

**THE IMPACT OF PICTORIAL VOCABULARY
LEARNING MODEL ON LOWER
SECONDARY ESL STUDENTS
IN PENANG, MALAYSIA**

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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THE IMPACT OF PICTORIAL VOCABULARY LEARNING MODEL ON
LOWER SECONDARY ESL STUDENTS IN
PENANG, MALAYSIA

NURUL HANNA BINTI HAMSAN



05-4506832



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Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah



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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impacts of the Malaysian-Based Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model (MBPVLM) on lower secondary ESL students' vocabulary learning. The mixed-methods research approach, specifically, the quasi-experimental research design was employed. The instruments used were the Pre-Test, Post-Test, Student Feedback Form and Semi-Structured Interview. Using convenience sampling, 60 Form 2 students from two secondary schools in Penang were selected for the study. 30 students were placed in the Experimental Group and another 30 in the Control Group. The scores gained from both Pre and Post-test were analysed by using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test as quantitative data. The qualitative data from the semi-structured student's interview was transcribed and analysed by using thematic analysis. The results based on the descriptive statistics depicts the percentage of improvement for experimental and control group are 141.05% and 122.78%. Based on the inferential statistics, the results of independent sample t-test are ($t=.947$, $df=17.90$, $p>.05$). This insignificant statistic score shows that the pre-test scores for both the control and experimental groups' participants are almost similar. From the semi-structured student's interview, the experimental group learners favoured Learning Mode 4 (Text-Picture-Sound Mode) whereas the pictorial elements in Mode 2 and Mode 4 allowed learners to take greater strides in improving their learning and understanding of the target vocabulary compared to Mode 1 and Mode 3 respectively. Based on the results, this model succeeds in improving the learner's learning of vocabulary. The study brings about pedagogical implications on the teaching of vocabulary among lower secondary school students in ESL context.





IMPAK MODEL PEMBELAJARAN PERBENDAHARAAN KATA BERGAMBAR PADA PELAJAR ESL MENENGAH RENDAH DI PULAU PINANG, MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat kesan Model Pembelajaran Perbendaharaan Kata Bergambar Berasaskan Malaysia (MBPVLM) terhadap pembelajaran kosa kata pelajar ESL Menengah Rendah. Pendekatan penyelidikan kaedah campuran, khususnya, reka bentuk penyelidikan kuasi-eksperimen telah digunakan. Instrumen yang digunakan ialah Ujian Pra, Ujian Pasca, Borang Maklum Balas Pelajar dan Temu Bual Separa Berstruktur. Menggunakan persampelan mudah, 60 pelajar Tingkatan 2 dari dua sekolah menengah di Pulau Pinang telah dipilih untuk kajian ini. Seramai 30 orang pelajar ditempatkan dalam Kumpulan Eksperimen dan separuh lagi dalam Kumpulan Kawalan. Markah yang diperoleh daripada kedua-dua ujian Pra dan Pasca dianalisis dengan menggunakan statistik deskriptif, ujian-t sampel bebas dan ujian-t sampel berpasangan sebagai data kuantitatif. Data kualitatif daripada temu bual pelajar separa berstruktur telah ditranskripsi dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis tematik. Keputusan berdasarkan statistik deskriptif menggambarkan peratusan peningkatan bagi kumpulan eksperimen dan kawalan ialah 141.05% dan 122.78%. Berdasarkan statistik inferensi, keputusan ujian-t sampel bebas ialah ($t=.947$, $df=17.90$, $p>.05$). Skor statistik yang tidak signifikan ini menunjukkan bahawa markah ujian pra bagi kedua-dua peserta kumpulan kawalan dan eksperimen adalah hampir serupa. Daripada temu bual pelajar separa berstruktur, pelajar kumpulan eksperimen menggemari Mod Pembelajaran 4 (Mod Teks-Gambar-Bunyi) manakala elemen bergambar dalam Mod 2 dan Mod 4 membantu pelajar dalam meningkatkan pembelajaran dan pemahaman mereka tentang perbendaharaan kata sasaran berbanding dengan Mod 1 dan Mod 3. Berdasarkan keputusan, model ini berjaya meningkatkan pembelajaran kosa kata pelajar. Kajian ini membawa implikasi pedagogi terhadap pengajaran kosa kata dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah rendah dalam konteks ESL.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
KBSM	Integrated Secondary School Curriculum
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
M	Mean Score
MBPVL	Malaysian-Based Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model
MMLT	Multimedia Learning Theory
MOE	Malaysian Ministry of Education
MySTIE	Malaysian Science, Technology, Innovation, and Economy
ODL	Open-Distance Learning
PT3	Form 3 Assessment
QE	Quasi-Experimental
RO	Research Objective
RQ	Research Questions
SAMR	Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition
SBELC	Standards-Based English Language Curriculum
SD	Standard Deviation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPV 2030	Shared Prosperity Vision 2030



