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The Effectiveness of Using Pictemp (Picture Template) to Aid Year 3 Vocabulary Skill in Malaysia

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Abstract:

Malaysian Government English Language Policy had clearly stated; English Language must be taught to all Malaysian student as a second language. The action research aimed to study the extent to which using the PicTemp (picture template) method is effective in improving the vocabulary among Year 3 pupils. The research participants comprised 10 low achievers Year 3 pupils from primary school located in Sepang and Putrajaya, Malaysia. The study involved the use of two different teaching methods, which were the traditional method and PicTemp methods. The instruments for the study consisted of Test 1 and Test 2, an interview schedule as well as journal entries. The results of the study showed that the PicTemp method was effective in helping Year 3 pupils develop their vocabulary. Although the results were positive, the study also finds that PicTemp method to be exhausting for young learners. Hence the study suggests that the application of this method could be on weekly basis.

Keywords: Norbert Schmitt's theory of vocabulary learning, shape poem, writing problem, second language learner, vocabulary skill

Introduction

"When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master — that's all."

Carroll, L (1871)

The idea of vocabulary can be generalized as word recognition and comprehension. Vocabulary refers to terms that have one or many meanings in everyday language but which have a precise and sometimes different meaning in scientific context Cassels & Johnstone, 1985, as cited in Zurida (2004). Art is a form of expression of feeling, ideas and thoughts which words can never express. Art therapy was conducted in order to help children illustrate their thoughts and using the artwork, the counsellor asks children to explain their painting. Therefore, the artwork actually helped children to organize their thoughts and help them to speak out. Art as defined by John Dewey is to feel the meaning of what one is doing, and to rejoice in that meaning: to unite in one concurrent fact the unfolding of the inner life and the ordered development of material conditions - that is art UNESCO (2005). Dewey also believes that art is essential where the integration of the arts in educational systems can improve the quality of education by motivating students and teachers; introducing active learning methods in the classroom; and making curricula more relevant to students' interests and needs. In addition, the arts enable successful learning in diverse educational environment. This action research shall combine and immerse the concept of art and language acquisition. The aim of integrated content and language learning is twofold: learning subject matter together with learning a language Zurida & Hashimah (2004). It is as suggested by the Malaysia Education Blueprint where there is a need of integration of subjects across curriculum.

The main objective of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of vocabulary in colouring templates (PicTemp /'pleɪˈkæb/) in improving Year 3 primary school English class in Malaysia. Data were collected using spelling tests, journal entries and semi structured interviews with the pupils regarding (a) the number of words they manage to remember, and (b) the probability of the pupils to understand the concept of the word.

Malaysian Context

The Malaysian Government English Language Policy is explicit; English is to be taught in schools as an effective second language. English is used for some thirtary education and quite widely as the language of business Jantmary & Yunus (2011). John Dewey believes that art is essential where the integration of the arts in educational systems can improve the quality of education by motivating students and teachers; introducing active learning methods in the classroom; and making curricula more relevant to students' interests and needs. In addition, the arts enable successful learning in diverse educational environments UNESCO (2005). This research believes in the combination and immersion of the concept of art and language acquisition. The aim of integrated content and language learning is twofold: learning subject matter together with learning a language Zurida & Hashimah (2004). It is as suggested by the Malaysia Education Blueprint where education system to not only improve the quality of its curriculum and assessments, but also achieve much tighter integration across them Ministry of Education (2012). Hence it is essential for teachers to play their role effectively in shaping the human capital especially in teaching and learning process Yunus, Harwati, Noriah &Zamri (2010).

Learning Theories and Approaches to Using PicTemp Method in Language Teaching *Norbert Schmitt's Theory of Vocabulary Learning Strategy*

This research develops the idea of the intervention through Nobert Schmitt's theory of vocabulary learning strategies. My intervention strives to meet a set of selected elements in the theory to suit the capability of the respondents. The reason for the choice of this taxonomy is based on Schmitt's (2000) claim that the use of VLS counts on a number of factors such as proficiency, motivation, and culture. This is because culture and environment can influence their preference for exacting learning strategies Schmitt (2000).

Shape poem

Shin & Crendall (2014) describes shape poem as words written in the shape of the major topic or feeling. This is what this research had adopted into the intervention. Shape poems could facilitate pupils to improve their English due it its nature of playing with word as well as image to facilitate word generation. Furthermore, pupils could benefit and learn vocabulary through intense drilling yet, in a way the pupils are able to enjoy.

