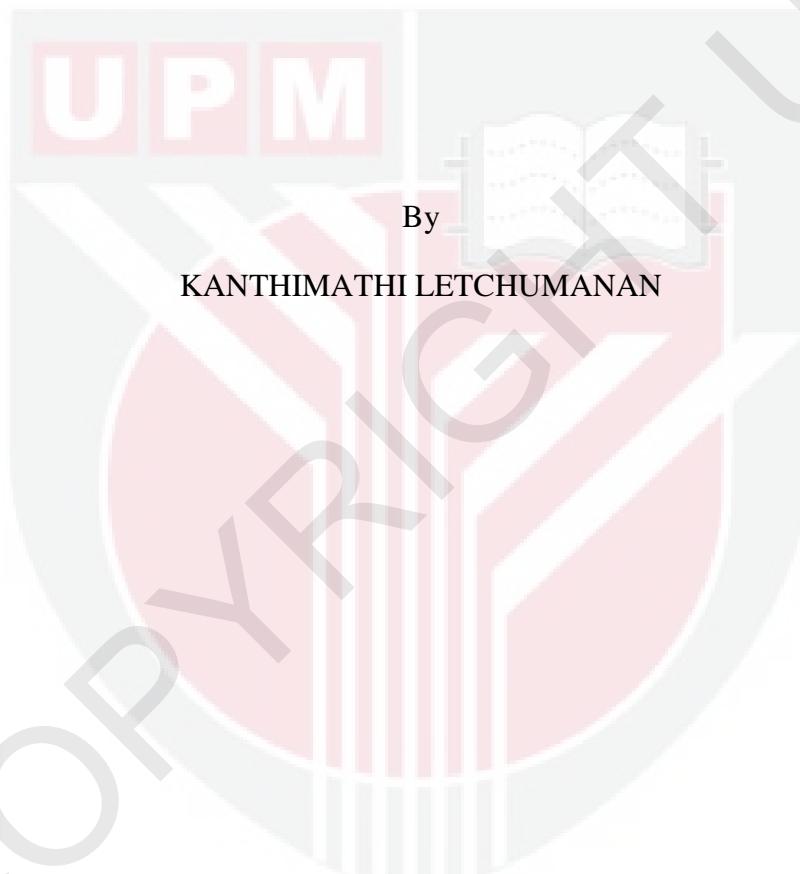**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THE EFFECTS OF GAME-BASED TECHNIQUES ON THE LEXICAL REPERTOIRE OF YOUNG ESL LEARNERS

KANTHIMATHI LETCHUMANAN

FBMK 2012 16

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THE EFFECTS OF GAME-BASED TECHNIQUES ON THE LEXICAL REPERTOIRE OF YOUNG ESL LEARNERS

By

KANTHIMATHI LETCHUMANAN

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

NOVEMBER 2012

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THE EFFECTS OF GAME-BASED TECHNIQUES ON THE LEXICAL REPERTOIRE OF YOUNG ESL LEARNERS

By

KANTHIMATHI LETCHUMANAN

NOVEMBER 2012

Chair: Associate Professor Tan Bee Hoon, PhD

Faculty: Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication

Vocabulary is fundamental to communication, and mastering words is important in learning any language. Effective communication is usually judged by vocabulary ability. Most people who have learned a language are aware of how insufficient vocabulary can retard their communication. This study aimed to address the gap in studies on the effectiveness of using vocabulary games to enhance vocabulary among ESL learners in a selected secondary school. The objectives of the study were to investigate the types of vocabulary learning strategies learners have used prior to the study, to investigate which mode of vocabulary game is preferred by the learners, to examine the learners' lexical frequency profile (LFP) in written essays and to investigate if ESL learners are able to use lexis from the vocabulary games to result in an improvement in vocabulary knowledge.

