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THE USE OF PICTURE CUE CARDS TO IMPROVE PUPILS' VOCABULARY RETENTION IN MALAYSIAN PRIMARY CLASSROOMS



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YUVABARTE ARUN A/P ARUMUGAM

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of picture cue cards in helping Year 3 pupils improve their vocabulary retention. This action research was conducted in a suburban school involving 30 pupils. Data collection instruments included pre-test and post-test assessments and a post-test questionnaire comprising Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The purpose was to gauge the pupils' attitudes towards using picture cue cards and to identify any challenges they faced during the process. The findings indicate that using picture cue cards significantly improved the Year 3 pupils' vocabulary retention. The paired sample t-test results revealed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($M = 10.60$ and $M = 27.17$, respectively), demonstrating marked improvement in vocabulary retention. Furthermore, the questionnaire data showed that the pupils had a positive attitude towards using picture cue cards for vocabulary retention. Despite the improvements, some challenges were identified through the open-ended questions, analysed using the thematic analysis method. These challenges will be considered to provide better interventions in the next research cycle. The theoretical implications of this research highlight the importance of multisensory learning approaches in language acquisition. The significant improvement in vocabulary retention suggests that visual aids, such as picture cue cards, can effectively support vocabulary learning in young learners. This aligns with cognitive theories of multimedia learning, which propose that combining visual and verbal elements can enhance understanding and retention. Overall, the research demonstrated that picture cue cards are a useful instructional tool in classrooms, effectively enhancing pupils' vocabulary retention and providing insights into practical and theoretical approaches to language teaching.

PENGGUNAAN KAD PETUNJUK GAMBAR UNTUK MENINGKATKAN PENGUASAAN PERBENDAHARAAN KATA DALAM KALANGAN MURID DI SEKOLAH RENDAH MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengukur keberkesanan kad isyarat bergambar dalam meningkatkan pengekalan perbendaharaan kata murid Tahun 3 dan untuk menilai sikap murid terhadap penggunaannya. Kajian tindakan ini dijalankan di sebuah sekolah pinggir bandar dengan melibatkan 30 orang murid. Instrumen pengumpulan data terdiri daripada penilaian pra-ujian untuk mengukur pengekalan perbendaharaan kata, serta soal selidik pasca-ujian untuk menilai sikap murid. Soal selidik ini mengandungi skala Likert lima mata dan soalan terbuka. Ujian statistik yang digunakan ialah ujian-t sampel berpasangan untuk membandingkan skor kedua-dua ujian bagi menilai perubahan dalam pengekalan perbendaharaan kata. Hasil kajian menunjukkan peningkatan ketara dalam pengekalan perbendaharaan kata murid setelah menggunakan kad isyarat bergambar. Keputusan ujian-t sampel berpasangan mendedahkan perbezaan signifikan antara skor pra-ujian ($M = 10.60$) dan pasca-ujian ($M = 27.17$), membuktikan keberkesanan alat ini dalam meningkatkan pengekalan perbendaharaan kata. Di samping itu, dapatan soal selidik menunjukkan murid menunjukkan sikap positif terhadap penggunaan kad isyarat bergambar dalam pembelajaran. Walaupun keputusan keseluruhan adalah positif, beberapa cabaran dikenalpasti melalui analisis tematik soalan terbuka. Cabaran ini akan menjadi asas kepada penambahbaikan dalam kajian akan datang. Secara teori, kajian ini menekankan kepentingan pendekatan pembelajaran multisensori. Gabungan elemen visual dan verbal dapat meningkatkan pemahaman dan pengekalan maklumat. Kesimpulannya, kad isyarat bergambar adalah alat pengajaran yang efektif dalam meningkatkan penguasaan perbendaharaan kata.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR Common European Framework

SPSS Statistical Package for Social Science





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Appendix

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the setting of the research paper by providing a brief review on the background of the study and problem statement. It also provides a concise review of the research by identifying the research questions that the study intends to answer. In conclusion, this introduction chapter provides a persuasive justification for the research study and set the stage for the remaining sections of the research paper.