Factors Contributing To Using Pictemp Method In Teaching

Spelling Errors

One of the problems Malaysian young learners are facing in learning English Language is spelling errors. The pupils have the tendency to spell according to how the words sound. Charles Read (1971; 1975; 1986) as cited in Cox (2014) claimed that children were able to name the letters of the alphabet and relate the letter names to the sounds of words. Then they "invented" spelling for words. Read had also found out that even though children misspell most words, they tended to misspell them in the same ways most of the time Cox (2014). Therefore, the pupils' did not actually "misspell" the words, but they have a different understanding on the relationship of sound and writing as compared to adults' understanding.

Lacking in Writing Skills

Malaysian young learners find it difficult to produce and write coherent sentences although their proficiency in spoken English was good. I.S.P. Nation (2011) as cited in Zimmerman (2014) suggests that form, collocation, and word class are best picked up incidentally, while aspects of meaning, register and other constrains on use are best learned through explicit instruction. I had learned during my practicum, although socioeconomic background plays a significant role in language acquisition, it could only cater to a certain element of language which were speaking and listening. It is as mentioned by Widdowson (2003) who believes that a person's background is one factor that can affect pupils' performance in their studies. This is because socioeconomic background does contribute in the pupils' listening and speaking skill, however it does not help much in terms of writing skill as well as reading skill.

Mother Tongue Interference

Another issue that I faced during my third practicum was the pupils' mother tongue interference. The pupils had an inclination to speak and arrange their sentences according to their L1. Abley (2009) had argued that the more social flux and tumult there are in a community, the more likely its language will alter. In this case, my pupils were not only living in a multicultural environment, they were also L2 learners, and their ability to differentiate the way to read and spell certain words was weak. However, the misspelt word also shows that the pupil was aware of the different spelling between Malay and English. It is agreed by Abley (2009) in his book 'The Prodigal Tongue' says that in Malaysia, the blend of English with Chinese languages and Malay is widely known as Manglish. Therefore vocabulary was picked up from local tongues. This results in the wide usage of vocabulary of the Malaysian culture. Abley himself did not consider mother tongue interference as a problem, yet he pointed out that it could lead to a lot of misunderstanding to most foreigners.

Effect of Sight Words

Sight words are defined as words that are immediately recognized as a whole and do not require word analysis for identification. Sight words are usually "high-frequency words, however many sight words do not sound as they are spelled Cox (2014). Therefore, sight word does not only affect the pupils' spelling but also their understanding. Yet in my case, the pupils were able to use the words in the correct form and sentences but they had no idea how that word functions in a different context. Knowledge of a word includes knowing how it sounds, how it is written, how it is used as a part of speech, and its multiple meanings Juel & Deffes (2004). Stahl (2003) makes the distinction between 'definitional knowledge' (similar to that included in a dictionary definition), and 'contextual knowledge' (understanding how a word's meaning adapts to different contexts). Ardnt, Harvey, and Nuttall (2000) had stated that people speaking a language as their mother-tongue language do not always need to think consciously about the context of their language use. However for second language learners, it may present a number of difficulties where contexts may be misinterpreted by learners, and lead to communication breakdown and redundancy. Sufian Hussin (1998) as cited in Tan Kok Eng (2006) described Malaysian learners as having "diffuse" and "passive" mental modes. People with diffusive mental mode tend to say tidak apa (never mind or it doesn't matter) when things didn't go as planned. They seemed to have a condition like a dyslexic. The

concept of the words does not match with the image in their head, and they are content with it. Noam Chomsky (2006) claimed that language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner which the principles of generation are used is free and indefinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation. Therefore, the pupils see the words according to their own interpretation and not based on what the word means.

Challenging Factors (Literature Review)

Yunus (2013) had published an article which believes that utilization of visual aid helps motivate and enhance pupils' interest in reading literary texts. The New York State Document (2010) had been emphasising about the importance and the benefits of art as a tool to teach children whom learning English as a second language. Both article and document believes that visual aid is a good tool to help children learn English language.

Yunus (2013) and The New York State Document (2010) literature review describes the benefits of visual aid and art in teaching second language learners vocabulary such as how it helps in motivate pupils to learn English Language, positive attitude in learning English, and visual aid and art help better understanding.

