



Faculty of Education, Language and Communication

**English Language Teachers' Knowledge and Practices in Teaching
Vocabulary using Audio-Visual Approach in Rural Primary School**

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English Language Teachers' Knowledge and Practices in Teaching
Vocabulary using Audio-Visual Approach in Rural Primary School

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Except where due acknowledgements have been made, the work is that of the author alone. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.



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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is the key to effective communication. Past research found that teaching vocabulary has often been neglected by teachers as they focus on other language skills such as listening, speaking, grammar, reading, and writing. This research was conducted to investigate the English language teachers' practices and knowledge with the use of the audio-visual (AV) approach to teach vocabulary in the rural east Malaysian primary school. This research focuses on the teachers' planning, approaches, perceptions, and challenges when using the AV approach to teach vocabulary. Seven primary-level English language teachers from two schools in a rural area of Bau, Sarawak, participated in this research. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis, and were thematically analysed. The findings indicated that teachers viewed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) aligned resources as their main guideline for lesson planning and approaching vocabulary teaching. Teachers were reported to use different AV approaches to teach vocabulary depending on the difficulty levels of the words. Findings show that teachers responded positively, and they were comfortable using the AV approach to teach vocabulary. However, teachers also experience infrastructure and policy challenges. The findings were then discussed in accordance with the two key themes: teachers' knowledge and practice. The challenges teachers faced seem to be linked to the gap between the teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in the subject matter and their PCK concerning the CEFR. The findings offer crucial implications for vocabulary teaching using the AV approach.

Keywords: Teaching vocabulary, audio-visual approach, teachers' practice, teachers' knowledge, primary-level English language classroom

Pengetahuan and Amalan Guru Bahasa Inggeris dalam Pengajaran Kosa Kata menggunakan Pendekatan Audio-Visual di Sekolah Rendah Kawasan Luar Bandar

ABSTRAK

Kosa kata memainkan peranan yang penting dalam komunikasi yang efektif. Kajian lepas menunjukkan bahawa guru cenderung mengabaikan pengajaran kosa kata dibandingkan dengan fokus yang diberikan kepada kemahiran bahasa yang lain seperti mendengar, bertutur, membaca, menulis dan tatabahasa. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji amalan dan pengetahuan guru tentang penggunaan pendekatan audio-visual (AV) dalam mengajar kosa kata di kelas Bahasa Inggeris peringkat sekolah rendah di kawasan luar bandar Sarawak. Fokus kajian ini adalah pada perancangan, pendekatan, dan persepsi guru dalam menggunakan pendekatan AV untuk mengajar kosa kata, serta cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru-guru tersebut. Tujuh orang guru daripada dua buah sekolah di kawasan luar bandar Bau, Sarawak, telah terlibat dalam kajian ini. Pengumpulan data meliputi kaedah temu bual, pemerhatian bilik darjah, dan analisis dokumen, yang kemudiannya dianalisis secara tematik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa sumber Pendidikan yang sejajar dengan Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) telah dijadikan panduan dan rujukan utama guru semasa membuat perancangan, serta pelaksanaan pengajaran dan pembelajaran kosa kata semasa kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa guru mengadaptasi strategi pendekatan AV berdasarkan tahap kesukaran kosa kata yang diajar. Para guru telah memberi respon yang positif terhadap penggunaan pendekatan AV untuk pengajaran kosa kata di kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Namun, hasil kajian juga menunjukkan kekangan yang dihadapi oleh guru dari segi infrastruktur dan dasar pendidikan. Dapatan kajian adalah dibincangkan melalui dua tema, iaitu amalan guru dan pengetahuan guru. Perbincangan dapatan menunjukkan bahawa cabaran yang dihadapi

oleh guru adalah berkaitan dengan jurang antara Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) guru dalam kandungan mata pelajaran dan PCK mereka berkaitan CEFR. Dapatan ini menawarkan implikasi penting untuk pengajaran kosa kata menggunakan pendekatan AV.

Kata kunci: *Pengajaran perbendaharaan kata, pendekatan audio-visual (AV), amalan guru, pengetahuan guru, Bahasa Inggeris sekolah rendah*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AV	Audio-Visual
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
MOE	Ministry of Education
DSKP	<i>Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran</i>
SoW	Scheme of Work
CD	Compact Disc
SK	<i>Sekolah Kebangsaan</i> (National Primary School)
SJK	<i>Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan</i> (National Type Primary School)
e-Resources	Electronic Resources
KSSR	<i>Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah</i> (Standard Curriculum for Primary School)
TP	<i>Tahap Penguasaan</i> (KSSR levels of achievement)
IT	Information Technology
BPK	Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
TPACK	Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter covers the issues that underline the background of the study and the problem statement. Besides, it also includes the research objectives, research questions, significance of study, scope of study and definition of key terms.

