

Strategies in Learning and Acquiring English Vocabulary among Level 2 Pupils in Saeh, Subis Primary Schools

Valerie Ionnie anak Robert Ayin, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Parilah M. Shah

Abstract—English is one of the major subjects in all Malaysian primary schools. However, learning and acquiring the language have become one of the challenges among the Level 2 pupils especially in suburban primary schools due to lack of exposure with the language. In this study, the researcher focused on the pupils' learning and acquiring strategies in enhancing their English vocabulary. This study was a quantitative research that employed survey. The samples of this research were 90 Level 2 pupils from three selected Saeh's primary schools in Subis district of Sarawak. The data was gained through questionnaires that were distributed among the respondents. The collected data from the questionnaires were tabulated and calculated in frequencies and percentages using SPSS Statistics. The findings indicated that the highest mean score of strategy used by pupils in learning English vocabulary was by reading the English passages as requested by the teacher. Meanwhile, reading English materials such as books, magazines, comics, newspapers and etc. were the highest mean score of strategies used by pupils to acquire the English vocabulary. In conclusion, teachers need to be aware of the pupils' needs and preferences in order for them to master the English vocabulary.

Index Terms— Level 2 pupils, English vocabulary, learning strategy, acquiring strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

English is one of the world's demanded language and naturally the English vocabulary has the largest number among all the languages. However, there was a general agreement among the researchers that Malaysian primary school pupils who started early schooling with limited vocabulary knowledge are the ones who are potentially at risk to score poorly results in their English examination papers. It is due that those pupils tend to use their own mother tongue as their first language and English is somehow becoming the second or third language used.

A. Background of The Study

Vocabulary growth is closely related to school progress (Penno et. al, 2002). Vocabulary is very essential to be learned because it is one of the three elements of language.

Valerie Ionnie anak Robert Ayin, Sekolah Kebangsaan Rumah Mentali, Subis, The National University of Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Parilah M. Shah, Faculty of Education, The National University of Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Vocabulary acts as the building material for a language and it is also the key to better communication with other people (Zhihong, 2018). The term "vocabulary" is used in different senses. It is not only referring to the total number of words in a particular language but it can stand for the words used in different historical periods such as the Old, Middle and Modern English vocabulary. Other than that, we also use it for words in a particular dialect, book or the words possessed by an individual. It is also one of the three factors in learning and acquiring the language. It acts as the basic element to construct sentences and express thoughts or meanings despite of becomes the main requirement of language communication. Hence, widening the knowledge towards learning and acquiring vocabulary is significant and essential to those pupils especially in primary schools.

Due to that, it is necessary to investigate the strategies in learning and acquiring English vocabulary as it is a stepping stone for the whole language learning. According to Zhihong (2018), he stated that language learning and acquiring strategies had become the main theme for research studies in the 1970s and vocabulary was the main component that the researchers focused on. Furthermore, the strategies of learning and acquiring vocabulary are among the highlighted factors to determine how and how well the pupils learn the English language.

B. Research Problem

The study was conducted because most of the Level 2 pupils in three selected primary schools in Subis district had performed poorly in their previous English Paper 1 and Paper 2 during their mid-year examinations.

C. Research Objectives

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the strategies used in learning and acquiring English vocabulary among the Level 2 pupils in the three selected schools in Subis district. In doing so, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the most common strategy used in learning English vocabulary among the Level 2 pupils.
2. Identify the most common strategy used in acquiring English vocabulary among the Level 2 pupils.

D. Research Questions

The study also attempts to answer the following research

questions:

1. What is the Level 2 pupils' most common strategy used in learning English vocabulary?
2. What is the Level 2 pupils' most common strategy used in acquiring English vocabulary?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher explained about the definition of vocabulary, importance of the English vocabulary, teaching vocabulary, learning strategies, vocabulary learning and acquiring strategies.

B. The definition of vocabulary

Vocabulary represents one of most important skills necessary for teaching and learning either a second language or foreign language as it is the foundation for the development of all the other skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is also the main tool for pupils in their attempt to use English effectively. Vocabulary can be defined as the words of language which includes single items and phrases or chunks of several words that convey a particular meaning. Vocabulary is also the total number of words needed to express the speakers' ideas in communication (Mofareh, 2015). Besides that, according to Nie and Zou (2017) vocabulary is known as the building blocks of language and there will be none language acquisition taken place without the acquisition of vocabulary.

