On Explicitness and Specificity: The Roles of Specific Word Instruction (SWI) in Developing Malaysian ESL Learners' Vocabulary Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary knowledge is crucial for ESL/EFL students as it enables effective communication, comprehension, and expression in the target language, enhancing their overall language proficiency. Teachers and students often encounter challenges in ESL/EFL vocabulary learning due to the vastness of vocabulary, the need for context-rich understanding, and the difficulty in retaining and applying learned words within authentic language contexts. The Specific Word Instruction (SWI) approach refers to a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the explicit use of carefully selected words as the focal point for vocabulary instruction. Specific Word Instruction (SWI) has emerged as a significant subject within the realm of vocabulary acquisition, with a particular focus on augmenting one's understanding of form, meaning, and use, particularly among individuals acquiring a second language. The primary objective of this article to delve into the potentials and problems associated with targeted word instruction, particularly Specific Word Instruction (SWI) approach in the teaching and learning of vocabulary knowledge of ESL learners. The findings of this review suggest that the utilisation specific word instruction (SWI) exposes teachers to a greater range of instructional variations. These variations not only address the individual needs of students, but also foster their engagement through a diverse array of tasks and learning experiences. Consequently, this approach allows students to fully showcase their utmost potential. Specific word instruction has various implications for different stakeholders. Teachers will have the autonomy to select and teach high-utility words, which demands careful planning, pedagogical strategies, and resources tailored to students' proficiency levels, ensuring that vocabulary lessons align with overall language goals which allows students to Focusing on specific word instruction allows learners to acquire key words relevant to their needs, enhancing their communication abilities, comprehension skills, and confidence in using the language effectively, thereby accelerating their language development. With SWI, policy makers are able to obtain informed curriculum decisions. The findings allow researchers to explore further the effectiveness of specific word instruction methods, strategies for retention, and the impact on language acquisition can lead to improved pedagogical techniques, innovative teaching tools, and a deeper understanding of vocabulary's role in language learning, enriching the field of language education.

Keywords: Specific Word Instruction, Vocabulary knowledge, ESL, Explicit Approach, ESL Challenges, Teaching Methods, ESL Learners, English Classrooms, Competencies.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a significant role in the daily learning practises within educational institutions. Vocabulary serves as the fundamental building block of any language and holds significant importance as it forms the bedrock of linguistic expression. Language is comprised of fundamental elements that enable us to articulate our thoughts and ideas, exchange information, comprehend others, and cultivate interpersonal connections. These components play a crucial role in the advancement of language acquisition. Developing vocabulary knowledge, especially at an early age, is vital for ESL/EFL learners due to the cognitive advantages associated with early language acquisition. Research by Hart and Risley (1995) demonstrates that vocabulary size at age 3 predicts language and literacy skills in later years. Young learners are more receptive to language input, and

early exposure to diverse vocabulary enriches their linguistic abilities, facilitating smoother language development as they progress through their educational journey.

In the context of Malaysian English education, specifically within primary schools, it is customary for new vocabulary to be introduced to learners on a daily basis during English lessons. Incorporating new vocabulary into daily English lessons in Malaysia is essential to enhance language acquisition. Research by Nor HashimahJalaluddin et al. (2019) underscores the positive impact of consistent exposure to new words on language proficiency and communication skills among Malaysian ESL learners. This practise is implemented through the incorporation of various topics into the curriculum. The incorporation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into the Malaysian National Curriculum for Primary Schools, also known as the KSSR, has highlighted the importance of vocabulary acquisition for Malaysian English as a Second Language (ESL) students with low proficiency levels. This emphasis is deemed essential for these students to advance to higher proficiency bands as outlined in the CEFR global scales (Council of Europe, 2001).

