

## Using Vocabulary Journals to Improve Vocabulary Learning Among Primary School Pupils in Malaysia

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### Abstract

This action research was to investigate the effects of vocabulary journals on Malaysian primary school pupils' vocabulary learning. English language learners (ELLs) are often unable to retain the new vocabulary learnt. This could be attributed to the fact that the traditional method of vocabulary learning does not appeal to them in terms of engagement and interest. Therefore vocabulary journals were conceived as an interesting and engaging method to improve pupils' vocabulary learning. The action research design was used which integrated both qualitative and quantitative data (i.e., pupils' work, semi-structured interview, pre-vocabulary test, and post-vocabulary test). The results show that vocabulary journals helped the participants to learn vocabulary more effectively. It is an effective scaffolding tool for vocabulary learning among the primary school pupils, though the journals could be further improved. Further suggestions were to improve on the questions in interview and to use reflective journals to increase the validity of the research.

**Keywords:** action research, English language learners, vocabulary journals, vocabulary learning

## A. Introduction

Reading educators and classroom teachers agree that vocabulary acquisition is crucial for success in language learning, in particular to reading (Yopp, Yopp & Bishop, 2009). Results of several studies have confirmed the important role of vocabulary especially in reading comprehension. For one, Ouellette (2006) found that depth of vocabulary knowledge is an accurate predictor of skill in reading comprehension. A wide knowledge of vocabulary tended to result in correspondingly high levels of reading comprehension. In a similar vein, Hiebert and Kamil (2005) professed that vocabulary plays an important role in reading comprehension and in students' overall academic success. From the statements of these studies, the researchers concluded that good vocabulary skills can grant language learners a notable advantage in certain language skills over their peers.

However, it appears that many language teachers agreed upon the idea that vocabulary is not as important in learning a foreign language as certain aspects such as grammar. Folse (2004) noticed that the role of vocabulary in foreign language curricula has been mostly restricted to a secondary role. Watts' study (as cited in Graves, 2006) found that teachers viewed vocabulary instruction as a method of assisting reading comprehension and not in terms of the more general goal of building students' vocabulary in ways that would be beneficial both in and out of school. With teachers having these views toward vocabulary instruction, it is easy to see why they do not set aside enough time specifically for vocabulary instruction to meet their pupils' needs.

There is a gap between the vocabulary knowledge of native English learners and English language learners, and its impact carries over into other language skills. Graves et al. (2013) acknowledged that the gap is quite wide, and August and Shanahan (2006) stated that the vocabulary gap is the reason that English language learners rarely approach the same level of proficiency in reading comprehension as that achieved by their English-proficient peers. This means that if teachers were to address the problem of poor reading comprehension among English language learners, they would have to start with building a solid foundation in their pupils' vocabulary. As such, it is vital for teachers to find ways to support the vocabulary development of pupils, especially those who start school with small stores of words.

However, the challenge of teaching vocabulary to ELLs is a difficult one to surmount, namely because of the sheer complexity of word knowledge (Yopp et al., 2009). Words in the English language convey multiple meanings which vary according to the context in which they are used. A single word can possess as many as three or four meanings in different contexts. Yopp et al. (2009) highlighted the fact that a pupil who knows only one meaning of a word will face difficulties in comprehending the same word in a different context. This is because the pupil needs to build understanding of the word in the new context and also combine the two meanings into the same word. Often, the pupil becomes confused between the various meanings and fails to make the right contextual connection.

## B. Background of Study

In the researchers' past teaching experiences, they had observed that the level of vocabulary of the pupils they taught was very low, especially the pupils from rural areas. Compared to their more urban counterparts, the rural pupils did not know even the most basic vocabulary such as "pencil-case" and "blackboard". The pupils' low level of vocabulary proved to be a major stumbling block during reading and writing lessons. They were unable to read the simplest of texts and lost interest in the lesson very quickly. The researchers had to constantly provide support in explaining the words normally through miming and gestures. However, the pupils were still unable to understand the content of the text and could not complete the activities they had planned for them. The researchers struggled through the majority of their reading and writing lessons.