1.1 Background of the study





Vocabulary is one of the key elements of language learning. According to Cameron (2011), as cited in Niklas and Schneider (2020), vocabulary is considered to be one of the greatest key players for the learners of the knowledge areas in language acquisition. Vocabulary plays a vital role in shaping learners' basic proficiency. Francis and Simpson (2019) prioritize vocabulary learning because words are considered as the building blocks of language. Every word that we use in our daily life conversation are vocabularies which enable us to communicate effectively. Without a proper vocabulary usage, an individual will not be able to convey a message nor to have an effective communication among their social circle. This statement is supported by Wilkens (1972), as cited by Van Rijt and Coppen (2021) 'without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed'. Thus, it is important for a learner of a language to have a vast choice of vocabulary so that they would be able to convey their ideas in the targeted language adequately.



English language is taught as a second language as a compulsory language in the Malaysian schools since preschool. Based on an article by The Star (2015), it is stated that the ability to master English language is not only viewed as a sign of one's intellectual development but also as medium by which the learners respond their experiences through improved thinking and communication skills. Although it is notable that Malaysians have between 11 to 13 years of learning English as a second language in schools, the level of competence are still below the par. (David et al.,2017).

Based on Rusreena Rusli, & Melor Md Yunus's (2018) journal article, it is stated that according to Malaysian Education Blueprint, the operational proficiency in English is much lower. Only 28% of students achieved a minimum credit in the 2011





SPM English paper against Cambridge 1119 standards. This is mainly because of the learners' inability to master the vocabulary. Research has shown that second language readers rely heavily on vocabulary knowledge and the lack of that knowledge is the main and the largest obstacle for L2 learners to overcome (Porter, P.& G. Margaret,1995, as cited Krashen.,2021). On the other hand, vocabulary has been acknowledged as second language learners' greatest single source of problems (Meara, 2017). Hence, it can be said that many second language learners are finding it difficult to communicate in a fluent English as they are lacking in vocabulary content. This issue was also identified among the pupils of SK La Salle, Klang. The pupils of SK La Salle, Klang tend to shy away from communicating in English language as they are found to be lacking in confidence to use the language due to weak vocabulary retention.



As a way to overcome the issue that concerns the lack of vocabulary retention among the learners, many researchers and teachers have come up with various methods and ways. Based on Ur's (2018) research, there are various techniques for teaching new vocabulary that can be used in order to enhance the vocabulary retention. She lists different techniques used in presenting new vocabulary as follow:

1. Concise definition
2. Detailed description (of appearance, qualities...)
3. Examples (hyponyms)
4. Illustration (picture, object)
5. Demonstration (acting, mime)
6. Context (story or sentence in which the item occurs)
7. Synonym
8. Opposite (antonyms)





9. Translation

10. Associated ideas, collocations.

Cited By, Ur (2018 p.48)

Based on the list of techniques above, one of the effective methods that can be used in improving the learners' vocabulary acquisition is through the help of visual aids, which includes pictures. According to Thornburry (1986), as cited by Swan (2019), it is found in several studies that visual aids can greatly improve the information acquisition as well as improves students' understanding of unfamiliar. Pictures are one of the valuable aids which bring "images of reality into the unnatural world of the language classroom" (Hill, (1978), as cited by Chen et al. (2017). Besides, pictures can be also used as a way to attract the learner's attention and interested towards the teaching and learning. Associating pictures that can be related to the words will help the students to remember and acquire the vocabularies for a longer period of time. Thus, in order to enhance the vocabulary retention of the pupils of Sk La Salle, Klang, the researcher decided to interplay visual art, which is by using pictures and vocabulary learning.

Teaching vocabulary using picture cue cards or is an intervention that is used by the researcher in order to overcome the issue of pupil's lack of vocabulary content. Young learners have a shorter span of remembering the information that has been taught to them (Holmes.J., 2017). As pupils tend to forget and shy away from using the English language, the Picture cue cards help the students to refer to the needed vocabularies that is being taught for the particular topic whenever they want to. This will enable them to remember the words which are associated pictures and use them frequently. Hence,





pupils' vocabulary content as well as their fluency in English language can be improved.