Malaysian ESL/EFL learners encounter challenges in learning English vocabulary due to factors such as the linguistic diversity in Malaysia, where various languages are spoken, leading to interference and code-switching. Additionally, the curriculum's focus on examination-oriented teaching often limits exposure to authentic language use, hindering vocabulary acquisition in real-world contexts. Furthermore, a lack of resources, such as vocabulary-rich reading materials, can impede learners' access to diverse lexical input. These issues are highlighted in research by Azirah Hashim and NoorizahMohd Noor (2018) which emphasizes the need for contextually meaningful vocabulary instruction tailored to the Malaysian ESL/EFL learners' needs.

Objectives.

1.To identify the challenges faced by Malaysian ESL/EFL learners in developing English vocabulary knowledge

2. To explore the potential and problems of Specific Word Instruction method in developing the Malaysian ESL/EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge

In this article, vocabulary knowledge for esl/efl learners will be explained first. The article then delves into the importance of vocabulary knowledge for ESL/EFL learners, followed by Malaysian ESL learners' challenges in developing vocabulary knowledge. Subsequently, SWI in ESL classrooms is illustrated and concluded by summarizing the key takeaways regarding the effectiveness of specific word instruction and explicit teaching in enhancing vocabulary learning outcomes in the Malaysian context.

Vocabulary Knowledge for ESL/EFL Learners

The acquisition of vocabulary is a fundamental component in achieving proficiency in any language, particularly when acquiring a second or foreign language (Sénéchal, 2006). According to Grant et.al (2011) research, there is a significant correlation between language skills, vocabulary knowledge, and reading ability among ESL/EFL learners. Numerous studies have indicated that English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners exhibit a comparatively slower rate of vocabulary development in comparison to their word reading skills. Additionally, their vocabulary knowledge tends to remain lower in comparison to their counterparts who are native English speakers (Chiappe et al., 2002; Lipka& Siegel, 2007, 2010). The acquisition of vocabulary in a second language (L2) is influenced by both the depth, which refers to the richness of the presentation, and the breadth, which refers to the number of words known (Nel & Theron, 2008; Verhoeven, 2000; Grant et al., 2011). According to Verhoeven (2007), individuals who possess a wide range of vocabulary are more inclined to attain proficiency in reading. ESL/EFL learners hailing from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently lack access to high-quality interactive language input and experiences within their households, resulting in insufficient acquisition of English vocabulary knowledge

Importance of Vocabulary Knowledge for ESL/EFL Learners

In the past decades, vocabulary knowledge has always been given emphasis on in the English language class even though sometimes it may not be the main focus in a lesson. It is deemed to be vital to English teachers who often make different and varied decisions about ways to enrich English language learners vocabulary and the experience in learning them. According to Hague (1987, p.217), "Vocabulary is by far the most sizeable and unmanageable component in the learning of any language, whether a foreign or one's mother tongue" because of "tens of thousands of different meanings."

The significance of vocabulary and background knowledge in the process of learning has been extensively examined and emphasised in scholarly discourse (Fisher & Frey, 2009; Kamil et al., 2008). The extent of a learner's background knowledge can be inferred from their vocabulary mastery. If an individual possesses comprehension of a particular term, it is likely indicative of their grasp on the associated concepts. According to the findings of Cromley and Azevedo (2007), the most significant factors in predicting comprehension were background knowledge and vocabulary. These factors also had an indirect influence on a student's likelihood of employing problem-solving strategies in situations where meaning becomes unclear. Essentially, the utilisation of vocabulary and background knowledge is not a passive process, but rather an active mediator in determining the extent to which other reading comprehension behaviours are utilised.