C. Importance of English Vocabulary Learning

Teaching and learning English in primary schools especially in suburban geographical setting can be challenging for both teachers and pupils. Since Malaysia adopts English as the Second Language, it is vital to ensure the young pupils to acquire enough knowledge to communicate effectively in the English language. However, some Malaysian pupils face issues when communication comes in because they are lacking of English vocabulary which impedes the success of transferring of their ideas or thoughts. As stated by Mofareh (2015), the perspective of the vocabulary knowledge is as a critical tool for second language learners because of limited vocabulary in a second language obstructs successful communication. As for instance, when pupils confront a native English speaker, listen to English songs or watch television shows and movies without subtitle and read or write messages to their friends are where they will need to operate the English vocabulary. Hence, pupils need to be aware of the importance in having wide English vocabulary. In the trend of globalization, internationalization of language is unavoidable. English will undoubtedly play the most vital role. It includes three elements namely pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. It is very obvious that vocabulary is the most essential and liveliest part of the three elements. Without English vocabulary, the pupils will face troubles especially in their communication with the others when using the language. However, pupils possess the most sufficient vocabulary in the classroom. It is because they really focus on learning the language with detailed explanation from the teachers compared to outside the school and for sure they pay less attention to learning English at home. There is a statement mentioned by Mofareh (2015) that the relationship

between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary in which vocabulary knowledge allows language use that later leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. The learning and acquisition of vocabulary play an important role in the formation of complete spoken and written texts despite of being essential for successful second language use. It also plays a vital role in all language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Some researchers also argued that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is important for a successful second language because pupils will be unable to use the functions and structures learned for comprehensible communication without an extensive vocabulary.

D. Learning Strategies

Rebecca (2003) defined learning strategies as the specifications, behaviours, procedures and techniques used. As for instance, seeking out conversation partners or giving someone encouragement to handle a challenging language task used by pupils to enhance their own learning. When the pupils is consciously chooses strategies that fit their learning styles, these strategies become a useful toolkit for their learning which are more active, purposeful, conscious and self-regulated. In general, different pupils have their own learning styles or strategies that they use in learning a particular language.

E. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

According to Nie and Zou (2017) vocabulary learning strategies are based on the framework of language strategies theoretically which are also one of the most essential components of the language learning strategies. Vocabulary learning strategies are the steps taken by the pupils to acquire new English words (Asgari and Ghazali, 2011). Generally, it is agreed that successful language learners apply the learning strategies appropriate to their own language learning needs. Pupils need to be explicitly taught on the methods for intentional vocabulary learning for example in the classroom. The examples of methods that can be conducted such as teaching specific words to support pupils' understanding of texts containing those words and teaching word-learning strategies that pupils can use independently. It is fundamental to promote the development of word consciousness other than carrying out word play activities to engage pupils in learning new words.

F. Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies

Roesser (2018) stated that vocabulary acquisition strategies are useful in helping pupils to build deep, meaningful learning structures where they can learn, utilize and play with new words. It is encouraged for pupils to acquire vocabulary incidentally through direct exposures to words at home and school for examples by listening to books read aloud to them or instructions given by the teacher, talking to their teacher a peers in English or reading widely on their own.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher had explained about the research design, research sample, research instrument and research procedures in this study. This study also investigated the Level 2 pupils' strategies in learning and acquiring

English vocabulary in three selected primary schools in Subis district.

B. Research Design

In order to fulfil the requirements of the study, this study was a quantitative research design that employed survey and was conducted among samples from a population. Asgari and Ghazali (2011) identified that a quantitative research design acts as one of the investigation methods for a phenomenon to be understood based on separate methodological ways of inquiry that evoke the condition of humans or social issues. Meanwhile, according to Social Science Research and Instructional Centre (1998) survey research is a method of collecting data from the respective respondents by asking them questions. One of the ways to conduct a survey is through questionnaires.