In the context of SK La Salle, Klang, where pupils struggle with vocabulary retention, the use of picture cue cards can be particularly beneficial. By integrating visual aids into vocabulary instruction, this study aims to provide a more effective and engaging approach to language learning, ultimately improving the English proficiency of the pupils. The proposed intervention is grounded in a robust theoretical framework. According to Paivio's (1971) Dual Coding Theory, both visual and verbal information are used to represent information. When both visual and verbal cues are combined, it enhances the memory and learning process. This theory supports the use of picture cue cards, as they provide a dual representation of vocabulary through both images and words. Additionally, Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning posits that people learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone, as the combination stimulates active cognitive processing. This theory underscores the potential effectiveness of visual aids in enhancing vocabulary retention.

Moreover, research by Clark and Lyons (2010) highlights that visuals can reduce cognitive load and help in the better organization of information, which facilitates learning and retention. By using picture cue cards, learners can visualize the meaning of words, making it easier to remember and recall them when needed. This approach is not only beneficial for young learners with shorter attention spans but also for all learners who benefit from multi-sensory learning experiences.





In conclusion, the background of this study emphasizes the critical role of vocabulary in language acquisition and the challenges faced by second language learners, particularly in the Malaysian context. The integration of visual aids, such as picture cue cards, offers a promising solution to improve vocabulary retention and overall language proficiency. By providing a more engaging and effective method of vocabulary instruction, this study aims to enhance the English language skills of pupils at SK La Salle, Klang, addressing the pressing issue of vocabulary deficiency and contributing to better language learning outcomes.

1.2 Problem statement

One of the major issues that was identified by the researcher among the pupils of Sk La Salle, Klang is the pupils' lack of confidence to communicate in English as they are lacking in vocabulary content. Even though various methods were used to improve the pupils' vocabulary they tend to forget the vocabularies they learn quickly.

Based on Richards & Schmidt's (2017) article, it is stated that vocabulary retention, which is also known as the ability of the learners to remember the lexical items once a period of time has lapsed is considered to be one of the key components in the mastery of vocabulary. Without using the vocabulary learned often, the vocabularies may be forgotten by the learners. This is supported by Ahmadian, M.J. (2019), where it is stated that the words which are not used frequently will not be saved in the long-term memory of the learners. This will eventually make the learners to forget the word of the language itself as time goes on. Ahmadian M.J. (2019), also stated that learners do not





remember things not only because of insufficient focus, time or attention span, but because of lack of practice, usage, revisiting and application of the language.

Ebbinghaus's forgetting curve is an effective model that shows us on how memories go missing over the time and the steps of prevention to reinforce the things that has been learned, so that learned information can be stored for a long term. In the model, it is also mentioned that any information which is not in use for more than 31 days will be deleted from the long-term memory of the learners.

The researcher faced the same issue with the pupils of Sk La Salle, where they were in lack of use of the language due to not using it often, which eventually made them to forget the language. The pupils tend to ask questions regarding the physical characteristics of the words such as 'how does it looks like?' Or 'what is the shape of it?' These questions made the researcher to realise that the pupils are mostly visual learners and they need to be given a visual representation of the words introduced in order for them to understand better. Andrä et al. (2020), states that learners remember better if the material has been presented by means of visual aids. Some words work well with pictures, particularly, nouns. So, as the next step, the pupils were taught using pictures that can be associated with the words. For instance, if the word shovel is introduced during the lesson, a picture of a shovel will be shown to the pupils together with the meaning and the usage of the words in a sentence. Through this way, the researcher notices that the pupils tend to have a better understanding of the vocabularies.





In spite of the fact that the techniques were effective, the pupils still have difficulties in remembering the words for a long term. Poor retention among the pupils is caused by several factors. Working memory (WM), is believed to be responsible of the active tasks of extracting contextually appropriate vocabulary, stating one's own opinions, while temporarily storing the other person's word during conversation (Baddeley., 2020). As the pupils having difficulties in remembering the vocabularies for a long term, the researcher realized that the pupils need a tool that helps them to trigger their memory on the particular vocabulary. As the pupils are identified to be visual learners, the researcher decided to interplay the visual aid, which is the picture to enhance the vocabulary retention of the pupils. Hence, the researcher introduced an intervention by using the picture cards in order to enhance the vocabulary retention of the pupils.