The study employed a mixed-method research design to incorporate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The counterbalanced design was used to compare the effects of two modes of vocabulary games. In the study, two intact groups formed the experimental groups and underwent a vocabulary game treatment for fourteen weeks, playing computer and paper-based games at different stages. In the first stage, prior to the game treatment, the respondents wrote an essay each, and sat the Productive Vocabulary Levels Test (PVLT). The essays were processed using the *VocabProfile*, that categorized the words produced by learners in their essays into four levels of word frequency: 1000 word-level, 2000 word-level, Academic Word List (AWL) and Not-in-the-list (NIL) word-level. The *VocabProfile* results determine the LFP of the essays written by the learners. The PVLT that measured the learners' vocabulary depth, were manually marked and scores was obtained.

In the second stage of the experiment, the vocabulary game treatment was conducted for seven weeks. Group 1 played the computer-based games and group 2 paper-based games. Post- treatment Test 1 was conducted where both groups wrote parallel essays and sat the PVLT. In the third stage of the experiment, both the experimental groups switched treatments, and continued to play games for another seven weeks and participated in Post-treatment Test 2. They wrote another parallel essay and sat the PVLT. The respondents also answered a questionnaire and participated in an interview.

The results revealed that the respondents preferred computer-based games to paper-based games. Both the experimental groups have improved in the vocabulary depth of the 2000

iii

word-level after playing the vocabulary games which was shown from their PVLT results. The data analysis also showed that the respondents' usage of vocabulary at the 2000 word-level measured through mean scores in their LFP had also increased although it was not statistically significant. The study suggests that the use of vocabulary games could be an effective technique for vocabulary learning among ESL learners. In other words, by gamifying vocabulary learning, even shy and slow learners would engage and participate in the language classroom because vocabulary learning becomes interesting, enjoyable and fun. This idea of gamifying vocabulary learning is an important contribution of the study to the research field.

STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN KOSA KATA DAN KESAN TEKNIK BERASASKAN PERMAINAN TERHADAP REPERTOIR LEKSIKAL PELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA *ESL*

Oleh

KANTHIMATHI LETCHUMANAN

NOVEMBER 2012

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Tan Bee Hoon, PhD

Fakulti: Fakulti Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Kosa kata adalah asas kepada komunikasi dan menguasainya sangat penting dalam pembelajaraan sesuatu bahasa. Kelancaran komunikasi juga diukur dari segi keupayaan penggunaan kosa kata. Kebanyakan orang yang telah mempelajari sesuatu bahasa sedar akan kekurangan kosa kata yang boleh membantutkan komunikasi. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani jurang perbezaan tentang keberkesanan menggunakan permainan kosa kata untuk meningkatkan kosa kata dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat jenis strategi pembelajaran kosa kata yang telah digunakan pelajar sebelum kajian, mengenal pasti permainan kosa kata yang disukai oleh pelajar, untuk memeriksa profil kekerapan kosa kata pelajar (LFP) dalam karangan dan untuk menyiasat jika pelajar ESL dapat menggunakan kosa kata dari permainan kosa kata yang boleh menjana profil yang kaya dengan pelbagai kosa kata.

Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kaedah-gabungan yang menggunakan gabungan dua kaedah iaitu kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk pengumpulan data dan analisis. Kaedah kajian "counterbalanced" telah digunakan untuk membandingkan kesan antara dua jenis permainan kosa kata ke atas kosa kata pelajar. Dalam kajian ini, dua buah kumpulan utuh membentuk kumpulan eksperimen yang diberi latihan selama empat belas minggu untuk bermain permainan kosa kata berdasarkan kertas dan komputer pada peringkat yang berlainan. Pada peringkat pra kajian, iaitu sebelum bermulanya latihan, setiap responden menulis esei dan menduduki Ujian Kosa Kata Tahap Produktif (PVLT). Esei pelajar dimuat naik ke atas perisian computer, *VocabProfile*, yang mengkategorikan penggunaan kosa kata esei pelajar kepada empat tahap frekuensi perkataan: tahap 1000 perkataan, tahap 2000 perkataan, senarai Kosa Kata Aademik (AWL) dan kosa kata-tiada-dalam senarai. Keputusan *VocabProfile* menentukan LFP esei yang ditulis oleh pelajar. Ujian PVLT yang mengukur tahap kefahaman kosa kata pelajar pula ditanda secara manual dan skor diperolehi.