C. Research Samples

In this study, 90 respondents were selected as the samples. The respondents of this study were among the Level 2 pupils from three primary schools in Saeh area in Subis district.

D. Research Instrument

In this study, the data was collected using close-ended questionnaires. The questionnaires were adapted from ‘Young Learners’ Language Strategy Use Survey’ by Andrew D. Cohen and Rebecca L. Oxford (2002). There are two questions asking about the pupils’ English papers examination scores, nine questions asking pupils on the general practices towards vocabulary, nine statements regarding with pupils’ vocabulary learning strategies and eight statements regarding with their vocabulary acquiring strategies. Each item required pupils to either mark a plus (+) if the statement really describes them, slash (/) if the statement is somewhat like them and minus (-) if the

statement is not like them. The questionnaires were distributed to the pupils during their English lessons carried out by their English teachers. The English teachers were assigned to assist pupils to understand the statements in the questionnaires better. In addition, one of the main instruments of analysing the data is the researcher of this study. The collected data from the questionnaires were tabulated and calculated in frequencies and percentages using SPSS Statistics.

E. Research Procedures

As for the data collection procedures, initially the researcher contacted the headmaster from the three selected primary schools in Subis district to secure their permission for conducting this study. A written letter to the headmasters were also submitted requesting their permission to carry out a survey with their Level 2 pupils as well as the questionnaires also had been given. Teachers who taught English for Level 2 in the respective schools had been briefed about the questionnaires. At about one two days, the teachers handed in the completed questionnaires to the researcher to be analysed.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher had analysed the data based on the four research questions that had been mentioned earlier. However, the researcher initially explained about the frequency and percentage of the pupils’ gender and also the scores for English Paper 1 and Paper 2 based on the frequency distributions as shown below.

Table 1 Frequency Distribution and Percentage According to Pupils’ Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	46	51.1	51.1	51.1
	female	44	48.9	48.9	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 above shows the frequency distribution and the percentage according to pupils’ gender. Based on the table, 46 (51.1%) of the samples were males and 44 (48.9%) were females.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Pupils’ English Paper 1(013) Scores

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-39	12	13.3	13.3	13.3
	40-49	54	60.0	60.0	73.3
	50-54	4	4.4	4.4	77.8
	65-79	12	13.3	13.3	91.1
	80-100	8	8.9	8.9	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 above shows the frequency distribution and percentage of pupils’ English Paper 1(013) scores. Based on the table, 54(60.0%) was the highest frequency achieved by the pupils in their English Paper 1(013) which at the range score of 40-49. It means that, that was the average score that

most pupils achieved for English Paper 1(013). Then, followed by the frequency of 12(13.3%) for both 0-39 and 65-79 score. The frequency of 8(8.9%) for the score 80-100 and the lowest frequency was 4(4.4%) for the range score of 50-54.

Table 3 Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Pupils' English Paper 1(014) Scores

Valid		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0-39	54	60.0	60.0	60.0
	40-49	19	21.1	21.1	81.1
	50-64	14	15.6	15.6	96.7
	65-79	3	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 above shows the frequency distribution and percentage of pupils' English Paper 1(014) scores. Based on the table, 54(60.0%) was the highest frequency achieved by the pupils in their English Paper 1(014) which at the range score of 0-39. Then, followed by the frequency of 19(21.1%) for 40-49 score. The frequency of 14(15.6%) for the score

50-64 next and the lowest frequency was 3(3.3%) for the range score of 65-79. From the table shown, it can be summarised that majority of the pupils failed the paper with very poor results.

B. What is the Level 2 pupils' most common strategy used in learning English vocabulary?

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of the Pupils' English Vocabulary Learning Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
LS1	90	1.00	3.00	2.0444	.74820
LS2	90	1.00	3.00	1.9778	.73405
LS3	90	1.00	3.00	2.0444	.77765
LS4	90	1.00	3.00	1.9222	.78221
LS5	90	1.00	4.00	2.0000	.79323
LS6	90	1.00	3.00	1.9667	.75625
LS7	90	1.00	3.00	1.8889	.77088
LS8	90	1.00	3.00	2.1556	.73303
LS9	90	1.00	3.00	1.9778	.79291
Valid N (listwise)	90				

The results showed that the highest mean of the vocabulary learning strategy used by the Level 2 pupils was reading the English passages as requested by the teacher with the mean score of 2.1556 followed by learning English words at home and memorising the words as requested by the teacher with the mean score of 2.0444. Practice conversing using the English vocabulary in school was next with the mean score of

2.0000. Learning English words in school and practicing writing in English as requested by the teacher came next (1.9778). Completing English vocabulary tasks given by the teacher was the second lowest strategy used by the pupils to learn the vocabulary with the mean score of 1.9667 and followed by using dictionary to help them translate the Malay words into English words (1.8889) which showed the lowest mean score.