In teaching reading to the class, the researchers noticed that most of pupils did not know the vocabulary in the text. This was shown by the pupils' lack of response when the researchers asked them questions about the text. The vocabulary concerned was of the beginner's level, such as "shield" and "sword." The researchers tried the method of pre-teaching the vocabulary before reading the text. This method proved to be inefficient as some of the pupils still asked them about the same vocabulary during individual work. This meant that not all of the pupils were able to grasp the new vocabulary taught. The pupils were also clearly bored with the

traditional method of vocabulary instruction which involved presenting the word and its meaning. As the researchers expected, when they asked their pupils about the vocabulary the next day, most of them had forgotten about it and needed prompts. Therefore, the researchers decided that they needed to find an interesting way to help their pupils learn vocabulary more effectively.

### C. Problem of The Study

One of the problems the researchers observed in their pupils that aroused the concern was the pupils' poor recall of vocabulary. The pupils were largely unable to remember the vocabulary they had learnt from one day to the next. For example, if the teacher taught them four new words one day, they would forget three of the words the next day. There were pupils who recognized the written or oral form of the word, but could not produce the word meaning without guidance from the teacher.

Other educators have noticed similar problems about word recall in second language learners. Takac (2008) claimed that when new information is obtained, if conscious effort is not taken on the part of the learner to retain it, most of the new input will be forgotten immediately. One of the reasons given for this phenomenon is the non-linear, incremental nature of vocabulary acquisition. Knowledge of a lexical item encompasses multiple dimensions, which are phonological, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic. As such, it is generally accepted that fully learning a word is a highly complex task (Graves, 2006). Additionally, another factor that affects vocabulary recall is the complexity of word knowledge. In a study on the effects of word complexity on second language (L2) vocabulary learning, Rosa and Eskenazi (2011) showed that L2 students found it easier to learn words with two or fewer word senses than those with three or more word senses. As could be seen from the investigations of various researchers, word learning is a difficult process and English language learners find it a potential stumbling block to their language learning. One of the factors that makes word learning hard is that a word may have different meanings in other contexts. Hence, teachers need to help their pupils to be able to grasp the meaning of the word accurately by aiding them to comprehend the word in several contexts.

This research aims to achieve the following objectives: (a) to investigate the effects of using vocabulary journals on pupils' vocabulary learning and (b) to investigate the effects of vocabulary journals on pupils' participation in learning vocabulary.

The research questions formed are as follows: (a) What are the effects of using vocabulary journals in facilitating the pupils to learn vocabulary? and (b) How does using vocabulary journals affect the pupils' participation in learning vocabulary?

### D. Literature Review

#### 1. *English Language Learners (ELLs)*

A large proportion of students learning English in Malaysia are ELLs. The term ELL refers to students who come from homes where English is not their native language and who require further instruction in English to improve their proficiency (August & Shanahan, 2006). Data from international assessments have shown that many students in Malaysia fit the characteristics of ELLs. In the 2009 exercise of the PISA assessment, 44% of Malaysian students had a below minimum proficiency level in reading, compared to the OECD average of 19% (Ministry Of Education, 2013).

Most students in Malaysia are exposed to English as a second language only when they come to school. Students, especially those in semi-urban and rural areas, think of English as a foreign language as it is not their native language and do not use them in their daily lives (Yamat, Fisher & Rich, 2014). Pupils who have both of these characteristics fall under the classification of ELLs.

#### 2. *Vocabulary Journal*

Fisher and Frey (2008) highlighted the following sequence in the use of vocabulary journals: (1) introduce, (2) define, (3) discuss, and (4) apply. The sequence allows ELLs to work with their vocabulary. The format of the vocabulary journal can be determined by the teacher to suit the particular context and needs of the content area. For example, a journal in an English as a second language classroom may have sections divided according to word classes. Vocabulary

journals are typically used to record vocabulary, student-friendly definitions and visual representations for each term (Larson, Dixon & Townsend, 2013). Teachers can include features such as a word index or examples of usage in different contexts.

The inclusion of student-friendly definitions in vocabulary journals makes the task of word learning more effective. Graves (2006) emphasized that definitions are a staple in all effective vocabulary instruction. However, traditional dictionary definitions are often too complex for ELLs to decode and thus, are not very helpful to many students. By contrast, student-friendly definitions are phrased using everyday language and provide examples of how the word is used (Yopp et al., 2009). By incorporating student-friendly definitions, vocabulary journals make the task of word learning less daunting and more approachable.

