures were observed to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Riazi et al., 2023) collected from both classroom observations and teachers' semi-structured interviews regarding the teaching of the ablaut principle. To enhance credibility, we shared the findings with participants and sought their feedback to confirm or clarify their views and experiences (Libman, 2023). To enhance transferability, we reflected on the participants' biases, assumptions, and perspectives and influenced the research processes and findings. A detailed description of the research components was provided, including the aim, research questions, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures to enhance dependability (Shufutinsky, 2020). We critically reflected on the participants' assumptions and values that influenced the research processes and interpretations to enhance confirmability. Also, the potential for bias was minimised by acknowledging and addressing subjectivity.

Findings

Teachers' perspectives on teaching ablaut principles to English L2 learners were organised and examined. The data of the first finding collected using classroom observations and the second finding using semi-structured interviews were analysed to indicate teachers' perspectives on the feasibility of using the GBT approach, such as the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*, to teach the ablaut principles. To address the research questions stated in the preceding discussion, teaching approaches for teaching a change from regular to irregular verbs in the simple past tense were carefully considered.

The finding supports Ali et al.'s (2023) suggestion that most English L2 teachers struggle to smoothly incorporate games into their lessons due to social, economic, psychological, technological, and challenges related to the school environment. Although some teachers face challenges in using the GBT approach, teaching and learning the ablaut principles is more rewarding. For example, using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach assists in dealing with the ablaut principle because it appeals to diverse teaching and learning styles. It stimulates learners' interest to make them participate fully in the lesson being taught by the teachers, and participation. Again, the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach increases midbrain dopamine that sorts and recalls envisaged information.

Findings from classroom observation lessons

The outcomes from the classroom teaching observations indicated that using the GBT approach, namely, the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*, provided better learners' comprehension, although such approaches call for proper application. Three transcripts from the classroom observations were employed to establish how the identified approach improves the teaching ablaut principles to English L2 learners. The transcripts helped us determine the manner and reasons for using the identified approach in teaching the ablaut principles in the classroom environment. Complying with ethical philosophies for protecting participants' identities, teachers were anonymous and denoted as Teachers A, B, C, and D. The names of schools were not mentioned. The next classroom observation was handled by Teacher A, who strategically divided the class into Groups One and Two to deal with the ablaut principle in the past tense.

Excerpt 1

Teacher A (*excitedly*) : Good afternoon class.
Learners (*in unison*) : Good afternoon, Sir, thank you.

- Teacher A : Yesterday, we dealt with the suppletion principle. Today we look at how to past tense irregular verbs using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*.
- Peter (*happily*) : Wow! Can't wait to play the game.
- Teacher A (*suggesting*) : Let's get a scribe. Any volunteer?
- Learner (*Edzani raises up a hand*) : I will record the scores, Sir.
- Teacher A : Right! Form two groups and decide who will start to play.
- Latani (*rotates the wheel*) : Wow! It lands at 'dug'.
- Teacher A (*with great happiness*) : Excellent! The verb 'dig' becomes 'dug' by turning the vowel from 'i' into 'u'. The vowel 'e' can be changed into 'o'. Can anyone spin the wheel to get an answer?
- Phophi (*spins the wheel*) : Oh, 'take' becomes 'took'.
- Teacher A : Precisely! Group One please, rotate the wheel to find the verb formed by changing the vowel 'i' into 'ou'.
- Khodani (*spins the wheel*): 'Find' becomes 'found'.
- Teacher A : Group Two, what is the past tense form of the verb 'seek'?
- Tom (*spins the wheel*) : The answer is '*seeked'.
- Teacher A (*angrily*) : No, that is incorrect because the word '*seeked' has been added an '-ed' suffix. OK, Edzani, add scores. Who is the winner?
- Edzani : Group One.
- Teacher A : Wow, let's give a round of applause.