As much as visual aids and art are said to be effective in enhancing pupils' interest to learning English, it does not warrant the increment in vocabulary skill. It is as believed by Schmitt that says repetition is important. By merely showing photos and have the pupils to observe and identify is not enough in ensuring that the pupils are able to remember the form. The children need to spell, write and pronounce the words themselves to ensure that they fulfil the elements of vocabulary acquisition. However those claims disputes Pigada and Schmitt (2006) whom had discovered that mere reading a text (without visual aid) for several times repeatedly does not promise memory retention in long term. There is a requirement in terms of personalization where the pupils could relate the word in a more in depth level. Joklova (2009) suggested that the pupils draw the image themselves to ensure that the pupils could relate to the image and the words in a personal level. Sedita (2005) stated that word knowledge does not simply repeating the word and a definition or synonym, but seeing the word in a different context.

All of the research above believes that visual aid helps in terms of pupils' motivation and interest. Yunus (2013) argument was useful in gathering ideas and facts on how visual aids benefit pupils. Furthermore, there were many positive feedback received by the respondents. However the respondents of the research were of among the teachers instead of the pupils themselves. Therefore, most of the feedbacks are only in the point of view of the teachers. On the other hand the New York State document (2010) is mostly works as a guideline for the teachers on how arts help in teaching English. Pigada and Schmitt (2009) believes that repetition does help pupils to remember words yet there is a problem where there are certain words that requires a lot of repetition while there are others that need to be looked up only once.

Even though this research does not focus on secondary school students in the context of reading skill, and the document target audience are second language learners in New York, they are still relevant. Especially in the context of how visual aid and art helps children to be more motivated to learn English.

Method

Data collection during action research is often idiosyncratic, fuelled by desire to understand one's practice and to collect data that are appropriate and accessible Gay, Mills & Airasian (2009). Thus, for this paper, I applied the triangulation approach which consists of; tests (spelling test), semi-structured interview and journal entries.. "Triangulation" is a process of verification that increases the validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods Sabrina & Khan (2012). By having several points of view, a more accurate outcome can be collected.

Procedures

This study was carried out on 10 Year 3 participants of Sepang and Putrajaya Makmur National Primary School. The school is located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The school's current enrolment is 370 pupils and the percentage is 70% are immigrants from Indonesians, 28% Malays, and 2% Indians (However only one of them is Malaysian in nationality). In regards to socioeconomic class, they are mostly of the middle class to lower middle class; some of them are even from the lower class. According from the data, the pupils' parents are mostly cleaners or stay-home parents. Bahasa Malaysia is the main language used to

teach all subject except English. Participant in this study also reported that their parents did not speak English and hence did not give the children encouragement or motivation as to the usefulness of learning the language.

For this paper, two English lessons for Year Three on Unit 7 (From the Sea) based on the theme of World of Knowledge had been conducted. The lesson plan was designed to address the Writing Module. The first lesson was conducted in a traditional and teacher-centred manner. For the first lesson, the teaching aids that I had used were task sheet and picture cards. On the other hand, the second lesson was implemented using the PicTemp method. The teaching aids applied in this lesson were picture cards, A3 version of PicTemp, A4 version of PicTemp. For this research, four interview sessions were conducted; two sessions before both lessons and another two after the lessons. Due to their lack of proficiency in English, the interview was carried on using Malay Language. . I also had been analyzing my journals to gain more insights regarding the intervention and based on my point of view.

Results

The result is based on if PicTemp method had managed to help improving the vocabulary skill of a group of year 3 pupils. Tests results showed improvement in terms of the pupils' memory and spelling of the selected vocabulary. Interview transcriptions had revealed that the PicTemp method is a taxing task for young learner.

Table 1   *Comparison of Scores between the Traditional and PicTemp Methods*

Pupils	Method		Differences in marks
	Traditional (Test 1) (%)	PicTemp (Test 2) (%)	
A	80	100	20
B	90	90	0
C	30	50	20
D	70	90	20
E	70	90	20
F	50	80	30
G	80	100	20
H	60	70	10
I	90	90	0
J	70	80	10
Total score	690	840	150
Mean	69	84	15

Regarding on the tests data, the scores for each pupil were collected. Then the scores were tabulated. Table 1 shows how the scores presented. The scores for each pupil between the traditional and PicTemp

methods, that is between Test 1 and Test 2 were compared. The overall mean score for the participants between the two teaching methods are compared.