Vocabulary journals also have visual representations of vocabulary, which are included in the form of drawings made by pupils. Experts have found visual representations to demystify the retention process and improve the students' comprehension. For example, Graves et al. (2013) recommended using pictures to raise interest and improve retention of vocabulary in pupils' memories. Phillips (2005) referred to drawings as a graphic language, and that children use drawings to record understandings and reconstruct ideas. As children find it easier to express meaning and form concrete understanding by making mental images and drawing them, this feature of vocabulary journals makes it useful as an effective vocabulary instruction strategy for primary-age learners.

Furthermore, vocabulary journals help to provide a more authentic experience for ELLs in the area of building word knowledge. A learning experience is authentic when it involves contexts and concepts that are relevant to the learner (Authentic Learning, 2013). Vocabulary journals build on previous concepts familiar to the learner and lets pupils to make changes to existing information, effectively making it an archive of vocabulary. Larson et al. (2013) emphasized that pupils can revisit the journal to add new information about previous words, such as new nuances and contexts. Pupils can refer to, make additions, and revise the content of the journal as they progress through stages of word learning, making it a personal experience unique to every individual. As the pupil adds to the pages and sections, the vocabulary journal authentically grows in proportion to the pupil's word knowledge.

The format of the vocabulary journal that the researchers used included student-friendly definitions, visual representations, and writing sentences; each template had spaces for four words. Additionally, the researchers included the feature of window flaps to make the journal more interactive.

### 3. *Underpinning Theories*

#### a. Zone of Proximal Development

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is defined as the area between the child's current developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of development that the child could achieve through adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, a learner is unable to achieve tasks beyond his current knowledge on his own. However, when working together with a teacher or person of higher knowledge, the learner would be able to achieve those tasks. Woolfolk (2010) described the ZPD as dynamic and changing, influenced by the interactions between the teacher and learner. The learner's role is to construct understanding by making connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge obtained by current experiences. The teacher's role is more significant as it is he/she who guides the learner to achieve deeper understanding.

One of the common applications of the ZPD is in the concept of instructional scaffolding. Instructional scaffolding refers to the technique of changing the level of support given to learners when solving a problem or a task. The scaffold is given so that learners will be able to concentrate on building understanding and completing the task (Woolfolk, 2010). Research has already proven that instructional scaffolding has a significant positive impact on the acquisition of literacy among young learners, helping them to become more skillful, independent and competent (Burch, 2007). Initially, the teacher or more skilled person might do most of the work, but as the learner grows more competent, the scaffolding is withdrawn. The most important function of the scaffolding is to keep the learners in the ZPD (Schunk, 2008). When too much scaffolding is given, it will cause over-dependence in learners and put a stop to

the process of independent mastery. The idea is that instructional scaffolding acts as a purely supportive structure, with the learner in charge of his or her own learning process.

#### b. Explicit Instruction

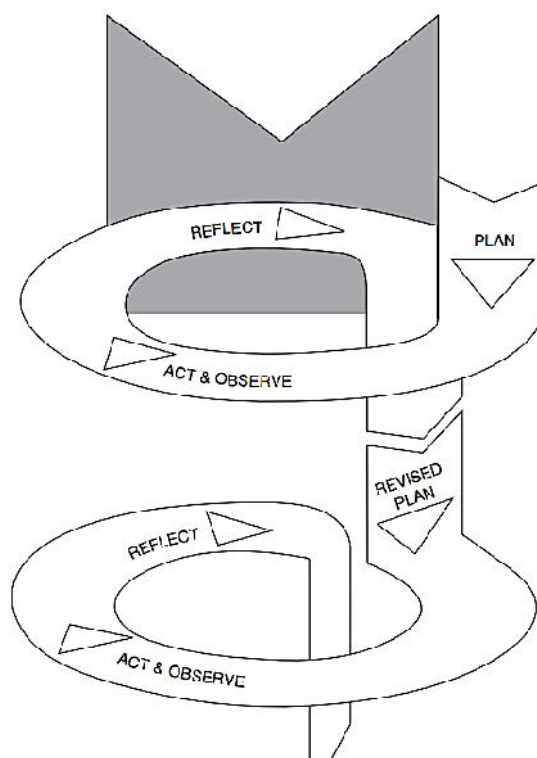
Archer and Hughes (2011) explained explicit instruction as an unambiguous and direct approach to teaching. The instructor provides a specific outline of learning goals for the student, teaches the lesson content through clear and direct explanations (Jenkins, 2012), and supports student practice until the learning goals are achieved. Elements of explicit instruction include focusing instruction on critical content and helping students to organize knowledge (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Teachers can teach important skills, concepts, and vocabulary to meet the instructional needs of their students. Additionally, teachers can help students organize knowledge in ways that help them to better understand connections between concepts.

