

Primary Pupils' Challenges and Benefits of Game-Based Learning Strategies in Vocabulary Learning: A Literature Review

Chai Kar Ni & Melor Md Yunus

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Email: karni21chai@gmail.com, melor@ukm.edu.my

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Abstract

Vocabulary is a core component in the primary education system for primary pupils to learn English language. Learning vocabulary is a fundamental aspect to acquire the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Nevertheless, previous studies had proven that it was extremely draining to teach vocabulary to primary pupils using conventional chalk and talk methods. They were demotivated and could not remember the words learned. Hence, this paper is a literature review about the challenges encountered by primary pupils in vocabulary learning and benefits of game-based learning strategies employed in vocabulary learning. Thus, it is crucial to recognise the benefits of game-based learning strategies used by English language teachers in teaching and enhancing the teaching and learning of vocabulary among primary pupils from related previous studies. By identifying the challenges faced by primary pupils, teachers would be able to choose the most appropriate game-based learning strategies to be used in their own classroom which would help to maximise their pupils' vocabulary learning.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Education, Primary Pupils, Challenges, Game-Based Strategies

Introduction

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is the language used when different second language speakers interact with each other (McKay, 2018). Moreover, English language is the lingua franca of the modern world as it is the dominant language in international affairs (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012). In fact, English acts as a lingua franca at multiple levels, including local, regional, national and international levels. In short, ELF indicates the teaching, learning and the use of English language as a common medium of communication.

On the other hand, in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) (Ministry of Education, 2018), the importance of teaching English as a second language had been given emphasis and teachers need to make sure that their pupils are able to communicate using English in order to stay globally competitive. It is undeniable that the Ministry of Education

has emphasised the need of knowing and using the English language. According to Misbah et al. (2017), the Ministry of Education has also highlighted that it is imperative for pupils to be good in the English language since they are in primary school. In fact, the English Language contains numerous sets of idiosyncratic structures that challenge pupils' learning comprehensibility (Potsdam, 2017). Vocabulary is the core of language teaching and learning. With an adequate amount of vocabularies, this can help in the acquisition of the four language skills. In fact, this will also help the learners to perform or practise their skills better. Thus, it is important for pupils to master vocabulary so that they are facilitated to construct sentences in spoken or written form (Alqahtani, 2017).

In fact, based on related past studies, there are several challenges encountered by primary pupils in vocabulary learning such as difficulties in remembering and retaining the new vocabularies learned, limited resources used to assist primary pupils' vocabulary learning and lack of motivation due to the drilling method used in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. Hence, it is important to use game-based learning strategies in overcoming primary pupils' challenges and enhancing their vocabulary skills. The related past studies highlighted the benefits of using game-based learning strategies which have been proven to be effective in enhancing primary pupils' vocabulary skills. The benefits including using game-based learning strategies can help primary pupils to gain learning experiences, create a fun, creative and cooperative learning environment in the classroom, attract primary pupils' attention and improve primary pupils' results in vocabulary learning. Therefore, this literature review will focus on the challenges encountered by primary pupils in learning vocabulary and benefits of using game-based learning strategies in enhancing primary pupils in learning vocabulary more effectively.

Research Objectives

- To identify the challenges encountered by primary pupils in learning vocabulary.
- To identify the benefits of using game-based learning strategies in enhancing primary pupils' vocabulary learning.

Research Questions

- What are the challenges encountered by primary pupils in learning vocabulary?
- What are the benefits of using game-based learning strategies in enhancing primary pupils' vocabulary learning?

Literature Review

This chapter will provide an integrated overview of the study as it will explain briefly the broad bodies of literature that have relevance for the research problem. Then, the history of the area of the study will be enlightened from the theories, methods and results stated by previous researchers in the field.

Teaching and Learning of Vocabulary

Vocabulary has an important role in English language learning. This is because it links the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing together. In fact, many primary pupils have low vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, to be well-versed in the target language, pupils should have sufficient vocabularies and apply them appropriately. According to Indriyani and Sugirin (2019), vocabulary is imperative to be acquired by the learners. Recent studies in second and foreign language acquisition emphasised that second language speakers

should acquire a good foundation of vocabulary knowledge to become good users of English in all academic achievement (Viera, 2017).