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction



Instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) both place a significant emphasis on vocabulary acquisition as one of its basic tenets. Every student has to amass a significant vocabulary to compose and build sentences that are semantically correct. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), as this study focuses on learners at the range of A2 to B1, their range of vocabulary should be at the 2000-word level, at the very least. Learners of English learn English vocabulary via a number of means, such as through self-discovery or through formal educational settings. The growth of the learners' vocabulary knowledge is significantly influenced by a number of important elements, such the availability of resources and a supportive environment. Because of this, there are a number of different methods that are particularly designed





to help students improve their vocabulary in school. Utilising visual assistance, making inferences based on the context, and semantic mapping are all examples of these tactics. The several approaches of acquiring vocabulary that are shown here may either be taught extrinsically or intrinsically, depending on the requirements of the students and the students' level of competence.

Early exposure to English is very important as it is crucial for learners to acquire English language at an early age as English is a global language that is used not only in the level of primary and secondary school but also in the tertiary level of education. As Malaysian children go through a rigorous and regulated process of learning English throughout the course of their eleven years of education, their school experiences have a significant impact on the level of English comprehension that they attain by the time they graduate. Research by Tahir et al. (2020) and Kashinathan and Azlina (2021) have clearly shown that one of the main factors that play into the students' poor command over the English language is their lack of vocabulary. This is supplemented by recent research in which it is stated that vocabulary is very important for those who seek to master a language, which in this case, is English (Susanto, 2017). Furthermore, the importance of having a solid foundation in vocabulary as stated by Misbah et al. (2017) is crucial for lacking it impedes the progress of students in acquiring the four basic skills pertaining to the English language.

The lacking capabilities of students in the vocabulary is exacerbated by the lack of reading materials (Hazita, Normazidah, & Koo, 2012). This, combined with the sheer lack of exposure of the English language in use in conducting day-to-day





tasks is translated into reduced capabilities to transmit the meanings that they intend in communicating and writing (Heidari, 2019).

When learners participate in meaningful learning, they are able to develop new literacy skills. In addition, the components of education in the 21st century include the introduction and gradual incorporation of technology into the teaching and learning process in order to accommodate and cater to tech technologically savvy younger generation, as well as a definite emphasis on learning that is focused on the student in accordance to the introduction of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. However, research by Ebrahimi and Yeo (2018) and Tahir et al. (2020) has shown that the level of technological implementation in schools in Malaysia are still on the low side even though the perception of teachers and students on the use of Information and Computer Technology in school for teaching and learning purposes alike indicate quite the opposite. However, there are many reasons for this, such as the lack of proper facilities and equipment such as the lack of a modem, computer labs, few computers, outdated equipment, poor WIFI connection, as well as some of the more senior teaching staff who are unable to keep up with the advancements of technology serves to discourage the use of technology, with some teachers even seeing it as a waste of time to learn and set up, not to mention the bias against video games in the classroom (Yong & Halim, 2021).

The use of digital technology is of great importance and significance to vocabulary learning, because it allows for the use of additional resources such as pictures, visual and auditory elements without the hassle of preparing them individually. This is observed in the use of the MBPVLM, which seamlessly





combines pictorial elements and sound effects with textual information simply to serve the singular purpose of improving vocabulary learning, without having to print out pictures and prepare audio devices separately, allowing vocabulary learning to take place in a simple package without major inconveniences and preparations. Furthermore, theories such as the Multimedia Learning Theory as explained in Chapter 2 attests to the importance of being able to access multiple streams of information from as many channels as possible, which becomes comprehensible input to improve the rate of vocabulary learning.

However, the recent emergence of the global pandemic known as Covid-19 can be seen as a timely opportunity to revive the integration of technology into pedagogy, albeit out of necessity, not of choice. In the case of this research, this is the perfect opportunity to introduce the MBPVLM that has been specifically designed to enhance the learning and understanding of vocabulary Lower-Secondary Malaysian ESL students, which in the context of this research, is represented by Form 2 students.

1.2 Background of the Study

All Malaysian schools are required by the 1996 Malaysian Education Act to provide English as a Second Language classes to students. Even so, as English is neither the national language nor the mother tongue to most Malaysians, it is rarely used for communication outside the ESL classroom and schools. This infrequent use of the English language by the students is both the cause and result of their lacking proficiency in English. To remedy this, it is imperative that the learning of English





vocabulary must be emphasised by English teachers due to its status as a second language in Malaysia (Oscarini & Bhakti, 2018; Wulandari, 2019).