Vocabulary knowledge plays a pivotal role in the field of English language instruction as it directly impacts students' ability to comprehend others and effectively articulate their own thoughts and opinions. According to Wilkins (1972), effective communication is reliant on both grammar and vocabulary. Wilkins emphasises that while grammar is essential for conveying meaning, vocabulary plays an equally crucial role. Without a sufficient vocabulary, the conveyance of any information becomes impossible (pp. 111-112). Vocabulary knowledge is widely recognised as a fundamental component in the development of language proficiency, as it plays a crucial role in comprehending both written and oral discourse. Therefore, as learners are exposed to vocabulary more frequently, they develop increased confidence in comprehending and interpreting the meaning of unfamiliar words based on contextual cues (Schmitt, 2011). Vocabulary knowledge encompasses more than simply memorising new words; it also involves understanding their functions and how they can be applied in various contexts and situations. Learners are required to acquire the language not solely as a theoretical construct of vocal symbols or as a mere compilation of grammatical rules and vocabulary. Instead, it is imperative to comprehend it as a practical instrument that enables learners to discern which expressions are efficacious for effective communication (Halliday, 1978), as well as to discern which expressions are suitable or unsuitable for employment within a specific context. Furthermore, it is imperative to offer students strategies to enhance their lexical repertoire, thereby enabling them to effectively engage in communication across diverse contexts and proficiency levels. According to the study conducted by Hadaway and Florez in 1988, This implies that if a child is capable of expanding their vocabulary, it will enhance their ability to effectively articulate and communicate in various contexts as required.

In order to acquire a language, vocabulary knowledge is necessary. The use of language proficiency assessments not only aids in the understanding and generation of language, but also serves as a reliable measure of one's proficiency and acquisition of various language skills. The acquisition of a second language, or a foreign language, is a multifaceted endeavour that encompasses social engagement and immersion in the desired language. Hence, it is imperative for language educators, particularly those in educational institutions, to enhance their pedagogical approaches by placing emphasis on both lexical components and individual vocabulary items (Siyanova, 2008).

The acquisition of a sufficient vocabulary knowledge enables language learners to enhance their communication skills and effectively convey their intended messages during interactions with others. In this context, it is advisable for instructional methods to actively seek out occasions wherein learners can engage in the application of newly acquired vocabulary, thereby enhancing their overall language proficiency. According to Nation (1993, 2001), it is crucial for language educators to prioritise the expansion of learners' vocabulary by carefully selecting the words to be taught and taking into account their frequency of occurrence. This is because not all words need to be acquired in order to achieve proficiency in language usage. The acquisition and mastery of a language is significantly influenced by the role that vocabulary plays for learners (Cameron,

2001). According to Harmon and Wood, (2009) and Keser and Linse (2005), the development of learners' vocabulary is a crucial component of their language acquisition. To enhance one's language proficiency, it is imperative to initially acquire a substantial vocabulary. Tunmen and Chapman (2012) undertook a study exploring the relationship between vocabulary knowledge, deciphering competencies, and language comprehension. Tunmen and Chapman (2012) conducted a study in which they administered assessments to evaluate various aspects of language proficiency, including vocabulary knowledge, non-word reading ability, context-free word recognition, as well as listening and reading comprehension skills. The study included a total of 122 children, aged seven to ten, who were living in urban regions of New Zealand. The researchers discovered that vocabulary proficiency played a significant role in enhancing both decoding skills and language comprehension abilities. Consequently, there was a demand for the inclusion of initiatives aimed at enhancing children's oral language abilities, particularly their vocabulary acquisition, in all language curricula.

In accordance with Fijin's (2009) findings, it is imperative for learners to possess a minimum vocabulary knowledge of 95% of the words present in a text in order to attain a satisfactory level of comprehension and to make informed inferences about the meanings of unfamiliar words based on contextual cues (Nation,2001). As a result, individuals who possess a limited vocabulary as language learners would consequently experience a constrained comprehension of the written material. Mart (2012) highlighted the significance of vocabulary in communication, as cited in Wilkins (1972), asserting that conveying meaning is unattainable without an adequate lexical repertoire. This suggests that individuals may face challenges in effectively expressing themselves both in understanding and producing language when they lack a sufficient vocabulary. The role of vocabulary is indisputably essential in the development of language proficiency, as it serves as the foundational element that supports various language competencies, including speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Individuals with a limited vocabulary may face challenges when it comes to effectively participating in spoken communication, written language production, reading comprehension, and understanding language. The importance of vocabulary in the field of second or foreign language acquisition cannot be overstated, as it plays a vital role in facilitating effective communication in both the comprehension and production of language skills. In essence, it is imperative for individuals engaged in the process of learning to possess a vocabulary of adequate magnitude in order to effectively comprehend the information being presented.