1.2 Background of Study

Vocabulary is the building block to effective communication, without sufficient vocabulary, communication will be difficult (Augus et al., 2005; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Sovakandan et al., 2017; Sutrisna & Artini, 2020; Yovanoff et al., 2005). Therefore, vocabulary is essential in learning English (Zhang, 2011), and it serves as the foundation for improving other language abilities including reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Koizumi et al., 2013; Mohd. Nor et al., 2015; Rasouli & Jafari, 2016; Susanto, 2017; Sutrisna, 2021). However, in reality, researchers found that vocabulary teaching has always been outshined by the attention given to teaching grammar, reading, and writing skills (Bastanfar & Hashemi, 2010; Kalajahi & Poursahian 2012; Lu, 2017; Maizatulliza & Kiely, 2018; Permana, 2020). This phenomenon can be seen happening globally (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008; Kalajahi & Poursahian, 2012; Lu, 2017) as well as locally in Malaysia (Maizatulliza & Kiely, 2018).

In reality, teaching the English language in Malaysia can be challenging, especially for teachers in rural schools in Sarawak where English is not the learners' first language. The differences in culture and background between the teachers and learners in these schools

often affect the pedagogical decisions made by the teachers (Chan & Kapong, 2021; Ler, 2012; Musa et al., 2012).

According to Kiss and Rimbar (2017), the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) has provided resources such as English textbooks for teachers. However, these textbooks were difficult to implement in rural Sarawak schools due to their extensive foreign cultural content being incompatible with the local setting. Thus, teaching vocabulary based on the textbook was a challenge for the teachers compared to teaching learners in urban schools, which have a more supportive environment, such as access to more up-to-date textbooks and technologies that can support English learning (Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021). The integration of technology into the Malaysian education system has raised concerns about how vocabulary lessons are planned and executed in English classrooms, particularly in rural Sarawak schools in Malaysia. The findings from this study were crucial to providing practitioners with insights into how rural teachers implement the AV approach to teaching vocabulary in their classrooms.

Traditionally, Scott & Nagy (1997) argue that vocabulary teaching was built on the definition approach. Other researchers find it a passive approach because teachers focused on providing learners with word definitions (Zeta et al., 2019) which pushed learners to become passive receivers. In recent years, technological advancement has contributed to the popularity of the audio-visual (AV) approach among Malaysian English teachers to improve students' language acquisition (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum [BPK], 2017).

Generally, audio-visual (AV) derived from the combination of two words: audio, which refers to "what we can hear," and visual, which refers to "what we can see" (Anas & Zakaria, 2019; Singh, 2007). In education, teachers often use the AV approach to share

information with the learners through both audio and visual resources (Swaran Singh et al., 2021) which targets both the senses of hearing and sight (Anas & Zakaria, 2019). AV approach was also adopted to increase the learners' experience in the classroom (Singh, 2007). In line with the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into our Malaysian education system in 2017, AV resources aligned with the Teacher's Guidebook and Student's Book were provided by the MOE Malaysia (BPK, 2017). The CEFR-aligned AV resources were saved in the form of compact discs (CDs) to aid English teachers in lesson planning and classroom practice (BPK, 2017).

Studies in the past indicated that teachers have been hesitant to use CEFR-aligned resources, such as CDs, despite knowing about their availability (Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021; Mansourzadeh, 2014; Ngu & Azlina, 2019; Utami, 2015). According to Bayuon et al. (2019), even with the availability of AV resources, integrating information technology (IT) in primary schools in Malaysia, especially in rural areas like Sarawak, has proven to be challenging. Past research has found that English teachers from rural schools were facing challenges such as the lack of resources (Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021; Utami, 2015), poor network coverage (Ngu & Azlina, 2019), lack of equipment and facilities (Wazeema & Kareema, 2017; Yonas et al., 2020), insufficient access to technology (Nawai & Said, 2020) and lack of teacher's training (Aminuddin & Azman, 2017; Azman et al., 2018).

According to Nurul Farehah and Mohd. Sallehudin (2017), the main reason that teachers were faced with these challenges was due to the lack of CEFR experts to develop and manage the CEFR-aligned resources, and also the lack of training for teachers to implement CEFR-aligned resources in actual classroom practice. Therefore, it is crucial to

understand how teachers plan and implement the CEFR-aligned AV resources for vocabulary teaching and the challenges faced in the actual classroom practice.

As teachers play a crucial role in determining the success and failure of teaching and learning in any classroom (Borg, 2003; Philip et al., 2019). How teacher perceive vocabulary teaching will affect their choice of approaches. The recent studies by Alanazi (2019) and Phan (2021) have found that teachers' choice of pedagogical approaches in their lesson planning plays a decisive role in the success or failure of a lesson practice. Therefore, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' perception of using the AV approach to vocabulary teaching in the primary-level English language classroom, as well as to understand the challenges they faced in the process.

