Enhancing Year 3 Pupils' Vocabulary Acquisition Using Board Games

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ABSTRACT

This study targets to explore the role of using board games in enhancing young learner's vocabulary acquisition for the context of Malaysian primary education students. In order to test the research instruments designed, 10 year 3 pupils were chosen based on their marks. The participants were exposed to two different methods over a period of two weeks in order to test their vocabulary acquisition. The two selected methods were incorporating board games as well as traditional vocabulary learning methods. The intervention strategy requires the pupils to play board games whereas in the traditional method, the pupils are exposed to the basic vocabulary strategies such as dictionary usage and contextual clues. The extent of the participants' vocabulary knowledge in the three methods was taken into account by pre and post-test, journal reflection as well as the observation.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary plays a major part in second language learning. Its importance is clear even in the early stages of second language learning. In this manner, vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of language aptitude since it indicates how effectively students will use the components of the language. According to Meung *et al.*, [27] vocabulary assists the language development of second language learners. The significant prominence of the strategies of vocabulary learning is escalating every day as it is often considered as hard as well as boring and slow. Even so, a variety of strategies has been introduced widely in order to assist the young learners grasp the gist of vocabulary learned such as books, newspaper readings, playing games, watching movies in the target language and many more [24]. Implementing games in classroom learning is one of the strategies that has been used worldwide. The integration of games, particularly board games, into pedagogical approaches has demonstrated considerable efficacy in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, especially among younger learners [18]. This approach addresses the challenge of traditional vocabulary learning methods, which often fail to engage students [31].

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This is greatly supported by Fidyaningrum *et al.*, [16] where greater importance is placed on vocabulary acquisition to enhance second language acquisition. Variety of approaches are needed to create a creative lesson to grab the interest of young ESL learners. According to Seilova, [37], classroom activities that include reading materials and instructional materials that catch the students interest in acquiring as well as grasping newly learned words. Vocabulary is a component of language that has not received much attention in the early stages of second language education because structural patterns of the language receive greater attention than vocabulary [32]. It is common to hear students remark that they are struggling with their English class. Learners frequently report that English vocabulary is difficult to acquire and memorise, that they lack language to express themselves, and that they have difficulty recovering vocabulary from their memory [2].

Vocabulary learning is essentially a critical part of language acquisition that involves learners' knowledge of word meanings, word construction, collocation, synonyms, and so on. Multiple ways of teaching vocabulary have been shown in studies to be the most successful in developing vocabulary abilities. These many techniques and chances for language learning may be controlled and play an important part in increasing learners' vocabulary. In terms of learning English vocabulary, unique and engaging approaches, such as language games, can break the monotony and lack of learners' motivation by creating a pleasant and suitable learning environment which can encourage greater retention of new words [18]. This is particularly relevant for English as a Second Language learners, where effective strategies for fostering long-term retention and comprehension are of utmost importance [40].

As a result, games assist kids in remembering new vocabulary, associating new knowledge with their environment, and developing their language and communicative abilities. Mattiev *et al.*, [25] on the other hand, suggested in their study that the multiple intelligences approach is effective in developing students' attitudes, and their findings revealed that students taught using the multiple intelligences method performed better than those who learned using traditional methods [7]. The conventional technique of acquiring vocabulary, which involves providing a large list of terms for pupils to memorise, is unproductive since students' vocabulary is found to be below the desired level in higher education [45].

Furthermore, traditional ways of acquiring vocabulary in isolation from a book, or through synonyms, antonyms, definitions, and examples, as well as translation and repetition, make learning tiresome for students [44]. Board games, for example, are growing in popularity in schools, and it's now feasible for students to play language games and acquire new words without even realising it. As a result, in order to enhance learners' vocabulary acquisition, it is critical that learners be exposed to the most recent method of acquisition through entertaining learning [16]. The study's goal is to examine if playing board games improves ESL learners' vocabulary learning.

1.1 Research Objectives

The primary goal of this research is to investigate the development of teaching material to enhance vocabulary learning among primary school students in Malaysian context. To achieve the goal, the study involved a development of a board game which is then being tested to investigate its effectiveness in enhancing participants' new vocabulary acquisition.

