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THE EFFECT OF GAMES ON YEAR THREE PUPILS' VOCABULARY ACQUISITION, INTEREST, MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES IN THE CHINESE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to investigate the effects of the use of games as a strategy during practice for improving vocabulary acquisition of year three pupils in the Chinese language classroom. Quasi experimental was used in the research. This research also sought to examine the effects of game-based practice on pupils' interest, motivation and attitudes. Two different teaching practices were adopted, that are game-based practice for the experimental group and conventional practice for the control group. Each group had 30 pupils who were randomly assigned. Data was collected through a vocabulary acquisition test, a questionnaire on pupils' interest, motivation and attitudes, focus group interviews with pupils and the experimental group teacher's interview. Statistical results revealed that there was no significant difference between the two groups on vocabulary acquisition test. However, the middle vocabulary level pupils in the experimental group made significant improvement and performed as well as the high vocabulary level pupils. When tested separately, the pupils of high, middle and low vocabulary levels in the experimental group significantly performed better than those in the control group. The pupils in the experimental group had significantly higher interest, motivation and attitudes in the Chinese language classroom compared to the control group. Positive and supportive responses were also garnered from the teacher and pupils towards the game-based practice. These positive results offered a notable incentive to language teachers to include game-based practice in their teaching of vocabulary. Moreover, the positive results with regards to pupils' interest, motivation and attitudes will augur well for an eventual improvement in the pupils' vocabulary acquisition.

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KESAN PERMAINAN KE ATAS PENGUASAAN KOSA KATA, MINAT, MOTIVASI DAN SIKAP MURID-MURID TAHUN TIGA DALAM KELAS BAHASA CINA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau keberkesanan penggunaan permainan sebagai strategi pengajaran untuk dipraktikkan dalam peningkatan penguasaan kosa kata bagi murid-murid tahun tiga di dalam kelas Bahasa Cina. Kaedah kuasi eksperimen digunakan dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengkaji keberkesanan penggunaan permainan dalam minat, motivasi dan sikap murid. Dua kaedah pengajaran yang berbeza telah dipraktikkan, iaitu kaedah bermain bagi kumpulan eksperimen dan kaedah konvensional bagi kumpulan kawalan. Setiap kumpulan terdiri daripada 30 orang murid yang telah dipilih secara rawak ke dalam kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan. Data kajian dikumpul melalui ujian penguasaan kosa kata, soal selidik berkenaan minat, motivasi dan sikap murid, temubual murid kumpulan berfokus dan guru yang mengajar kumpulan eksperimen. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tiada perbezaan yang signifikan antara dua kumpulan dalam ujian penguasaan kosa kata. Walau bagaimanapun, murid-murid tahap sederhana dalam kumpulan eksperimen telah menunjukkan peningkatan yang ketara dan boleh setanding dengan murid-murid tahap tinggi dalam ujian penguasaan kosa kata. Apabila diuji secara berasingan, murid-murid tahap tinggi, sederhana dan rendah dalam kumpulan eksperimen secara signifikan menunjukkan prestasi yang lebih baik berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan. Murid-murid dalam kumpulan eksperimen juga secara signifikan menunjukkan prestasi minat, motivasi dan sikap lebih tinggi dalam mempelajari Bahasa Cina berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan. Guru dan murid-murid juga memberi sokongan dan respon yang positif terhadap kaedah bermain yang digunakan. Dapatan kajian yang positif ini memberi insentif penting kepada guru-guru untuk menggunakan permainan dalam pengajaran kosa kata. Di samping itu, dapatan kajian yang positif berkaitan dengan minat, motivasi dan sikap murid-murid akan dapat memanfaatkan peningkatan seterusnya dalam pembelajaran dan penguasaan kosa kata murid-murid tersebut.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the Malaysian Education System, the current Chinese Language syllabus for Chinese primary schools aims to equip pupils with skills and provide a basic understanding of the Chinese Language so that they are able to communicate, both orally and in writing, in common everyday situations (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011a). It also enables pupils to read and to understand different kinds of texts for enjoyment and information. When pupils engage in Chinese learning experiences as described in the curriculum, they will develop the ability to speak, listen, read and write in Chinese meaningfully, purposefully and with confidence. Therefore, the teachers are required to apply classroom strategies which are learner-

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centred, prepare pupils to use language in real life situations and most importantly provide a fun learning environment (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011b).