The significance of acquiring vocabulary in order to improve proficiency in second and foreign languages has been underscored by a multitude of scholars, including (Laufer and Nation 1999; Maximo, 2000; Read, 2000; Gu, 2003; Marion,2008; and Nation,2011). Scholars emphasise the significance of maintaining cohesive oral and written discourse. The process of acquiring vocabulary plays a significant role in the advancement of language proficiency, which includes the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is especially relevant in the context of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) (Nation, 2011). According to Rivers and Nunan (1991), the development of a comprehensive vocabulary is a crucial factor in achieving proficiency in the acquisition of a second or foreign language. This phenomenon is a result of the recognition that individuals who possess a restricted vocabulary encounter difficulties in effectively utilising the linguistic structures and functions they have acquired, which are crucial for attaining understandable communication. According to Huckin (1995), empirical studies have provided evidence supporting the substantial dependence of second/foreign language readers on their lexical repertoire. Hence, the absence of this knowledge poses a significant and formidable barrier for individuals engaged in reading activities in a second or foreign language. In the field of production, it is essential for students to possess a wide array of vocabulary that can be effectively utilised to articulate their intended meaning or concept with proficiency. Krashen (as cited in Lewis, 1993, p25) asserts that students often opt to bring dictionaries rather than grammar books when they begin their educational pursuits.

Several academic studies in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have provided empirical evidence supporting the correlation between lexical competence and reading comprehension ability, as well as the impact of vocabulary acquisition on learners' overall language proficiency. In their study, Zhang and Annual (2008) undertook research to examine the significance of vocabulary acquisition within the Singaporean context, particularly among secondary students who were engaged in learning English as a second language. The primary objective of their investigation was to assess the influence of vocabulary acquisition on reading comprehension. The implementation of the Vocabulary

Levels Test functioned as a means of assessing the lexical proficiency of students. The study findings indicated a statistically significant correlation between the vocabulary proficiency of students at the 2000-word and 3000-word levels and their reading comprehension abilities. The aforementioned finding demonstrates a strong correlation between an individual's proficiency in vocabulary and their ability to understand written English. This emphasises the significance of having a comprehensive vocabulary in order to achieve a higher level of proficiency in the English language.

Moreover, a significant association was observed by Martin-Chang and Gould (2008) between vocabulary and reading comprehension, as well as between reading rate and primary print knowledge. The importance of vocabulary acquisition cannot be overstated in the context of reading comprehension, as it serves a similar function to prior knowledge in facilitating the understanding of written texts. According to Qian (2002), the acquisition of vocabulary plays a crucial role in an individual's ability to decipher written text, thus establishing decoding as a fundamental component of the reading process. The significance of vocabulary depth in relation to reading skill has been recognised by other scholars as well. The study conducted by Nation and Snowling (2004) examines the predictive significance of vocabulary depth knowledge, assessed through a meaning-based exercise, with regards to academic reading attainment. The findings of the study indicate a notable correlation between the extent of vocabulary knowledge and the level of reading comprehension, even when controlling for variables such as nonverbal tasks, reading unfamiliar words, and phonological skills. The existing body of research on second/foreign language vocabulary has produced results that provide evidence for the existence of a noticeable correlation between the level of vocabulary understanding and proficiency in academic reading. The research findings provide additional evidence to support the notion that having a wide-ranging vocabulary is essential for achieving proficiency in reading in a second or foreign language.