Furthermore, the performance data of the Malaysian education system, particularly from the Performance-Based Assessment (PBD), further underscores the urgency of addressing vocabulary retention issues. The PBD, implemented as part of the Malaysian Education Blueprint, aims to provide a more holistic assessment of student performance, focusing not only on academic achievements but also on other aspects such as attitudes, skills, and values. However, the PBD data reveals a significant gap in English language proficiency among Malaysian students.

The PBD assessments have shown that many students struggle to achieve the expected levels of competency in English. This is particularly concerning given that English is a compulsory subject from preschool through secondary school. The PBD data indicates that a substantial number of pupils fail to meet the minimum standards





required for effective communication in English. This deficiency is often linked to poor vocabulary retention, which hinders pupils' ability to understand and use the language fluently.

Moreover, the PBD performance data highlights disparities in English language proficiency across different regions and schools in Malaysia. Schools in urban areas tend to perform better than those in rural areas, which often face additional challenges such as limited access to resources and qualified English teachers. This discrepancy further complicates efforts to improve overall English language proficiency in the country.

In the context of SK La Salle, Klang, the PBD data reflects similar trends, with many pupils showing inadequate vocabulary retention and usage. This lack of proficiency impacts their confidence and willingness to communicate in English, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions. The introduction of picture cards as a visual aid aims to address this specific issue by providing a memorable and engaging way for pupils to learn and retain vocabulary. Thus, the usage of Picture cue cards will enable the pupils to perform better in their PBD assessments.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 To determine the use of Picture cue cards to improve the pupils' vocabulary retention.

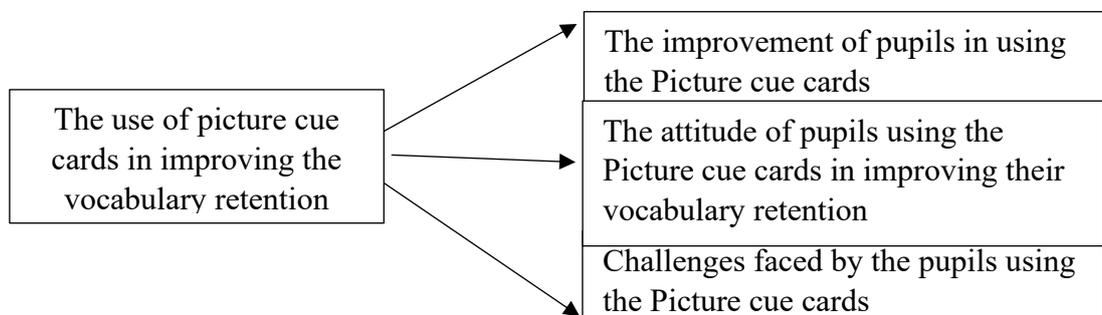


- 1.3.2 To identify the pupils' attitude towards the use of Picture cue cards in improving their vocabulary retention.
- 1.3.3 To explore the challenges of Picture cue cards in improving the pupils' vocabulary retention.

1.4 Research Question

- 1.4.1 Does the usage of the Picture cue cards help to improve the pupils' vocabulary retention?
- 1.4.2 What is the pupils' attitude towards the of Picture cue cards in improving their vocabulary retention?
- 1.4.3 What are the challenges of Picture cue cards in helping to improve the pupils' vocabulary retention?