However, in order to communicate well or enjoy Chinese reading, pupils must acquire an adequate number of Chinese vocabularies and should know how to use them accurately (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011a). According to Coady and Huckin (1997), vocabulary is central to language. It is often considered the basis of all language. Metaphorically, Ma (2004) explained that words of a language are just like bricks of a high building; despite quite small pieces, they are vital to the great structure. In language acquisition, vocabulary plays an important role which links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing (Nguyen & Khuat, 2003). Since vocabulary is an important aspect of language, it is important for learners to acquire adequate vocabulary so that they can carry basic communication with others. Therefore, in the initial stages of learning Chinese language, the emphasis in the initial acquisition stages will be on vocabulary (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011a).

Recently, researchers (e.g. Boers, Piriz, Free & Eyckmans, 2009; Hummel, 2010; Min, 2008; Mizumoto & Kansai, 2009; Rott, Williams & Cameron, 2002; Shen, 2010) have paid more attention to using strategies and techniques for teaching vocabulary. Through research the researchers are finding that lexical problems frequently interfere with communication; communication breaks down when people do not use the right words (Mansoor & Elham, 2013). However, learners often experience great difficulty with vocabulary and many of them identify the acquisition of vocabulary as their greatest source of problems (Mansoor & Elham, 2013). Similarly in Malaysia, Ratnawati and Ismail (2003) found that due to Malaysian

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school learners' lack of basic vocabulary, they are often unable to respond to reading tests or tests of vocabulary and many of them are even not able to use the language beyond the word level.

For young learners, perhaps it is easier to learn vocabulary items for the first time than to remember them (Luu, 2012). When young learners are acquiring new vocabulary, they often keep learning and forgetting, so they need effective methods to collect, store, and retrieve words for retention and future use (Luu, 2012). Consequently, Luu (2012) advises that it is crucial for language teachers to be aware of the effectiveness of different methods of vocabulary teaching and choose the most effective ones to help learners retain new words in long-term memory. Despite this, Aroney Pereira (2005) also found that in most Malaysia schools, teachers tend to use a conventional method of teaching to teach language. She claims that most of the learners' language learning is based on the conventional method the teacher used in terms of content and teaching technique such as using textbook, activity book and drill and practice. Aroney Pereira added that the dependency on the textbooks have created a climate for socially isolated learning among learners.

A number of researchers have recently examined the fruitfulness of different techniques of vocabulary instruction (File & Adams, 2010; Min, 2008; Mizumoto & Kansai, 2009; Rott, Williams & Cameron, 2002; Singleton, 2008). They revealed that vocabulary instruction should be based on a variety of teaching techniques and activities in order to discover the ways or skills that will best help learners better learn, retain and retrieve vocabulary. Singleton (2008) advises that it is of extreme

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importance to encourage learners' active participation in vocabulary learning and cooperation with their peers and the teacher.

When dealing with Chinese vocabulary acquisition, there is a consensus that Chinese character recognition is a challenging aspect because the Chinese writing system is totally different from an alphabet spelling system (Yun, Liang & Hooi, 2011). Chinese learners have to remember whole words aurally as well as graphically and learning Chinese require a unique memorizing effort: remembering thousands of new words, along with their tones and characters (Fu, 2005). Fu also claims that the different tone of spoken Chinese is one of the most difficult skills to master which frustrates many learners and is also a widely recognised problem with Chinese language education. Due to the challenging nature of Chinese vocabulary, it is important that instructors provide a supportive environment for learners; not only meaningful exposures to language but learners need many opportunities for language interaction (Fu, 2005).

Using games have long been advocated for assisting language learning (Mungai, Jones, & Wong, 2002). Supporting view comes from Schiller (2000) who stated that:

> Games help learners strengthen recall, practice new knowledge, reinforce learning and assimilate information effectively…foster collaboration and engage the learners deeply into the content…grab learner's attention and motivate them to accept challenges…the outcome is much more effective when one is interacting with the material, not passively listening (p. 1).

Similarly, Nguyen and Khuat (2003) investigated the effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games. The research revealed that games contributed to

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vocabulary learning. They found that games brought in relaxation and fun for learners, thus helping them learn and retain new words easily. Xia (2011) also agreed that the use of vocabulary games with online tools and classroom games such as charades, word puzzle and jeopardy helped her students review Chinese vocabulary. Xia further added that learners loved games and games have the positive effect of making students participate actively and promoting vocabulary acquisition.

Children love playing games and research have indicated significant learning advantages of using games in language learning classrooms (Li, 2012; Luu, 2012; Nguyen & Khuat, 2003; Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2005). Games promote appropriate social interactions, logical thinking skills, reasoning strategies, and how to follow rules and procedures among children. Game-based learning favours constructivist teaching (Jong, Shang, Lee & Lee, 2010) which is useful in helping Chinese language learners to have a better grasp of vocabulary knowledge. Using games as a learning approach seems to enhance learner's learning in the Malaysian classroom as Zuhaira (2007) in her study find that most of the learners feel that games help them to understand the subject content. Other studies also indicated that by using games learners gain higher motivation to study and they are more motivated to learn (Roslina, Rasimah, Hasiah & Azizah, 2011; Zuhaira, 2007).

