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**RECEPTIVE AND EXPRESSIVE VOCABULARY AMONG PRIMARY ONE
CHILDREN: A COMPARISON BETWEEN MALAY AND ENGLISH**

LAU LEE YIN

This project is submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
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The project entitled 'Receptive and Expressive Vocabulary among Primary One Children: A Comparison between Malay and English' was prepared by Lau Lee Yin and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Cognitive Science)

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition is an important process to assist children's reading skill. This is due to the strong relation between vocabulary knowledge (e.g., receptive and expressive vocabulary) and the Simple View of Reading (SVR) model. This study compared the receptive and expressive vocabulary in Malay and English. The children's first, second and third languages were also investigated in this study. Data on Primary 1 children ($N = 866$) were analyzed by using a one sample t-test analysis and descriptive statistics. The results showed that most of the Primary 1 children's receptive and expressive vocabulary was better in Malay than in English. In addition, most of the children's first language was Sarawak Malay, their second language was Malay, and their third language was English. This shows that the children's first and second languages were better than their third language because their Malay was better than English. So, most of the children have poor English because English is not their first language. These results also highlight the importance of the English vocabulary acquisition among the children, which will influence their later performance in English.

Keywords: vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, receptive vocabulary, Malay, English, language acquisition, first language, second language

ABSTRAK

Perbendaharaan kata merupakan alat yang sangat penting untuk membantu kanak-kanak dalam kemahiran membaca. Hal ini adalah kerana perbendaharaan kata (terdiri daripada reseptif dan ekspresif) dan model “Simple View of Reading” mempunyai hubungan yang kait rapat. Kajian ini adalah untuk berbandingkan perbendaharaan kata reseptif dengan ekspresif dalam Bahasa Melayu dan Bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, Bahasa ibunda, Bahasa kedua dan Bahasa ketiga kanak-kanak telah dikaji dalam kajian ini. Data yang mengenai kanak-kanak dalam darjah satu ($N = 866$) telah dianalisis dengan menggunakan “one sample t-test” dan statistik deskriptif. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa kanak-kanak dalam darjah satu mempunyai prestasi yang lebih baik dalam perbendaharaan kata Melayu berbanding dengan bahasa Inggeris. Selain daripada itu, kebanyakan kanak-kanak mempunyai Melayu Sarawak sebagai bahasa ibunda, bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa kedua dan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa ketiga mereka. Keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa bahasa ibunda dan bahasa kedua kanak-kanak adalah lebih baik daripada bahasa ketiga mereka kerana Bahasa Melayu kanak-kanak adalah lebih baik daripada Bahasa Inggeris. Kebanyakan kanak-kanak lemah dalam Bahasa Inggeris kerana ia bukan Bahasa ibunda mereka. Oleh itu, keputusan-keputusan ini menekankan kepentingan perbendaharaan kata Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan kanak-kanak yang akan memberi kesan yang baik dalam kemahiran membaca Bahasa Inggeris.

Kata kunci: perbendaharaan kata, perbendaharaan kata ekspresif, perbendaharaan kata reseptif, Bahasa Melayu, Bahasa Inggeris, bahasa ibunda, bahasa kedua

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multicultural society with multiple languages. This multicultural and multilanguage context poses a great issue in the Malaysian education system because the acquisition of the English language is likely a second or additional language for most Malaysians. According to McGill-Franzen and Allington (2010), students face difficulties in learning English if their first language is not English. In other words, students perform better in their first language as compared to second or additional language.

According to the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE, 2012), acquiring Malay and English language is equally important to Malaysian students in schools. Although the English language is the international language, it is still taught in the national schools as a core subject. However, there is a big gap between the student's Malay and English performance. For example, there are 30% of students who took examinations of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), 26% of them took examinations of Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR), and 45% of them took examinations of Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) achieve an excellent result in Malay language, as compared to only 16% of students in SPM English, 18% of students in PMR and UPSR English (MOE, 2012). So, it can be concluded that Malaysian students perform better in Malay language than in English.