In Except 1, the lesson offered by Teacher A was successful because learners spanned the 'irregular verb wheel game' to form the ablaut principles according to the GBT approach and found the expected answers. Teacher A started his lesson by linking the participants' existing knowledge to the current to stimulate their interest. Thereafter, the participants played the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* to obtain the correct answer. Learners enthusiastically enjoyed spinning this wheel because it is reliable to obtain an appropriate answer. After we recorded and compared the scores between the two groups, it was discovered that Group One performed better than Group B. They did not over-regularise verb formation by adding the verb *-ed* ending to the verb *seek* into **seeked* when attempting to use the ablaut principles.

The following classroom observation was done by Teacher B after the participants in the class were divided into rows One, Two, Three, and Four to enable a good stunning competition among the rows since the game lesson is

accessed better in this regard. Additionally, class division ensured a comparison of participants' scores that could assist teachers in finding learners' performance.

Excerpt 2

- Teacher B : Good morning class. How are you?
 Learners (*in unison*) : Good morning, thanks, Madam. We are happy and you?
 Teacher B : Fine, let's use the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* to get the correct answer, okay? Tendani, please record the scores.
 Tendani (*happily*) : Okay Madam I will do that.
 Teacher B : You know vowels can change from '-i' to '-a', 'a' to 'i' and even 'e' to 'o' as in *ring/rang* and *behold/beheld*, by spinning the 'Macmillan irregular verb wheel game' (*demonstrating*). In rows One, Two, Three, and Four (*pointing*), let's start with row Four. Get any irregular verb by changing the vowel 'a' to 'o'.
 Wangwa (*rotates the wheel*) : The answer is stand/stood.
 Teacher B : Row Three, use the vowel 'i' to 'o'.
 Tshifhiwa (*rotates the wheel*): I got *win/won* Madam.
 Teacher B (*excitedly*) : Excellent. Row One, what's your take on using 'o' to 'e'?
 Linde (*spinning the wheel*) : The answers are '*hold/held*' and '*go/went*'.
 Teacher B (*excitedly*) : I love this. Okay, Row Two. Change 'o' for 'i'.
 Masindi : Eh, the answer is *do/did*.
 Teacher B (*impressed*) : Wonderful, you all performed remarkably. Will you like any further lessons using the same wheel tomorrow?
 Learners (*in unison*) : Yeah, let's do it tomorrow.

Teacher B's lesson was outstanding because after having divided the class into four rows, it was discovered that the power of the GBT approach is indispensable in teaching the ablaut principles using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*. Teacher B started her lesson by indicating the purpose of the wheel game to learners. Also, she demonstrated how a verb wheel could be played to get the correct verbs in the ablaut principles to stimulate each participant's interest in the lesson. Dividing the class into rows enhanced learners' performance. The classroom lessons conducted by Teachers A and B show that the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach ensures remarkable performance. Although the Teachers A and B did not perform equally, the identified approach here cannot be denied teaching the ablaut principles.

Excerpt 3

- Teacher C : Afternoon class.
Learners (*excitedly*) : Good afternoon, Sir.
Teacher C : Let's use the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* to form answers in the ablaut principles. Do you appreciate it?
Learners (*in unison*) : No, we do not like *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*.
Teacher C (*angrily*) : Why?
Bamuza (*instantly*) : We can only use it in class. We need something to use at home.
Teacher C : I don't think this is a good idea. But because it is here?
Learners (*voices raised up*): That's nothing, Sir.
Teacher C (*disappointedly*): So, which approach do you like?
Learners (*in unison*) : Anyone, Sir.
Teacher C : Fine, I will bring it next time. Okay, study irregular verbs in your textbooks.
Learners : Thanks, Sir.

Teacher C's lesson was an embarrassment because his learners did not see the importance of the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach. Consequently, we left the teacher and his learners in the class.

