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**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO TEACH
VOCABULARY AMONG LOWER SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS : A CASE STUDY**

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DECLARATION

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



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of using authentic materials to teach vocabulary. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The samples (N=60) comprised of two classes of Form Two students. The students in the experimental group were taught using authentic materials to learn vocabulary while the students in the control group were taught using the conventional method. The students were administered a pre-test to assess the initial vocabulary levels of the students and two weeks later a post test to assess the vocabulary development. Data collected revealed that the students in the experimental group had higher achievement than the students in the control group. The difference between the two groups were statistically significant. This indicated that students acquired more vocabulary through exposure to authentic materials in the teaching of English. Thus it is recommended that various authentic materials be used during the English lesson to make the lesson more interesting and to achieve better performance among the students.





ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat keberkesanan penggunaan bahan-bahan asal (surat khabar, resipi, permainan, iklan dan lagu) untuk mengajar perbendaharaan kata. Data kuantitatif telah dikumpul dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan Perisian Program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Sampel ($n=60$) terdiri daripada dua kumpulan murid dari Tingkatan Dua. Kumpulan experimental diajar dengan menggunakan bahan-bahan asal sementara kumpulan kawalan diajar dengan menggunakan cara traditional untuk menguasai perbendaharaan kata. Ujian Pra dan Pasca diberi untuk menguji perbendaharaan kata yang sedia ada dan yang dikuasai. Data yang dikumpul menunjukkan bahawa para pelajar dari kumpulan eksperimen mempunyai pencapaian yang lebih tinggi daripada para pelajar dari kumpulan kawalan. Perbezaan di antara dua kumpulan ini adalah signifikan secara statistik. Ini menunjukkan para pelajar memperoleh lebih perbendaharaan kata melalui penggunaan bahan asal dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Dengan itu disyorkan pelbagai bahan asal digunakan semasa pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris supaya pelajaran ini menjadi lebih menarik dan para pelajar memperoleh pencapaian yang lebih tinggi.





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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Experience teaches us, and research abundantly confirms, the indispensable role that words play in human communication. Without words, language for us would be reduced to mere discourse of iconic gestures and symbols. This dependency on the lexicon requires that even a novice communicator in a language amass a repertoire of thousands of words. Estimates indicate that the average adult native speaker of English possesses knowledge of from 17,000 to over 40,000 (Nagy & Herman, 1987) (cited in Hermann, 2003) base words. It is further estimated that a second language learner of English must acquire a minimum of 3,000 base words to be capable of reading unsimplified text with some degree of comprehension (Nation, 1990) (cited in Hermann, 2003). Building and maintaining a large word stock is such an essential part of achieving proficiency in a language.

For a number of years, the teaching of vocabulary was neglected in language classrooms despite the importance that learners attach to the task of building and maintaining an adequate vocabulary. It could be argued than in second language context, as opposed to foreign language context, the initial stages of language learning should be devoted almost entirely to vocabulary work (Nunan, 1991).





Hussin, Maarof, and D'Cruz (2000) in their study found that although the drill-and-practice approach had some advantage in language teaching, it however did not help the student to master the language in the long run. They found that students, who became good test-takers, were not able to speak and write competently when they graduated from high schools. The result was that when students left school, they were actually far from being able to read unsimplified English which they were expected to read. The gap between the academic English that they were now expected to understand and the simplified English that they had been taught was too great.

Ratnawati Mohd Asraf and Ismail Sheik Ahmad (2003) found that Malaysian rural school students lacked basic vocabulary in English to be able to respond to reading tests or tests of vocabulary. Because of their lack of exposure to English, many students are not able to use the language beyond the word level. This was based on their knowledge, gained through their experience as teacher educators, and based on study that they had conducted on the teaching and learning of English.

Rivers (1983) (cited in Nunan, 1991) argued that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary was essential for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary we would be unable to use the structures and functions we might have learned for comprehension communication.

What was more important was that teachers realized that given an environment where the English language input was limited and non-conducive to learning the target language, teachers needed to find creative ways to teach the language especially vocabulary through the use of authentic materials to increase the student's motivation to learn the language and to eventually appreciate and use it in daily life.