Since most of the Malaysian students perform better in Malay language, it means that majority of them are at risk in their future careers. According to Aruna (2011), almost 50% of human resources recruiters had rejected Malaysian fresh graduates after the interview sessions due to their poor English performance, communication skills and attitude. In other words, most of the fresh graduates do not have the ability to speak or use fluent English which affect their poor performance in communication skills and remain unemployed. According to the MOE (2012), Malaysia should develop good literacy skills in order to

increase the job opportunities and catch up with the rapid changes of economic and technological advancement.

Although, the MOE claims that Malaysian students' academic performances are improving drastically in the national standard (2012), when they were tested in the international levels, their international academic performance is totally different from the national standard. For example, Malaysian Form 5 students who failed to achieve minimum standards based on the Cambridge grading scale is 50%, but only 20% of students failed based on the Malaysian grading scale.

In general, there are two international assessments, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which provide a universal scale that allows the comparison between each country's performance in terms of the grades and subjects (MOE, 2012). TIMSS is used to examine students' curricula abilities and measure the students' mathematics and science performances whereas PISA is used to examine the students' abilities in solving real world problems and measure the students' reading skills, mathematics, and science knowledge (MOE, 2012).

According to Walker (2011), PISA has three levels which are advanced, intermediate and below minimum levels. However, he mentioned that Malaysian students' reading performance in PISA 2009 was at *below* the minimum proficiency. *Below* the minimum proficiency in reading means that Malaysian students were given a text, but they do not know how to find the information, do not have basic concept, and they make poor conclusions. On the other hand, if students are at *above* the minimum proficiency which are intermediate or advanced level, they have the abilities to understand well, produce multiple conclusions, and evaluation when a text is given. From this result, it shows that Malaysian students are at risk in reading abilities.

In PISA, the ranking of international average is from 1 until 42 whereas OECD average is from 1 until 18 (Walker, 2011). Unfortunately, Malaysia was ranked 52 out of 76 in reading which means it falls far behind the international and OECD average. There was only 0.1% of Malaysian students who were able to achieve advanced level in reading performance as compared to other countries (e.g. Korean, 12.9%; Hong Kong, 12.4%; Singapore, 15.7%). Therefore, poor performance in reading is a critical issue faced by Malaysians.

The Importance of Reading

Some questions might arise in people's mind. Why is reading very important to us? What are the benefits of reading? What happen if humans are unable to read? Well, reading is definitely important to us as it brings positive benefits to humans. One of the benefits of reading is to assist humans' literacy development.

Humans start to acquire languages during infancy (Fern & Jiar, 2013; Stockall & Dennis, 2013) and they continue learning new words through reading, parents' and teachers' guidance (Stockall & Dennis, 2013; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) as those words are useful in representing objects, thoughts, actions or even feelings (Feldman & Papalia, 2012). In other words, reading improves human's communication system, cognitive abilities, and new intervention of technologies and problem solving.

Due to the importance of reading, the world's societies such as educators and parents (Cabell et al., 2011) are taking serious actions in applying multiple solutions to assist student's reading skills. For example, the educators and parents build frequent communications with each other in order to understand the students' progress in reading (Stockall & Dennis, 2013). Besides, parents guide their children to do reading activities in order to build their interest in reading, support their understanding of reading contents and vocabulary development (Hill & Diamond, 2013; Stockall & Dennis, 2013). The examples of

reading activities between parents and children are reading bedtime stories, reading storybooks in the library, organising a reading competition between siblings and friends, and reading about history in museums.

Although reading is very important to mankind, there are some situations where children face difficulties in reading such as dyslexia. Children with dyslexia are unable to recognize words, but they are good in listening comprehension (Tunmer & Greaney, 2010). In summary, humans with different reading disabilities will face different problems. To have a better understanding about reading, the Simple View of Reading model has been applied by many researchers since 1986 until hitherto (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Lee & Wheldall, 2009; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012).

Simple View of Reading (SVR)

The Simple View of Reading model (SVR) was proposed by Gough and Tunmer in 1986 (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Kendeou, Savage, & Broek, 2009) and it is largely used in the classification of reading profiles (Catts, 2003). The SVR model is comprised of two components which are: oral language comprehension (C) and word recognition (D) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). In other words, without either one of the components, the reading process cannot be achieved or children will have problems in reading.

