

Using Poetry for Vocabulary Acquisition among Malaysian Secondary Students

Noor Syarafina Kamaludin

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Malaysia, Sekolah
Menengah Kebangsaan Bandar Baru Bangi, Bangi 43650, Malaysia

Hanita Hanim Ismail

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Malaysia
Corresponding Author Email: hanitahanim@ukm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i2/25512> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i2/25512

Published Online: 26 May 2025

Abstracts

Vocabulary is a fundamental aspect in language learning since its use is important for language skills (namely reading, speaking, listening, and writing). However, students often find these language skills to be difficult due to their limited vocabulary. Although poetry was once included in the Language Arts as an effort to instil reading habits, its role to enrich vocabulary was not quite looked into in the past. Hence, this research investigated the use of poetry at enriching lower secondary school students' vocabulary. An experimental research design was conducted where a paired-sample T-test was used to analyse the pre and post-intervention vocabulary scores among 34 Form 3 students selected through purposive sampling. A vocabulary test in the form of a crossword puzzle was administered before and after the poetry-based intervention. The results revealed that poetry is able to improve the students' vocabulary. Thus, the outcome of this study would inform educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in Malaysia about the efficacy of incorporating literary texts as a pedagogical strategy in teaching vocabulary. On the other hand, future research can compare the effectiveness of poetry with other instructional methods or materials, such as non-literary texts, multimedia resources, or digital tools, in enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: Language Learning, Literature in ESL Classroom, Poetry, Secondary Students, Vocabulary Acquisition

Introduction

English language teaching and learning in the global context is pivotal due to the widespread influence of English as a *lingua franca*. The significance of English proficiency extends beyond linguistic competence, encompassing economic, professional, and academic opportunities. In Malaysia, the position of English as a second language (ESL) is constitutional, thus making it a required subject in the national school assessment. The general expectation is for Malaysians to be able to communicate in the language upon the completion of their schooling syllabus (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2015). As part of the syllabus, literature is synonymous to

English language teaching and learning, making the two coexistent (Hashim & Abd Talib, 2019). This is because of the availability of vocabulary, sentence structure, and idiomatic expressions in literary texts that contribute to language proficiency.

In English language education (ELE) in Malaysia, exploring literary texts holds a key to unlocking the vast potential of vocabulary development among ESL students. The incorporation of literary works into the curriculum offers a dynamic and immersive approach to language learning. Beyond the traditional methods of vocabulary acquisition such as repetition and drills, flashcards and dictionary use, engaging with narratives, characters, and themes in literature provides a unique context for students to expand their linguistic repertoire (Mansoor et al., 2022). The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) mandates the inclusion of an English literature module as a mandatory element in the secondary school English curriculum (Rajan & Ismail, 2022). Based on the scheme of work for the English syllabus at secondary level, literature is included at the end of every unit after the reading, listening, speaking and writing skills.

Vocabulary is an essential component that ESL learners need to master since it is used to enhance language skills. Its mastery enables learners to comprehend what they read and listen as well as to produce the language needed to write and speak. This is supported by Mohd Tahir et al. (2020) who claimed that the lack of vocabulary resources makes it difficult for ESL learners to communicate and write in the language. This is also observed by Alghonaim (2018), who noted that students often used general words in their writing that do not convey the exact meaning. He further added that even when they write about different topics, they constantly use the same word since they do not have a sufficient vocabulary bank. Apart from that, since they do not have the precise words to express their thoughts clearly, they usually talk around their ideas and try to explain them. On the other hand, Nor et al. (2015) conducted a study on the English language teachers' perceived difficulty of using English skills among their ESL learners. The study found that it is challenging for students to use a variety of vocabulary and expressions when speaking. As a result, inadequate vocabulary knowledge eventually impedes ESL learners' mastery of language skills.

In vocabulary learning, ESL learners cannot avoid having several learning issues that could eventually affect their performance and motivation too. First, learners fail to produce in-depth word knowledge as they might not understand every word in a text (Mohd Tahir et al., 2020). As a result, they might face difficulty in understanding what they read or hear. Apart from that, another issue faced is erroneous word choice (Saadiah & Kaladevi, 2009). The limited vocabulary causes them to mistakenly choose the correct word to express their exact thoughts and feelings either in speaking or writing. Furthermore, learners also tend to forget the new words that they have learned. For example, if they have been introduced to four new words in an hour's lesson, they are likely to remember one word (Hasram et al., 2021). This is also supported by Mohd Tahir et al. (2020) who explained that the newly learned vocabulary is likely to drastically deteriorate after two weeks.