Table 5 Overview of the required items in the questionnaire for English vocabulary learning strategies.

Item No.	Question: <i>Which of these strategies you use to learn the English vocabulary?</i>
LS1 (12)	Learn English words at home.
LS2 (13)	Learn English words in school.
LS3 (14)	Memorise the words as requested by the teacher.
LS4 (15)	Use the English vocabulary in school.
LS5 (16)	Practice conversing using the English vocabulary in school.
LS6 (17)	Complete English vocabulary tasks given by the teacher.
LS7 (18)	Use dictionary to help you translate the Malay words into English words.
LS8 (19)	Read the English passages as requested by the teacher.
LS9 (20)	Practice writing in English as requested by the teacher.

The findings of the study showed that the main strategy used by pupils to learn English vocabulary is in school which is the classroom during English lessons. This happened because school is the only place where the pupils can access and expose more to the language. They learned and gained new vocabulary every day other than they had the opportunities to apply it with their teacher and peers in the classroom directly. The needs for them to use the language were as a requirement

to complete a task. Hence, the use of the language is more purposeful in that case. Compared to at home, most of the pupils' family members were not using the language at all because they communicate in their mother tongue. They were less exposed to English at home and the only reliable materials that they could use to learn English with were their English homework and textbooks provided.

C. What is the Level 2 pupils' most common strategy used in acquiring English vocabulary?

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics of the Pupils' English Vocabulary Acquiring Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AS1	90	1.00	3.00	2.1111	.78532
AS2	90	1.00	3.00	2.0111	.74191
AS3	90	1.00	4.00	1.9222	.78221
AS4	90	1.00	3.00	1.9111	.81619
AS5	90	1.00	3.00	1.7778	.81802
AS6	90	1.00	3.00	2.0111	.82781
AS7	90	1.00	3.00	1.8444	.71753
AS8	90	1.00	3.00	1.9000	.70392
Valid N (listwise)	90				

The results showed that the highest mean of the vocabulary acquiring strategy used by the Level 2 pupils was reading English materials such as books, magazines, comics, newspapers, etc. with the mean score of 2.1111 followed by reading advertisements, posters and banners in English and playing English games (e.g. Board games, video games) with the mean score of 2.0111. Next strategy was listening to

English songs (1.9222) followed by listening to the television or radio advertisements with the mean score of 1.9111. The third lowest mean score (1.9000) was using the dictionary followed by second lowest was surfing English materials on the Internet (1.8444) and the lowest strategy used for acquiring English vocabulary was watching English movies with the mean score of 1.7778.

Table 7 Overview of the required items in the questionnaire for English vocabulary acquiring strategies.

Item No.	Question: Which of these strategies you use to acquire the English vocabulary?
AS1 (21)	Read English materials such as books, magazines, comics, newspapers, etc.
AS2 (22)	Read advertisements, posters and banners in English.
AS3 (23)	Listen to English songs.
AS4 (24)	Listen to the television or radio advertisements.
AS5 (25)	Watch English movies.
AS6 (26)	Play English games (e.g. board games, video games).
AS7 (27)	Surf English materials on the Internet.
AS8 (28)	Use dictionary.