There is a mathematical formula of the SVR, which is reading equals to the production of oral language comprehension and word recognition ($R = C \times D$), where R represents reading ability, C represents oral language comprehension and D represents word recognition. The scores of R, C and D can be 0 or 1, respectively (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). If either C or D is 0, then R would be 0. If the children's score in reading is 0, it means that the children have problems in reading. On the other hand, if the children's score in reading is 1, it means that the children have normal reading abilities. In a situation where children have

word recognition but are poor in oral language comprehension, it means that D is 1, C is 0. So, reading is equal to 0, where 1 times 0 is 0. Therefore, word recognition and oral language comprehension are dependent on each other to yield a successful reading skill (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012).

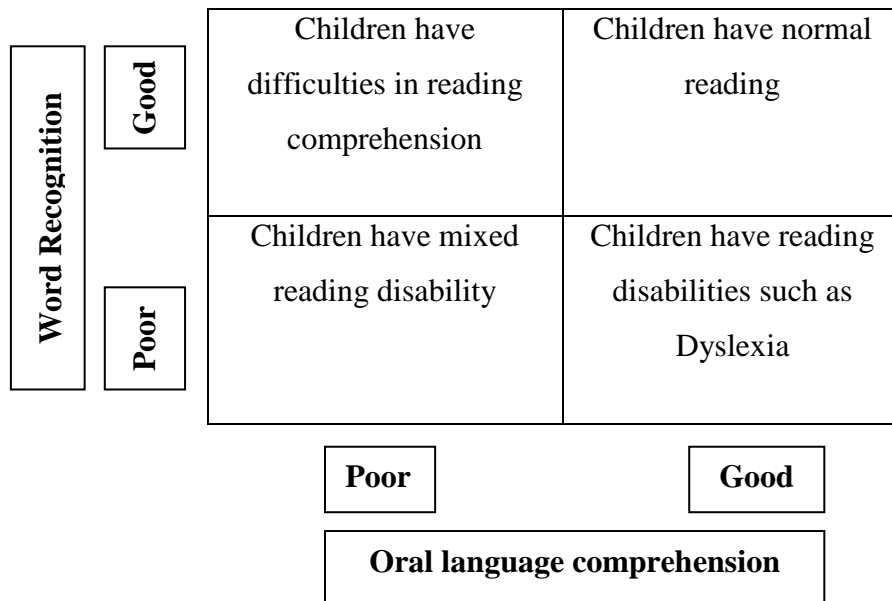


Figure 1. The four different categories that causes reading difficulties. Adapted from “Defining dyslexia,” by W. Tunmer and K. Greaney, 2010, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 43, p. 233.

The four reading categories are shown in Figure 1. Children with good oral language comprehension but poor in word recognition have a reading disability, known as dyslexia (Tunmer & Greaney, 2010). On the other hand, children with poor oral language comprehension but good in word recognition will have difficulty in specific reading comprehension. Normal readers are good in both oral language comprehension and word recognition (e.g: Reading equals to 1 when oral language comprehension times decoding, where C is 1 and D is 1). Lastly, children who suffer from mixed reading disability is due to their poor oral language comprehension and word recognition (Tunmer & Greaney, 2010).

Furthermore, Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley (1995) mentioned that the SVR is equal to decoding and listening comprehension skill. According to Gough and Tunmer (1986), children with decoding skill have the ability to read words accurately and quickly, whereas children with word recognition are able to recognize words as they have letter and sound knowledge (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). From the two definitions, decoding and word recognition are similar.

On the other hand, listening comprehension and oral language comprehension have the same meaning. According to Gough and Tunmer (1986), children with oral language comprehension or listening comprehension are able to comprehend the meaning of words or sentences through listening or spoken language.

From the Simple View of Reading model, one conclusion can be made which is SVR model is largely related to vocabulary knowledge. In other words, children acquire vocabulary knowledge in order to improve their reading skill (Biemiller, 2003). In order to have a better understanding about the connection between the Simple View of Reading and vocabulary, research on vocabulary has been studied.