On the other hand, Afzal (2019) highlighted that one of the reasons for Malaysian pupils' poor vocabulary mastery is ineffective teaching methods adopted by teachers. Since learning vocabulary can be challenging for second language learners, it is crucial for teachers to adopt appropriate teaching techniques and materials to ensure the effectiveness of

vocabulary lessons. Therefore, literature could be used in a vocabulary lesson to enhance students' vocabulary. For many years, teachers have used literature as a tool for teaching EFL students about the various vocabulary words and grammar rules in the English language in Saudi Arabia (Baaqeel, 2020). Novels, short stories, poems and plays are literary texts that can be used to enhance learners' vocabulary. Abdalrahman (2022) suggested using short stories to teach vocabulary as he explained that learners can understand a word better when it is presented in context.

Hence, vocabulary acquisition is a crucial component of language proficiency, especially in a multilingual country like Malaysia where English serves as a second language. Malaysian secondary students often struggle with vocabulary retention and usage, which can hinder their academic performance and communication skills. Traditional methods of vocabulary teaching, such as rote memorization and isolated word lists, may not fully engage students or foster deep understanding.

Poetry, with its rich and expressive language, offers a unique and creative medium for vocabulary learning. Through rhythm, rhyme, imagery, and context, poetry can make vocabulary more memorable and meaningful. Furthermore, poetry encourages students to engage emotionally and cognitively with the language, which can enhance both motivation and retention.

Despite the potential benefits, the integration of poetry into vocabulary instruction is not widely explored in the Malaysian secondary school context. Therefore, there is a clear need to explore how poetry can be used as an effective pedagogical tool for vocabulary acquisition. Hence, this study aims to fill that gap by providing insights into how poetry can support vocabulary development and recommending strategies for practical classroom implementation. Thus, this paper investigated the effectiveness of using English literary text specifically poetry in enriching lower secondary school students' vocabulary so that it can be an eye opener for the secondary students that reading poetry can improve their vocabulary acquisition. In addition, this research will provide teachers with practical strategies to incorporate poetry into their teaching practices. It will also help them understand the pedagogical value of literary texts beyond aesthetic appreciation. The study is also important for curriculum developers and policymakers too as it offers evidence that shows the relevance of literature in the national syllabus and it should be embraced not just as a subject, but as a vital component of a meaningful learning experience.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis (H_0) states that there is no significant difference in students' vocabulary scores before and after the poetry-based intervention. In contrast, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) posits that there is a significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores following the poetry-based intervention. This can be expressed as:

$$H_0: \mu_{pre} = \mu_{post}$$

$$H_1: \mu_{pre} < \mu_{post}$$

where μ_{pre} represents the mean vocabulary score before the poetry-based intervention, and μ_{post} represents the mean vocabulary score after the intervention. If the paired-sample T-test shows a statistically significant increase in post-test scores, the null hypothesis will be

rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, supporting the effectiveness of poetry in enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

Literature Review

This section is divided into three subsections: Krashen's second language acquisition theory, vocabulary learning and incorporating English literary texts into the teaching of vocabulary.

Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory

There are various theories that describe second language learning. These theories are crucial as it provides understanding on how individuals acquire proficiency in a language other than their native tongue. Krashen (1977) in his Input Hypothesis theory explained that when a person is exposed to language that is comprehensible and contains $i+1$, language acquisition occurs. He further explains that the ' i ' indicates the current level of language already acquired, and the ' $+1$ ' shows the language aspect such as words, grammatical forms, aspects of pronunciation that is just a step beyond that level. Therefore, integrating literature in vocabulary learning aligns seamlessly with Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Literature, especially well-selected texts, can offer language learners comprehensible input to improve their language skills, especially vocabulary. Literature often contains a mix of familiar and unfamiliar words, allowing learners to deduce meaning through context, just as Krashen suggests. This challenges learners without overwhelming them, fostering vocabulary development. In addition, selecting literature that is slightly above the learners' current proficiency level ($i+1$) encourages growth by exposing them to new words and phrases within a context they can understand. This incremental exposure aligns with the Input Hypothesis by providing a challenging yet accessible linguistic environment.