It is important to teach vocabulary explicitly to English language learners in order to supplement their vocabulary learning. Experts tell us that many students who need to develop their vocabulary do not read widely enough to do so. For example, Hanson and Padua (2011) stated that students who read less learn far fewer words than those who are active readers. Graves et al. (2013) emphasized that instruction incorporating explicit teaching is more powerful than traditional instruction. The research has spoken—explicit instruction undeniably has positive implications for language learning. Students who do not spend time reading independently need explicit vocabulary instruction to improve their vocabulary.

### E. Methodology

#### 1. Research Design

In this action research, the researchers applied Kemmis and McTaggart's (2008) action research model which involves four stages in a spiral cycle: (1) planning, (2) acting, (3) observing, and (4) reflecting (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Kemmis and McTaggart's action research model. Obtained from N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (2008).

In this model, the researchers began by devising a plan of action based on the premise that improvement or change was desired (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). It was that the researchers were seeking to improve on their existing practice, or to find a way to solve the problem. The plan of action was carried out and its effects monitored by the researchers. As new data started coming in from the implementation, the researchers reflected on and

evaluated the effect of the action plan. The general plan was then revised in light of the new information obtained and the second cycle was carried out accordingly; and so the spiral continued.

The idea behind the action research model is that the researchers were encouraged to investigate what was happening in their classrooms in an organized and systematic way. Kemmis and Mc Taggart (2008) described their spiral model as a deliberate process through which people aim to transform their practices through a spiral of cycles of critical and self-critical action and reflection. A lot of critical reflection and evaluation is needed to refine a plan or strategy before it becomes really efficient and effective; hence the spirals shape of the model that implies a repeating cycle. The spirals cycle was helpful for the researchers to guide them through the repeating steps of the model and incorporate improvements from previous plans to form better ones.

## 2. *Research Participants*

The participants of this research were from Sekolah Kebangsaan Montfort in the town of BatuPahat in the state of Johor in Malaysia. They were from a class of Year Five pupils. There were 27 pupils in the class, all of which were males as it is an all-boys school. The class was ranked second overall in the year, meaning that their English proficiency ranged from low to moderate, with one or two outliers of exceptional aptitude.

All of the participants spoke Malay language as their native tongue. The researchers chose to focus on this particular group as the researchers were most interested in the pupils' opinions about the vocabulary journal and how it would affect their vocabulary learning and their participation in the learning of it.

## 3. *Technique of Data Collection*

For this research, the researchers used two qualitative data sources and one quantitative data source. The qualitative data sources are semi-structured interview and pupils' work. The quantitative data source is teacher-made pre-vocabulary test and post-vocabulary test. The idea behind this is that the blending of both qualitative and quantitative methods would provide a more thorough understanding of the research problem than a single type of method by itself.

## 4. *Instruments*

### a. *Data Collection Methods*

#### 1) *Pre-Vocabulary Test and Post-Vocabulary Test*

The instrument of pre-vocabulary test and post-vocabulary test was a quantitative data source. Teacher-made tests are used to measure the impact of the proposed strategy on participants' performance (Mills, 2007). The test the researchers created consisted of 15 questions. The researchers administered the pre-vocabulary test in the first week of the research before the action, and the post-vocabulary test in the fourth week after the action. In order to see if the vocabulary journals had any significant impact on the participants' vocabulary development, the same test was used for both times. The results of both tests were then tabulated and analyzed to compare the scores of participants before and after the implementation of the action.