Vocabulary Acquisition

When people look at the word ‘vocabulary’, what is the first thing that comes out in their mind? Most of the people might explain that acquiring vocabulary is learning new words that build up languages. According to Braze, Tabor, Shankweiler, and Mencl (2007) and Coll (2005), vocabulary knowledge includes one component which is oral language comprehension. In addition, vocabulary has two categories which are receptive and expressive vocabulary (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Therefore, the combination of receptive and expressive vocabulary builds a successful oral language comprehension.

Moreover, Storch and Whitehurst (2002) defined receptive vocabulary as receiving known words, whereas expressive vocabulary as naming known words. Children with

receptive vocabulary have the ability to receive spoken words with understanding through listening, whereas children with expressive vocabulary have the ability to decode from the written words and express it verbally (Gershon et al., 2013). These definitions are strongly related to oral language comprehension in the SVR model. It is because oral language comprehension is one of the components in the SVR model. In other words, vocabulary acquisition is one of the important processes that builds up good reading skills. Without either receptive or expressive vocabulary, the oral language comprehension component in the reading process cannot achieve. In summary, vocabulary and the Simple View of Reading are related.

In order to become good readers, vocabulary acquisition is necessary (Biemiller, 2003; Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). However, some children face problems in vocabulary acquisition such as the delay of vocabulary acquisition which influences their pre-reading skills (Wise, Sevcik, Morris, Lovett, & Wolf, 2007). For example, if children have rich vocabulary at the beginning, later on, they can build richer vocabulary and increase the growth of reading comprehension. However, if children have poor or limited vocabulary, they face difficulties in catching up with their reading comprehension as the gap of reading skills becomes larger (Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010). Furthermore, according to Torgesen (2002), the delay of reading skill development will affect the children's vocabulary as they will lose the opportunity to build their comprehension strategies. Subsequently, it changes the children's attitude and motivation in reading. Therefore, children are required to start learning vocabulary as early as possible in order to continue learning more complex vocabulary throughout their lives (Christensen et al., 2014).

Moreover, Malaysian children also encounter problem in vocabulary acquisition in different languages. According to Catts, Fey, Zhang, and Tomblin (1999), there are more than 70% of kindergarten kids who have poor performance in phonological processing and oral

language due to the differences of language acquisition. Therefore, some countries have realised the importance of vocabulary knowledge and they are finding solutions to assist children's vocabulary acquisition in different languages that builds up children's reading. For example, researchers from Spain had done some research on Spanish-speaking children in learning English as their second language by inventing Spanish-English storybook and they examined whether the English vocabulary instruction can improve Spanish children's words (Lugo-Neris, Jackson, & Goldstein, 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that can be made, if children are good in English vocabulary, then, they are good in English reading. In other words, vocabulary acquisition largely depends on what languages that have been applied by children.

Malay and English in Malaysia

In Malaysia, there are two common languages that students are required to learn. These languages are Malay and English. According to MOE (2012), the Ministry of Malaysia hopes that the students are able to master both Malay and English languages when they leave their schools. Both languages are equally important to children because Malay is the national language, whereas English is the international language and it is a compulsory subject in national schools in order to compete with other countries (MOE, 2012).

However, it is not an easy task to learn English as a second or an additional language. McGill-Franzen and Allington (2010) pointed out that English, as an additional language, is difficult to learn. It simply means that acquiring a second or additional language is more difficult than acquiring a first language.

First Language and Second Language Acquisition

First language (L1) is the language used at home or basically referred to as the mother tongue, whereas second language (L2) is the language that is different from the first language and sometimes it is called the additional language (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2010).

According to Caesar and Nelson (2013), when children are acquiring their second language, their acquisition of second or additional languages is affected by their first language. For instance, Chinese-English bilinguals face problems when they learn English because Chinese is their first language. Besides, both languages, Chinese and English are totally different from each other in terms of their sounds, letters, and orthography (Cao, Tao, Liu, Perfetti, & Booth, 2013). In short, children's first language acquisition is stronger than their second language acquisition. For example, Malay children speak better in Malay than in other languages such as English, Chinese, Iban, and other foreign languages.