However, a conventional approach of teaching is deeply teacher-centred in which teachers serve as the source of knowledge while learners serve as passive receivers (Kuzu, 2007). In comparison, game-based learning can create a more social and cultural world that helps individuals learn by integrating thinking and social interactions (Shaffer, Squire, Halverson & Gee, 2005). Xia (2011) states that learning

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Chinese vocabulary should based on the learners' active engagement in constructing understanding, not simply on passive receiving information from a text or lecture.

There is a significant body of research to support the potential of using games as an educational tool (Annetta, Cheng & Holmes 2010; Paraskeve & Papagiann, 2010) and to complement conventional teaching for enhancing learners' learning (Kiili, 2005; Tan, Ling & Ting, 2010). Past researches indicate that games have the potential to draw learners into the learning process and to encourage them to participate through a more interactive environment (Gosen & Washbush, 2004; Proserpio & Gioia, 2007; Zantow, Knowlton & Sharp, 2005). The use of games can also provide educators with an interactive means of delivering knowledge that is particularly useful for teaching cause and effect (Gosen & Washbush 2004; Thompson & Dass 2000). As an educational tool, games have the capacity to engage and motivate learners (Paraskeve & Papagiann, 2010; Prensky, 2001). Games improve learners' participation, interests, motivation and influence learners' learning behavior and attitudes; and the learning from games is more likely to be retained (Annetta et al., 2010).

Research supports the idea that games can stimulate learners' interest and motivation (Gough, 1999; Owens, 2005). The use of games in children's classroom can be beneficial for academic achievement, motivation and classroom dynamics (Rosas, Nussbaum, Cumsille, Marianov, Correa, Flores … Salinas, 2003). Therefore, it is important that teachers should not see games as time fillers or tools designed for fun only, but integrate them into their language teaching activities (Uberman, 1998). However, despite its importance, there is relatively little study conducted on

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vocabulary acquisition in Chinese language (Fu, 2005). According to Lee (2012), the use of games in language learning has received little research attention in Malaysian schools. In Malaysia, studies in other subjects such as Mathematics, Science and Geography have shown the usefulness of using games in learning (e.g. Hana, 2009; Akram Kamarudin, 2010; Zareena & Faaizah, 2012). However, studies using games in language learning in Malaysian primary schools have been very limited (Lee, 2012), specifically the Chinese language classes (Fu, 2005). Therefore, this study attempts to investigate whether using games in teaching Chinese vocabulary is able to improve pupils' vocabulary acquisition, interest, motivation, as well as attitudes in the Chinese language classroom.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Learning a language means learning its vocabulary (Gass, 1999). Laufer (1986) also points out, "Any experienced teacher knows that even after students have mastered grammar, they still face masses of unknown words" (p. 131). Chinese language acquisition requires the use of vocabulary as the most basic building blocks underlying the reading process (Fu, 2005; Ma, 2004).

Studies have found that vocabulary is the main difficulty of all Chinese language learners at different levels, and it is also the main problem in all the learning processes of Chinese speaking, listening, reading and writing (Gao, Li & Guo 1993). Because of the challenging nature of Chinese vocabulary and the lack of necessary Chinese word knowledge, it is difficult for Chinese language learners to identify and

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isolate units of meaning, to build up Chinese character networks, and to demonstrate intratextual perceptions (i.e. how different parts of a text are integrated into a coherent discourse structure) in Chinese reading; thus, the development of Chinese reading proficiency is seriously hindered (Everson & Ke 1997).

The current Malaysian educational system emphasises that pupils should be well prepared for the real world where they can think independently, make complex decisions, work collaboratively and communicate effectively in order to be successful (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011b). However, conventional teaching methods currently employed in Malaysian schools has disadvantaged the pupils and pupils lack the engagement in learning (Aroney Pereira, 2005; Ratnawati & Ismail, 2003) and consequently teaching fails to fulfill the current educational needs (Xia, 2011). Conventional teaching methods discourage pupils and make them demotivated and disinterested to learn Chinese language (Xia, 2011). If this trend continues, pupils in Chinese language classes will be bored by the monotony of the classroom and become disinterested (Ratnawati & Ismail, 2003; Xia, 2011).