Pada peringkat kedua kajian, latihan permainan kosa kata telah dijalankan selama tujuh minggu. Kumpulan eksperiment 1 bermain permainan bahasa berdasarkan komputer dan kumpulan 2 bermain permainan bahasa berdasarkan kertas. Ujian Pasca 1 dijalankan kepada kedua-dua kumpulan dan mereka menulis sebuah esei dan menduduki Ujian Kosa Kata Tahap Produktif yang selaras. Selepas itu, kedua-dua kumpulan ini bertukar latihan, dan bermain permainan kosa kata itu selama tujuh minggu lagi. Selepas tujuh minggu, responden menduduki Ujian Pasca 2. Mereka menulis lagi sebuah esei dan menduduki

vi

Ujian Kosa Kata Tahap Produktif yang selaras. Responden juga menjawab soal selidik dan mengambil bahagian dalam temu bual.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar memilih permainan kosa kata berdasarkan komputer berbanding permainan kosa kata berdasarkan kertas. Kedua-dua kumpulan eksperimen telah menunjukkan peningkatan dalam penggunaan kosa kata pada tahap 2000 perkataan selepas bermain permainan kosa kata seperti yang ditunjukkan dalam skor Ujian Kosa Kata Tahap Produktif. Analisis data juga menunjukkan penggunaan kosa kata pada tahap 2000 perkataan yang diukur melalui LFP esei pelajar turut meningkat, walaupun peningkatan itu tidak signifikan. Kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa permainan kosa kata boleh digunakan sebagai satu teknik yang berkesan untuk pembelajaran kosa kata dalam kalangan pelajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Dalam erti kata lain, melalui teknik 'gamifying' pembelajaran kosa kata, pelajar yang malu dan lembap akan turut melibatkan diri dalam kelas bahasa kerana pembelajaraan kosa kata menjadi menarik, menyeronokkan dan menggembirakan. Idea 'gamifying' pembelajaran kosa kata adalah sumbangan penting kajian kepada bidang penyelidikan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to the following people who had made it possible for me to complete this doctoral thesis. I am truly indebted to them.

First, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my main supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Tan Bee Hoon, for her concise, professional comments, patience and guidance which were a driving force for me to complete this doctoral thesis. Despite having a tight schedule, she always welcomed me with a smiling face each time we meet to discuss. She was always available for my questions and doubts, large or small and motivated me to complete this thesis.

My gratitude also goes to the other members of my supervisory committee, Associate Professor Dr Shamala Paramasivam and Dr Sabariah Md Rashid, who had given me invaluable advice, encouragement and careful guidance. My sincere thanks goes to Dr Vijay Mallan who has given his guidance and support during the proposal stage of my thesis. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Karthiyaini Devarajoo of Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur (IUKL) Malaysia, for being a supportive friend during my emotional periods.

My gratitude also goes to my husband who had given me his unlimited moral support from the beginning of my studies. He was a great motivator who pushed me to complete this journey. I also wish to thank my children for their patience, tolerance and understanding me as a working, postgraduate student and mother.

Lastly, I am grateful to my ageing parents for their unending support who always wanted one of their daughters to pursue doctoral study. I am indebted to them more than words can express. To them I dedicate this thesis.

APPROVAL

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 28 N0vember 2012 to conduct the final examination of Kanthimathi Letchumanan on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled "Vocabulary Learning Strategies and the Effects of Game-based Techniques on the Lexical Repertoire of Young ESL Learners" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the Doctoral of Philosophy.

Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ain Nadzimah Abdullah
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairperson)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Faiz Sathivellu Abdullah
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Dr. Yap Ngee Thai
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Prof. Dr. Paul Nation
School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
(External Examiner)

_____
Seow Heng Fong, PhD
Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Tan Bee Hoon, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chair)

Shamala Paramasivam, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Sabariah Md Rashid, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

_____
BUJANG BIN KIM HUAT, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

_____

KANTHIMATHI LETCHUMANAN

Date: 28 November 2012

xii

TABLE OF CONTENTS