Excerpt 4

- Teacher D (*excitedly*) : Good morning my dear learners.
Learners (*in unison*) : Good afternoon, Madam, thank you.
Teacher D : Guess what! Today are using *the Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*.
Learners (*shouting*) : What is it, Madam? Tell us.
Teacher D (*pointing*) : This is an approach for teaching verb formation. Like it?
Learners (*in unison*) : Yeah!
Teacher D (*showing them how to play*): You play it this way.
Learners : Wow! It looks good.
Teacher D : Vule, spin the wheel.
Vule : Ok, Sir. Let me try. Wow, it is easy, hey.
Teacher D : Yes. But answers are matched randomly from the edge of the wheel.
Dakalo : Sir, is there any approach like this? This is quite lovely.
Teacher D : No. This is irreplaceable and user-friendly.

From teacher D's lesson, it is noteworthy that the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* is an important tool in the teaching and learning of the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. Teacher D demonstrated how the Grade

8 English L2 learners can play such a game to find appropriate answers. The description regarding the use of this game was quite understandable because learners finally knew how to choose the correct answers from the given possibilities.

Based on the findings from Excerpts 1, 2, 3, and 4, the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach has been found to be an invaluable solution to address the question 'What are the approaches suitable for teaching ablaut principle to Grade 8 English L2 learners? Additionally, the question 'How can the identified approaches for teaching ablaut principle to Grade 8 English L2 learners be described?' was also addressed in the sense that Teachers A, B, and D taught their learners successfully. Finally, the identification and description of the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game approach* were explained.

Findings from teachers' semi-structured interviews

We transcribed, analysed, and evaluated perspectives obtained from the four teachers who teach English L2 to Grade 8 learners. Each of the four teachers was asked a total of six open-ended questions. Interestingly, in all the questions asked, each teacher's perceptions indicated that the use of the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach is irreplaceable in the teaching and learning of irregular verb formation. The codes developed from all the questions reduced subjectivity and bias using criteria such as 'Yes' or 'No' responses. Similarly, the other relevant responses were expected from the participants to describe and illustrate, condense, recap, evaluate, and analyse the data obtained. The codes identified and summarised the imperative perceptions of teachers within a set of interview transcripts. The ideas emerging from data analysis were sorted and arranged. The three themes regarding using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game approach* are:

Ablaut principles are difficult to teach

In the formation of irregular verbs regarding the simple past tense. Teachers experience challenges in getting learners to memorise them. Although numerous long lists concerning the ablaut principle are presented in English language textbooks for learners to understand the ablaut principles, English L2 learners still confuse the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. This calls for the English L2 teacher's mastery of the informed intervention strategies required to run this process.

Nevertheless, most English L2 teachers do not have adequate teaching skills in teaching the ablaut principles. In this situation, two teachers agreed that teaching irregular verbs in the simple past tense is a daunting task. They

indicated that unless teachers use *the Macmillan irregular verb wheel game approach*, learners might not be competent in using simple past tense irregular verbs. All teachers commented that

When we teach the formation of the ablaut principles in the simple past tense, learners seem to enjoy and understand the lessons. However, when assessing them, they often perform badly. (Interview, Teacher A)

The above-mentioned comment indicates that all teachers frequently teach the ablaut principles in the simple past tense to Grade 8 English L2 learners at their respective schools. As these teachers had enough experience teaching their learners, they all indicated difficulties encountered when teaching the ablaut principles in the simple past tense.

Game-based teaching alleviates the ablaut teaching challenges.

Game-based learning is a reliable paraphernalia for teaching the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense because learners memorise verb forms spontaneously. Although several strategies, including 'Hangman', 'Call My Bluff', 'Simon Says', and 'Goats on the Road' (Paulichi et al., 2020) can be used in teaching the ablaut principles, using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game approach* is irreplaceable. Teacher A commented that:

I enjoy teaching irregular morphological processes using the Macmillan irregular verb wheel game approach, as it is easy to obtain correct answers after being instructed on how to use it. (Interview, Teacher A)

Although several game teaching and learning strategies are available in the teaching of regular and irregular verb formation in the simple past tense the finding reveals that learners enjoy rotating the wheel. The results are that learners often understand and recall what they have learnt. Teacher B remarked that:

