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## Project Based Learning as Social Strategy in Enhancing Students' Vocabulary

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### **Abstract:**

*English is a second language taught in all Malaysian schools. It requires a broad of vocabulary among students in acquiring the second language. However, the lack of vocabulary among students leads to obstacles in language acquisition. This made the students left behind the outperform students in listening, speaking, reading and writing. In order to develop vocabulary among students, project-based learning as social strategy is seen as a medium that could assist students in acquiring the language. The aim of this paper is to investigate how project-based learning could benefit the students in the acquisition of English vocabulary in ESL lessons. 30 students of age 10 had been selected from a school in Pahang, Malaysia to see their performance in enhancing vocabulary through a survey using questionnaire. The post-survey result showed improvement in students' vocabulary and project-based learning as social strategy demonstrated students' achievement in enhancing students' vocabulary. In conclusion, this finding evidently gives a different approach in conducting the teaching and learning during ESL lessons.*

**Keywords:** Vocabulary, project based learning, social strategy, ESL lesson

### **1. Introduction**

Malaysia is a multicultural country with different races that speak different languages. The people are of bilingual or multilingual. They use more than one language besides their language accents or dialects. Azmi (2013) indicated Malay was declared as the official language after the announcement of National Language Act in 1967. The objective of the implementation of National Language Act is to uphold Malay as the national language that could promote unification among different races. English is a second language in Malaysia and it is widely used throughout the country besides Malay language. The language is considered as a benchmark for the development of the nation.

Despite of its status as the second language in Malaysia, Wang & Xu (2018) mentioned English is crucial as the use of the language internationally. English has been taught in schools either in primary or in secondary schools. There are four language skills that students need to focus on such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced a few policies and programmes to be implemented at schools to strengthen English. According to Yamat, Umar & Mahmood (2014), one of the main policy introduced by the MOE is the Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language (MBMMBI) policy. In addition, to strengthen English as a compulsory subject at schools, the Ministry of Education (2010) laid an alignment to the Common Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) which emphasizes on students' English proficiency and the competencies of the English teachers. The English Language Education Roadmap seems to be holistic as it caters both students and teachers to ensure the success of the implementation. They need to achieve the required proficiency level that suits to the international standards. The evaluation of CEFR is based on positive evaluation of 'can do' descriptors according to the global scale. Subsequently, the performance of the students is evaluated base on the descriptors. It was supported by Uri & Abd Aziz (2017) who mentioned that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was applied whereby language proficiency skills are measured based on CEFR descriptors. Nevertheless, majority of students' achievement in English examination and spoken language are still weak.

Eventually, without adequate vocabulary, it is difficult for the students to learn English. According to Alqahtani (2015) communication is impossible without sufficient vocabulary. It was also mentioned by Sener (2015), it is crucial to have broad vocabulary as to understand the messages conveyed either verbally or in writing. The lack of vocabulary makes the students demotivated to learn the language. As a second language, vocabulary is necessary for the students to master the language and it is important for the students to acquire ample vocabulary in order for them to accomplish the four main skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in ESL lesson. Behbahani (2016) states vocabulary is vital in learning English as a tool of communication. According to him, the most suitable learning strategy should be selected to enhance students' vocabulary acquisition. Thus, teachers will have to select the best strategy to assist the students to acquire vast vocabulary to enable them to improve their language skills.

According to Rusdin (2018), the teaching and learning process should focus on the 4C's mainly communication, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity. It was a part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning which emphasized the students as dominant in the process of learning and teaching as well as to promote collaborative learning. Therefore, the use of project based learning in social strategy will help the students to enhance vocabulary within the timeframe given. The students will also be able to work together, solving problems, creatively propose their ideas and give feedback as it is a part of collaborative work which are align with the elements of 4C's. There were many studies carried out to investigate the development of students' vocabulary. However, the use of project-based learning as social strategy in ESL lesson can be conducted to enhance students' vocabulary and it can be carried out at the students' pace. The aim of this study is to explore the use of project-based learning as social strategy in enhancing students' vocabulary.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Project Based Learning (PBL)

One of the best ways to boost the confidence level of the students are by giving them the opportunities to explore and learn interactively. According to Renard (2017), project-based learning (PBL) is one of the learning approach whereby it encourages the students to engage in the task given collaboratively and later evaluate their own learning progress. Thus, students engage to the learning activities and will be able to come out with their ideas and creativity. The study by Chiang & Lee (2016) shows that using PBL as a part of teaching and learning process helps students to encounter the real-life situation whereby students become active learners which is aligned with one of the characteristics of a good language learner.