1.5 Conceptual framework





1.6 Operational definition

a) Vocabulary: Vocabulary is a key element in achieving language mastery as it sets the stage for learners' success in acquiring listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Mashhadi & Jamalifar, 2018). In this study, vocabulary refers to the words that have been stored in the memory of Year 3 pupils at SK La Salle, Klang.

b) Vocabulary Retention: Vocabulary retention refers to the continued use, existence, or possession of vocabulary and the ability to recall the meaning of words after a given period of time (Cambridge University Press, 2022). In this study, vocabulary retention is defined as the ability of Year 3 pupils to remember and frequently use the vocabulary they have learned.

c) Picture Cue Cards: Picture Cue cards are small photos or pictures affixed to cards, functioning as flashcards with images (Elvita, 2019). In this study, picture cue cards will serve as cues for Year 3 pupils to help them remember the vocabulary taught and use it long-term without hindrances.

d) Attitude of Students: The attitude of students refers to their feelings, beliefs, and behavioral tendencies towards the use of picture cue cards in vocabulary learning. In this study, the attitude of Year 3 pupils towards the use of picture cue cards will be examined, focusing on their engagement, motivation, and perceived effectiveness of this learning tool.

e) Challenges Faced by Pupils: Challenges faced by pupils refer to the difficulties or obstacles encountered by Year 3 pupils while using picture cue cards for vocabulary learning. These challenges may include issues such as difficulty in associating words with pictures, maintaining interest over time, or effectively integrating the use of cue cards into their regular study habits.





1.7 Importance of the study

The importance of the study can be divided into two parts, which are the theoretical contribution and the practical contribution. The importance is explained as below.

1.7.1 Theoretical contribution

As for the researchers who are interested in the field of vocabulary retention using pictures, this research will enable them to collect and analyse the gathered information and data by reviewing through the findings of this research. This study also provides a guideline for future research to the researchers a better explanation that has a new dimension that will provide a clear view in measuring the effectiveness of using pictures in teaching vocabulary in the classrooms.

1.7.2 Practical contribution

By conducting this research, it enables the Curriculum department in Ministry of Education to look further in including vocabulary as a part of the current CEFR curriculum. Though the CEFR aligned textbooks that are being used in the classrooms do contain numerous amounts of pictures, it is not being utilised fully. Through the implementation of Picture cue cards, the pictures in the textbooks can be fully utilised in the teaching and learning of vocabulary and vocabulary retention in future.





1.8 Delimitation of the study

This study focuses on the use of visual aids, specifically picture cue cards, to enhance vocabulary retention among pupils of SK La Salle, Klang. The research is limited to the pupils of SK La Salle, Klang, and therefore, the findings and conclusions drawn from this research may not be generalizable to other schools or regions in Malaysia or beyond. The study specifically targets the enhancement of English vocabulary retention, with other aspects of language learning, such as grammar, pronunciation, or writing skills, not being the primary focus. Participants are selected from a specific age group, primarily young learners within the primary school level, meaning that the results may not apply to older students or adults learning English as a second language. Additionally, only pupils identified as visual learners or those who express a need for visual aids in their learning process are included, which may exclude pupils who prefer other learning styles.

The study employs picture cue cards as the primary intervention for improving vocabulary retention, without extensively exploring or comparing other visual aids or teaching methods. The duration of the intervention is limited to a specific period, potentially not capturing long-term retention or the sustained impact of the intervention over several months or years. Effectiveness is measured using specific vocabulary tests and retention assessments designed for this study, and not other standardized language proficiency tests, focusing on vocabulary retention and recall rather than comprehensive language proficiency, which includes speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.





Conducted within the context of the Malaysian education system, with its unique curriculum, teaching practices, and cultural influences, the results may differ in educational contexts with different systems, curriculums, or cultural backgrounds. The study assumes a certain level of baseline English proficiency among the pupils, and those with significantly lower or higher proficiency levels may experience different outcomes. Data collection is primarily based on observational and test-based measures within the classroom setting, without controlling for external factors influencing vocabulary retention such as home environment, additional tutoring, or extracurricular activities. The study also relies on self-reported data and observations, which may be subject to biases or inaccuracies, though efforts are made to mitigate these biases. By clearly defining these delimitations, the study aims to provide a focused and manageable research framework while acknowledging the boundaries within which the findings are applicable.



1.9 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the problem identified, the research objectives as well as the research questions that is associated with the problem identified. Besides, the key terms which are being used throughout the research as well as the importance of the study is also discussed in this chapter.