1.2 Research Questions

In guiding the research, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the processes involved in developing a vocabulary board game that suit Malaysian primary school students?
2. What is the effectiveness of using a vocabulary board game in improving Malaysian primary school students' new vocabulary acquisition?
3. What is the range of students' vocabulary acquisitions before and after incorporation of the board game?
4. How does the use of vocabulary board game enhance Malaysian primary students' motivation in learning English?
5. What are the suggestions to improve the design of the vocabulary board game in enhancing Malaysian primary school students' vocabulary acquisition?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Constructivist Theory

In general Constructivist theory can be separated into two, which is the Cognitive Constructivist Theory and Socio Constructivist Theory. Cognitive Constructivism Theory is a theory of information which contends that people build their insight from a connection between their experience and their thoughts [21]. Jean Piaget was the primary scholar to guarantee that learning occurs through significant investigations of the environment around students and students build 'schemes' or develop the information or create thoughts by acclimatizing or accommodating to the new knowledge [24]. As stated in Piaget's Theory, assimilation is the procedure by which received knowledge is altered in our minds, so we can modify it with what we previously knew (the schema).

Whereas accommodation is the cycle in which we change what we knew earlier to oblige the new born knowledge. Constructivists concentrate on the knowledge gaining process, not the end product. Constructivists recommend learning is a more viable cycle when information is effectively built by the learners, not inactively assimilated from course materials and delivery of lessons by educators [42]. According to Putra [34] constructivist classrooms include specific qualities as explained below.

Learning is child-centered
Learners' prior knowledge is acknowledged and valued
Learner's and teacher are interactive
Democratic learning environment
Teachers play role of guides
Assessment is interwoven with teaching learning process

Constructivist classrooms generally value the learner's prior knowledge. Throughout the teaching and learning procedure, learners develop meaning that suits their experiences and assumptions [13]. This can cause them to build meaning different from what was expected by the teacher. Therefore, this leads the learners to experience cognitive conflict. Mindfulness towards learners 'prior knowledge is fundamental in a constructivist classroom [9]. Educators have to give an empowering environment where the learners are secure with what is not yet known to them and feel comfortable to impart their plans to their friends and instructor. Another feature of a constructive classroom is teacher and learner's interaction.

This interactivity allows for a dynamic exchange of ideas, fostering deeper understanding and knowledge co-creation rather than passive reception [3]. The teacher, in this constructivist framework, transitions from a dispenser of information to a facilitator who guides students in expanding and evaluating their understanding [7]. This emphasis on interaction is crucial as learners

actively construct new knowledge from experiences, integrating it with their existing cognitive frameworks [11]. This active construction of knowledge, where individuals interpret and build conceptual relationships based on experience and environmental interaction, aligns with the fundamental principle that knowledge is not static but continuously evolves through subjective perception [14].

Learning happens inside a net of social connections as instructors and students collaborate either informally or formally [41]. Educators design interactive circumstances for understanding learners' ideas and later restructure those ideas by posing inquiries, connecting with them in inquiries or potentially encouraging research. Which means Definition of the words and the ideas not yet grasped but arise after collaborative discussion. There is no control of educators and learning happens in a collective way and experiences. This approach positions the learner as an active participant in knowledge acquisition, challenging the traditional paradigm where knowledge is merely transmitted from teacher to student [38]. This active engagement fosters a more profound and personalized understanding, aligning with constructivist principles that emphasize knowledge creation through experience and interaction [35]. This approach contrasts with traditional methods where knowledge is passively absorbed, advocating instead for learners to actively construct meaning by linking new ideas with their existing understanding [10]. Furthermore, constructivist learning environments facilitate interaction between learners and knowledge, as well as among learners themselves, often employing various tools to emphasize a contextually purposeful learning experience [4].