One of the main causes for the lacking proficiency of the students in English vocabulary stems from the fact that they do not have the habit of reading English material, which could help is acquiring new vocabulary (Bi,2020) and understanding the meaning of new words from the context derived from the reading material ((TagerFlusberg, 2015). It is by fostering understanding of individual words and phrases that allows them to expand their understanding to entire sentences, paragraphs and the whole text (Rahayuningsih, 2020). A number of recent research relevant to this in which one by Zakaria, Azmi, and Hadi (2019) clearly proves that there is a positive correlation between reading and improvement in student's learning of English vocabulary, as well as the English language as a whole. However, if students can't understand what they're reading, then there is little to no improvement.

However, this problem cannot be resolved by simply having more students read books, or provide more English reading material. This is because while mastering vocabulary is necessary for the students being able to understand and like what they are reading, reading is also what helps them foster their proficiency in vocabulary (Susanto 2017). The ability to understand context and derive the meaning of the words from the context allows students to comprehend what they are reading, and therefore, the more they read, the more words they are able to acquire and understand (Fitria, 2019). Providing English language reading material is useless if the students do not care to read it, nor do they understand it. All of this recent research





and studies have proven true the statement of Yildirim (2008) in that reading is beneficial to the students' acquisition and understanding of vocabulary.

Aside from students lacking English vocabulary that hinders them from being able to understand English reading material well, which prevents them from learning more vocabulary, the Malaysian students' attitude towards reading English material itself is a matter of much worry. According to Inderjit, 2014, Malaysian students tend to read simply for the purpose of their studies and fulfilment of academic goals, rather than for leisure, entertainment and other studies. Furthermore, a previous study by Ambigapathy (1997) in which he states that just because a person fully capable of reading and understanding English texts doesn't mean that he uses it to a significant degree, and that a large group of perfectly literate people tend to prefer to watch television, listen to the radio and play games over reading. This proves that Malaysian students do not just have a lacking enthusiasm towards reading English material, but towards the habit of reading itself. He also states that while some games have English content, the English in these games are catered to game situations and many terms are either used in a fictional or fantasy context, and thus see little to no use in actual, real-life situations. Moreover, there is also no guarantee that those amongst the readers read English books instead of those written in Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin or Tamil. Inderjit (2014) concludes that reading is no longer a popular activity in Malaysia, and that the little time they use for reading is for examination preparation or to complete academic tasks.

Research by Gass and Selinker (2008) which was cited in an article by Sofi and Bakr (2022), shows that lexical mistakes are the most frequent errors produced by





second language (L2) learners. This conclusion was reached based on an enormous corpus of errors and vocabulary learning, both of which may indicate successful L2 acquisition. Because of this, a student must not only have a wide vocabulary, but also be able to use it accurately to be considered proficient. This is attainable via a number of different means. In an attempt to improve the students' learning and vocabulary, and hence their proficiency in English as a second language, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) includes the studying of vocabulary into the curriculum via the KBSM English textbooks used in Malaysian schools as the MOE's preferred means of doing so. Due to this study focusing on Lower-Secondary students, and more specifically Form 2 students, the textbook in question would be the Pulse 2 textbook. The Pulse 2 textbook provides several vocabulary exercises that serve as tools for English teachers to employ in teaching vocabulary.



However, the use of the Pulse 2 English Textbook has its own problems with regards to vocabulary learning. According to Shak et al. (2021), one of the greatest concerns about using the Pulse 2 English Textbook, is its high lexical richness, which is excessively complex and relatively high for Malaysian pupils. This particular issue is also emphasised by varying research studies in recent years (Johar & Aziz, 2019; Goh & Aziz, 2020). Furthermore, according to Shak et al (2021a) in his research that revisits the use of the Pulse 2 Textbook after three years, he states the textbooks are one of the decisive elements that could either encourage or discourage a learner as well as affect their motivation and interest based on their materials. Moreover, research conducted in recent years by various evaluators such as Noor (2021) and Tahir et al. (2020) have further supported this statement as they pointed out that quite a number of the vocabulary-based exercises and activities in the textbook are too





simple for overachievers yet quite difficult for underachievers with the breadth of the unbalanced extremes of the vocabulary spectrum proving to be quite the hard gap to mend.