#### 2) *Pupils' Work*

When pupils create a document as a product of learning, these documents fall under the categorization of pupils' work (Curtis, Dempsey & Shambough, 2010). Pupils' work is commonly used as a data source in action research as they are a rich source of qualitative data. Goh (2012) endorsed pupils' work as strong evidence in action research, useful for demonstrating the developments in pupils' understanding. The wonderful aspect about pupils' work is that pupils will inevitably create them as a natural by-product of learning, and therefore this data source requires only that the teacher keep samples of it for analysis.

In the research, pupils' work consisted of the vocabulary journals the pupils had created. The researcher/teacher created the books by folding 5 pieces of A4 paper in halves and then stapling them together. The template of the vocabulary journal was created using Microsoft Word. The format of the template included window flaps, pupil-friendly definitions, example of sentences, and visual representations. The researcher/teacher distributed these templates the day before the lesson that she planned to use the journals. Pupils cut out the templates and then

pasted them into the makeshift books in readiness for the next day's lesson. A total of six participants' vocabulary journals were used in the data analysis.

### 3) Semi-Structured Interview

One-on-one interviews are a common qualitative data source used in action research (Creswell, 2012). The advantage of interview is that they allow participants to give detailed information in a specific area, which is helpful for the researcher to answer a specific question in their research. However, researchers need to phrase questions correctly so that they can get the information they really need (Mills, 2007). It is recommended to use an interview guide to prevent veering off-topic and also to record the interview to accurately capture participants' responses.

The researchers used the interview method because they wanted to obtain information about the perceptions of the participants towards the effects of vocabulary journals on their learning and participation. The researcher/teacher carried out individual interview in a semi-structured format with three of the participants. Before carrying out the interview, they obtained consent from the participants. The interview followed a formal style and an interview guide was used, though sometimes the researcher/teacher asked a few additional questions when appropriate. In order to put the interviewees at ease, the interview was carried out in an informal setting which was the classroom. In addition, the researcher/teacher used smartphone to record the interview for the purpose of transcription and decoding.

#### b. Data Collection Procedures

A number of actions were taken while implementing vocabulary journals among the participants. The researcher/teacher implemented the plan of action over a period of three weeks. In the first week, the researcher/teacher conducted the pre-vocabulary test and introduced the pupils to the vocabulary journal. The researcher/teacher explained about the purpose of the vocabulary journal and informed the class that they would be using the journal during the reading lesson. The vocabulary journal was used in the pre-reading stage of reading lessons to pre-teach vocabulary that would appear in the reading text. The researcher/teacher conducted a total of three reading lessons using vocabulary journal as part of the pre-reading stage. A total of 15 words were taught (i.e., five for each week) in action phase. All of the words were action words under the verbs word class.

Before starting the action of the vocabulary journal, the researcher/teacher had to make sure that the pupils knew what they were about to do. To her knowledge, the pupils had not been exposed to journal writing in any form before this. Therefore, the researcher/teacher took care to introduce the journal using simple explanations. She drew the format of the journal on the whiteboard as part of the explanation. The researcher/teacher also gave clear instructions to the pupils on how to cut and paste the templates correctly, and prepared spare templates in case of mistakes. As part of the introduction, she prepared a sample of the vocabulary journal and showed it to the pupils.

The time allocation for filling in the vocabulary journals was approximately 15 minutes after pre-teaching the vocabulary for a reading lesson. At first, the researcher/teacher guided her pupils through a detailed step-by-step process to complete a few entries in the journal. After the first time, pupils quickly grasped the format of the journal and were able to complete it without any instructions. Still, she made sure to circulate an example of a completed journal (with different vocabulary) for pupils who were slower on the uptake.

As pupils were filling in the journal, the researcher/teacher walked around the classroom and facilitated the process. For each entry, the pupils had to fill in five words, each with a pupil-friendly definition, a simple line drawing and one sentence. The researcher/teacher usually discussed the definitions with her pupils and wrote them on the whiteboard for their reference. Pupils were always encouraged to draw representations of the word based on their own mental images. When pupils asked the researcher/teacher questions about how to write sentences or make drawings, she provided some suggestions to facilitate their thinking process.