According to the table above, pupil F has the highest score difference in Test 2 compared to Test 1. They were 50 and 80, this shows that participant F has performed better in Test 2 compared to Test 1. The results also shows that eight pupils had performed better in Test 2 compared to Test 1. Pupil B and Pupil I however had shown no improvement. However they also did not indicate declination in their performance. Table 1 reveals that eight out of ten pupils achieved better results on Test 2 compared to Test 1.The results suggest that the performance of the participants was significantly better in Test 2 compared to Test 1.

The findings from the tests are supported with journals and interviews. For this research, four interview sessions were conducted; two sessions before both lessons and another two after the lessons. Due to their lack of proficiency in English, the interview was carried on using Malay Language. The data of the interviews were taken from all research participant. The excerpts from the interviews were transcribed to support the findings as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2   *Emerging themes from the interview data*

No.	Themes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Writing the same word	21.0	21.9
2	Can remember the words	19.0	19.8
3	Can spell the words	19.0	19.8
4	It was fun	20.0	20.8
5	Hangman was fun	17.0	17.7
	Total	96	100

For this research, initially four interview sessions were conducted; two sessions before both lessons and another two after the lessons. Due to their lack of proficiency in English, the interview was carried on using Malay Language. However the pupils were nervous during the first few sessions, thus another two sessions were conducted to ensure that the pupils are fully relaxed and prepared to answer my questions. The data of the interviews were taken from all research participants. The excerpts from the interviews were tabulated to support the findings. The questions asked were; Do you think that you are able to spell the words you've learnt today? Can you list down the words you remember? Which activities do you like the most? Do you like the first lesson or the second lesson? Below are the interview data and journal entries that support the use of PicTemp in teaching vocabulary.

Table 3

Question: do you like the first lesson or the second lesson? Why?

Pupil	Responses
A	*Kelas yang nombor dua. Sebab main warna* (The second class. Because we play with color.)
B	*Kelas hari ni. Sebab best.* (Today's class. Because it is fun)

Pupil	Responses
C	*Hari ni. Sebab faham.* (Today. Because I understand.)
G	*Kelas nombor dua. Sebab tak boring.* (The second class. Because it's not boring.)
I	*Kelas nombor dua. Sebab harini kita "color" gamba.* (The second class. Because today we color a picture.)
F	*Kelas hari ni. Sebeb bes. Tak boring, Lagi pun tak bising.* (Today's class. Because it was fun. It's not boring. Besides, it's not noisy.)

The pupil was interested and was capable to handle the lesson well. The pupil was also on task most of the time. Therefore, less noise was made when pupils were doing the task. This had created a calm atmosphere for some pupils who could not handle too much noise. The journals had been analyzed to gain more insights regarding the intervention and based on my point of view. Furthermore, the incidents that had happened in the class had been jotted down. The journal entry is as below.

The pupils were supportive and on task. They managed to complete the PicTemp and a few pupils were even managed to correct their own mistakes.

(Journal Entry No.18 (a), 10 March 2016)

The pupils were very well-behaved and they were focused while completing their task. I saw Pupil J, I and, H doing their task and was not talking during the whole class. Some others were more daring and were brave to explore with colors as they complete the task. They are quite creative after all.

(Journal Entry No.18 (b), 10 March 2016)

Based on the interview data and the journal entries it is clear that the pupils were having fun during the intervention lesson and were participative in class.

Furthermore, instead of the traditional repetitive writing in notebook, PicTemp is a form of art therapy for the pupils.

However, the usage of PicTemp requires tremendous concentration and extra work from the pupils. This is because the intervention was an alternate version of rote learning and memorization. The research found that even though the pupils were writing the same words again and again, the word count that the pupils wrote in the PicTemp was significantly more compared to their usual tasks. Therefore, some pupils with weaker soft skills will experience the strain from the application of PicTemp.

In conclusion, the test results, interview data, and the journal entries has reaffirm my belief that PicTemp method is effective in helping pupils in learning vocabulary. Although they experience some strain, the pupils were able to understand the word better and the visual form that associates with it.