Apart from the above factors affecting the vocabulary learning and growth amongst our students, there is also the fact in which vocabulary is not taught as a standalone component and skill, but is merely instructed and touched upon under the umbrella of the four essential skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking on which major emphasis has been placed upon (Tahir, 2020). This results in the role of vocabulary being relegated to nothing more than a supplementary element of minor importance. His research also contains interviews with other English language teachers in secondary schools in which they state that the current practice of learning vocabulary is superficial. Moreover, most vocabulary learning consists of students being asked to identify unfamiliar words by referring to a reading, listening, or speaking text, and that teachers only explain the meaning of those words after the students have identified the words. Because of time limits, students aren't required to construct sentences using the vocabulary to demonstrate their comprehension. This suggests that they only have a superficial understanding of new vocabulary. It is possible to make the case that the learning of vocabulary, despite its significance for the improvement of learners' ability, is just a secondary concern in L2 programmes. As a consequence of this, it is very necessary for the student to make the most of any and all opportunities to acquire new vocabulary, especially when participating in English lessons at school.





In recent years, a number of pictorial learning-based studies on vocabulary learning have been conducted as well, all of which yield positive results as to how effective the use of pictorial elements has been in improving the learning of vocabulary. Some examples include a study conducted by Octaberlina and Anggarini (2020) whose results proves that the use of coloured pictures is effective in attracting the interest and attention of children. For that reason, the Malaysian-Based Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model (MBPVLM) that serves as the basis for this research uses coloured images, rather than simplistic black and white pictures. Furthermore, using pictorials as a medium for learning can present detailed images to learners to greatly aid in their ability to visualise. Furthermore, for the purpose of detailed visualisation alone, the use of still images is better than motion images. This has been recently proven in a research study by Kurniati, Rukmini, Saleh and Bharati (2020) through their experiments, in which students are able to clearly observe the veins of a leaf in a still picture, whereas they can only identify leaves in motion pictures based on their shape and colour, but the finer details are hard to recall.

All of the above factors have led to this present study on which the MBPVLM is implemented in the vocabulary learning of Malaysian lower-secondary students to determine if its use has a significant difference on their vocabulary learning in a positive manner such as enhancing their vocabulary learning in terms of improving their understanding of the word's meaning, allowing them to use it more accurately in context. This model does not place a heavy emphasis on reading, due to reading not being popular nor preferred by students, much less the reading of English material. Moreover, while the vocabulary items used in the model are taken directly from the English as a second language (ESL) syllabus for Lower Secondary Forms, it does not





place vocabulary as an mere component taught under the cover of the four main skills, but is a model designed specifically for vocabulary learning, and optimised for this purpose, as it not only provides pictorials and sound effects, but also simple to understand textual information in the form of bilingual translations, definition of vocabulary items and even sample sentences, with a strong Malaysian context for the purpose of boosting the learning and understanding of Lower Secondary Malaysian ESL students towards English vocabulary. The use of this model removes the need to learn vocabulary using reading, reduces the need for hefty English reading material, takes a straightforward and direct approach in encouraging understanding of vocabulary, and does not restrict vocabulary learning from its dependence on the four main skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing for instruction, rather, this model seeks to promote the learning of vocabulary as a major component on its own that does not conflict nor depend with the four main literacy skills.



1.3 Problem Statement

The problem that this research seeks to resolve is the subpar standard of vocabulary displayed by secondary school students in Malaysia, and more specifically targets the lower secondary form in this study. This problem is made evident via research conducted by Tahir et al (2020) in which a minority of the learners who participated in a New Word Test were only familiar with 30 out of 120 words taken from the KBSM English Curriculum Specification Document for Lower Secondary Forms, with the other 90 words being “unknown” by the vast majority of the participants despite being recommended for study by the Malaysian Education Ministry (MOE).





According to the standards set by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which influences the syllabus used for teaching English in Malaysian secondary schools at the lower forms, and more specifically, Form 2 which is the focus of this study, the Form 2 vocabulary word list consists of 126 items (going by category), and is therefore quite close to the amount of words in the New Word Test mentioned above. However, the syllabus directly stated that pupils are not expected to learn all these words by heart, nor spell them all with 100% accuracy. This lack of urgency within the syllabus itself may be an influencing factor with regards to the dismally low vocabulary count of the students. At Form 2, in which students are targeted to be at low-intermediate levels of proficiency (approximately A2 and B1), they are supposed to have 1000 words at A2 level and 2000 words at B1 according to Zipf's Law (Alexiou & Milton, 2009). This should be the case according to the power law invented by American linguist George Kingsley Zipf in his studies into the word distribution and frequency in languages in 1930, which does not just occur specifically for and in the English language, but also various other languages as well. This law indicates that to speed up one's learning of a language, which in this case is English, the most effective way would be to master certain, high-frequency vocabulary items that provides the learner with extensive access to the heart of the language. The CEFR should have been of great help as a majority of the vocabulary items on the list occur at high frequencies and are used regularly. However, not only are they far from this level, a recent study by Sulaiman, Salehuddin and Khairuddin (2018) clearly indicates that even high proficiency university students are unable to achieve the threshold of vocabulary competency, corresponding to an earlier study by Harji, Balakrishnan, Bhar and Letchumanan





(2015) showing that Malaysian undergraduates only possessed a 2000-word level, much less the lower secondary school students.