Numerous academics contend that vocabulary assumes a pivotal, if not paramount, position in the acquisition of a second language. Consequently, it is crucial to ensure that the design of foreign language curricula aligns with this significance. According to the findings of Wilkins (1972), the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences lacks significant importance when there is a lack of an extensive vocabulary that enables effective communication of one's intended message. According to the author's assertion on page 97, the conveyance of information is considerably limited in the absence of grammar. Nevertheless, in the complete absence of vocabulary, the transmission of information becomes utterly unachievable. Various scholars, including (Richards, 1980;Krashen,1989) as referenced in Maximo (2000), have put forth different justifications for the importance of prioritising the acquisition of vocabulary. Primarily, it is imperative to acknowledge that possessing an extensive lexicon is undeniably crucial in achieving a heightened level of proficiency in a specific language. According to the author's claim, individuals who are involved in the acquisition of a second language possess a conscious awareness of this specific situation. Members of this particular cohort demonstrate a tendency to favour the use of dictionaries as opposed to grammar books. Furthermore, they frequently express the view that the restricted vocabulary presents a significant challenge (p.25).

Malaysian ESL Learners' Challenges in Developing Vocabulary Knowledge

English is recognised as a second language in Malaysia. Although English is not the designated official language of the country, it holds significant importance in various domains such as education, employment, and social standing. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that while English serves as a second language for the majority of learners in Malaysian schools, it may also function as a third language or even a foreign language for certain individuals. This variation can be attributed to factors such as socio-economic status, social dynamics, racial and ethnic disparities, and the varying levels of English language proficiency among Malaysian students. Malaysian students encounter difficulties in the English classroom, particularly in comprehending word meanings and discerning distinctions, primarily due to their limited exposure to the subject matter and language. According to Washburn (1992), non-native English-speaking students frequently encounter difficulties in comprehending reading materials as a result of the vocabulary contained within the texts. According to Washburn, challenging vocabulary refers to words or phrases that impede the understanding of written text. To enhance students' reading comprehension, it is imperative for educators to acknowledge the significance of vocabulary in relation to reading comprehension, as well as familiarise themselves with effective strategies for teaching vocabulary.
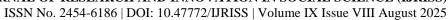
According to Huckin (1995), second/foreign language readers heavily depend on their vocabulary knowledge, and the absence of such knowledge poses a significant and formidable challenge for learners of second/foreign languages. The challenges encountered by English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in acquiring vocabulary are intricately linked to the instructional methods employed in the classroom and the strategies employed to implement them for ESL/EFL learners. Numerous strategies for instructing vocabulary have been elucidated by scholars in the field. Schmitt (1997) identified two primary categories of strategies in vocabulary instruction: discovery strategies, which learners employ to independently acquire knowledge of words, and consolidation strategies, which involve the reinforcement and integration of vocabulary once learners encounter it. In the context of learning English in Malaysia, learners who actively engage in independently acquiring knowledge of words and utilize consolidation strategies demonstrate enhanced language proficiency (Azianura Hani Shaari et al., 2020). These approaches empower learners to take ownership of their vocabulary development and optimize their learning outcomes within the Malaysian educational context.

In addition to the aforementioned primary challenges and obstacles in acquiring English vocabulary, namely insufficient linguistic exposure, unsupportive educational culture and environment, and inadequate reading materials, Kabilan et al. (2009) further elucidate that ESL/EFL learners in Malaysia encounter additional issues and difficulties, particularly within the context of primary school education. One notable challenge pertains to the limited involvement of teachers and the insufficient utilisation by students in regards to communication and application of the English language within educational institutions and beyond. The lack of communication in the target language and limited exposure to it presents a significant concern. Furthermore, the attitudes of certain parents and society towards the acquisition of a second or foreign language also pose a significant concern. Certain parents may experience a sense of cultural assimilation when their children opt to engage in conversations or seek exposure to a novel, non-native language beyond the confines of the educational setting. Moreover, a significant number of learners frequently experience apprehension towards committing errors during the learning process. Consequently, this fear poses a challenge for educators in effectively discerning the areas of weakness and providing appropriate corrective measures.

