

THE IMPACTS OF LEARNING SYNONYMS THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORMS ON STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary learning can be a strenuous task when it comes to memorizing the words, knowing how to use them in a proper context and understanding the definitions for better language usage. Under the KonPPI-3 sub-theme 1: Teaching and Learning, this action research paper attempts to investigate the learning impacts of acquiring vocabulary knowledge through synonyms. As learners' interests fall in the use of the digital platform, the intervention used for the study is from an online synonym website. A pre- and post- test was conducted to 16 students from Module 1. Results show that the post-test scores had increased in the range of 20-40% of difference. It was also found that 88% of the sample group made 2 and lesser errors in the second quiz during the intervention; a reduced number of errors by 38% as compared to the first quiz. This indicates that learning synonyms through online platforms generates faster vocabulary enrichment and builds better awareness in the choice of lexis among learners. The study proves that learning synonyms through online platforms has strong impact on one's language acquisition.

Keywords: Synonym, vocabulary, language acquisition

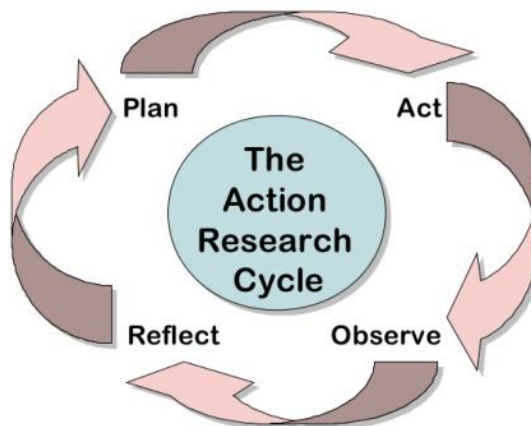
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The issue of having lack of vocabulary has been a common discussion among educators, researchers and learners. Many blames it on the lack of reading but it is more than that. Through the researcher's experience, achieving a good standard of vocabulary takes a long way of good practices, consistent use of the language and effective language strategies. Vocabulary is essential in language learning and without it, one cannot communicate and express himself effectively. As stated by Rohmatilah (2014), the more people master vocabulary the more they can speak, write, read and listen as they want.

In the English Language studies of the Matriculation, students tend to repeat the same words during speaking practices and prefer to use direct translation or even copy directly from the existing materials in the internet for their writing assignments. Though the idea of avoiding plagiarism has been emphasized in class, some students seemed to have no choice probably due to the time constraint to complete the assignments with the low fluency in the language.

Learning the vocabulary can be done in class and effectively underlined to improve the learner's language acquisition. The researcher believes that with the many new teaching approaches especially in today's digital world, one's effort to help expand the students' language expressions is vital.

Figure 1 Action Research Cycle



Action research is a research method that aims to simultaneously investigate and solve an issue (George, 2023). Using the four basic stages in the cyclical action research process: reflect, plan, act, observe (Dickens & Watkins, 1999) as in Figure 1, this study completes one cycle before coming up with the discussion and conclusion for the topic concerned.

2.0 REFLECTION OF PAST TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Research by Smith (1998. in Simmonds, 2017) states that language-rich classrooms are more conducive environments for learning and thus progress. One way to develop a language-rich classroom is to develop interest and motivate students to become actively involved in lessons. Having the opportunity to develop a good rapport with the students, the researcher made the attempt to ask the students their main issue or problem in language learning. Among the answers given were:

"I tend to forget the new word easily"

"I got confused when there are so many words referring to the same meaning"

"I don't understand the grammar rules"

"I can't decide which is the best word to use in a sentence"

"I have difficulties understanding so many unfamiliar words"

"I always got stuck not understanding some words"

"I have no interest to learn and explore new words"

The most common problem or area from the talk was the students' knowledge on the English language vocabulary. They seemed to feel that their level of English language was not good enough and not being able to use good vocabulary in a suitable context made them less confident in all the language skills, namely Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Some even acknowledged that their lack of reading could be the reason for the rising issue. The results in their WE013 Continuous Assessment show that majority of the students obtained as low as 60% and 64% for both their Reading and Writing Assessments respectively as compared to the lowest of 70% and 80% in their Listening and Speaking Assessments respectively.

