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THE USE OF LANGUAGE GAMES  
IN TEACHING VOCABULARY

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DISERTASI YANG DIKEMUKAKAN INI UNTUK MEMENUHI  
SEBAHAGIAN DARIPADA SYARAT MEMPEROLEHI  
IJAZAH SARJANA PENDIDIKAN (TESL)

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this project is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Date : 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010

.....

JENNY VINCENT

M20071000140

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## ABSTRAK

Penggunaan permainan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran kosa kata telah menjadi penting dan terkenal. Peningkatan penggunaan permainan dalam pembelajaran kosa kata telah membuat kita menilai penggunaannya dalam pembelajaran. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kepentingan penggunaan pelbagai aktiviti dan permainan dalam menguasai kosa kata terhadap murid-murid Tahun 3, SK Methodist (ACS) Kampar, Perak. Kajian ini membantu dalam menilai betapa efektifnya penggunaan permainan dalam pembelajaran kosa kata dan ianya juga direka untuk mendapat jawapan untuk soalan yang berbunyi, "Adakah permainan membantu murid-murid dalam pembelajaran kosa kata, dan kalau ya, bagaimana?" Di samping itu, kajian ini juga dapat membantu dalam mengetahui sama ada penggunaan permainan dapat membantu murid-murid bersikap positif dan memberi motivasi kepada mereka terhadap pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Kajian ini juga dilaksanakan untuk mengkaji sejauh manakah penggunaan permainan dapat mengatasi masalah murid-murid terhadap mempelajari satu bahasa terutamanya dalam bidang kosa kata. Terdapat dua kumpulan murid yang dikaji iaitu kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan terkawal. Kedua-dua kumpulan ini diberi suatu ujian yang dikenali sebagai *pre-test*. Selepas itu, kumpulan eksperimen mempelajari satu senarai kosa kata melalui pelbagai aktiviti permainan. Manakala kumpulan terkawal mempelajari senarai kosa kata yang sama melalui proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang biasa dalam kelas. Setelah itu, kedua-dua kumpulan telah menduduki satu lagi ujian yang dikenali sebagai *post-test*. Keputusan markah yang diperolehi daripada kedua-dua ujian akan dibincang dan dibandingkan. Pelbagai maklumat juga telah diperolehi melalui soal-selidik. Keputusan menunjukkan yang penggunaan permainan dapat membantu pengajaran dan pembelajaran dengan baik. Permainan membantu murid-murid mengenali dan mengingati perkataan dengan lebih efektif berbanding dengan pembelajaran secara biasa dalam kelas seharian. Murid-murid mendapati permainan merupakan satu aktiviti yang menyeronokkan dan ia memotivasikan mereka untuk belajar dengan sikap yang positif.



## ABSTRACT

Using games in teaching and learning vocabulary has become prominent. The increased application of such a tool has called for the need to evaluate its educational value. The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games in Year Three classrooms in SK Methodist (ACS) Kampar, Perak. The study attempted to look into the effects of games on vocabulary learning and to investigate the answer to the question, “Do games help pupils learn vocabulary, and if so, how? The study was also designed to investigate whether using games could be effective tool in creating positive attitude and motivation in language learners. This study was also conducted to investigate to what extent using games could solve the unanticipated problems of the learners in learning a language especially in vocabulary area. The subjects in this study involved two groups, the experimental group and control group. Both groups took a pre-test. The experimental group learned a list of vocabulary through various activities using games. The control group also learned the same list through activities in a face-to-face learning lesson. Later, all the subjects took the post-test. The scores of the tests obtained by both groups were compared and discussed. Other information was also collected through a survey questionnaire. The results showed that games can be an effective means of instruction in learning vocabulary. Games help pupils remember the words learnt more effectively than face-to-face learning lessons. Pupils found games to be fun-filled and they were motivated to learn.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
L1	First Language
PKSR	<i>Penilaian Kendalian Sekolah Rendah</i>
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

In the era of globalization, English is becoming a dominant language. A mastery of English Language skills is considered essential because English is an important medium of communication. In order to master the language for the purpose of education or daily use vocabulary building plays an important role. In other words, the ability to communicate effectively hinges upon having an adequate vocabulary. Communication breaks down when people do not use the right words. The accuracy and clarity of our message depends on the words we use.