### 2.2. Social Strategy

Social strategy is one of an indirect strategy which led the students to be independent in learning and practise the knowledge gains afterwards. Teh, Yusoff & Embi (2013) supported this in which they mentioned that students need to be socially exposed to the language learning collaboratively in order for them to learn and work together to complete the given tasks. It enables the students to have freedom in learning by letting them to be creative and to have mutual understanding with their team members. As each individual has different learning styles, teachers should choose the most suitable language learning strategies for the students. According to Hardan (2013), social strategy provides positive environment for the students to learn and acquire second language throughout learning process. A student will have to cooperate with team members as to complete the task given, neglecting whatever differences or circumstances they may encounter while finishing the task.

### 2.3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is essential in every language learning. Susanto (2017) emphasized that it is difficult for teachers to teach vocabulary to the students. Inadequate vocabulary leads to obstacles among students to speak and write. Thus, English will be seen as difficult subject by many people. Askar (2016) indicated the importance of vocabulary as it may be used to convey messages or information. In addition, it is significant for the students to have sufficient vocabulary in the acquisition of the second language. Asyiah (2017) stated wide range of vocabulary benefited students to be able to perform in four language skills mainly listening, speaking, reading and writing. As to improve students' vocabulary, the teaching strategies have to be taken into consideration by teachers as these will help students to enhance their vocabulary skills.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Design

The design for this study is a survey and a set of questionnaires was employed as an instrument for data collection in the study. The questionnaire was aimed to assess students' vocabulary in project-based learning activity in social strategy.

### 3.2. Respondents

There were 30 students selected from a primary school in Temerloh, Pahang as participants in this quantitative study. They were from Standard Four students of the age 10 years old. The sample populations consist of 12 male students and 18 female students.

### 3.3. Procedures

30 students of Standard Four were chosen using convenience sampling. The teacher as a researcher selected the students who are under her supervision. Before the activity was conducted, students were given a questionnaire to evaluate their vocabulary level. Then, students completed the project-based learning activities based on the topics given by the teacher. Students were asked to complete the project related to each topic in groups. After they have completed the task, students were given the same questionnaire to determine whether project-based learning was useful in language learning strategy of enhancing students' vocabulary. Figure 1 shows how the study was conducted to the students.

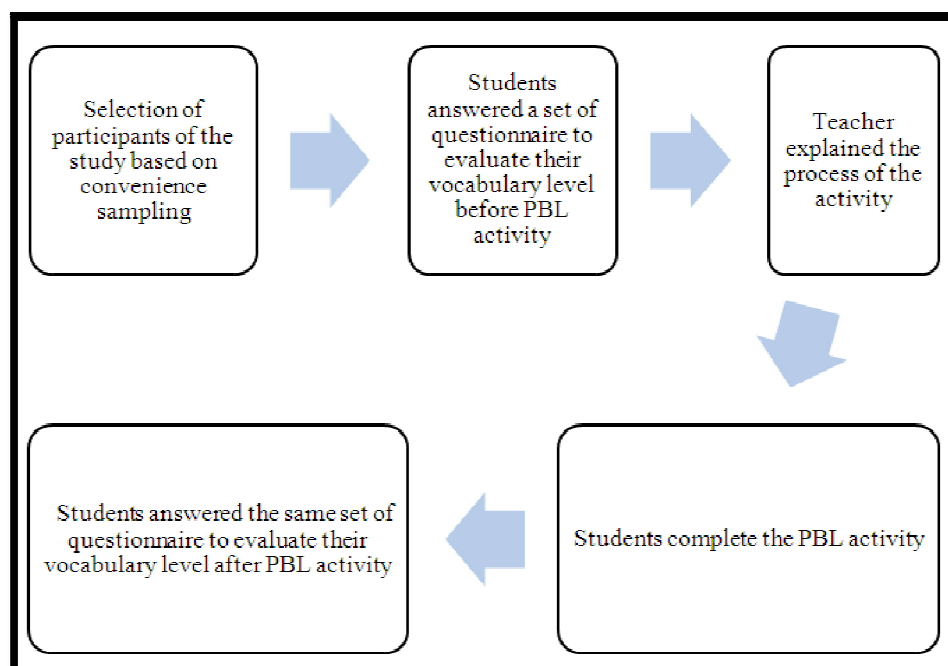


Figure 1: Procedure of the Study

#### 4. Data Analysis

The results of the questionnaire which was distributed to the students before and after project-based learning was collected as the main data. The questionnaire consisted of 5 items using 5-Likert scale report degrees. The data collected from the questionnaire were analysed statistically using percentage distribution.