With good vocabulary, pupils will be able to comprehend and express language in better form. In accordance to that, vocabulary is the basic component for language proficiency because it serves as the solid foundation for how well learners can listen, speak, read and write (Mashhadia & Jamalifar, 2015). Therefore, emphasis should be given to primary pupils in vocabulary learning as it is very important in the second language acquisition.

Challenges in Vocabulary Learning

Bakhsh (2016) mentioned that vocabulary acts as the most basic component of English language learning and it is a key element to learn any language. Undoubtedly, it is a challenging task for English language teachers to equip primary pupils with adequate vocabulary even though many teaching strategies have been used to assist them in learning vocabulary (Yunus et al., 2020). In addition, for an individual to master a language, the basics of words and meaning must first be attained. This is especially for young children as they acquire their first language. According to Conwell (2017), at the early stage of language acquisition, children will often deduce speech sounds with meanings from their experiences and surroundings. As these speech sounds and meanings are developed, children begin to gain conscience and understanding of words they learnt. Learning vocabulary helps primary pupils to know words and use them in the correct context. Primary pupils must acquire vocabulary skill in order to get other skills; mainly listening, speaking, reading and writing.

On the other hand, Hussin et al. (2016) stated in their studies that primary pupils in Malaysia often struggle to acquire the language skills in language learning due to their limited knowledge in vocabulary. However, even though pupils realise the importance of vocabulary, most of them find it challenging to acquire this skill due to the difficulties in remembering and retaining the new vocabularies learned. In fact, lack of vocabulary skill and active participation from primary pupils are some of the challenges required to be taken into consideration by teachers in boosting primary pupils' vocabulary (Yunus, Kiing & Salehi, 2013). For a primary pupil, acquiring vocabulary might be one of the concerns they face. Hence, the use of suitable teaching approaches to overcome this issue is imperative.

Moreover, within the Malaysian context, the teaching and learning process of vocabulary in the English language begins as early as Primary 1 and onwards to Primary 6 (Ministry of Education, 2017). The English language textbook has been the main source to teach and learn vocabulary through the different language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. One of the criteria to teach and learn vocabulary highlighted in the Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) is that after the six years of primary schooling, pupils will be able to talk to peers and adults confidently and appropriately in any situations. Furthermore, they are also expected to be able to read and understand a range of English texts for information and enjoyment (Ministry of Education, 2017). The use of English language textbooks as the main source to teach and learn vocabulary has demotivated primary pupils to remember the vocabularies learned. They have no interest in remembering the vocabularies. In addition to that, they find learning vocabularies boring and thus, they often give up in remembering the vocabularies. In short, primary pupils found vocabulary learning challenging due to the limited resources provided for them to learn vocabulary.

Throughout the English language syllabus, the teaching and learning of vocabularies only focus on the use of drilling or using flashcards by decoding, pronouncing and develop

connection to the related spoken words (Taylor, Greenberg & Terry, 2016). Although the drilling strategy or using flashcards may work in certain occasions, in the long run, this strategy may not be sufficient to maintain the momentum of the teaching and learning of vocabulary in the aspect of learners' interest, mood and motivation. In fact, the use of drilling method failed to arouse primary pupils' interest to learn vocabulary. They found learning vocabulary boring and they sighed whenever they were drilled to read and spell the vocabulary. On the other hand, as asserted by Nie and Li (2017) as well as Rachmawati (2018), various strategies must be employed to teach and learn vocabularies effectively especially for primary pupils. With only one strategy highlighted in the DSKP, learners do not receive adequate exposure to the learning of vocabulary. The teaching and learning of vocabulary must not be taken lightly as the vocabularies are among the high frequency words. These high frequency words are in the list of words that are compulsory for learners to master before proceeding to a higher level of English language learning (Ministry of Education, 2018). Therefore, there is a need to implement a systematic teaching and learning strategy in order to enhance the primary pupils in vocabulary learning.