The researcher/teacher also observed other pupils who were quieter, but nevertheless needed some form of scaffolding. She approached them and asked them leading questions so that they would be able to connect the word meaning to their prior learning. To fulfill her role as facilitator, the researcher/teacher made sure never to provide the pupils with direct answers.

She usually allowed 15 minutes for pupils to complete the journal before collecting them and proceeding with the rest of the lesson.

In the next lesson, the researcher/teacher returned the journals to her pupils. She instructed her pupils to exchange journals with partners sitting near them and check the journals for any blank spaces. If they found blank spaces in the journals, pupils would mark them with an "X". The journals were then be returned to their owners, who were given 10 minutes to fill in the blank spaces. During this time, other pupils could re-read, make corrections, revise, or add to previous entries if they wished.

### 5. *Technique of Data Analysis*

The data obtained through research is organized into two types which are quantitative and qualitative data. For quantitative data, the information is presented through method of descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics does not make any inferences and predictions, but is concerned only with the description and presentation of numerical data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Data is presented as mode, mean, median, and standard deviation.

Qualitative data is presented in narrative, descriptive, and non-written forms. Sources of qualitative data include field notes, maps, journals, surveys, and et cetera. Analysis of such data involves going through a large quantity of language and images recorded in the data sources with a fine-tooth comb to locate information of interest. Creswell (2012) viewed the analysis of quantitative data as a process that requires the researcher to understand how to make sense of text and images in order to form answers to the research questions. The researchers did so by organizing the data according to themes, summarizing the findings, and interpreting the data.

## F. Findings and Discussion

### 1. *Findings*

#### a. Pre-Vocabulary Test and Post-Vocabulary Test

The mode of the pre-vocabulary test is 53, the mean is 42.17 and the median is 43.5 (see Table 1). In the post-vocabulary test, the mode had increased to the figures of 73 and 100, the latter of which is the maximum value. From this, the researchers concluded that more participants had achieved a maximum score on the post-vocabulary test compared to the pre-vocabulary test. The median score increased from 43.5 to 76.5 and the mean score increased from 42.17 to 77.67, which indicate that on average participants scored better in the post-vocabulary test.

**Table 1** *The mode, mean, median, and standard deviation*

Test	Mode	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Pre-vocabulary test	53	42.17	43.5	10.74
Post-vocabulary test	73, 100	77.67	76.5	22.21

The standard deviation tells us the shape of the distribution in the data set, and how close the individual data values are from the mean value. A large standard deviation would imply that the scores of participants tend to stray far from the mean score. The value of the standard deviation increased from 10.74 to 22.21, which implies that the distribution of scores between participants has become wider in the post-vocabulary test. From this, the researchers concluded that some participants were able to benefit more from the vocabulary journal compared to other participants.

#### b. Pupils' Work

The participants' journal entries showed that pupils had a good understanding about the meaning of the words. This could be seen through the illustrations they made to help them remember the meanings of the words. For example, for the word "punch" participants drew a picture of a fist hitting the face of a person (see Figure 2). It was obvious from their drawings that the participants understood the meaning of the word quite well. In another instance, for the word "knock" participants drew the picture of a hand knocking on the door (see Figure 3). The drawings among the participants were different according to their own styles, but all of them showed a common factor of comprehension.



Figure 2. Drawings by (from left to right) P1, P2, and P3 for the word “punch”.



Figure 3. Drawings by (from left to right) P4, P5, and P6 for the word “knock”.

The pupils’ entries in the journal showed that they enjoyed drawing simple illustrations of words they had learnt (see Figures 2 and 3). They did not copy the pictures from a source, but were able to draw images from their own imagination. This was evidenced by the variety in drawing styles and high level of personalisation to the drawings.

The participants’ journal entries showed that they were able to grasp the context of the vocabulary and use it to some extent in their writing. This could be observed through the sentences that they wrote. For example, P5 wrote the sentence “*I yawn [yawn] before sheep [sleep]*” and P4 the sentence “*I [was] very tired. I yawn [yawned].*” for the word “yawn” (see Figure 4). The pupils had understood that yawning was a symptom of being tired and wanting to sleep.