Vocabulary

Studies on vocabulary teaching and learning generally examine vocabulary skills e.g. understanding word meanings, guessing meaning in context, and spelling. For example, Tahir et al. (2021) investigated the explicit method of vocabulary learning with Form Two learners, which looked at word meaning. The participants can show their understanding of word meaning through multiple-choice questions, which is demonstrated by actively remembering the word in context. This study revealed that the use of explicit vocabulary methods to learn the target words led to an improvement of learners' vocabulary. Earlier, Tahir et al. (2020) investigated the effectiveness of using Visual Vocabulary. In this study, participants were given fifteen short reading passages in which synonyms or phrases with similar meanings to the target words are used within the sentences. This study revealed that the scores from the post-test from the experimental group exceeded the control group indicating the effectiveness of using Visual Vocabulary. Apart from that, Ariffin (2021) investigated whether student collaboration helps improve their vocabulary. By focusing on guessing meaning in context, Ariffin argued that student collaboration is an effective technique in teaching vocabulary due to the discussion done.

Vocabulary is a crucial component of language learning and proficiency, allowing learners to effectively communicate their ideas and thoughts with others. Knowing a word means knowing its meaning, its collocations, its grammatical functions, and its register, or level of formality (Scrivener, 2011; Thornbury, 2002; Nation, 1990; Zimmerman, 2014). It is necessary to ascertain the type of words that must be used with this word, as well as the

words that may be anticipated to come before or after it (Nation, 1990; Scrivener, 2011; Thornbury, 2002). For instance, the word *hair* can be combined with the word *blonde* forming collocation '*blonde hair*' (Scrivener, 2011). Hence, words can be added to, or combined, to form new words. Other than that, a word also can have different grammatical functions. For example, the word *look* can become *looks*, *looking* or *looked* depending on the sentence it is used (Thornbury, 2002). If it is used to talk about the past, the word *looked* will be used. Apart from that, a word also can belong to two or more-word classes (Thornbury, 2002). For instance, the word *pretty* is an adjective and at the same time it is also an adverb. It is also important to know the register of a word, so that we will know to use the word in a formal or informal context (Zimmerman, 2014). Hence, to know a word means to know more than its meaning.

One of the ways to introduce new vocabulary is by presenting the word in context (Harmer, 2007; Nation, 1990; Scrivener, 2011; Thornbury, 2002). This is because for students to understand how words are used in vocabulary instruction and learning, its use ought to be shown in context (Harmer, 2007; Thornbury, 2002). As such, Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (2011) suggested that students learn new words by reading texts or listening to audio tracks where those words are used and later given the chance to hear its use or see its function. This is called a situational presentation (Thornbury, 2002), which emphasises on the memorable impact of the words. Harmer (2007) further added, introducing texts to pupils is a great way to introduce them to new language, besides giving them the opportunity to understand word usage when they are assigned to read or listen. In addition, Zimmerman (2014) stated that in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), vocabulary is selected from authentic materials according to its usefulness. Therefore, literary texts are authentic materials that offer the context needed for learners to understand a word better. Learners could see how the words are used and memorise them. This is because literary texts expose learners to words in rich, meaningful contexts. In stories, poems, or plays, words are often embedded in situations that reveal their meanings through action, dialogue, or description. This contextualization helps learners understand not just the definition of a word, but also its connotations, nuances, and appropriate use. For example, the word "**melancholy**" may be introduced when students read novels in order to explain a character who is going through a difficult time. In the sentence, "She felt a deep melancholy as the autumn leaves fell," learners can connect the word with feelings of sadness, loneliness, or reflection, based on the context provided by the surrounding words and events.