Benefits of Using Game-Based Learning Strategies

The application of games can assist the learning activities that teachers bring into their classroom. Taghizadeh et al. (2017) mentioned that the application of games enables primary pupils to learn vocabulary better than using conventional ways. Furthermore, Shahriarpour and Kafi (2014) stated that using games makes primary pupils participate actively in this 21st century technological society. Undeniably, according to Takeuchi and Vaala (2014), playing games which are educational to primary pupils would give a chance for them to experience a more positive and encouraging learning environment. Game-based learning strategies allow learners to accomplish a goal through multiple levels of actions and they will gain learning experiences from these actions. Especially in the context of the learning of vocabulary, there were various past studies conducted using game-based strategies. One of the prominent studies was conducted by Saeed and Ghayour (2017) through the introduction of a computerised game called "Fun Spelling". Results from the study proved that by employing the "Fun Spelling" game, learners were able to categorise, differentiate and comprehend the different types of vocabularies in a fun way. On the other hand, learners were also found to be amused with the game which served as a source of motivation in learning the spelling of vocabulary effectively. In addition, Pomerantz and Bell (2007) also stated that introducing educational games to pupils would create a fun and creative environment in the classroom. In fact, these elements are utterly important, especially in the case of language learning sessions where learners could easily lose their concentration due to short attention span. This is commonly seen during long periods of second language learning classes. Thus, using language learning games that contain detailed linguistic contents can be helpful. In short, this can also motivate pupils who are driven by external component by using these games in proper contexts (Jan & Gaydos, 2016).

Moreover, past researchers also believed that games can help teachers to create various meaningful contexts in which pupils can apply the usage of the language for communication in terms of exchanging information and expressing their own ideas especially in the spelling of new vocabularies (Derakhshan & Khatir, 2015). Therefore, it is evident that by combining learning and playing through games and using other technologies in their learning environments, great impacts on pupils can be seen in their learning process. In addition, Hidayat (2016) clearly stated that the games used are always pupil-centered and

they can be enhanced to be in sync with the learning objectives, age of learners as well as the children's level of proficiency. This is supported by another distinct game-based learning vocabulary activity which was conducted by Shabaneh and Farrah (2019). In their study, the learners were exposed with learning vocabulary through games to improve their reading and spelling on the vocabularies. Findings showed that the learners were able to enjoy while learning and showed great improvements. In short, through vocabulary games, learners will be more enthusiastic in learning vocabulary as games provide a multimedia context that engages the learners in vocabulary and key sentences.

Besides, the usage of games is also effective in learning vocabulary because they usually involve friendly competition among learners and create a cooperative learning environment for the pupils (Calvo-Ferrer, 2015). While playing the game, pupils interact with each other and as a result, they will have better acquisition of language vocabulary (Pirrie, 2017). This is also supported by Yunus, Salehi and Amini (2016) that by using different strategies in teaching vocabulary, it can help to contribute to enhance primary pupils' vocabulary development. Moreover, in a research conducted by Akdogan (2017) on the effects of games in vocabulary acquisition, it showed that pupils who learned through games scored significantly better than the others who used different means of practising vocabulary. In fact, through vocabulary game, it will help in developing the pupils' interpersonal skills and their vocabulary. They will be encouraged to speak confidently in the target language which will eventually help to promote their speaking skill as well.

On the other hand, according to Liu and Liu (2015), pupils also claim that games are appealing and can assist them in developing their vocabulary skills. Games have been employed by educators for centuries in education. Traditional games such as chess, *shogi* and checkers had been implemented way back in the days to teach strategic thinking, analytical skills, leadership skills and sharpens concentration (Sousa & Rocha, 2019). Thus, using games in teaching vocabulary is more attractive for children and can motivate them to improve their English vocabulary. In fact, games help young learners to learn vocabulary with more motivation than traditional teaching ways.