1.1 The Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the effectiveness of using authentic materials to teach vocabulary. This study also determined if students actually learned any vocabulary from the use of authentic materials.

1.2 Need for The Study

It was found that students in Government residential secondary schools (gifted students) in Malaysia performed well in their academic subjects but were below par in English (Frankland, 2004). The same problem existed in many other schools apart from residential schools. Many students had difficulty comprehending what they read.

As a result they did not achieve good grades in their exam. The analysis of PMR 2004 results showed that students of SMK St Anne's Convent in Kulim Kedah achieved 100% passes in all the subjects except for Mathematics and English. The February monthly test in 2005 administered to Form 2 students of the same school (SMK St. Anne's Convent) yielded the same result. However, students achieved only 46% passes in English.

It was found that a major cause of this difficulty is the lack of understanding of words. Most of the students' language learning were based on the textbooks or materials the teacher used in terms of content and teaching technique. The dependency on the texts books had created a climate for socially isolated learning among students due to heavy emphasis on grammar. They contained information-centered exercises such as repetition, pattern practice drills, gap-filling and grammatical transformation (Cook, 1998).





This study hoped to find out if students' vocabulary could be enhanced through the exposure to authentic materials. The aim of teaching English language for secondary schools in Malaysia was to enable learners to use the language to further their studies, for work purposes and to enable learners to access knowledge on the internet and to network with people both locally and overseas. To achieve these aims students needed to have an adequate knowledge of vocabulary. Knowledge of vocabulary is related strongly to reading comprehension. This study hoped to examine how authentic materials assisted in learning of vocabulary or facilitated vocabulary learning.

As authentic materials are interesting, easily available and keep students informed about what is happening in the world, it is hoped that the findings of this study will help policy makers to think of other materials which are cost-effective, interesting and easily available so that classroom activities become preparation for real life scenarios, in line with the idea of democratization in education. The students' success in school and beyond depends in great measure upon their ability to read with comprehension. Thus, there is an urgency to providing instruction that equips students with the skills and strategies necessary for lifelong vocabulary development.

1.3 Statement of The Problem

This study investigated the problem of teaching vocabulary effectively in the classroom. The language proficiency of the students in SMK St Anne's Convent in Kedah was low. This was because they have limited vocabulary knowledge. Thus, they found it difficult to understand reading texts. As a result, they did not do well in





examinations as well as class tests. Many teachers were found to be emphasizing on grammatical exercises to meet the needs of the examinations and neglecting vocabulary. It was found that teachers use textbooks and workbooks most of the time. Thus, students were not motivated to learn English. Students require a break from the monotony of examination-format exercises through short, fun-filled activities, which at the same time would reinforce items learned. It was hoped that the use of authentic materials would motivate and enhance students' vocabulary so that they would be able to comprehend written texts and use the language both inside and outside of the classroom.



1.4 Research Questions



The study investigated the following question:

1. Do students learn more vocabulary through exposure to authentic materials or through the use of the text book and handouts in the classroom?

1.5 Hypotheses

Based on the research question, the following are the null and alternative hypotheses formulated for this study:

H_{01} : There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of students who are taught vocabulary through exposure to authentic materials





and students who are taught vocabulary through the use of the textbook and handouts.

H_{a1}: There is a statistically significant difference between the performance of students who are taught vocabulary through exposure to authentic materials and the performance of students who are taught vocabulary through the use of the textbook and handouts.

1.6 Definition of terms

Authentic Materials.

Nunan (1989) (cited in Taylor, 1994) defines authentic materials as any materials which has not been specifically produced for the purpose of language learning purposes.

Vocabulary.

Lehr and Osborn (2004) define vocabulary as knowledge of words and word meanings in both oral and print language and in productive and receptive forms.





Grammar

Fromkin and Rodman (1998) define grammar as the mental representation of a speaker's linguistic competence; what a speaker knows about a language, including its phonology, morphology, syntax, semantic and lexicon.

Lexicon

The list of words and morphemes stored in a native speaker's memory (Finegan, 2004).