The lacking vocabulary of lower-secondary school students is a pressing problem as it is of significant help in learning and mastering a language more efficiently, which leads to improved English language competency (Nezhad & Shokrpour, 2012). Nation (2015) echoes this sentiment as he states in his study that a better grasp and mastery of vocabulary leads to students displaying markedly improved competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Mensah and Ivy (2022) follow this statement up by citing Alqahtani (2015) in which his study states that the learning of vocabulary is an important part of learning a second or foreign language, which in this case, is English which is being taught as a second language in Malaysia.



According to Hazita, Normazidah, and Koo (2012), the poor vocabulary of Malaysian students is what severely restricts their competency in the four main literacy skills of English, which are reading, listening, speaking and writing. Learners who do not have an appropriate grasp of English vocabulary have a poor level of competence because they are unable to read, write, listen, or speak effectively and fluently in the English language (Surmanov & Sardor, 2020). According to Alqahtani (2015), there are two main reasons that language learners find vocabulary learning difficult, the first being the sheer openness of the vocabulary system and the lack of specific rules that learners can follow in acquiring and retaining the lexical knowledge in the target language. Future research that delves into further detail the categories of the difficulties in vocabulary learning have found them to be wide-ranging, such as





from choosing the appropriate meaning of the words, learning different grammatical forms of the words, confusing the use of the words based on context and most prominently, the difficulty in pronouncing the words. Apparently, the more difficult the word is to pronounce, the more difficult it is to learn and use, for students tend to avoid it (Surmanov & Sardor, 2020). This undoubtedly leads to a vicious cycle that constantly repeats itself unless swiftly and competently addressed. The Malaysian-Based Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model (MPVLM) that is the main focus of this research study does address the following above problems. To address the sheer openness of the vocabulary system and the lack of specific rules that learners can follow, MPVLM chooses to select vocabulary items from the syllabus that the students are learning. The vocabulary items can be progressively increased in number and difficulty according to the progress of the students. Furthermore, by providing not just definitions, but also translations, examples of application in the form of sentences as well as pictorials to support their understanding of the vocabulary items, these form a strong foundation on which students can build their comprehension and mastery of these vocabulary items. For words that are difficult to address, the MPVLM specifically chooses words who have few syllables, with sounds that are easy and convenient to pronounce. More difficult words can be introduced in accordance to the students' progress in their vocabulary learning, and improvements can be made such as adding a step-by-step breakdown in the pronunciation of difficult words.

Furthermore, students with a low level of language competence due to having poor vocabulary usually do not have the chance to learn and apply new terminology while they are in the classroom. Research has proven that English teachers have identified several of the factors for this, such as language shyness, and how





committing language mistakes incur penalties and punishment makes students view the use of English, especially if their proficiency is low, rather than being encouraged to use the language more actively in spite of the mistakes, which can be corrected (Mpiti, Thandiswa, & Tahir, 2020). This in turn leads to other problems such as the students' unwillingness to communicate (Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Riasati, 2018; Riasati & Rahimi, 2018), students' low motivation for learning English (Liu, 2020). This is further worsened by the language barriers between mother tongue and English as a foreign language (Saneka & Witt, 2019) as students tend to rely more on the use of their mother tongue as a reference point in comprehending the structure of a new language such as English. The problems mentioned above highlight how and why vocabulary learning is no mean feat, and to master it is harder still. With vocabulary knowledge being one of the most important parts of language acquisition, it is essential to discover vocabulary training that is suitable and appropriate for Malaysian learners.

As such, the researcher proposes the use of the MBPVLM to assist lower secondary students to improve their learning of English vocabulary, improving their mastery of English and proficiency in the four literary skills as well.

To put it into perspective, the issues in schools regarding vocabulary learning that making it necessary to develop the above model would be due to the low vocabulary knowledge of students, their weak grasp and understanding of vocabulary that results in misuse and inaccuracy of their vocabulary in use, be it in speaking or writing, as well as the lack of dedicated learning materials and teaching tools specifically for the purpose of vocabulary learning. The development of the



MBPVLM is a countermeasure to address and resolve these issues as well as to fill in the gap of a dedicated vocabulary learning model for a language, which in this case, is the English language. The success of this model may prove it sufficiently feasible to be implemented for vocabulary learning across a variety of languages such as Mandarin, Tamil and Bahasa Malaysia as well, which can further hasten the literacy, fluency and mastery of our students in other languages.