2.2 Vocabulary

According to AL-Orbawi [4], vocabulary is the knowledge of words and its meaning in printed form or even oral form of the language that is receptive and productive. On the other hand, vocabulary serves as the foundation on how good a learner listens, speaks, writes and reads as it is the main element of language proficiency [16]. More specifically, Syamsidar *et al.*, [42] explained vocabulary as the assembly of words or a package of subsets of words that are used in specific circumstances which are known to an individual or utilised in a certain textbook. In brief, vocabulary can be explained as an assortment of words in language which comprise of word structures, spelling, pronunciation as well as the definition of words that may convey various meanings in different contexts [32].

Vocabulary should be taught and learnt by employing effectful methodologies. Teaching vocabulary is pointed toward empowering students to comprehend the ideas of new words, acquire a more prominent number of words, and utilize words effectively for communication reasons. A robust vocabulary is pivotal for L2 learners, enabling them to comprehend diverse linguistic inputs and articulate their thoughts with precision, thereby enhancing overall communicative competence [3]. Furthermore, vocabulary mastery is fundamental for effective communication, allowing individuals to articulate ideas clearly and comprehend others' expressions [42]. , stresses the primary objectives of learning vocabulary are to find the definitions of new words; remember the information on the recently learnt words and to extend English vocabulary knowledge. Using successful methodologies both in teaching and learning the vocabulary will lead to positive vocabulary growth and improve language skills of ESL learners [30].

Furthermore, learning strategies discovered by Dobbins separated the vocabulary learning strategies into two which are indirect and direct strategies. Indirect strategy comprises learners' vocabulary learning through social strategy, metacognitive strategy and affective strategy while direct strategies including memory strategy, compensation strategy and cognitive strategy. Handayani, *et al.*, [20], extends vocabulary learning strategies by dividing them into three

parts as planning, sources and process. During the first part, the learners should plan in advance for their vocabulary learning. Later, the learners can discover the sources of the new words by figuring out how and where to search for information about the new words [16]. The final strategy is the process. This stage is to form vocabulary knowledge based on the former two strategies.

2.3 The Importance of Vocabulary Learning

According to Purwanto *et al.*, [32], vocabulary education should be placed as a priority in second language learning. Vocabulary plays an important part in learning a second language, especially for beginners. Vocabulary knowledge also majorly contributes to second language learners' massive development in language acquisition [27]. Therefore, in the initial stages of learning a language, vocabulary plays a major role. According to Efgivia *et al.*, [15], compared to grammar, vocabulary is far more essential in learning a language because it enables pupils' to communicate using basic words that they have learned. To emphasise the importance of vocabulary, Krashen (1987, cited in Chand, [13], explained, "When pupils travel, they don't bring grammar books; they bring dictionaries." "You can communicate practically everything with words, but you can say very little with grammar," Sorokoumova *et al.*, [39] stated. According to Barus *et al.*, [12] students begin to gain knowledge of the target language by memorising words.

Furthermore, according to Jsch [22], having a good understanding of vocabulary helps students not only gain confidence in using the target language but also communicate more effectively and precisely because words are used for "analysing, inferring, assessing, and reasoning." In addition, Meung *et al.*, [27] states that learning vocabulary is a difficult and time- consuming endeavour, particularly for children. Furthermore, according to Fidyaningrum *et al.*, [16] learning vocabulary is a time-consuming and exhausting process, especially when done by rote and mechanical methods. However, the ability to remember new words is possibly the most difficult aspect of language learning [16] .Games can help kids establish domains of words and relatedness by allowing them to practise and repeat these words. As a result, providing a classroom climate where kids are encouraged to learn by playing with words might help children become more motivated to learn and improve their vocabulary [25].

2.4 Definition of Games

Li *et al.*, [24] believed that children's education is based on action, and that they learn more effectively when playing and participating in practical tasks that allow them to express and articulate their ideas. Children are active learners, according to Bader *et al.*, [9]. They develop knowledge through opportunities for action. Finally, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that children's language learning growth is aided by social contact with their surroundings. As a result, games provide opportunities for very young learners to communicate with their peers in the target language [11]. Similarly, Barekat, [11] asserts in recent literature that learners learn and develop more effectively when they are engaged in play. Students suffer fear and nervousness when they attend the classroom because they are presented with unfamiliar linguistic structures [29].