Last but not least, findings from the studies conducted on the game-based learning strategies in vocabulary learning had shown distinct and promising results. In the Malaysian education context, textbooks should not be the main source of reference for teachers and primary pupils. It is not sufficient in assisting primary pupils to learn vocabulary. The core concept of game-based strategies is to assist and teach primary pupils to learn through repetition, failure and achievement of goals. In addition, most game-based learning strategies are compatible with the education curriculum as learners are working towards a goal, selecting appropriate learning actions and experiencing the outcome of the learning actions (White & McCoy, 2019). This creates an active learning environment which allows learners to practise and learn vocabulary effectively. This is also supported by Bavi (2018) that pupils would be motivated to learn and memorise vocabularies in order to read, spell and know the meaning of the vocabulary through games. Hence, in order to cater to the limitations of the textbook, various game-based learning strategies can be used to enhance vocabulary learning among primary pupils.

Discussion

As aforementioned, this literature review discussed on the challenges encountered by primary pupils in vocabulary learning and the benefits of using of game-based learning strategies in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. This is mainly due to the issue

surrounding most primary pupils worldwide in acquiring an adequate amount of vocabularies to develop the other language skills. As a result, vocabulary skill is extremely important in this 21st century.

It is imperative to take into consideration the challenges encountered by primary pupils in learning vocabulary effectively. The challenges encountered by primary pupils include difficulties in remembering and retaining the new vocabularies learned, limited resources used to assist primary pupils' vocabulary learning and lack of motivation of the drilling method used in the teaching of vocabulary. On the other hand, different teaching approaches should be employed in enhancing the primary pupils' vocabulary learning such as using game-based learning strategies in the teaching and learning of vocabulary (Yunus et al., 2020). In addition, by knowing the benefits of using game-based learning strategies in vocabulary learning, English language teachers could choose suitable games in teaching vocabulary to primary pupils' and not depend solely on using English textbooks in teaching vocabulary (Shabaneh & Farrah, 2019).

Apart from that, it is vital to be aware of the benefits of using game-based learning strategies in the teaching and learning of vocabulary from related previous studies. By knowing the game-based learning strategies used by the other teachers, English language teachers would have more choices to choose the ones which are suitable for their own pupils (Yunus, Salehi & Amini, 2016). In fact, from the previous studies, using game-based learning strategies is always effective to cater the challenges faced by primary pupils and enhance their vocabulary skills. In addition, game-based learning strategies in this context would motivate primary pupils to learn more vocabularies. It will also engage the learners towards the goal of remembering the different vocabularies while attaining fun in learning through the given positive reinforcement (White & McCoy, 2019). Hence, teachers should know the challenges encountered by their learners and overcome their problems using suitable game-based learning strategies.

On the other hand, regarding the challenges encountered by primary pupils in the classroom, teachers should know the reasons causing it and select suitable teaching approaches in order to address their difficulties. In relation to this, English teachers should clearly express the need of vocabulary skills for primary pupils to have a deeper understanding towards the importance of having adequate vocabulary. In fact, they should encourage primary pupils to enhance their vocabulary skills by using the target language through game-based learning strategies.

Conclusion

Vocabulary acquisition, especially for young learners, is often found to be tedious and challenging. Hence, using appropriate methods for the teaching and learning of vocabulary is deemed crucial in order to help ease the knowledge acquisition among learners. The application of game-based learning strategies has recently encouraged researchers worldwide to examine which would fit their respective situations or learners best. In line with this, the integration of game-based strategies in vocabulary learning will definitely have huge impacts on vocabulary learning and acquisition among learners. In other words, this literature review clearly shows the efficacy of game-based learning methods among language learners. The results from previous researches and reviews confirmed that learners are able to benefit a lot from these learning methods as they show high potential to improve the learners' vocabulary competence and simultaneously, increase their level of English language proficiency as well.

This literature review discussed on the challenges encountered by primary pupils in vocabulary learning and the benefits of using of game-based learning strategies in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. It is important to identify the challenges encountered by primary pupils in vocabulary learning. By identifying the challenges faced by primary pupils in vocabulary learning, English language teachers would be able to choose the most appropriate teaching approaches to be used in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. In relation to this, English language teachers should be aware of the benefits in using game-based learning strategies in enhancing primary pupils' vocabulary learning so that suitable game-based learning strategies could be employed more effectively in the class. In short, based on the related past studies, game-based learning strategies could be employed by English language teachers in overcoming the challenges encountered by primary pupils in learning vocabulary more effectively.

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