In schools, language teachers often realise that with the mastery of the vocabulary knowledge, pupils will be able to comprehend a text well and consequently perform well in both oral and written communication (Ratnawati & Ismail, 2003). Blachowicz and Fisher (2005) argue that poor vocabulary knowledge is the greatest influence of poor language skill. In Malaysia, poor vocabulary learning is partly due to language teachers typically using a number of conventional vocabulary teaching methods such as looking up new words meanings in a bilingual dictionary (Aroney Pereira, 2005), listing new words with meanings in their first language

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without any real contextual practice or, most frequently, language learning are based on the textbooks and activity books (Aroney Pereira, 2005; Ratnawati & Ismail, 2003). Thus, learners feel bored and demotivated in language learning (Che Aida, 2004).

Language teachers are aware of the important role of words and know that the lack of them may lead to a feeling of insecurity among pupils learning a new language. However, for some language teachers, they fail to use the most appropriate or effective teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse learners in order to overcome the language learning issues and facilitate learners' learning (Geng, 2007; Xia, 2011). As Pivec and Dziabenko (2010) suggested the learning process should be interesting, easy and fun to learn. However, this is seemingly not happening in Chinese language classes because as Xia (2011) claimed most Chinese language teachers use teacher-centred methods in class and pupils merely are attentive listeners.

Many experts of language teaching methodology (e.g, Ersoz, 2000; Hadfield, 1999; Lee, 1995; Richard-Amato, 1988; Schmitt, 2000; Sökmen, 1997; Thornbury, 2002 & Uberman, 1998) agree that playing games is a good way to learn vocabulary. Games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways (Luu, 2012). With the use of games, the teacher can create various contexts in which learners have to use the language to communicate, exchange information and express their own opinions (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2005). Games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes (Lee, 1979; Richard-Amato, 1988). The use of games is a way to make the lessons more

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interesting, enjoyable and effective (Deesri, 2002; Nguyen & Khuat, 2003; Schultz, 1988).

Although vocabulary learning has been the subject of many studies (e.g, Azwar, 2009; Li, 2012; Luu, 2012; Nguyen & Khuat, 2003; Zhang, 2010) but most of these studies of vocabulary learning and teaching focus on English Language. Few studies have investigated the teaching and learning of Chinese vocabulary acquisition (Fu, 2005). Even less is studied looking at using games to teach vocabulary in Chinese language classrooms in Malaysia (Lee, 2012). So, much is needed to know about using games as a teaching tool to improve vocabulary acquisition, to create interest and to motivate learners in learning Chinese language vocabulary. This study is meant to fill this gap. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of game-based practice on vocabulary acquisition by year three pupils in a Chinese school, their interest, motivation, and attitude in the Chinese language classroom.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the effect of games on year three pupils' vocabulary acquisition, interest, motivation and attitudes in the Chinese language classroom.

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1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objective of the study, the study sets out to address the following research questions:

1.4.1 Do pupils in the experimental group who were taught using game-based practice perform better in vocabulary acquisition as compared to pupils in the control group who were taught using conventional practice?

1.4.2 Do pupils of high, middle and low vocabulary levels in the experimental group who were taught using game-based practice perform better in vocabulary acquisition as compared to pupils of high, middle and low vocabulary levels in the control group who were taught using conventional practice?

1.4.3 Do pupils in the experimental group who were taught using game-based practice show improved interest as compared to pupils in the control group who were taught using conventional practice?

1.4.4 Do pupils in the experimental group who were taught using game-based practice show improved motivation as compared to pupils in the control group who were taught using conventional practice?

1.4.5 Do pupils in the experimental group who were taught using game-based practice show improved attitude as compared to pupils in the control group who were taught using conventional practice?

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1.5 Research Hypothesis

The following research hypotheses are formulated to answer the research questions:

H_1: Pupils who were taught using game-based practice would perform better in vocabulary acquisition when compared to pupils who were taught using conventional practice.

H_2: Pupils of high, middle and low vocabulary levels who were taught using game-based practice would perform better when compared to pupils of high, middle and low vocabulary levels who were taught using conventional practice.

H_3: Pupils who were taught using game-based practice would show improved interest when compared to pupils who were taught using conventional practice.

H_4: Pupils who were taught using game-based practice would show improved motivation when compared to pupils who were taught using conventional practice.

H_5 : Pupils who were taught using game-based practice would show improved attitudes when compared to pupils who were taught using conventional practice.

1.6 Theoretical Framework - Constructivist-based Learning

Constructivist-based teaching might prepare teachers to help their pupils learn the language. Constructivist learning is parallel with the advocacy of constructivism in education that enables learners to construct knowledge or new ideas on their own (Jong et al., 2010). Learning research has shown that learners learn best by actively "constructing" knowledge from a combination of experience, interpretation, and

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