

The Employment of eThesaurus to Facilitate Reading Comprehension among Malaysian ESL Students

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Abstract—Reading comprehension has been highlighted as a problem among Malaysia ESL students. Many students while being proficient text decoders have difficulty comprehending text. When there is little to no emphasis on comprehension, on exploring the meaning behind the words, students are not actually reading but merely making the appropriate sounds. The use of thesaurus among second language learners is useful in enriching their vocabulary, in that it is not only useful in looking up for new words, but also in scaffolding reading comprehension. Utilizing the thesaurus, students will be able to understand the difficult words by referring to other words that have the same meaning as the referred word. Consequently, it could encourage students to empower and enrich their vocabulary in second language. The main finding of the study suggests that employing eThesaurus helps ESL readers in their comprehension of literary texts. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 35 students and the data collected were statistically analysed.

Keywords—reading comprehension, English as a Second Language, eThesaurus, Malaysia

I. INTRODUCTION

The used of thesaurus could be a helpful dictionary for second language learners to enrich their vocabulary. The idea of using thesaurus is not only applicable for looking for the new words, but it is also applicable in literature learning. Through thesaurus, students will be able to understand the difficult words by referring to other words, which has the same meaning as the referred words. Thus, it could encourage students to empower and enrich their vocabulary in second language.

Thesaurus could be in any form and it could be in a document form, or in electronic one. Thesaurus dictionary is an example of the document form and electronic thesaurus (henceforth e-thesaurus) can be in a form of smartphone applications and last but not least, thesaurus in PDF format.

Learning literature as in poem, short story, drama and novel should be interactive and fun as it is a component of language that gives opportunity to appreciate the nuances of language itself. Thus, to create an interactive and fun language learning classroom, the use of technology will be really helpful. According to Schacter (2001) as cited in Gassel (2008), it was said that the use of technology as a learning tool could consistently improve students' attitudes towards learning and their own self-concept.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Teacher's traditional teaching style has always been claimed to be demotivating students to learn literature. Teaching by talk and chalk always discourage students to learn literature, since that there is no engagement and participation in language learning. Teacher - centred learning is one of the examples of teacher's traditional teaching style. According to Gurnam Kaur (2003), Siti Norliana (2003), and Suriya Kumar (2004) as cited in Hwang and Mohamed Amin Embi (2007), students were seen to be passive and were unable to respond critically and literature lessons were always too teacher - cantered and it cause the labelling of teachers as dull and uncreative.

Almost all second language learners fears to learn other languages other than their mother tongue languages. Most students have difficulty to recognize and memorize the vocabulary of the language that they learn, especially English language. When learning English is a fear for the students, it is only natural for them to fear the learning of literature too. Literature has always been claimed to have 'bombastic words' that are difficult to comprehend and translate.

Selected literary texts such as poem and short story contain a lot of vocabulary that is difficult for students to comprehend. To understand words into an understandable ones, the students are encouraged to use thesaurus instead of bilingual dictionary (i.e. English - Malay dictionary). That was how I came up with the idea of using e - thesaurus in teaching selected English literary texts, which is short story. "*The growing awareness of the significance of vocabulary learning in determining language learners' ability to function competently in the target language has attracted a great amount of attention from English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners of vocabulary teaching and learning. With that development, it is noticeable that vocabulary learning has widely become part and parcel of English teaching courses to prepare learners to function well in the target language. Besides, it is vital to be aware that without equipping second language (L2) learners with adequate mastery of vocabulary, more often than not they would be unable to proceed to a higher level in their education.*" (Chang, 2011)

Hence, this study is designed to investigate the effectiveness of using e - thesaurus in teaching selected English literary text (short story) to the students and to find out whether

it can improve students' understanding and motivation in their learning.

III. AIMS OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using e – thesaurus to enhance students' understanding in selected literary texts.

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) To investigate the effectiveness of using e – thesaurus to improve students' understanding in teaching and learning selected literary text (short story)
- 2) To investigate students' interest and perception of using e – thesaurus.

IV. NULL HYPOTHESES

The following are the null hypotheses of this research:

- H01: There is no significant different in pretest performance mean between controlled and treatment group.
- H02: There is no significant different in posttest performance mean between controlled group and treatment group.
- H03: There is no significant different in pretest and posttest performance mean for controlled group.
- H04: There is no significant different in pretest and posttest performance mean for treatment group.

V. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Bruner insists that the final goal of teaching is to promote the “general understanding of the structure of a subject matter” (Bruner, 1962 as cited in Sprinthall, Sprinthall & Oja, 1998).

When a student understands the structure of a subject, he sees it as a whole. In addition to that, ‘discovery learning’ introduced by Bruner shows that children discovering new knowledge through their own explorations are more usable and tend to be better retained than materials that have merely committed to memory.