Leki (1992) asserts that ESL/EFL students experience frustration when faced with challenges related to comprehending word implication and meaning. There exists a discernible discrepancy in the acquisition of new vocabulary between the primary and secondary languages. Students are also grappling with challenges related to composing assignments, adhering to deadlines, and achieving optimal quality in their final written work or classroom engagements. An examination of the existing literature pertaining to English language acquisition in the educational setting of Malaysia reveals that the presence of the first language, Malay, significantly hampers the process of acquiring the second language. For example, (Maros et al., 2007 as cited in Musa et al., 2012) found that the influence of the Malay language poses a significant obstacle to the attainment of English literacy skills among secondary school students. The study conducted error analyses and contrastive analyses to examine various types of writing errors among a sample of 120 students from three regions in Malaysia. The primary issue identified in the English writing of Malaysian students was the utilisation of appropriate English grammar and vocabulary. The researchers have reached the conclusion that the primary cause of errors made by learners is the influence of their first language, specifically the Malay language.

Vocabulary language learning in Malaysia is a dynamic process influenced by the nation's multilingual and multicultural context. The linguistic diversity in Malaysia, where various languages such as Malay, Chinese dialects, and Tamil are spoken, can lead to unique challenges and opportunities in English vocabulary acquisition. Research by Azianura Hani Shaari et al., (2020) emphasizes that Malaysian learners' language backgrounds can shape their vocabulary learning strategies. Moreover, the country's bilingual education policy, which emphasizes the use of Malay as the medium of instruction in schools, can impact the exposure and usage of English vocabulary in formal educational settings (Shuib, 2004). The interplay between these languages and the varying degrees of exposure to English vocabulary in different contexts contribute to the complexity of vocabulary acquisition for Malaysian learners.

Efforts to enhance vocabulary language learning in Malaysia include research that examines effective strategies and interventions. Azianura Hani Shaari et al., (2020) emphasize the importance of metacognitive strategies, such as self-regulation and planning, in fostering vocabulary growth among Malaysian ESL

learners. Additionally, research by Nor HashimahJalaluddin et al., (2019) underscores the significance of incorporating new vocabulary into daily English lessons to improve language proficiency and communication skills among Malaysian ESL learners. These studies collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of vocabulary acquisition in the Malaysian context and offer insights into strategies that can optimize English language learning outcomes.

SWI in ESL Classrooms

Given the significant impact of vocabulary on reading comprehension, coupled with the limited incidental acquisition of vocabulary words by students, it is imperative to implement explicit and specific vocabulary instruction within educational settings (Daniels, 2009). The utilisation of specific word instruction is considered an explicit instructional approach within the realm of teaching (Beck et al., 2002). The utilisation of specific word instruction refers to an instructional approach employed for the purpose of teaching vocabulary, and is considered a component of direct vocabulary learning. The acquisition of vocabulary occurs through direct instruction, wherein learners are explicitly taught both individual words and strategies for word-learning. The concept of specific word instruction refers to a comprehensive instructional approach that encourages active involvement with vocabulary, leading to enhanced word acquisition (Beck et al.,2002). The primary concept underlying targeted word instruction, particularly in the context of acquiring English language vocabulary knowledge, posits that children exhibit optimal word learning outcomes when they receive instruction spanning a prolonged duration and actively engage with the words during the instructional process.

The frequency of students' utilisation of novel vocabulary and their ability to employ these words across various contexts positively correlates with their likelihood of acquiring a comprehensive understanding of said words. Research has shown that students exhibit enhanced acquisition of new vocabulary when they are exposed to these words frequently and in diverse contextual settings. There appears to be a positive correlation between the exposure, auditory perception, and active engagement of children with particular words, and their subsequent learning and retention of said words. When educators offer comprehensive instruction that fosters active participation, they afford students with multiple opportunities to encounter unfamiliar vocabulary. When students encounter the aforementioned words within their assigned texts, their level of exposure to these novel lexical items is heightened.