2.5 Benefits of using Games in the EFL Classroom

Implementing games in the language classroom increases learners' motivation while also increasing their involvement and focus [28]. Aside from these features, games encourage students to utilise the target language in more innovative and communicative ways [36]. Furthermore, Prayoga [31] claims that when students play games, they learn more actively and with higher enthusiasm, resulting in a stronger grasp of the learned information when compared to a more

traditional way of teaching. Students absorb the target language unconsciously while playing through well-organized games because they dedicate themselves to the activities they are involved in Anane [5].

Games not only stimulate and improve collaboration, but they also attract the interest and involvement of the learners [39]. Another advantage is that they create a challenging competitive environment that encourages student engagement while being pleasant and entertaining [5]. Finally, Sumarna *et al.*, [41] feels that games provide a pleasant respite from the monotony of the language classroom. Taking all of this into account, it is possible to infer that establishing an atmosphere in which students may learn by doing and engaging with one another is critical in the classroom of young learners. Implementing games not only adds to cooperative learning since students work in groups and exchange information, but it also fosters a learner-centered atmosphere that supports the learners' interests, allowing them to learn by playing. According to Balakrishna [10], when youngsters encounter learning through games, it appears to impact their expectations because they choose activities that are quick, energetic, and inquisitive.

Furthermore, they create an atmosphere conducive To meaningful repetition [43]. According to Efgivia *et al.*, [15], a well-designed game gives high repeat play value, incentivizing students to play the game again and over until they feel confident in providing the correct answer. as a result. As a result, the words are more likely to be well practised and connected to their interests, as well as more quickly retrieved in memory [47].

Board games are seen as a valuable tool because they generate an engaging and entertaining environment in which students are not hindered by making errors or excluded if they do not know an answer, therefore building their self-confidence [43]. Furthermore, by employing the target language, it assures that reluctant or timid pupils will surely engage [10]. Even the board track allows students to generate mental images, recall, and finally integrate and apply the material they have learned during the session [43]. Board games can help kids build word domains and relatedness since they allow them to practise and rehearse these terms [5].

2.6 Data Triangulation

Data triangulation was carried out among the two instruments to establish validity and reliability of the research. For example, the data from the classroom observation will be triangulated with the journal entries recorded. And the data from journal entries will be triangulated with data from classroom observation. The reason that data triangulation is being conducted in the research is to provide the researcher with a more comprehensive picture of what is going through in the minds of the pupils during the research.

3. Result and Discussion

The findings gathered from the pre-test and post-test, reflective journal jottings and classroom observation will be discussed in this chapter. Pre-test were given to the research participants before the intervention lesson where traditional lesson method was used during the pre-test. Post-test were given to the research participants during the intervention lesson where the board game was used in the lesson. Reflective journal jottings were recorded throughout the research including the initial stage of identifying the issue till the last stage of the intervention lesson.

Besides that, pupils' thoughts on both the traditional lesson and intervention lesson were also recorded in the form of reflective journal jottings through the perspective of the researcher. Classroom observations' findings will also be discussed in this chapter. All these three instruments

were used in this research to ensure the triangulation which enhances the validity and the reliability of the research. This chapter will be discussing the findings of the research based on the three instruments that have been used for this research, that is the pre- tests and post-tests, reflective journal jottings and classroom observation.

3.1 Pre-Tests and Post-Tests

One of the data collection methods that was executed during this research was the pre- test and post-test. Two sets of pre-test and post-test were carried out to determine the reliability of the research intervention. The Pre-Test results were collected during Traditional Lesson and the Post-test results were collected during Intervention Lesson. Traditional Lesson has been carried out using traditional way of teaching without using any intervention or strategies.

On the other hand, Intervention Lesson has been carried out using the intervention strategized by the researcher that is using board games to aid the pupils' vocabulary acquisition. And the same method was used in the Post-Test. One of the ways the outcome for both of these lessons were collected using the IBM SPSS Statistics Software. Both the Pre-Test and Post-Test 2's marks were collected to be tabulated its data. Paired samples t- tests were conducted upon the marks that has been obtained from the both the tests. This subsection will be discussing about the results obtained.