The findings showed that the main strategy used by the pupils in acquiring the English vocabulary was by reading English materials such as books, magazines, comics, newspapers, etc. Even though it might be quite old fashioned to use printed materials, however in sub urban schools, pupils were most accessed to those materials compared to gadgets. Despite that, it is very important for teachers to encourage pupils to buy and bring their own dictionary to be used at home and school because it helps them a lot especially when the teacher is not around. As they used the dictionary, they were doing self-learning while completing their exercises especially for reading and writing tasks. Reading advertisements, banners or posters came second in which pupils can see them hanging around the town. Sometimes their English exercises have questions that need pupils to respond to advertisements or posters so pupils can relate them contextually in the real world. Listening to the advertisements from the television and radio too help pupils to acquire the language. However, the percentage is not that high because not all of the pupils own a television at home and as for pupils only read English materials from books, magazines, newspapers or comics mostly in schools. Once they go back home, they do other things like playing around with their friends and house chores. So, the only time they acquire the language is through doing English homework.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, it showed that pupils had applied different strategies in learning and acquiring English vocabulary. Hence, it is fundamental for teachers to be aware of the pupils' preference in order for them to design and prepare the teaching materials for their lessons that are relevant to pupils' needs and proficiency level in English. The results of the study too can help teachers to improve on their teaching methods and approaches.

Furthermore, the strategies used by the pupils in learning and acquiring the English language are affected by their culture, home environment, peers, classroom atmospheres, materials available, teaching methods carried out by the teacher and tasks requirements. Teachers can allocate more time for pupils practicing using the language especially through communication. The structure of the sentences is not that important as long as the pupils use the vocabulary correctly and have meanings. Teacher can also give pupils more English exercises as homework so that they can have the time for self-learning of what had been taught in the classroom. Parents' role is important too in this case in which they can help their children in their learning process. Other than that, teachers can encourage pupils to bring their own books or any other printed materials from home to school so that they can share their findings after reading them or even share on the new vocabulary that they have learned. Teachers also need to be creative in the teaching methods because different kinds of interesting activities carried out in

the classroom with the pupils can attract and engage them more to learn the language. A fun and stress-free classroom atmosphere will help pupils to learn English with open hearts in which will prevent them from thinking that it is a very technical and challenging language to be learned.

So, it is fundamental for both sides, teachers and pupils other than parents to collaborate on helping each other so that the pupils can master the language as it is the second important language used in our country.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Hereby I would like to acknowledge and say out my gratitude to Dr. Parilah Mohd Shah in guiding me to complete my thesis. It has always been a pleasure that we had a strong bond that has helped me carry out my work with commitment and satisfaction. Without her dedicated and endless help, I would not have been able to complete this paper.

Apart from that, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to both of my parents for their endless supports and motivation that they have given me throughout my Master programme journey. Without their love and perseverance, I would not have been able to produce my paper wholeheartedly.

Besides my parents, I want to thank my siblings for their guidance, prayers and endless love that they have showered upon me which led me to the way furthering my study for a better future. I want to give my gratitude to my fiancé for the encouragement and advices with his patience to me in facing all the challenges while completing this paper which making it into a reality at the end.

Last but not least, to all my course mates and friends who have created a vision of this together. Thank you for all the supports and struggles that we had throughout this whole journey.

REFERENCES

- [1] Azadeh Asgari & Ghazali Bin Mustapha. (2011). The type of vocabulary learning strategies used by esl students in university putra Malaysia. *English Language Teaching*. 4(2): 84-89.
- [2] Goundar, P.R. 2015. vocabulary learning strategies of english as foreign language (efl) learners: a literature review. *International Journal Of Humanities And Cultural Studies*. 2(2): 292-298.
- [3] Oxford, R.L. 2003. Language learning styles and strategies: an overview. *Learning Styles & Strategies*. 1-17.
- [4] Mofareh Alqahtani. 2015. The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. *International Journal of Teaching and Education*. 3(3): 21-31.
- [5] Penno, J.F., Wilkinson, I.A.G. & Moore, D.W. 2002. Vocabulary acquisition from teacher explanation and repeated listening to stories: do they overcome the matthew effect? *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 94(1): 23-33.
- [6] Roesser, A. 2018. Vocabulary acquisition strategies: what will work in your classroom.
- [7] Yongwei Nie & Li Zhou. 2017. A study of vocabulary learning strategies used by excellent english learners. *Research on Modern Higher Education* 4. 101-106.
- [8] Zhihong Bai. 2018. An analysis of english vocabulary learning strategies. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 9(4): 853-859.