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

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By

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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
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.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN KOSA KATA DAN KESAN TEKNIK BERASASKAN PERMAINAN TERHADAP Repertoire LEKSikal PELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA ESL

Oleh

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Kosa kata adalah asas kepada komunikasi dan menguasainya sangat penting dalam pembelajaran 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.

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

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APPROVAL

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 28 November 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.

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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
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ABSTRACT       | ii  |
| ABSTRAK        | v   |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | viii |
| APPROVAL       | x   |
| DECLARATION    | xii |
| LIST OF TABLES | xvii|
| LIST OF FIGURES | xix |
| LIST OF APPENDICES | xx  |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | xxi |

## CHAPTER

### 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study 1
1.2 Problem Statement 9
1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions 13
1.4 Theoretical Framework of the Study 14
   1.4.1 Constructivism Theory 14
   1.4.2 Information Processing Theory 15
   1.4.3 Input-Process-Output Model 16
1.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study 20
1.6 Definitions of Terms 23
1.7 Significance of the Study 30

### 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction 34
2.2 Vocabulary Acquisition 34
2.3 Word Knowledge 36
2.4 English Vocabulary Size 39
2.5 Incidental Learning and Vocabulary Acquisition 41
   2.5.1 Incidental Vocabulary Learning in L1 Contexts 43
   2.5.2 Incidental vocabulary Learning in L2 Contexts 44
2.6 Vocabulary Learning Strategies 47
   2.6.1 A Taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning Strategies 47
   2.6.2 Types of Vocabulary Learning Strategies 49
2.7 Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies 58
2.8 Language Games 64
   2.8.1 Characteristics of Games 64
   2.8.2 Types of Games 66
   2.8.3 Advantages of Language Games 70
2.9 Research on Language Games 73
2.10 Research on Computer-based Games 79
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Research Design
3.3 Research Plan
3.4 Variables of the Study
3.5 Population and Sampling
3.6 Data Collection Methods
  3.6.1 Production Vocabulary Levels Test
  3.6.2 Essay
  3.6.3 Questionnaire
  3.6.4 Interview
3.7 Timeline and Duration for Data Collection
3.8 Data Analysis
3.9 Selection of Games
  3.9.1 Selection of Computer-based Games
  3.9.2 Selection of Paper-based Games
3.10 Computer-based Games Used in the Study
  3.10.1 Letter Rip
  3.10.2 Fowl Words
  3.10.3 Wordo
  3.10.4 Mystery Case Files
  3.10.5 Crossword Puzzle
  3.10.6 Irregular Plurals
  3.10.7 Prefix
  3.10.8 Homonyms
  3.10.9 Speed Word
3.11 Paper-based Games Used in the Study
  3.11.1 Crossword Puzzle
  3.11.2 Word Maze
  3.11.3 Missing Letters
  3.11.4 Hidden Pictures
  3.11.5 Prefix and Suffixes
  3.11.6 Jumbled Words
  3.11.7 Riddles
  3.11.8 Proverb
3.12 Pilot Study
3.13 Summary

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

xiv
REFERENCES
APPENDICES
BIODATA OF STUDENT
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

xvi