#### 5. Findings and Discussion

The findings were based on the questionnaire given to the students before and after the activity. They were required to state their agreement or disagreement in enhancing English vocabulary.

Options	Before	After
Strongly agree	0	7 (23.3%)
Agree	4 (13.3%)	9 (30%)
Uncertain	2 (6.7%)	5 (16.7%)
Disagree	13 (43.3%)	7 (23.3%)
Strongly disagree	11 (36.7%)	2 (6.7%)
Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

Table 1: I Have Wide Vocabulary

The data presented in Table 1 shown the differences of the percentages in students' improvement in English vocabulary. There is a positive result whereby 23.3% strongly agree that they know many vocabularies after the activity of project-based learning was conducted compared before the activity was carried out. It indicated they developed their vocabulary while completing the task. On the other hand, there are 23.3% disagree and 6.7% strongly disagree they have improved their vocabulary. Therefore, it implied that mastering English vocabulary takes time to build up.

Options	Before	After
Strongly agree	5 (16.7%)	11 (36.7%)
Agree	13 (43.3%)	15 (50.0%)
Uncertain	1 (3.3%)	0
Disagree	8 (26.7%)	4 (13.3%)
Strongly disagree	3 (10.0%)	0
Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

*Table 2: I Always Refer to Dictionary*

The findings in Table 2 shows a wide gap of data concerning the use of dictionary before and after project-based learning activity. After the project was done, students' usage of dictionary increased from 16.6% to 36.6% and a total decrease percentage from 10.0% to 0 of strongly disagree. Students are eager to refer to dictionary whenever they come across unfamiliar words to them as to know the meaning of the words. Thus, it shows students' passions in developing their vocabulary through project-based learning activity.

Options	Before	After
Strongly agree	6 (20.0%)	14 (46.7%)
Agree	5 (16.7%)	9 (30.0%)
Uncertain	7 (23.3%)	1 (3.33%)
Disagree	4 (13.3%)	6 (20%)
Strongly disagree	8 (26.7%)	0
Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

*Table 3: I Always Eager to Use Project Based Learning in ESL Lesson*

Table 3 shows the eagerness of the students to use project-based learning in ESL lesson in which the percentage increased from 20.0% to 46.6% for strongly agree option. In contrast, the percentage was decreased from 26.6% to 0 for the strongly disagree. The students were particularly enthusiastic to work in groups to complete the project given as a task in ESL lesson.

Options	Before	After
Strongly agree	3 (10.0%)	15 (50.0%)
Agree	3 (10.0%)	8 (26.7%)
Uncertain	12 (40.0%)	2 (6.7%)
Disagree	5 (16.7%)	5 (16.7%)
Strongly disagree	7 (23.3%)	0
Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

*Table 4: I Found Project Based Learning Provides Opportunities for Me to Work in Group*

Table 4 implies signifies that most of the students, 50.0% agreed that project-based learning provides opportunities for them to work in group. None of them strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, it implies that the students realized by completing project-based learning activity in ESL lesson, they also have the enjoyment of working in groups which is align with the social strategy of language learning strategy. In addition, students were able to be actively participated and develop teamwork.

Options	Before	After
Strongly agree	2 (6.7%)	14 (46.7%)
Agree	3 (10.0%)	12 (40.0%)
Uncertain	6 (20%)	0
Disagree	15 (50%)	4 (13.3%)
Strongly disagree	4 (13.3%)	0
Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

Table 5: I Found Project Based Learning Helps to Enhance My Vocabulary

The results in Table 5 demonstrates the increase percentage of strongly agree from 6.7% to 46.6% and decrease percentage of strongly disagree that is from 13.3% to 0. This remarks students' acceptance of the social strategy by completing project-based learning in enhancing their vocabulary.

## 6. Implications and Conclusion

From the study conducted, it was revealed that project-based learning as social strategy could enhance students' vocabulary. The students' active participations in completing the project increased their interest to acquire as many vocabularies as they could. Both teacher and students were benefitted in this study as students have the freedom to be creative in presenting their project while teacher facilitated them throughout the teaching and learning process. Students not only can share their ideas and creativity in project-based learning with peers and teacher but their vocabulary have also developed.

Therefore, teachers should choose the most appropriate language learning strategies which are suitable for their students' language achievement. Learning does not take place in direct way but also in indirect way. Project based learning as social strategy has helped to enhance students' vocabulary which is crucial to master the English language.

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