As Parrish (2022) mentioned, when students begin to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, they develop self-regulation and can set more ambitious goals. The researcher thought that if students are made to be more independent in their learning, knowing what they need, why they need them and how they could achieve what they want; in this case, to improve their vocabulary in the English Language, they would be more engaged in their learning and the process of acquiring the language would be easier.

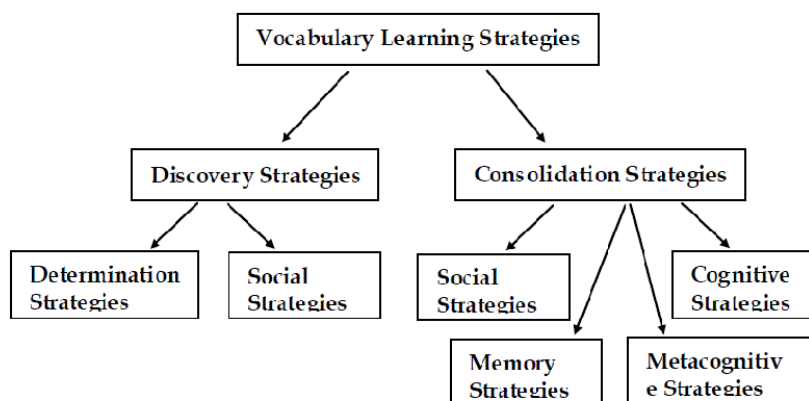
3.0 RESEARCH FOCUS

This action research focuses on vocabulary learning. Vocabulary instructions involve getting the word's definition through a dictionary, knowing the synonyms and antonyms of the word and its parts of speech (Shanahan, 2023). The researcher decided to work specifically on the learning of synonyms to widen the students' vocabulary. Webb (2007) mentioned that learning the synonyms of known words is a very common occurrence in vocabulary learning, and intuitively and logically, learning a synonym would be easier than learning a non-synonym. Kuswatun (2017) in her studies, has proven that the students' vocabulary scores taught by using synonym is better than before or when they were not taught by using synonym. This is probably due to the increase of words known through synonyms.

Studies done by Webb (2007) also indicated that synonymy may facilitate vocabulary learning. The scores were significantly higher for words with known synonyms than those without. Schmitt (2019) also highlights that understanding the various aspects of vocabulary knowledge (e.g. spelling, meaning, word parts, collocations) and how they relate to each other would focus more on acquisition, especially how to move learner's knowledge to the more advanced productive level.

As today's learners are more interested in the use of technology as a medium of learning, the researcher attempted to look at the availability of online platforms for students to practice and learn words through synonyms. As seen in figure 1, Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies (1997, in Tanyer, Seray & Ozturk, Yusuf, 2014) outlines the many strategies that could be found in the digital platform. There are websites that offer some dictionaries, videos, quizzes and games to engage the students on a different level of synonyms. The learning could take place in an entertaining hands-on practice through the applications in the phone. Thus, the study is seen important, relevant and useful.

Figure 1 Schmitt's Taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (1997)



4.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the action research are:

1. Students' scores in the post- test are increased by at least 3 marks after the intervention.
2. Students' errors are reduced from 5 to 2 errors in the 2 sets of quizzes given.

5.0 TARGET GROUP

In this action research study, the students involved were from one of the researcher's tutorial classes. They were of mixed ability group, ranging from weak to excellent level based on their SPM GCEO results. There were 5 boys and 11 girls in the class.

The group was chosen based on an unscrambling word activity carried out; where students are to make up any 4 letter or more words from the word ARGUABLE. Out of 98 words that could be made out, the students could make up 3 to 15 words only. This is the lowest range obtained compared to the other groups from the researcher's classes. This indicates a low fluency- based vocabulary, thus the researcher felt that the group would make the best choice for the study.