Vocabulary acquisition is increasingly viewed as crucial to language acquisition. However, there is much disagreement as to the effectiveness of different approaches for presenting vocabulary items. Moreover, learning vocabulary is often perceived as a tedious and laborious process. Vocabulary should be taught in a memorable way. As words are the most important tools, vocabulary development must be an important and ongoing part of classroom learning. Pupils should be frequently exposed to the words

through different activities such as games, songs, poems, exercises, classroom use and testing.

This study investigated the effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games. Pupils usually feel bored in vocabulary lessons because they have not changed their learning habits, such as writing words on paper, trying to learn by heart or learning passively through the teacher's explanations. Thus, it was for the purpose to help pupils find language classes, especially vocabulary lessons more interesting, and to achieve more from games that this study was carried out.

There is no doubt that unfamiliar vocabulary can hinder learning. According to Newton (2001:30), coming across with unfamiliar vocabulary is among the obvious and expected challenges faced by language learners using the target language in communication outside the classroom, whether for work, travel or recreation, when using the media, or in academic contexts. Newton (2001:30) states mastering vocabulary is not easy because vocabulary is one major problem for learners. Mastering vocabulary is the basic unit of language form. Without sufficient vocabulary, one cannot communicate or express ideas effectively. Having a limited vocabulary is also a barrier that prevents pupils from learning a language. If the pupils do not know how to expand their vocabulary, they gradually lose interest in learning.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

In the educational environment, teachers as change agents are the school's greatest assets as good teachers produce good pupils. In order to confront the challenges surrounding English language teaching, there is a need to understand teachers and to prepare activities that suits their language teaching needs. Just as Ambigapathy (2001) stated,

The teaching profession in the new millennium has taken a more challenging task. In order to breed students those are knowledgeable and informed, teachers require more than the traditional teaching method.

(Ambigapathy 2001:37)

In this light, the use of various methods in teaching and learning has become increasingly prominent and popular. Among all these methods, games are also can be used as an alternative way of teaching and learning English. It is undeniable that the use of games is indeed worth looking into. Many researchers have started to turn their attention to this matter. A study conducted by Wood (2001) was an example of investigating the importance of the use of games as an effective learning tool. She has brought the attention to the potential benefits of games for vocabulary learning. She has also drawn the conclusion that game-like formats can be more effective at capturing attention than traditional media such as textbooks.

Besides, research conducted by Lee (1979), shows that games play an important role, specifically in second language learning. It also functions as a motivational tool that will help pupils to learn the language in a more fun and enjoyable way. This research also suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading towards the goal of improving learners' communicative competence.

According to Abdul Rashid Mohamed in *Pendidik* (2008:45), in Malaysia it is a common knowledge that pupils would normally be interested in learning anything if the process of learning is enjoyable. Thus, it would be logical to assume that pupils' enjoyment of their English lessons might be contributing factor in their process to acquire the language and finally to be competent in the language. He says that judging from teachers' grouses and the examination results one would be inclined to believe that most of Malaysian pupils did not find their English lessons enjoyable. He adds by saying that the solution to this problem would be to make the English lessons more enjoyable. Since games can be considered as universally appealing, therefore, the application of games to learn vocabulary is gaining acceptance in education. However, the application is still at the early stage of implementation. This is similar to the school where the study had been conducted. It is hoped that this study shed light on the extent to which vocabulary games can help pupils to learn vocabulary. The learning of English is a foreign and second language in our schools is very complex. The majority of the pupils are not well motivated. The learning of English in our schools is further hampered and interfered by the pupils' mother tongue and the various dialects. Therefore, games seem to be one of the most effective and familiar strategy to provide motivation to the pupils and a sense of

play that brain research and teacher experience indicate can enhance both learning and memory. It is also used to create a setting for second language acquisition. Games can provide readily adaptable structures in which the ideas of the pupils can experience growth gradually within the experience of the game and the shelter of its format.