The researcher has the expectation that the findings of this study will make a significant contribution to this research field, particularly with regard to the efficacy of utilising pictorials as a medium of vocabulary instruction.

If there is positive feedback concerning the results obtained, then stakeholders or English curriculum developers should consider conducting a more thorough and in-depth study in order to incorporate vocabulary learning during English language lessons in class using this model to help learners improve their learning of vocabulary rather than incorporating it as a side component in the teaching of the four main literacy skills. Moreover, by reviewing various research studies for a more in-depth knowhow of the various problems plaguing vocabulary acquisition and learning, the model also provides learning aids in the form of audio clips and providing sentences in which the vocabulary is used in context. The chosen words are also selected for being simple to pronounce so that there is less hindrance that inhibits the learning progress of the students.



1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this research is to observe and determine whether implementing the Malaysian-Based Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model (MBPVLM) has a significant difference on the vocabulary learning of lower-secondary ESL students in a Malaysian classroom setting in terms of their test scores using the model compared to their test scores without using the model. This is exemplified in the first objective in which the significant difference in the students' vocabulary learning is determined by the improvement in comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test for the students who have used the model (experimental group) with those who have not (control group). If there is no improvement or if there is a worsening of the scores, the results are negative, but if there is an improvement, then the difference is determined as positive.



The second objective is simply to determine which one of the four learning modes of the MBPVLM is preferred by the participants. This only targets students in the Experimental Group for only they have been given access to the use of the MBPVLM. The students' preferred learning mode is based on the students' own perspectives on the model, having experienced using it in their learning of vocabulary.

The third objective also targets the experimental group. By comparing the improvement of pre-test and post-test results for the modes with the pictorial element with their non-pictorial counterparts (text-mode vs text-picture mode, text-sound mode vs text-picture-sound mode), this helps determine whether the pictorial element



has a positive influence on the students' vocabulary learning. All this is done with the intention of further enhancing and refining the model for deeper application, with the goal of maximising vocabulary learning in ESL lessons. These learning goals are presented in accordance with the following aims:

- i. To investigate if the use of the MBPVLM results in a significant difference in the vocabulary learning of the participants who are Lower Secondary Malaysian ESL students.
- ii. To determine which among the four learning modes of the MBPVLM are preferred by the participants who are Lower-Secondary Malaysian ESL students.
- iii. To investigate whether the use of the pictorial modes (text-picture mode and the text-picture-sound mode) of the MBPVLM would yield better results with regards to the participants' vocabulary learning as compared to their non-pictorial counterparts (text mode and text-sound mode) respectively.

1.5 Research Questions

In line with the objectives, three research questions are presented:

- i. Does the use of the Malaysian-Based Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model (MBPVLM) result in a significant difference in the vocabulary learning of the participants who are Lower-Secondary Malaysian ESL students?

- ii. Which of the four learning modes in the MBPVLM would be preferred by the participants who are Malaysian Lower-Secondary ESL students?
- iii. Does the use of the pictorial modes (text-picture mode and the text-picture-sound mode) of the MBPVLM yield higher scores with regards to the participants' vocabulary learning as compared to their non-pictorial counterparts (text mode and text-sound mode) respectively?

1.6 Research Hypothesis

As part of an experimental study, the research hypothesis below is tested:

H0: There is no significant improvement in learners' knowledge of the target words after receiving the vocabulary instruction using the Malaysian-based pictorial-based vocabulary learning model (MBPVLM).

H1: There is a significant improvement in learners' knowledge of the target words after receiving the vocabulary instruction using the MBPVLM.

1.7 Significance of the Study

It is expected that the research would stimulate the attention of stakeholders, instructors, curriculum creators, and producers of content. This is due to the fact that the purpose of this research is to determine the effects of the Malaysian-based pictorial-based vocabulary learning model (MBPVLM) that has been implemented as a tool for vocabulary learning for lower-secondary ESL students. In other words, the research aims to determine what influence the model has on the student's vocabulary



learning. If the results show that the MBPVLM is beneficial in helping learners learn vocabulary, then the teachers can use it in their arsenal of available methods to assist learners in vocabulary learning. If the results are negative, however, then the model is proven to be ineffective in its purpose and thus awaits further testing.