According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), the utilisation of explicit vocabulary instruction can enhance an individual's reading comprehension. This phenomenon arises from the fact that learners can enhance their understanding of word meanings through targeted instruction, which involves teaching individual words. The pre-teaching of specific words prior to engaging in reading activities has been found to have a positive impact on both vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Prior to engaging with a text, it is advantageous to provide students with explicit instruction on the specific vocabulary words that will be encountered within the text. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), it has been observed that introducing significant vocabulary prior to engaging in reading activities can be beneficial for students in terms of acquiring unfamiliar words and enhancing their comprehension of the text. Research has shown that students exhibit enhanced acquisition of new vocabulary when they are exposed to these words frequently and in diverse contexts. There appears to be a positive correlation between the exposure, auditory input, and active engagement of children with particular words, and their subsequent learning outcomes. When educators offer comprehensive instruction that fosters active participation, they afford students with multiple opportunities to encounter unfamiliar vocabulary. When students encounter the aforementioned words within their assigned texts, their level of exposure to these novel lexical items is heightened.

In the context of an English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, the pedagogical approach known as Specific Word Instruction (SWI) is employed to enhance students' understanding of word meanings. This instructional method involves the targeted teaching of individual words with the aim of facilitating a more profound comprehension of their definitions. According to Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn (2001), this intervention is anticipated to facilitate students' comprehension of auditory and written information, as well as enhance their ability to effectively employ vocabulary in both oral and written communication. The pre-teaching of specific words prior to engaging in reading activities has been suggested to have a positive impact on both vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. In English as a Second

Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructional settings, it is common practise for educators who employ the strategy of Selective Word Instruction (SWI) to proactively introduce and instruct students on the vocabulary they will encounter in a given text prior to engaging in reading activities. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the instruction of essential vocabulary will precede the reading activity, thereby facilitating the acquisition of unfamiliar terms and enhancing the students' overall comprehension of the text.

SWI, or Specific Word Instruction is recognised as an instructional approach that fosters active participation in vocabulary acquisition and enhances word learning. According to Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn (2001), optimal word acquisition in children occurs when they receive prolonged instruction and actively engage with the words. This implies that students' likelihood of acquiring new words is positively correlated with their frequency of usage and the diversity of contexts in which they employ these words, particularly when the words are explicitly taught to them.

The instructional approach referred to as Specific Words Instruction (SWI) involves the repeated exposure of words within diverse contexts in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Undoubtedly, students acquire new vocabulary more effectively when they are exposed to it frequently and in diverse settings. There appears to be a positive correlation between the exposure, auditory input, and active engagement of children with particular words, and their subsequent learning outcomes. When educators implement the strategy of SWI to foster active student participation, they provide students with multiple opportunities to encounter unfamiliar vocabulary. When students encounter those identical words within their assigned texts, their exposure to the new vocabulary is enhanced.

In order to demonstrate the application of SWI (Specific Word Instruction) in the instruction of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) vocabulary, it is imperative to establish a framework that elucidates the appropriate utilisation of SWI in vocabulary instruction. When a teacher intends to incorporate the novel "King of Kites" by Judith Heneghan into the curriculum for his primary 4 students, which centres around a proficient kite maker and his mother who is a skilled seamstress, the teacher would need to provide an explanation of the definitions of the terms "skilful" and "seamstress" to the learners. The instructor recognises the significance of comprehending the underlying meaning of the two terms in order to deepen one's comprehension of the narrative's storyline. Consequently, prior to commencing the students' reading of the novel, the instructor must undertake various measures to ensure their comprehension of the underlying concept and its significance within the narrative. For instance, the educator might initiate a discourse with students regarding the aforementioned occupations. They could read a sentence from the text that incorporates the word in question and supplement the discussion with visual aids to facilitate comprehension for both students and the instructor. Additionally, the teacher may prompt students to employ their pre-existing knowledge in an attempt to deduce the word's meaning. Moreover, the instructor may prompt the students to consolidate and strengthen their comprehension of the term. Subsequently, the instructor may request that the students employ the newly acquired vocabulary in their own sentences. By employing the aforementioned SWI approach, students will acquire the ability to comprehend and utilise the form, meaning, and application of the words they have learned.