3.2 Pre-Test

As for the Pre-Test, the lesson was conducted to collect data for the tests. The mean for the test were collected to determine whether the intervention was effective or not. The data was tabulated in the IBM SPSS Statistics software and the results from the Pre-Test obtained is shown below:

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PreTest2	3.63	16	3.704	.926
	PostTest2	9.75	16	.683	.171

Based on the Paired Samples T-test were collected above, the mean score that has been obtained for the Pre-Test was 4.38 and the result that have been obtained for Post-Test was an awesome 9.56. This shows a good significance in increase in the mean score of the grades in the Post-Test compared to the mean score obtained in the Pre-Test. The results of the paired samples t-test has proven that the use of board games has significance in improving and helping the pupils' vocabulary acquisition.

As a teacher, the researcher is happy with the results obtained as the researcher feels that she has found one of the ways that the pupils enjoy playing the games. Another set of tests were done to determine whether the intervention was effective. This is to ensure that the intervention continues to obtain consistent results from the pupils. The next subtopic will be discussing about the results obtained from the Post-Test.

3.3 Post-Test

For the Post-Test that was conducted, similarly, the marks were obtained through the Traditional Lesson and the Post-Test marks were obtained through the Intervention Lesson. The marks that were

obtained from the pupils were then tabulated into the IBM SPSS Statistics software and Paired Samples T-test were then conducted from the marks that has been obtained. The results obtained were shown in the table below:

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PreTest1	4.38	16	3.667	.917
	PostTest1	9.56	16	.727	.182

Based on the table above, the mean score that is obtained from the Pre-Test 1, that is from the Traditional Lesson 1 was 3.63. Meanwhile, the mean score that was obtained from the Post-Test is 9.75. This again, has shown a significant increase in the Post-Test compared to the Pre-Test 2. This shows that the pupil's reading vocabulary acquisition is enhanced further with the presence of board game as an aid.

Keeping aside the results, as a teacher who is always thirsty to find the best way to tackle the pupils needs in learning the English language. This is has fulfilled one of the thirsts of the researcher. As a teacher-researcher, this result has shown one of the million effective ways that yet to be discovered by the researcher to enable the pupils get the input delivered by the teacher and to enable the pupils understand, retain, learn and thoughtfully use the English language in their daily life. The intervention that has been used in this research is a success based on the data collection and interpretation. The results that have been obtained from the t- test results proves that the use of board game in teaching reading comprehension were effective and the pupils were positively receiving the board game as one of their strategies to enhance their vocabulary acquisition.

The findings revolve around research questions which will be discussed based on the research questions of the research and the literature that has been reviewed. The results that were obtained through this research has shown that the use of board game as an aid for reading vocabulary acquisition were effective for the pupils. The results of the t-test, reflective journal jottings and the classroom observation reflects the tremendous success. There are a lot of factors that has contributed to the result. This subtopic will be discussing on the factors that made the board game as an aid for vocabulary acquisition were successful. The discussion will be backed up with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. There are a lot of instances that has proved that the board game has been effective in helping the pupils to comprehend the words that they have read. The results of the t-test have proven that the board games have hugely helped the pupils in remembering the words that they have been introduced. The big difference in mean in the pre-test and post-test results that has been calculated in both cycles of the data collection has shown that the board games has been a huge aid for the pupils to understand, pronounce as well as to remember the new vocabulary that they have learned.

One of the many reasons that the use of board game in helping the pupils was a success is the where the pupils were able to produce their own meaning of the text based on the information of the text with the information [22] that they already knew. Through the intervention of using board games, the pupils were able to make meaning out of the text that has been given to them. The use of board games in lesson strategy has enabled the pupils to interact with the words (Grabe 1991 as in Zhou [47] which has eventually made the pupils to understand the text that has been given to them during the Post-Test 1 and Post- Test 2. This has led to the pupils to acquire the words introduced well by mentally interconnecting the various event that took place in the text and then to interpret

the text intelligibly [36]. This can be explained through the two main activities that is taking place during the activities. First, when the pupils drafting out the strategy, they need to understand the flow of the game so that they could burst more balloons in order to obtain the clues. Secondly, through this study it was revealed that the pupils were able to remember the words that was newly introduced to them.