However, according to Montrul and Foote (2014), if second language learners are fully immersed in their second language and neglected their first language, they will no longer recognize their first language and vice versa. In other words, if Chinese-English bilinguals are fully immersed in English by doing more practice than Chinese, then their knowledge in Chinese will decrease.

Summary

There are some issues faced by Malaysians. First, there is a big gap between the student's Malay and English performances, although both languages are taught in national schools. However, by reviewing SPM, PMR and UPSR students' performances, Malaysian students achieved excellent results in Malay language than in English (MOE, 2012). Nowadays, fresh graduates are rejected after the interview sessions due to their poor English performance (Aruna, 2011).

Second, Malaysian students' reading performance in PISA 2009 result was at *below* the minimum proficiency (Walker, 2011). *Below* the minimum proficiency in reading means that Malaysian students are unable to find information and have no basic concept when reading materials were given to them. According to Feldman and Papalia (2012), reading

allows human's communication system and cognitive abilities. So, Malaysian students are at risk in reading abilities.

Third, since there is a connection between reading and vocabulary, and the Malaysian's score of PISA in reading is at *below* the minimum proficiency, therefore, the children might have poor vocabulary knowledge. Currently, there is a dearth of research on Malaysian students' performance specifically in vocabulary knowledge, which consists of receptive and expressive vocabulary, and the relationship between SVR model and vocabulary. It is because the Ministry of Education did not further investigate the root causes of the children's deficiency in reading.

The Current Study

The present study aims to measure the receptive and expressive vocabulary in Primary 1 children by comparing their Malay and English language. Specifically, the first aim of this study was to measure the Primary 1 children's receptive vocabulary by comparing their Malay and English performance. The goal of producing this objective is to determine whether the Primary 1 children perform better in Malay or in English receptive vocabulary. In addition, the children's receptive vocabulary performance influences the development of listening comprehension of SVR model (Gershon et al., 2013).

The second aim of this study was to measure the Primary 1 children's expressive vocabulary by comparing their Malay and English performance. The goal of developing this objective is to determine whether the Primary 1 children perform better in Malay or in English expressive vocabulary. Furthermore, the children's expressive vocabulary performance influences the development of listening comprehension of SVR model (Gershon et al., 2013).

The third aim was to measure the highest first language, second language and third language that most of the Primary 1 children acquire. According to Caesar and Nelson

(2013), children will be affected by their first language when they are acquiring the additional language(s). So, the goal of this objective is to determine which first, second and third languages are the most common among the Primary 1 children in the sample.

Research Questions

There are three research questions:

1. Is there any difference between Malay and English in Receptive Vocabulary test?
2. Is there any difference between Malay and English in Expressive Vocabulary test?
3. Which language is the most common language used as the children's first language, second language and third language?

Hypotheses

Based on the first two research questions, there are two hypotheses that can be made which are:

H₀: There is a difference between Malay and English in Receptive Vocabulary test.

H₀: There is a difference between Malay and English in Expressive Vocabulary test.

Conceptual Framework

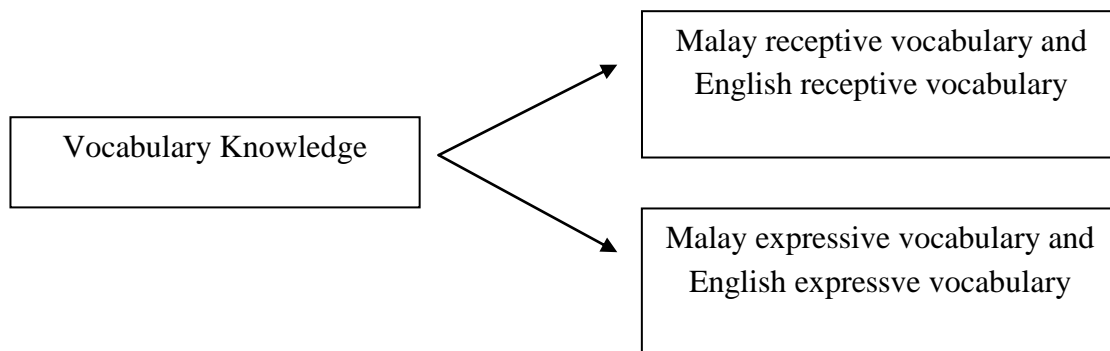


Figure 2. The conceptual framework of this study. There are two types of vocabulary knowledge which are receptive and expressive vocabulary. Each vocabulary are tested in Malay and English.