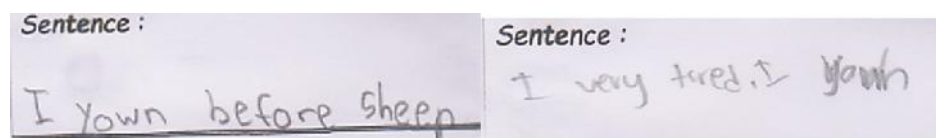


Figure 4. Example sentences by P5 and P4 for the word “yawn”.

However, P1 and P3 were not able to display any knowledge of being able to use the vocabulary they had learnt in the correct context. P3 did not write anything into the space provided for writing sentences, while P1 merely copied down the vocabulary again.

#### c. Semi-Structured Interview

All the responses from the interviewees were recorded and transcribed in order to facilitate the process of coding the information. The perceptions of the pupils about the effects of the vocabulary journals toward their learning and motivation were interpreted through the content analysis of their responses. For the coding of the data, the researchers classified the participants’ responses according to two themes which would help them to answer the research questions they had set.

##### 1) Effects on Vocabulary Learning

All of the participants agreed that the vocabulary journals helped to improve their vocabulary learning (see Table 2). For example, in answer to the question “Did the vocabulary journal help you to learn vocabulary?”, all three participants answered with a firm “Yes.” This showed that the participants felt strongly that the journals had a positive impact on their vocabulary learning.

**Table 2** Participants' responses to interview question 1

Question	Did the vocabulary journal help you to learn vocabulary?
P1	Yes.
P2	Yes.
P3	Yes.

The participants were able to provide some reasons for how the vocabulary journal had helped them (see Table 3). P1 said this: "*Melukis, member maksud dan membuat ayat. (Drawing, giving the meaning, and making sentences.)*" Participant 2 said this: "*Boleh melukis, boleh membuat ayat, dan boleh membuat maksud. (I was able to draw, make sentences, and make definitions.)*" P3 said this: "*Bagi saya melukis, member maksud, membina ayat. (It let me draw, give meanings, and make sentences.)*" The three reasons given were that they could draw, write definitions, and form sentences, and all of them gave the same reasons. Interestingly, the first reason given by the participants was that they could draw illustrations of the vocabulary. The other reasons given were that they could give the meanings of the words and write sentences.

**Table 3** Participants' responses to interview question 2

Question	How did the vocabulary journal help you to learn vocabulary? State 3 ways that it helped.
P1	By drawing, giving definitions, and forming sentences.
P2	I can draw, form sentences, and make definitions.
P3	It let me draw, give definitions, and form sentences.

## 2) Participation

The participants all agreed that the experience of using vocabulary journals made them participate more in learning vocabulary (see Table 4). When asked about the features of the journal that he felt made him interested, P1 said this: "*Boleh melukis, membuat ayat, dan menampal. (I can draw, form sentences, and paste it.)*" Participant 2 answered as such: "*Sebab ia boleh melukis dan ia boleh member maksud. (Because I can draw and write the meaning.)*" P3 said this: "*Sebab ia boleh bagi maksud. (Because I can use it to write down the meaning.)*" Amongst the reasons stated, the elements of drawing and writing the definition were most frequently given by the participants. Other reasons given were that the pupils could paste the templates and to write the meaning of the word (see Table 5).

**Table 4** Participants' responses to interview question 3

Question	After using the journal, are you more interested in using vocabulary?
P1	Yes.
P2	Yes.
P3	Yes.

**Table 5** Participants' responses to interview question 4

Question	Please give me a reason why (the journals helped you to learn vocabulary).
P1	I can draw, form sentences, and paste it.
P2	Because I can draw and write down the meaning
P3	Because I can use it to write down the definitions

The participants listed some common features that they liked most about the journal (see Table 6). P1 stated this: “*Membuatayat, melukis, dan menampal. (I can make sentences, draw, and paste.)*” P2 said such: “*Ia ada warna, ia boleh ditampal, dan boleh membuat ayat. (It’s colourful, can be pasted, and I can make sentences.)*” P3 said this: “*Melukis, member maksud dan menulis ayat. (Drawing, giving definitions, and writing sentences.)*” From their responses, the most popular features of the vocabulary journal were found to be that participants were able to write sentences and draw simple illustrations of vocabulary.