Rather than merely including it in the instruction of the four essential skills, curriculum architects should think about including the acquisition of target words as a part of the fundamental domains of language learning. In addition, material writers are capable of developing exceptional vocabulary learning aids that may assist learners in expanding their word knowledge. Last but not least, several stakeholders, including the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), higher education institutions, and private enterprises, would benefit from the implementation since it assists them in improving their proficiency in English. The presence of English language users who are proficient in the workforce will almost likely result in the development of high-quality professionals who are able to compete on a global scale, which benefits the nation.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The findings may serve as a point of reference for understanding the effects and impacts of applying methods that solely emphasises vocabulary learning by ESL learners in the form of a pictorial-based vocabulary learning model on lower-secondary ESL students' and their vocabulary learning towards the end of the research.





Nonetheless, there are a few restrictions that come with this research. The first limitation on the amount of time that may be spent on the research is that it takes place and is observed only during regular school hours. Because the vocabulary was instilled using the model that was employed as a vocabulary-focused instruction tool in schools, the intervention plan did not account for the learning of target words that may occur outside of school hours. In particular, this oversight was caused by the fact that the model was used in schools.

Students can still learn the target words at home with the support of peers, parents, and a variety of English language reading materials even though it is generally acknowledged that learning a second language is difficult and takes a long time for students to master (Tahir et al., 2020). This is because students can learn the target words at home with the support of peers and parents. As a consequence of this, the fact that there was a restricted amount of time available to learn the target words for this investigation may have an effect on the accuracy and dependability of the findings. In addition to this, it is impossible to rule out the possibility of bias coming from participants in the study process. As a result of the extended time periods during which this research is carried out, the people who take part in the study are able to anticipate the expectations of the researcher to a certain degree, and as a result, they alter their behaviour in order to satisfy those expectations. The result of this is something that is known as participation bias (Tahir et al., 2020).

Because the instruments that were used to assess the model were created on the Substitution Augmentation Modification and Redefinition (SAMR) framework,





participants who are acquainted with the framework may be able to anticipate the question patterns and evaluate abilities on the test, which would allow them to get a better score in these areas. In the end, the SAMR model is a highly well-known and widely-applied framework in terms of technology integration. Because of this, it plays a significant role in the creation, planning, and execution of the pictorial-based vocabulary acquisition model. The very name of the SAMR framework provides a clue as to what each step of the four-stage framework really reflects, since the phases themselves are labelled quite plainly. According to Tahir et al. (2020), the findings are inaccurate in depicting reality as a consequence of the participants' memories, and as a result, the testing effects may cause the test's accuracy to be compromised.



1.9 Choice of Pictorial Use

As for why the researcher has chosen to undertake an approach that utilises pictorials as a means to improve vocabulary learning over a variety of other options such as the use of auditory mediums such as sounds and music, verbal means such as verbal explanations or the use of text, there are several reasons for this. First of all, Julaiha, Syahputri & Prihatini, (2022) mentioned that utilising conventional media such as books in language learning are boring learners, and that the monotonous verbal expounding by language teachers is quite difficult for learners who are just learning the language. With that said, there is a need for innovative mediums of vocabulary learning that are customised to the characteristics of both the learners and the target subject of their learning (Liando, Mangare & Olli, 2021), which in this case, is vocabulary, that would allow students to progressively overcome the difficulties they face in the process of vocabulary learning. Research conducted by Zulkifli





(2019) clearly proves that visualisation is the best way to teach new words for all subjects, and is therefore particularly useful for language learning. As such, compared to songs and sounds, the use of pictorials that are not only capable of drawing student attention, but also aids their ability to focus, visualise and retain information in their minds is more effective. As such, that is why the researcher's primary pick for this research study is pictorials.

1.10 Operational Definition

It is critical to comprehend the operational definition of the research issue in order to comprehend the study's focus. The following are the definitions:

1.10.1 Vocabulary Learning



A student's mental knowledge of spoken and written words, which goes beyond a basic dictionary definition and is referred to as their "vocabulary," is what is meant by the phrase "vocabulary" (Snow, Griffin & Burns, 2005). They also noted that children's vocabulary knowledge is grown throughout time as they study instances and non-examples of the term or similar terms, create links with other words, and appropriately apply the words within the context of the sentence. When the students have reached the level of lexical or semantic growth, they are given an assignment to do in order to learn the words that are the focus of the lesson. According to Jiang (2004), students at this level should be able to integrate lexical or semantic information into entries as well as transfer words from episodic memory to the lexicon.