I like Macmillan's irregular verb wheel game approach because it saves time and energy. My learners enjoy spinning the wheel until I stop them from playing. Also, when I give learners written tasks, they often perform outstandingly. (Interview, Teacher B)

Teacher B's remark shows that *Macmillan's irregular verb wheel game approach* is indispensable because it enhances English L2 learners' competence in using the ablaut principle accordingly. In this regard, Teacher C stated that:

I did not believe that Macmillan's irregular verb wheel game approach was productive in teaching the ablaut principles until I used it in class. Henceforth, I prefer using it every time. (Interview, Teacher C)

The comment mentioned above shows that *Macmillan's irregular verb wheel game* approach is important paraphernalia amongst all the GBT approaches employed in the learning and teaching of the ablaut principles to English L2 learners. It is a game approach that saves time and energy because it is easy to manipulate. In this regard, Teacher D said that:

I like using the Macmillan irregular verb wheel game approach when teaching the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense because it stimulates learners' interest in the lesson. (Interview, Teacher D)

From the comment indicated supra, the importance of using *the Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* in the teaching and learning of irregular verb formation in the simple past tense cannot be denied.

Macmillan's irregular verb wheel game approach can be used autonomously

As a single learner can play the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach, its indispensability is undeniable even in the absence of the teacher. Therefore, such a wheel game can be manipulated even when learning occurs from home. All participants, for example, Teacher B, remarked that:

We like the Macmillan irregular verb wheel game approach because it is a reliable approach without face-to-face interactions. It is a solution for alleviating difficulties experienced in teaching the ablaut principle from a distance. (Interview, Teacher B).

Considering the remark mentioned above, the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach is invaluable at different places and times. It can be used with the guidance of parents or guardians so long as they know how to operate it. Thus, teachers' perspectives on the approaches for teaching the ablaut principles to English L2 learners are congruent with the objectives of the current research.

Discussion

The main findings from the classroom observations and the semi-structured interviews complemented each other. Both the findings demonstrated that using *Macmillan's irregular wheel game* approach is required if one wants learners to

perform preternaturally. These findings are unique as they have never been identified in this manner by previous studies. Compared with the previous studies, the finding supports Paulichi et al. (2020), who claim that the GBT approach is active in learning the ablaut principles.

Teacher A's classroom observation lesson indicates that some group B learners did not perform as anticipated, as suggested by Ulvi (2021) that English L2 learners experience difficulties in memorising the changes that occur during the irregularisation of verbs in the simple past tense because they rotated the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach and obtained the answer *seeked instead of *sought* when attempting to form the irregular verbs in the simple past tense. This finding is congruent with the suggestion by Astiantih (2023) that some English L2 learners lack the understanding of the verb form in the formula pattern of the simple past tense. The finding is in line with Ali et al. (2023), who claim that most English L2 teachers sometimes fail to incorporate games smoothly into their lessons due to social, economic, psychological, technological, and challenges related to the school environment.

Also, the finding supports Mouri's (2020) and Lambani and Maluleke's (2019) estimation that learners make recurrent mistakes during irregular verb formation as they consciously or unconsciously learn the wrong form of verbs. However, most learners got their answers correctly as games stimulated their ability to store and recall information. The finding is congruent with Dashti et al. (2023), who suggest that using GBT improves English L2 learners' understanding of the use of the ablaut principles.

In the second classroom observation lesson, Teacher B's teaching of the ablaut principles using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach was productive because no learner failed to give the correct answer. The finding supports Rajeswari and Madhavi (2023), who suggest that if teachers' professional knowledge and learners' approach to learning are empowered, both teachers and learners can understand contemporary educational practices, including the use of this game for teaching the ablaut principles. Moreover, it supports Dashti et al.'s (2023) suggestion that the morphosemantic treatment of the inflection of regular and irregular verbs in the simple past tense enhances the ablaut principles of learning.