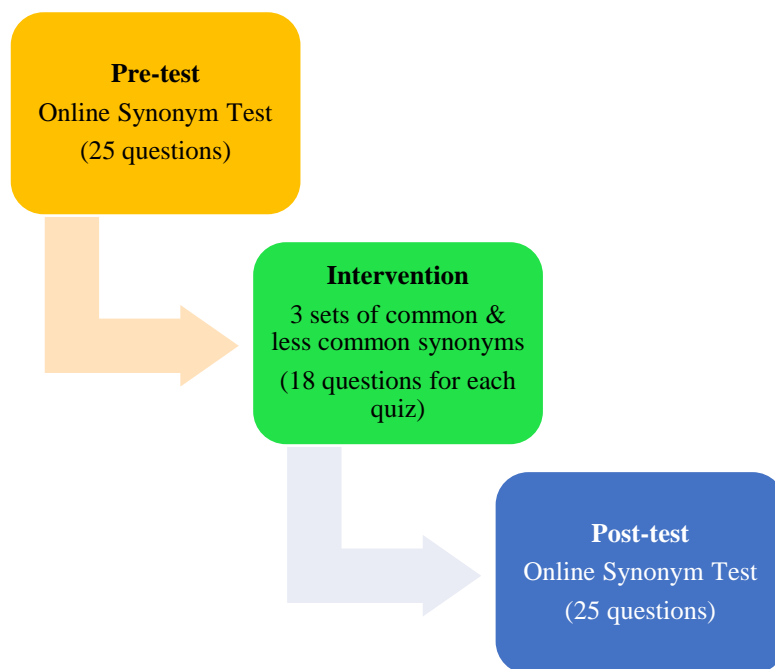
6.0 IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Pre- and Post- Tests

The pre- and post- tests selected are from one synonym test available online. There are 25 questions displaying 4 options to select the best synonym for the word displayed (refer to Appendix 1). There are many sets of the synonym tests available and teachers can instruct the students to any test number. All the 25 questions are of mixed level ranging from easy to difficult, thus the pre-test and post-test have the same level set.

This test was chosen as it is very challenging for the students. The distractors are close and that made the students think first before choosing the correct synonym. The choice of words is also appropriate for the students' level ranging from CEFR Level of B1-C2. Students were motivated to challenge their own scores. Both tests were done in a week time to minimize other contributing factors that might influence the students' scores for the following test. The contextual framework for the implementation of the study is as follow:

Figure 3 The contextual framework of the study



6.2 The Intervention- Online Synonym Quizzes

As this action research is intended to investigate the impacts of learning synonyms through the online platforms, the intervention chosen comes from one available online site that offers several practices that could widen the students' vocabulary. The one given to the students during the intervention was the site that has questions for the common synonyms and less common synonyms (refer to Appendix 2). Students had their mobile phones along and the internet coverage was good at the time.

Each single practice has only 6 questions with 3 options to choose from. Students found the practices could be done very quickly as they do not look lengthy. For the intervention, the students were asked to answer 3 sets of synonym questions in the common synonyms and less common synonyms consecutively. Thus, the total for each part is 18 questions. The number of questions is thought as appropriate considering the limited time available for the lesson. All scores were recorded in a form given.

7.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results gathered were the scores from the pre- and post-tests before and after the intervention. The scores of the common synonyms and less common synonyms quizzes were analysed too. The differences in the scores were recorded as below:

Table 1 The Differences of Scores in the Pre- and Post-tests

Sample	Pre-test %	Post- test %	Differences %
1	60	80	20
2	60	84	24
3	60	100	40
4	60	80	20
5	52	80	28
6	60	72	12
7	60	96	36
8	60	76	16
9	60	96	36
10	60	88	28
11	60	88	28
12	56	76	20
13	60	80	20
14	60	92	32
15	60	92	32
16	52	92	40

Results in table 1 show the differences in the scores from the pre- and post-tests. It could be seen that the scores of the post- test have increased with the range of 12% to 40% differences. This indicates that the online synonym quizzes given have strong influences on the students' vocabulary acquisition on the area of synonyms. The students have learned more words and were able to pick the most suitable synonym to match the word given.

This also proves that extra practices do contribute to the increase in the students' vocabulary knowledge in synonyms. The online platform helps as it is interesting, challenging, fast and thought- provoking. This is supported by the study of Cakrawati (2017) who concluded that most of the participants in the study agreed that the online learning platforms can help them in practicing language skills, acquiring new vocabularies, and improving their understanding on the contents of the lesson.