## 1.2 Need of the Study

In learning second language learning classrooms, pupils might encounter with a number of problems in learning vocabulary. It was found that the pupils in SK Methodist (ACS) Kampar had difficulty comprehending what they read. As a result, they did not achieve good results in their examination.

It was identified that a major cause of this difficulty was the lack of understanding of words and lack of vocabulary skills among the pupils. The pupils usually feel bored in vocabulary lessons because they have not changed their learning habits, such as writing words on paper, trying to learn by heart or learning passively through the teacher's explanations.

To achieve these aims, pupils needed to have an adequate knowledge of vocabulary. Therefore, pupils who learn vocabulary through games performed better than those who learn by the traditional method. This study hoped to examine the use of games activities could retain pupils' attention longer and create more motivation towards learning a language as compared to the not using games. The pupils were taught vocabulary in a more interesting way by exposing them to games in classroom.



### 1.3 Statement of Problem

In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing altogether. In order to communicate well in a foreign language, pupils should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately. Even though pupils realize the importance of vocabulary when learning language, most pupils learn vocabulary passively due to several factors. First, they consider the teacher's explanation for meaning or definition, pronunciation, spelling and grammatical functions were boring. Second, pupils only think of vocabulary learning as knowing the primary meaning of new words. Third, pupils usually only acquire new vocabulary through new words in their textbooks or when given by teachers during classroom lessons.

In recent years, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been applied and it has shown its effectiveness in teaching and learning language. The CLT approach helps pupils to be more active in real life situations through the means of individual, pair and group work activities. It encourages pupils to practice the language they learn in meaningful ways. In a CLT classroom, playing vocabulary games is one of the activities which require pupils to actively communicate with their classmates, using their own language. Thus, this present study is on the effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games for Year Three pupils in SK Methodist (ACS) Kampar. Therefore, the researcher began to examine whether games could help pupils learn vocabulary effectively and how it was conducted.



The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. Can teaching using games be considered as an effective means of instruction in learning vocabulary?
2. How and to what extent can using games solve attitude and motivation problems of the pupils towards learning a language specifically in vocabulary area?
3. How and to what extent can using games solve the unanticipated problems of the pupils towards learning a language specifically in vocabulary area?

#### 1.4 Purpose and Objective of the Study

Games play a significant role in motivating pupils to learn English. The main purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of using language games in vocabulary learning. Therefore, this study was driven by the following objectives which were:

1. To examine whether using games can be an effective means of instruction in learning vocabulary.
2. To examine whether the games method can solve attitude and motivation problems of the pupils towards learning a language specifically in vocabulary area.
3. To examine whether the games method can solve the unanticipated problems of the pupils towards learning a language specifically in vocabulary area.



## 1.5 Significance of the Study

Experienced teachers of English as a second language know very well how important vocabulary is. They know pupils must learn thousands of words that speakers and writers of English use. Vocabulary learning requires a very complex task. It has not been given enough attention and emphasis to make the subject area the main focus in language learning.

For many years, however, programs that prepare language teachers gave little attention to techniques for helping pupils learn vocabulary. Some books appeared to be telling teachers that pupils could learn all the words they needed without help. In fact, teachers were sometimes told that they ought to teach many words before their pupils had mastered the grammar and the sound system of the language. In journal articles for teachers, vocabulary was seldom mentioned. Pronunciation and grammar were emphasized, but there was little or no emphasize on vocabulary.