1.3 Statement of The Problem

Based on the past research and literature review, the main problem found leading to this study was the lack of research to address the use of the AV approach to teach vocabulary from the teacher's perspective. There are five key issues which will be addressed in this study.

The first issue that led to this study was the gap between teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of vocabulary teaching and their actual practice in the English language classroom. Teaching vocabulary is a complex process that does not adhere to a set of structural rules like teaching grammar, thus, how to teach vocabulary depends on the teacher's understanding (Maizatulliza & Kiely, 2018).

In reality, even though pre- and in-service English teachers undergo training to gain content and pedagogical knowledge in teaching language skills, including teaching

vocabulary (Blachowicz et al., 2006; Boyd et al., 2012; Hendrick et al., 2004; Zhang, 2008), yet studies in the field showed that teachers were often uncertain of the best practice in vocabulary teaching (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008; Lu, 2017; Sutrisna, 2021). Past studies from Permana (2020) and Sutrisna (2021) found many teachers were unable to recognise the fact that teaching vocabulary was merely about explaining the meaning of the words. In fact, teaching vocabulary should not only focus on understanding the meaning of the words but also on knowing how to apply the vocabulary learned in the real world (Sutrisna, 2021).

Likewise, the findings of a recent study conducted by Maizatulliza and Kiely (2018) to investigate the understanding of teacher's PCK in ESL vocabulary teaching revealed that teachers pay less attention to teaching vocabulary compared to teaching grammar, despite teachers' claims to understand the importance of vocabulary.

As mentioned earlier, with the integration of technology into our current education system, CEFR-aligned AV resources were prioritised in terms of teaching and learning, including teaching and learning vocabulary (Ngu & Azlina; 2019). However, there were no clear instructions given in the curriculum documents showing how the audio-visual should be used to teach vocabulary, neither in the *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran* (DSKP) nor the Scheme of Work (SoW). Therefore, teachers were given the autonomy to create and decide on instructional activities for vocabulary teaching based on the word list and AV resources while depending heavily on their content and pedagogical knowledge (Maizatulliza & Kiely, 2018).

However, past studies have found that teachers were not taking full advantage of the AV to teach vocabulary even though they understood the benefits of adopting the AV approach to teaching (Mansourzadeh, 2014; Utami, 2015). Similar challenges have also been

identified in recent studies where researchers found that teachers were hesitant to use CEFR-aligned AV resources, despite knowing its benefits and availability (Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021; Ngu & Azlina, 2019). The teachers' hesitation to apply the Av approach despite knowing its benefits reflected the gap between the teachers' PCK and their actual classroom practice in vocabulary teaching. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the reason behind this gap by looking at the teacher's perceptions which will influence their instructional decision on how to teach vocabulary in the English language classroom (Chien, 2020; Kaur & Mah, 2022; Niu & Andrews, 2012; Philip et al., 2019; Sangster et al., 2013).

The second issue identified as the basis for this study is the lack of research on teachers' perceptions regarding the use of the AV approach in teaching vocabulary. Most of the studies in the field focus on learners' perception of the use of AV aids in vocabulary learning (Anas & Zakaria, 2019; Firda et al., 2018; Mathew & Alidmat, 2013; Tamimi Sa'd & Rajabi, 2018). Recently, there have been few studies which investigate the teachers' perception in terms of vocabulary teaching (Chien, 2020; Lu, 2017; Nguyen & Nguyen 2020; Susanto, 2017), but it was not related to the AV approach. Whereas the study by Make and Yonas (2018) focused on investigating teachers' perception of teaching speaking skills instead of vocabulary.

Furthermore, the findings of Tan et al. (2019) research reinforce the lack of research in terms of teachers' perception, highlighting the huge research gap regarding teacher cognition which was falling far behind in Malaysia. Based on their research, the teacher's perception was one of the issues identified which was part of the teacher cognition (Tan et al., 2019). Similarly, Kaur and Mah (2022) highlighted the need to study teachers' perceptions because they played a significant part in successfully applying any curriculum content into the field.

The third issue identified as the basis for this study was the lack of studies related to vocabulary teaching based on the CEFR-aligned curriculum, textbook and AV aids in our Malaysia English language classroom. As the implementation of CEFR in the Malaysian education system was still relatively new, there were only a limited number of studies conducted in the local context. Most of the studies found were investigating challenges faced by teachers in adopting CEFR-aligned curricula and syllabus documents as the guide for English language teaching in the Malaysia classroom (Darmie et al., 2017; Lo, 2018; Nawai & Said, 2020; Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehudin, 2018). Accordingly, the studies address the issue that teachers need more guidance to understand and to incorporate CEFR-aligned curriculum with their pedagogical approach. There were also studies which investigated the teachers' proficiency level in English to align it with the standard requirement in CEFR (Rahman, 2013). However, none of those studies investigated the perception of teachers in terms of using of AV approach to teach vocabulary in the local English language classroom based on the CEFR-aligned curriculum.