The goal of this research is, in a nutshell, to assess the impact of implementing the approach of solely emphasising vocabulary learning on the growth of ESL students' vocabularies by comparing the outcomes of the pre-tests and the post-tests. It is often believed that youngsters who have a restricted vocabulary are unable to analyse the significance of words or texts in a critical manner. Because of this, it is hoped that the findings of this study contribute to the distribution of helpful information as well as discoveries about the efficacy of applying this focused approach in order to assist students in the process of learning new words. If students' post-test results are higher than their pre-test results, it indicates that they have a greater degree of understanding in terms of the meaning (semantic) of the target words when used in context.

1.10.2 Learners' Perceptions

Learners' perceptions have a vital impact in their educational experiences because of the close connection such views have with the learners' expectations (Tahir et al., 2020). As a consequence of this, the researcher may benefit from being aware of the expectations that learners have during an experimental treatment (a focused method of vocabulary education), as it may help them better understand the perspectives and attitudes that learners have regarding vocabulary acquisition. Because of this, we can end up with data of a better quality and a more in-depth understanding of how the students learnt the target words. It is essential for the researcher to determine how learners approach vocabulary learning, which is essential for determining if taking a direct and focused approach towards vocabulary training enhances vocabulary knowledge and understanding of vocabulary. An observation of the strength of



learners' perceptions greatly helps the researcher determine how learners approach vocabulary learning. According to Entwistle (2008), the methods in which learners approach learning and the quality of the knowledge they acquire are both impacted by their views of the situations in which they find themselves. As a consequence of this, the viewpoints of learners have been included into this research since assessing the level of success that learners have had in mastering the target words is dependent on taking their perspectives into consideration.

1.10.3 Malaysian Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model

The researcher defines the Malaysian-Based Pictorial Vocabulary Learning Model (MBPVLM) in terms of a module due to its modular nature, as it combines four individual modes (Text Mode, Text-Picture Mode, Text-Picture-Sound Mode and Text-Sound Mode) of vocabulary learning that encourages lower-secondary Malaysian ESL students to do so by using the tools provided by each individual mode in the form of textual, pictorial or auditory information, or even a combination of any of them.

The “Malaysian” in the model comes from the fact that the items to be learned are taken from the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) employed by Malaysian secondary schools, and that the examples provided are culturally contextualised for the benefit of Malaysian students.

As for the definition of “learning model”, Sam (2013) states that the process of learning itself is not very well understood and therefore researchers propose learning models which attempt to clarify and comprehend this process. In his words, it can



“explain human development and behaviour which highlights the potential influence of any environmental factors on the physical, cognitive, interpersonal and emotional rendering of the individual”.

The MBPVLM itself consists of four individual components, each based on a mode of vocabulary learning. Each and every one of these four modes come with their own pre-test and post-test respectively. The first mode is the Text Mode, which contains only textual information such as bilingual translations of the vocabulary items, definitions as well as samples of sentences.

The second mode is the Text-Picture Mode, which contains the same textual elements as the Text Mode, but with the addition of pictorials that represent or are associated with the vocabulary items and are selected to be contextually suitable for Malaysian students without affecting the meaning it represents.

The third mode is the Text-Picture-Sound Mode, which adds an auditory component in addition to the textual and pictorial elements. Note that as the focus of the modes are to help and encourage the vocabulary learning of students, the auditory component is not pronunciation of the vocabulary items, but rather sound effects concerning the vocabulary items instead.

As for the fourth mode, Text-Sound Mode, it contains textual elements and sound effects, but is devoid of the pictorial components. The main reason for having four modes is to compare if using the modes with the pictorial element, namely with Text-Picture and Text Picture-Sound Modes, can yield better results as compared to



their non-pictorial counterparts, which are the Text-Mode and Text-Sound Modes respectively. This is done by comparing the improvement of the pre-test and post-test results of the pictorial-oriented modes with their non-pictorial counterparts from the students in the experimental group. This corresponds to the second objective of this research study.

1.10.4 Lower Secondary ESL Students

In Malaysia, secondary education takes 5 years to complete, with each year referred to as a Form, ranging from 1 to 5. Students in Form 1 to Form 3 are known as Lower Secondary, whereas those in Forms 4 and 5 are referred to as Upper Secondary. The participants of this research are Form 2 students; hence they are Lower Secondary Students. As for terming them ESL students, that is because the English language taught in Malaysia is known as “English as a Second Language) or ESL for short.

1.11 Summary

In summary, the goal of this research would be to evaluate the impacts of the Malaysian-based pictorial-based vocabulary learning model (MBPVLM) that has been applied as a direct and focused approach towards vocabulary learning for lower-secondary ESL students. This is an effort to have vocabulary learning and instruction be regarded as one of the most important and significant parts of language learning, as opposed to merely being relegated as a component of taught language