**Table 6.** Participants’ responses to interview question 4

Question	Please tell me three things that you like about the journal.
P1	I can make form sentences, draw, and paste it.
P2	It’s colourful, can be pasted, and I can make sentences.
P3	Drawing, giving definitions, and writing sentences

## 2. Discussion

### a. Research Question 1: What are the effects of using vocabulary journals in facilitating the pupils to learn vocabulary?

Overall, the vocabulary journals had a positive impact on the pupils’ vocabulary learning. The researchers believed the journals helped the pupils to learn vocabulary more effectively. The positive impact of the vocabulary journals was shown through the pre-vocabulary test and post-vocabulary test. All of the participants’ scores saw an increase in the post-vocabulary test, proving that the journals were definitely of assistance, however slight, in their vocabulary learning. The results are supported by the statements of P1, P2 and P3 who affirmed that the vocabulary journals helped them to learn vocabulary in their interviews.

The characteristics of the vocabulary journals such as having segments to draw simple illustrations, record student-friendly definitions, and write sentences were found to promote the learning of vocabulary among the participants. This was corroborated by P1 who stated that drawing, giving word meanings, and writing sentences were helpful in learning vocabulary. The findings of the study are supported by Graves et al. (2013) who argued that instruction with both definitional and contextual information is more effective than instruction with only one type of information.

Drawing simple illustrations seemed to be especially helpful for vocabulary learning. This could be observed from the interviews where drawing simple illustrations was the first, immediate response given by all participants asked to list helpful aspects of the journal. The total agreement of the participants concerning the usefulness of illustrations tallies with Gangwer’s (2009) claim that most pupils are visual learners, and thus would benefit from visual learning.

The vocabulary journals were found to promote a deeper understanding of the context in which the vocabulary should be used as evidenced by analysis of the pupils’ work. Pupils consistently used the words in the correct contexts when writing sentences for the vocabulary they had learnt. This could be related to the fact that they could refer to their personal drawings for understanding. The claim was verified by Phillips (2005) who asserted that children use drawings to record understanding and reconstruct ideas.

However, the effect of the vocabulary journals seemed to vary according to the pupils. The standard deviations of the pre-vocabulary test and post-vocabulary test saw a marked increase from 10.74 to 22.21. This meant that the range between the scores of the participants in the post-vocabulary test had widened. From this, it would appear that the vocabulary journals had a better effect on some of the participants’ vocabulary learning compared to others. Another perspective would be that a number of the participants did not find the journals as helpful to their vocabulary learning.

### b. Research Question 2: How does using vocabulary journal affect the pupils’ participation in learning vocabulary?

The vocabulary journal was found to increase the pupils' participation in learning vocabulary. From their interview responses, all the participants stated that they liked the experience and found it enjoyable. The authentic experience of being able to add new information and personalize the journal seemed to have successfully attracted the participants to learn vocabulary. The findings are supported by Hiebert and Kamil (2005), who stated that seeing vocabulary in the rich contexts provided by authentic texts rather than in isolation was one of the characteristics of instruction that produced robust vocabulary learning.

### G. Conclusion

After using the vocabulary journals for a few weeks, all the pupils found that they were able to learn new vocabulary better. This was evidenced by the improvement in their test scores and fairly consistent use of the words in accurate contexts. However, the effect of the vocabulary journals does not appear to be uniformly good for all pupils. In addition, the pupils also became more enthusiastic about the learning vocabulary compared to before the action when they participated more in the lessons. To conclude, vocabulary journals could help the pupils to learn vocabulary better and increase their participation in learning vocabulary.

### H. Suggestions for Future Research

This research was conducted using only one type of word which was verbs. For further studies, researchers could investigate the effects of using vocabulary journals to teach other word classes such as adjectives, nouns, and adverbs. This would make the findings of the research more complete in terms of verifying the effects of the vocabulary journals toward learning vocabulary from various word classes.

Additionally, researchers could use other data collection methods to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. For an instance, questionnaires could be used to gain more definitive opinions from the pupils about how the vocabulary journals helped them to learn vocabulary. The questions used in the interview were also incomplete as participants were not asked to share their opinions concerning several important aspects of the effects of the journals, such as how writing student-friendly definitions helped to increase understanding. Further research in this area could include such questions, so that a better picture of the vocabulary journals' effects could be obtained.

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