The fourth issue identified as the basis for this study is the lack of qualitative research which provides a deeper understanding of using the AV approach to teach vocabulary from the teachers' viewpoint. Most of the research found in the field is either experimental or action research which focuses especially on the effectiveness of certain techniques or approaches in teaching vocabulary and their results tend to be quantitative. For instance, studies on the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching and learning using rote-memorizing (Khoii & Sharififar, 2013; Reed, 2012), spacing techniques (Schuetze, 2015), reading treatment (File & Adams, 2010), visual approach using visual aids (Bhatti, et. al., 2017; Takač & Singleton, 2008), and auditory approach using songs (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). AV approach using audio-visual aids (Azaman & Nur Ehsan, 2019; Barania et al., 2010;

Bhatti et al., 2017; Rosario, 2019; Utami, 2015). The findings of these studies were able to address the effectiveness of certain pedagogical approaches, yet it does not reflect the teacher's perception of conducting those pedagogical approaches in their classroom practice. However, even though there were a few studies investigating the AV approach in vocabulary teaching (Azaman & Nur Ehsan, 2019; Barania et al., 2010; Bhatti et al., 2017; Rosario, 2019; Utami, 2015;), its findings only manage to address the effectiveness of the AV aids instead of investigating how teachers perceive AV as a pedagogical approach. Therefore, studies which investigate the teachers' perception in the related field were limited.

The fifth issue identified as the basis for this study is the insufficient research to investigate the reason behind the challenges that teachers encountered when teaching the English language in the rural school of Sarawak. Studies in the past have found that English language teachers from rural areas were facing challenges such as the lack of resources (Ismail et al., 2017; Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021; Utami, 2015), poor network coverage (Ismail et al, 2017), and lack of equipment and facilities (Wazeema & Kareema, 2017; Yonas et al., 2020), as well as lack of access to technology and teachers training courses (Aminuddin & Azman, 2017; Azman et al., 2018). However, the studies did not further investigate the reason behind the occurrence of such challenges among teachers.

As the audio-visual approach was gaining popularity in the field of education of the 21st century, therefore, it is important to gain insight into the teachers' perceptions in terms of adopting the AV approach to teaching vocabulary in the primary-level English language classroom.

1.4 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' knowledge and practices of applying the audio-visual approach for vocabulary teaching in rural primary school English language classrooms. The objectives are:

1. To examine teachers' practices in teaching vocabulary in the primary-level English language classroom.
2. To investigate teachers' views on teaching vocabulary through the use of an audio-visual approach in the primary-level English language classroom.
3. To explore the challenges faced by teachers in using the audio-visual approach to teach vocabulary in the primary-level English language classroom.

1.5 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers teach vocabulary in the primary-level English language classroom?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of using the AV approach in teaching vocabulary in line with CEFR?
3. What are the challenges encountered by the teachers in the process of using the AV approach to teach vocabulary in primary-level English language classrooms?

1.6 Significance of Study

This study aimed to investigate the teachers' perception of using the audio-visual approach for vocabulary teaching in the primary level English language classroom. Based on the research questions, the findings will cover areas such as teachers' planning,

implementation and perception in using AV approach to teach vocabulary, as well as the challenges they encounter.

Therefore, the findings of this study will benefit teachers or practitioners with insight into how teachers adopt the AV approach to teach vocabulary in the classroom, as well as help to identify the best practice for teaching vocabulary. At the same time, the findings reflected the need to enhance the teachers' technological competence as part of the pedagogical training in line with the current digital education trend.

Besides, the findings of this study will benefit the policymakers by providing insight into the teachers' perception which would reflect the teachers' knowledge. With this information, it could serve as a reference for policymakers to design a more comprehensive professional development training or course based on the teachers' needs to minimise the challenges faced.

Furthermore, the findings may also provide a reference to researchers working within the field of education and language learning. These findings will help researchers understand how teachers perceive the use of the AV approach to teach vocabulary in primary-level English language classrooms, especially in rural schools.

Furthermore, as the CEFR has recently been adopted as our English language curriculum in Malaysia, it is hoped that the outcomes of this study will contribute to the limited research regarding vocabulary teaching through the CEFR-aligned curriculum that existed in the context of Malaysian English language classrooms.

Finally, since the integration of technology into the Malaysian education system has raised concerns about how vocabulary lessons are planned and executed in English