Research conducted on the use of specific word instruction or other methods of explicit teaching of vocabulary in Malaysia has shed light on effective strategies for enhancing language learners' vocabulary acquisition. Studies such as the work by Nor Azarina Ab. Aziz et al. (2017) have explored the impact of vocabulary intervention programs in Malaysian primary schools, demonstrating that targeted instruction and explicit teaching of words can significantly improve students' vocabulary knowledge and usage. Furthermore, research by Azianura Hani Shaari et al. (2020) delves into vocabulary learning strategies employed by ESL tertiary learners in Malaysia, highlighting the significance of metacognitive strategies and self-regulation in vocabulary acquisition. These studies collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the practical approaches and pedagogical methods that can effectively facilitate vocabulary development among Malaysian learners.

Utilizing the SWI as a pedagogical tool for instructing students in vocabulary acquisition has the potential to significantly enhance their lexical proficiency, as it concentrates on the fundamental components of vocabulary. The obtained findings and subsequent discussion yield several significant implications that can

serve as inspiration for L2 learners, teachers, material producers, and educational policy makers involved in the instruction of English in primary ESL settings in Malaysia. The implications of the study's findings suggest that they will make significant contributions to multiple domains. The research on vocabulary conducted by McKeown and Beck, in collaboration with their colleagues, has exerted a substantial influence on subsequent investigations in this domain (Beck et al., 1982; Beck et al., 2013; Coyne, Capozzoli-Oldham, Cuticelli, & Ware, 2015; McKeown & Beck, 2004).Research has indicated that the process of acquiring vocabulary that is specifically linked to reading and language comprehension plays a significant role in the enhancement of critical thinking abilities (Beck et al., 2013; Graves, 2011; NAEP, 2013; Nagy, 1988; NRP, 2000).

In the past few decades, there has been a notable scholarly emphasis on investigating the usage of subject-specific vocabulary within educational environments. Multiple research studies have provided evidence that students require frequent and clear exposure to vocabulary in specific contexts in order to effectively comprehend, retain, and apply the acquired knowledge (Beck et al., 2013; Ford-Connors &Paratore, 2014; Graves et al., 2014; Marzano, Kendall, & Paynter, 2005; National Reading Panel, 2000). Orawiwatnakul (2011) posited that the provision of diverse and extensive language experiences to students, coupled with their active participation in these experiences, enhances the learning process by engaging multiple modalities including reading, speaking, writing, and listening. By offering learners comprehensive and specific instructions, they can improve their comprehension and proficiency in vocabulary acquisition.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the utilization of specific word instruction and explicit teaching methods emerges as an effective approach to enhancing vocabulary acquisition within the Malaysian English education context. The research conducted by Nor Azarina Ab. Aziz and Fatimah Puteh (2017) demonstrates the tangible impact of targeted vocabulary intervention programs in Malaysian primary schools. Their findings indicate that explicit teaching of words, focusing on selected vocabulary items, significantly improves students' vocabulary knowledge and usage. Moreover, Azianura Hani Shaari et al. (2020) contribute to this conclusion by highlighting the practical efficacy of explicit and specific strategies in vocabulary acquisition among ESL tertiary learners in Malaysia. The incorporation of metacognitive strategies and self-regulation in vocabulary learning emerges as a critical element, aligning with the contextualized nature of language education in the country.

These findings collectively emphasize the importance of aligning vocabulary instruction with the linguistic diversity and bilingual educational framework of Malaysia. The specific word instruction approach acknowledges the need for targeted teaching that considers the unique language backgrounds and learning challenges of Malaysian ESL/EFL learners. By providing learners with a curated set of words and specific instruction on their usage, educators can bridge the gap between diverse languages spoken in Malaysia and English vocabulary acquisition. This approach not only enhances vocabulary knowledge but also empowers learners to engage more effectively in language communication. Therefore, the evidence from these studies underscores the effectiveness of specific word instruction and explicit teaching methods as valuable tools for vocabulary enhancement in the Malaysian English education landscape.

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