It is strongly felt that by using games pupils can improve their vocabulary. This study was targeted for the pupils of the primary school. The study might help these pupils to extend their vocabulary and to develop confidence through active participation, communicate effectively and enjoy learning the English Language. Through this study, language learning can be fun-filled and entertaining. Ersoz (2000) points out those games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication. Nevertheless, well chosen games are invaluable as they give pupils a break and at the same time allow pupils to practice language skills.



The result of this study would be useful for educators of all levels in teaching and learning in the context of Malaysian classroom. It might also interest headmasters who might be keen to discover if games can be used effectively in their school. The study would provide feedback to both teachers and parents on the progress of their children's vocabulary. This study hopefully will help teachers to find ways in minimizing the problem of learning English lexis among pupils and propose other alternative in teaching by using games.

## 1.6 Limitations of the Study

There are certain factors that limit this study. They are as outlined below:

- (a) The study was carried out in a school with only 30 pupils from Year Three. As the sample was small, it may not present an overall view of the effectiveness of using games as an effective method in improving vocabulary. Thus, the result may not be conclusive.
- (b) The experimental group, which is selected randomly, may include those pupils who do not love games. This might affect their vocabulary learning using games.
- (c) Another issue which needs to be mentioned is the time constraint. The time constraint did not allow the researcher to intensively focus on a bigger scale.



## 1.7 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were used extensively.

### 1.7.1 Vocabulary

Broadly defined by Kamil & Hiebert in press, vocabulary is knowledge of words and word meanings. However, vocabulary is more complex than this definition suggests. First, words come in two forms: oral and print. Oral vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in listening and speaking. Print vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in reading and writing. Second, word knowledge also comes in two forms, receptive and productive. Receptive vocabulary includes words that we recognize when we hear or see them. Productive vocabulary includes words that we recognize when we use when we speak or write. Receptive vocabulary is typically larger than productive vocabulary, and may include many words to which we assign some meaning, even if we don't know their full definitions and connotations – or ever use them ourselves as we speak and write (Kamil & Hiebert, in press). For purposes of this study, vocabulary has been defined as knowledge of words and word meanings in both oral and print language and in productive and receptive forms.

### 1.7.2 Game

A game is a competitive activity in which participants can aim for something to achieve while a set of predefined rules. It is a form of entertainment and recreation with the intention of amusement and enjoyment. Games may be designed for a single player or for a group of any number of people and may develop into a social activity. The application of using games in this study is for the purpose of teaching some aspects of language, that is, vocabulary.

Jones (1998) says that a language game is used to refer to any activity which is used to consolidate language already taught or acquired, and which occurs during the free-stage of a lesson, whenever there is an element of competition between pupils. In the TESL Journal (2000), the term *game* is seen as role-play, case-study and simulation with the addition meaning, used as a learning vehicle which is interactive and only minimally teacher-controlled. From the above views gathered and analyzed, we can conclude that language games are activities with clear defined learning goals in which players compete or co-operate to achieve the goals within a set of rules.



## 1.8 Summary

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of using games in vocabulary learning. The objectives of the study were to determine whether using games could be an effective means of learning vocabulary and foster positive attitude and motivation towards learning.

This study attempted to help pupils to improve their vocabulary through games. The objectives of the study are to examine the use of language games in vocabulary learning and compare them with some traditional techniques in teaching vocabulary, in order to determine whether they are more successful in teaching vocabulary than other methods. The researcher hopes that the fun-filling games and a conducive environment will certainly help the pupils to empower more vocabulary and thus improve their



language skills.



There are more to be discussed in the next chapters. In Chapter 2, the related literature review on the use of language games in vocabulary learning was discussed. The research methodology was discussed in Chapter 3 which included the research design, population and sample, instruments, procedure, technique of data collection and method of data analysis. The contents of Chapter 4 included profile of respondents and research findings. As for the final chapter, research summary, discussion of research findings, conclusion of research findings, implications of research findings and recommendations for further research were discussed in detail.