The outcome that has been expected by the researcher through this study has been fulfilled as the pupils were able to remember the words that they have learned when they were involving actively in the board game. This can be highly related to the study that was done by [18] by the title of 'EL Reading Activities on Facebook among Malaysian University Students' where the university students enjoying creating creative productions on Facebook rather than reading their normal academic content in their journey to enhance ESL reading habits, develop interest in reading and this boosts the meaning making of the text that they are reading. It also assists their vocabulary acquisition and making them to easily remember the words that was newly introduced to them.

Board games, that has been used in this intervention could be perceived as creative productions, and the interest of the pupils to create the clues creatively to participate in the game such as the board game which is full of words and images may have contributed to the huge difference in the mean scores of Pre-Test and Post-Test for both the cycles for this study. Another reason of why the intervention of this research were successful was the element of multimedia learning. The cognitive theory of multimedia learning is the backbone of this research where this research was to enable the pupils to make mental representations [26] of the board game that have been presented to them; in this research the text that they are assigned with.

The idea of the two different cognitive systems that exists in the human brain where one specializes in imagery processing and another with language [26] as the Dual Coding theory suggests had further consolidated the researcher's urge to try using the board games as an aid to help in pupils' reading comprehension. The results obtained from this research is reflected by the research of 'Visual Aids and Multimedia in Second Language Acquisition' in the research made by Barekat [11]. The study has proven that the pupils were able to learn the input taught and interacted with the visual aids that is provided during the lesson. In this research, the pupils were required to actively participate in the board game in order to acquire the clues. What was being put into test here is the ability for the pupils to make meaning of the text and be able to search for the right clue to complete the task given.

The use of board game as an assistance for the pupils to comprehend the reading text has proven to be a success. Based on the results and the classroom observation that was made during the research, the pupils were highly motivated to be exploiting board games as their vocabulary acquisition aid. The results can be clearly shown in the results that has been obtained from the difference of mean scores of pre-tests and posts for both the cycles in this action research. This subtopic will be discussing on the second research question by relating the question with the literature that was reviewed in the second chapter.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of board games has proven to be effective in helping the pupils in semi-urban areas with average and weak English language proficiency to comprehend reading texts. The use of board games has facilitated the pupils to make meaning out of the text that they are reading through the integration of words and images that is relevant to the text in the form of fun learning. This research has indicated the pupils' language skills especially their reading skills in English language could be improved through exploiting the pupils' interest and needs. More studies must be made in

order to find more strategies on how to improve their pupil's English language proficiency and then their English language literacy. This is because most of the Malaysian pupils are of average and weak English language proficiency.

Teachers should be ever-curious in identifying the pupils' problem in their English language proficiency and strive to find a suitable strategy to solve the issue. More research and study should be made to tackle the issues that is faced by the Malaysian pupils in achieving a good standard of English language proficiency. Therefore, a good teacher should be able adapt to the ever-changing trends in English as a Second Language Learning (ESL) whilst being highly receptive to their pupils' needs and attending to their pupils' issues in English language.

The implementation of the board game was very helpful in helping low proficiency pupils to remember the learned vocabulary better which would eventually expand their vocabulary level. However, this technique can be further improved by using realia instead of pictures as discussed earlier. Additionally, other forms of games can also be considered. As a teacher to be, always believe that we should always expand our knowledge by solving everyday classroom issues in order to improve ourselves professionally. This action research will be a stepping stone for me to improve myself in the teaching profession. In addition, the intervention that has been used in this research is a success based on the data collection and interpretation. The results that have been obtained from the t-test results proves that the use of board game in teaching reading comprehension were effective and the pupils were positively receiving the board game as one of their strategies to enhance their vocabulary acquisition.

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