Moreover, in the present study, the teachers' semi-structured interviews conducted on Teachers A, B, and D recommend the suitability of using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach to answer the question 'What are the approaches suitable for teaching ablaut principles to Grade 8 English L2 learners?' and 'How can the identified approaches for teaching ablaut principles to Grade 8 English L2 learners be described?'. The finding supports Paulichi et

al. (2020), who suggest that GBT approaches improve student learning. In the present study, the wheel game approach was necessitated by detailing its usage in getting the correct irregular past tense verbs from the present tense forms simply by rotating them.

Nonetheless, the finding is in contrast with Megah and Afifah (2019) claim that the simple past tense confuses English L2 learners because they sometimes fail to change the verb forms from present tense to past tense forms accordingly. It is noteworthy that when playing the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*, the correct verb forms are chosen at random from the edge of the wheel and matched from the given possibilities. In this regard, teaching the ablaut principle to Grade 8 English L2 learners can be enhanced using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach. The finding supports Lambani and Maluleke (2019), who suggest that English L2 learners are competent in using irregular verbs in common usage.

The current study contributed to the body of knowledge because it is not limited only to the Grade 8 English L2 learners at Dzindi Circuit, South Africa, but also to other learners throughout the world. These learners can obtain a suitable approach to learning the formation of irregular verbs in the simple past tense. English L2 teachers' challenges in teaching the use of ablaut principles can be minimised. Future researchers can conduct further research on the use of the identified approach in this study. The solutions offered by the current study are that the difficulties experienced in the teaching of the ablaut principles can be addressed by using the same approach and that Grade 8 English L2 learners can learn from the comfort of their homes.

Conclusion

As the present study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on the approach for teaching ablaut principles to Grade 8 English L2 learners at the Dzindi Circuit, South Africa, an attempt has been made to identify suitable approaches to be used by English L2 teachers in this regard. In this essence, the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach has been employed in the quest to produce tangible results regarding the teaching and learning of the ablaut principles to Grade 8 English L2 learners. After these learners successfully spun the identified wheel game in different classroom observations, the findings of this study became evident that the indispensability of this approach cannot be ignored in teaching and learning.

The formation of appropriate irregular verbs from simple present to past tense forms can be enhanced using the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game*

approach. Additionally, the findings from teachers' perceptions depict that the difficulties experienced in the use of the ablaut principles can be alleviated by using this approach. The present study revealed that teaching the ablaut principles to English L2 learners using the identified approach is indispensable. This result is important because English L2 learners' competence in using the ablaut principles is enhanced. Numerous insights from classroom observation lessons and semi-structured interviews are convenient for all Grade 8 English learners and teachers worldwide.

The implications for the study are that English L2 learners are expected to use the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach because it produces remarkable results in the classroom environment. However, the limitation of the current study is that the time factor inhibits the full realisation of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews that were conducted within a prescribed 25-minute slot allocated for each lesson. Also, the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* is not easily obtained in all secondary schools in the Dzindi Circuit, South Africa.

The current study recommends the regular use of the identified approach to teach the change of irregular verbs from simple present to past tense forms during the ablaut principles lessons not only by Grade 8 English L2 teachers but also by other English L2 teachers elsewhere. Future researchers are advised to conduct further research on the teaching of the ablaut principles to Grade 8 English L2 learners. Therefore, we argue that the *Macmillan irregular verb wheel game* approach is employed in the teaching and learning of a change from simple present to simple past tense forms of irregular verbs.

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Appendix. Interview protocol

1. Is *Macmillan's irregular wheel game* suitable for teaching the ablaut principles?
2. Do you know how to use *Macmillan's irregular wheel game* approach?
3. Have you ever used the *Macmillan's irregular wheel game* approach?
4. Do you enjoy teaching the ablaut principles using this game?
5. Are the ablaut principles easy to memorise?
6. What are the challenges faced by learners in teaching the ablaut principles?