According to Sprinthall, Sprinthall and Oja (1998), discovery learning helps to prove to students that exploration can be both rewarding and safe and is thus an important method for building lifelong discovery habits in students. Thus, when the students discover by themselves in searching for the difficult words they do not understand in the drama through electronic thesaurus, it will let them be bold enough to study on their own and among their friends, and are not scared whether they would get it wrong or not. This discovery learning could promote students to student – centered learning.

In a paper presented by Samira Houcine in International Conference “ICT for Language Learning” (2011), it is discovered that the use of ICT has positive effects on foreign language teaching/learning.

According to Houcine (2011), there are many advantages of ICT in foreign language teaching and learning, which is one of them, is the possibility to adapt easily the teaching materials according to circumstances, learner’s needs and response. Besides that, the use of ICT allows an instant feedback and teaching and learning become more interesting and less ordinary which boosts learners’ commitment towards foreign language.

Another study by James Efaw, Scott Hampton, Silas Martinez and Scott Smith (2004) which is ‘Teaching and Learning with Laptop Computers in the classroom found that the integration of laptops into classroom instruction spotted statistically significant improvements in student learning.

VI. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach where both statistical and attitudinal methods were used. Statistics, numbers, data collection and others measure quantitative method. According to Goertz and Mahoney (2012), a mixed - methods research that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques is essential for many complex research project whose goals require analyst to draw on the orientations and characteristics of both approaches.

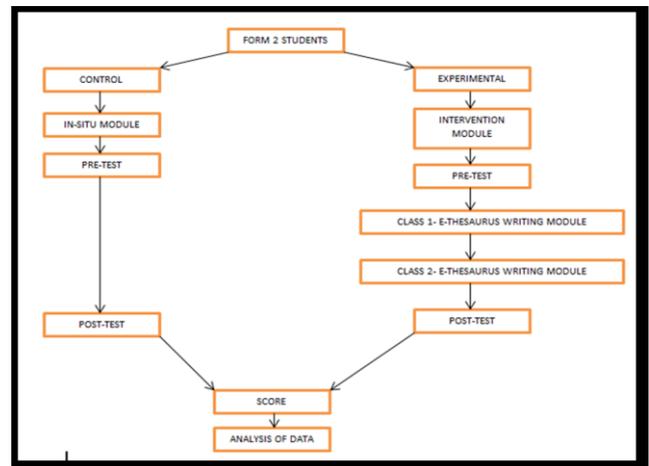


Fig. 1. Research Diagram

VII. RESULT

H01: There is no significant different in pretest performance mean between controlled and treatment group. The t-test result shows that it is not significant. (t=.97. df=53.645, p (2 tailed) = .923; p> 0.05). Hence, the first hypothesis null is accepted.

H02: There is no significant different in posttest performance mean between controlled group and treatment group. There is a significant difference between pretest and posttest of the treatment group (t = -9.066, df = 68, p(2-tailed) = .000; p<0.05). Hence, the hypothesis null is rejected.

H03: There is no significant different in pretest and posttest performance mean for controlled group. There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest of controlled group

($t = -1.961$, $df=34$, p (2-tailed) = 0.58; $p > 0.05$). Thus the hypothesis null was accepted.

H04: There is no significant difference in pretest and posttest performance mean for treatment group. There was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest of treatment group ($t = -11.603$, $df=34$, p (2-tailed) = .000; $p < 0.05$). Thus the hypothesis null was rejected.

Hence, these results seem to show that the intervention of e – thesaurus helped to improve students’ understanding towards learning of selected literary text (short story).

VIII. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Teaching and learning with the integration of e – thesaurus in teaching selected literary text (short story) was able to enhance students understanding towards their learning in selected literary text (short story). It also helped to increase their motivation and confidence in learning English literature. Besides that, e – thesaurus helped students to enrich students vocabulary when they could find out the synonym words for the unfamiliar words that they difficult to understand. It also eases the students’ burden in learning as not all the students could understand the meaning of the unfamiliar words in literary text (short story).

Besides that, learning using e – thesaurus was never being integrated in the school and thus e – thesaurus was a something new for the students in the school. With the integration of e – thesaurus, students can enjoy the lesson and this will attract their attention to learn more about literature.

As for teachers, we can focus to enhance students understanding towards the plot of the story and their vocabulary enrichment. Here, the integration of e – thesaurus was only the medium of teaching and learning to convey the content.

By integrating the e – thesaurus, teacher could be able to help students to improve students’ understanding in learning the short story and enrich their vocabulary. Vocabulary enrichment is important to help students in reading components such as short story, drama or poem. In a nutshell, creative and effective way of teaching and learning should always be integrated in the classroom to better suit the students’ needs nowadays.

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