Discussions

Lack Of Reading Among Young Learner

The most important words in any language are those that are most frequent (Zimmerman, 2014). Furthermore, word learning involves intentional learning (explicit learning) and incidental learning (implicit learning). One way that incidental word-learning features prominently is in reading Zimmerman (2014). In addition, one of the possible causes of the problem is the lack of reading among pupils, which is equivalent to the lack of frequency of words read by a learner. Hence, the lack of vocabulary skill in the language. Based on my discussions with the teachers and pupils of my third practicum, there is a tremendous issue regarding the lack of reading habit among the pupils. Russel G. Stauffer (1971) in

Language Experience stated that reading is a process used to develop language and to develop thoughts. Furthermore Nagy, Herman & Anderson (1985) as cited in Zimmerman (2014) claimed that a great deal of vocabulary growth is a direct result of reading. This is because the two major abilities involves in reading are word meanings and verbal reasoning (Nurizul & Abdul, 2001). Thus, through listening and speaking, a pupil learns to use a language. By reading, a pupil learns to understand the meaning of the words. Consequently they will be able to use the word appropriately. Vocabulary involves knowing the meanings of words and whether the learners can match each word with its synonym, a dictionary-type definition or an equivalent word in their own language. Read (2000).

Lack of English Usage

There is a lack of English language usage among the pupils which have caused the poor mastery of vocabulary. This kind of problem occurs when English only exists in school and is generally heard and spoken only in English lessons (Mohd. Sofi Ali, 2003; as cited in Tan Kok Eng, 2006). The research participants were mostly among middle class or lower class income family. Their socioeconomic backgrounds and the language use in their homes and communities can significantly influence opportunities to expand their vocabularies (Sedita, 2005). Their lack of usage and exposure towards English Language resulted in the pupils having weak language decoding skills which consists of (phonemic awareness, phonics and word fluency), and thus sees reading and writing as a difficult task. Research as a whole suggests that the differences in children's word knowledge are due largely to differences in the amount of text to which they are exposed to Stahl, 1999 as cited in Sedita, (2005).

Conclusion

The outcome of this study are not only applicable in my school's content. Although the research is focused to ten pupils of SK SK Sungai Rawang and SK Putrajaya Persint 11 (1), the PicTemp Kit is still applicable to other pupils of different proficiency. I strongly believe that teachers must practice lifelong learning. It is as mentioned by Yunus (2010) that a learning society has the responsibility of providing its avenues for its people to seek knowledge. Skinner (1968:254) as cited in Abdul Rashid, Sabariah Morad, & Shaik Mohamed (2006) asserts that "experience would assist teachers to better achieve a wide range of goals deriving from a wide range of conditions". Based on the findings, the intervention had proven to be effective. However, I need to continue reflect and seek new technique in teaching English for primary school in order to cater to the current need of the country as well as the society. This is because a higher standard of English is the key to maintain the country's competitive edge in the industrial and technical fields and in the global market place Ong (2004). The PicTemp method had helped me to put myself in the child's shoes and to see through their lenses of understanding. This research has been meaningful to me because it had presented me with chances to apply and use the theories that I was taught.

Implication

Picture Template Vocabulary (PicTemp) had proven effective and to a certain extent, dynamic. I believe that I shall continue using this method and I shall explore to see to what extend can I use this method in improving the pupils' language proficiency.

Based on what I have learned on the study, on the next cycle I am interested to know how the usage of colours affects pupils' learning. I am also interested to know if there is any difference in the pupil's performance if the task was conducted using one colour or will the understanding be better if I insist on using the correct colour for each image.

I also would like to change the first stage in the teaching and learning session and see how different set induction helps to prep the pupils for lessons. I am curious if the usage language games for the first stage are actually what had helped my intervention to go on smoothly considering the fact that PicTemp is a heavy-duty rote learning technique. Hence, this is where I need to integrate effective communication between the pupils and myself, because as mentioned by Yunus (2011) interaction between the students and the teacher becomes extremely important for successful relationship throughout the school year.

Additionally, even though I have experimented using PicTemp in different classes, I intent to modify and see if my intervention could help pupils to improve their writing skills. Furthermore, Abdul Rashid et al. (2006) had stated that the teaching of English at the early stage in the elementary schools was supposed to play a decisive role and to enable pupils to listen, speak, read and write English well in the later year. Therefore as a future teacher I must be innovative and creative to cater to current need of education. For

instance I had been trying the same method in a good class. However, instead of asking the pupils to apply PicTemp in word level, I made the pupils to write in sentence level. The sample is as shown below.

Figure 1. An advanced level usage of PicTemp method

However, there is not much to conclude in this matter due to the fact that there is no numerical data or research has been done regarding this version of PicTemp.

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