Significance of the Study

In terms of knowledge, readers will be able to broaden their knowledge about the vocabulary which consists of receptive vocabulary and expressive vocabulary. Besides, readers are able to realise the connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading skills. In order to build good reading skills, the first step is to acquire vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, readers are able to learn the differences between the first and second language acquisition and the factors of second language development.

In terms of policy, the development of vocabulary tests which proposed by Dr. Julia Lee Ai Cheng in her research entitled “Development of a comprehensive diagnostic tool for the identification and classification of language and literacy skills in primary school children who are at risk for reading difficulties (including dyslexia)” helps to detect children’s vocabulary ability, especially the receptive and expressive vocabulary skills in Malay and English. With the vocabulary tests, the children’s vocabulary performance can be easily detected by school teachers.

In terms of practice, the vocabulary tests can be applied in national schools. School teachers can widely use to test all the primary one children. Children with poor vocabulary performance are at risk in reading disability. Early prevention can be done to Primary 1 children after the detection of poor vocabulary.

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

Participants

The data from the study was supported by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) led by Dr. Julia Lee Ai Cheng. There were 11 national schools in Sarawak, Malaysia randomly selected to participate in the study. Specifically, the study was created in order to develop a comprehensive diagnostic tool for the identification and classification of language and literacy skills in primary school children who were at risk for reading difficulties. A sample of 866 Primary 1 children from 11 national schools in Kuching city had participated in the present study. Those 866 children had obtained approval from their parents with the used of consent forms (see Appendix C).

Research Ethics

The informed consent was used to inform the children, parents and teachers about our purposes in this research and to get approval from the children's parents. The target participants for the research were the Primary 1 children and they were too young to make decisions. So, it is important to get an agreement from children's parents before the collection of data. The process of vocabulary testing will stop if the children were unwilling to continue to do the vocabulary tests. Furthermore, confidentiality is necessary to ensure that the information collected from all participants is kept as confidential.

Measures

There are two measures used in the larger study were applied in this present study, which included receptive vocabulary and expressive vocabulary. The operational definition of vocabulary includes receptive and expressive vocabulary which is used to detect children's listening comprehension.

Receptive vocabulary. Two languages in the receptive vocabulary measure: Malay and English. The receptive vocabulary assessed the children's ability to listen carefully and point to the correct pictures. There were a total of 20 questions, each question scores one point. Furthermore, each question consisted of four different pictures. From the four pictures, children were required to point one of the pictures after listening to the test administrators (see Appendix D).

Expressive vocabulary. Two languages in the expressive vocabulary measure: Malay and English. The expressive vocabulary assessed the children's ability to decode pictures and name the pictures in words. There were a total of 20 questions, each question scores one point. Moreover, there was only one picture in each question. The children were required to name out the words by looking at the pictures given (see Appendix E).

Procedures

First, the English receptive vocabulary test with a total of 20 questions was given to the 866 Primary 1 school children. The test administrators were required to give instructions to the children. The children were required to listen carefully to the test administrators. When the test administrators name out the word, the children were required to listen carefully and point to the correct picture. If the picture is pointed correctly, one point will be given to the children. Thus, the test administrators need to observe carefully at the children's choices. Next, the Malay receptive vocabulary test was given to children. The procedure of the Malay receptive vocabulary test was similar to the English receptive vocabulary. For instance, test administrators asked the children: "From these four pictures, can you point to the fish?", then the children were required to point to a picture with a fish in the receptive vocabulary test.

Second, the English expressive vocabulary test with a total of 20 questions was given to the 866 primary one school children. The test administrators were required to give instructions to the children. The children were required to name the pictures in words to the