Thus, the first research objective has been achieved. To answer the second objective, the results from the total scores of the synonym quizzes were recorded and the number of errors done by the 16 samples is shown below:

Table 2 The Number of Errors for Quiz 1 & 2

No of Errors	Quiz 1	Quiz 2
None	0	2
1	2	9
2	6	3
3	1	1

4	6	1
6	1	0

Results in Table 2 shows the number of errors done by the students for each quiz. It was found out that the number of errors has reduced from the range of 1 (the least) to 6 (the highest) number of errors in Quiz 1 (Common Synonym) to the range of 0 (the least) to 4 (the highest) in Quiz 2 (Less Common Synonym). 88% of the samples made the most of 2 errors only in Quiz 2 while 50% of them did 2 and lesser errors in Quiz 1; a reduce of 38%. Hence, we can conclude that the number of errors is reduced in the second quiz during the intervention.

The main reason could probably be the increase in the awareness of the word- synonym through the many sets of the quizzes done on the online platform. As mentioned by Kohnke *et al* (2019), learners tended to focus more and to make more progress in learning when they felt appropriately challenged during the process. The repetitions and comparisons of the words given in the tests and quizzes could make the learners build their own mind- strategy to choose the correct answer, thus making them more alert on the choice of synonyms.

8.0 REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study may seem small but the idea of adapting and making use of what is recent is priceless. The cycle of the action research has been completed and exploring the area of synonyms available in the digital platform was a satisfying experience. As highlighted by Rezvan *et al* (2020), exploring the vocabulary learning strategies use of English language students can reveal individual differences in vocabulary learning among students. The researcher felt that when the students ventured into the synonym activities online, they were also exploring other language strategies, like learning how a sentence is formed and how a word functions as a verb, a noun or an adjective. This supportive exploration does help in the process of language mastery.

It is believed that the combination of multimedia learning environment is useful to link language information with the non- verbal information in which could deepen the understanding and memory of vocabulary more effectively and achieve better learning results. The students in the sample group were more alert with their choice of words and perhaps have gained more interest in exploring the English Language learning. With the variety of resources on the digital platforms, our learners will not find learning a new language difficult and will continue to advance and become fluent in the language. The future ready education is widely open for the generation to develop further.

In conclusion, designing and developing materials and activities to be used on digital platforms should be continuous and encouraged among all teachers and curriculum developers. Not only would it help the learners to improve their language acquisition, it would also make the education world motivating and rewarding. In the case of learning synonyms online, a more user-friendly applications with helpful hints or explanations for the word definition could lead to a faster learning process. The researcher hopes to investigate another cycle of vocabulary learning strategy to learn a more complex lexical item in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 The Pre- and Post- tests

<https://www.edudose.com/english/synonyms-tests-questions-answers/>

<p>Question 3 of 25</p> <hr/> <p>Select the nearest correct meaning or synonym of the word given below:</p> <p>QUOTE</p> <p><input type="radio"/> sight</p> <p><input type="radio"/> sigh</p> <p><input type="radio"/> sue</p> <p><input type="radio"/> cite</p>
<p>Question 4 of 25</p> <hr/> <p>Select the nearest correct meaning or synonym of the word given below:</p> <p>HARMONY</p> <p><input type="radio"/> cemetery</p> <p><input type="radio"/> ceremony</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> symmetry</p> <p><input type="radio"/> hierarchy</p>

Appendix 2 The Synonym Online Quizzes

<https://www.ldoceonline.com/quiz/section-synonyms/>

Synonyms

Take a quick quiz to test your knowledge of synonyms. Choose from synonyms of common words or synonyms of less common words.

You can do as many six-question quizzes as you like. The next quiz will be chosen automatically. Don't like a quiz? Click on the **Next quiz** button or click on the **Menu** button to choose a different type.

*

COMMON SYNONYMS QUIZ

Quick quiz to test your knowledge of synonyms of common words from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

**

LESS COMMON SYNONYMS QUIZ

Quick quiz to test your knowledge of synonyms of less common words from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

We hope you find our quizzes a quick and easy way to include vocabulary practice in your busy schedule. If you would like to do more in-depth vocabulary practice, why not take a look at our wide range of [English language exercises](#)?

Common synonyms quiz

◀ Menu ▶ Next quiz

Question: 1
Score: 0 / 6

1 Choose the one with a different meaning.

mistake
entrance
error

▶ Next question

Less common synonyms quiz

◀ Menu ▶ Next quiz

Question: 1
Score: 0 / 6

1 Choose the one with a different meaning.

candid
honest
chunky

▶ Next question