According to Melanie and Azlina (2019), the main obstacle for ESL students completing their assigned writing tasks is their limited command of the English language. They must therefore possess the necessary vocabulary, grammar, and sentence-building skills in order to create a piece of writing (Melanie & Azlina, 2019). Other than that, Azlina and Saraswathy (2021) stated that the students' poor vocabulary makes it challenging for them to communicate in English. Thus, Azlina and Saraswathy (2021) further added that numerous Malaysian employers assert that our graduates cannot get employment because they cannot communicate in English. Many students who have studied English as a second language for 11 years and graduate from secondary school perform poorly when speaking the language (Azlina & Saraswathy, 2021). In addition, Tran and Duong (2020) listed limited vocabulary possessed by ESL listeners as one of the listening comprehension problems. In reading, Sharon and Parilah (2020) mentioned that the texts that students read contain terms and cultural

context that are unknown to them. They occasionally recognise the words read but are unable to interpret them (Sharon & Parilah, 2020). As a result, reading anxiety develops among ESL students, as they struggle to comprehend the material. Hence, vocabulary is the basic problem faced by the ESL learners which eventually affects their proficiency in reading, listening, speaking and writing.

Literature in Language Learning

Literature is a useful tool for promoting language acquisition, since it offers rich and memorable contexts for understanding and processing new language (Lazar, 1993). This can be delivered through the reading of literary works, which Lazar suggested to be a valuable supplement to the inevitably limited input of the classroom.

Other than that, acquisition may also be accelerated because the overall context for processing a new language is interesting (Lazar, 1993). This is because literature introduces learners to authentic language use, showcasing a variety of vocabularies, idiomatic expressions, and complex sentence structures. These elements, embedded within compelling contexts, provide learners with opportunities to encounter language as it is naturally used, making the learning process both practical and enjoyable. Additionally, literary works often offer cultural insights, helping learners understand the values, traditions, and perspectives of the target language community. This cultural dimension not only deepens learners' interest but also provides a broader context for interpreting and processing the language. Ukat and Ismail (2022) highlight that incorporating literature into English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms offers significant opportunities to enhance students' language skills. They emphasize that engaging with literary texts allows students to encounter diverse vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and various language styles, which can improve their linguistic proficiency. Therefore, incorporating English literary texts into the teaching of vocabulary can potentially serve as an effective method to enrich vocabulary among the lower secondary school pupils. This is because literature offers a wide and varied spectrum of linguistic elements that can aid learners in developing their language. As they read a literary text, they are being exposed to diverse vocabulary, sentence structures, and language styles within rich, meaningful contexts. Unlike textbook examples, which are often simplified or artificial, literary works present language in its authentic and creative forms, reflecting how it is naturally used in different situations. For example, novels, poems, and plays often feature idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and figurative language, helping learners understand the subtleties of meaning and tone that are essential for fluency. Hence, learners experienced a meaningful environment for processing and interpreting a new language. It could immerse them in authentic and contextually rich settings where language functions as a living, dynamic tool of communication. As they engage with literary texts, learners are not merely decoding isolated words or structures but interpreting language within the context of characters, settings, emotions, and themes. This contextual immersion makes the language more relatable and memorable, as it is tied to vivid narratives, dialogues, and imagery. By supplementing classroom input with literary texts, learners may have more opportunities to engage with the language in a meaningful way, which can help to accelerate acquisition.

Elsewhere, several studies support this. In his research using poetry images and short stories as tools to understand and memorise vocabulary, Mohamed (2022) found that these materials enable the understanding and memorization of English vocabulary. In another

study, Abdelrady et al. (2022) who studied 79 secondary school students in Sudan, found out that learners have positive attitudes towards the role of literature in building their vocabulary. Locally, Wai and Hafilah (2020) who investigated Malaysian students' attitude towards learning poetry and the challenges encountered in learning poetry, found out that both the teacher's approach and the choice of poems contribute towards students' growing interest in learning the language as well as understanding its context, culture, and values. They also foster a favourable attitude towards learning poetry as a second language. Atek et al. (2020) who investigated students' perceptions of the importance of the English literature component in selected secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia, found out that students have positive perception towards the English literature component, and they think that students who study English literature have a better understanding of culture, increase their critical thinking abilities, and enhance their vocabulary and grammar. English literature develops their cultural awareness, critical thinking skills, as well as improves their English grammar and vocabulary. Rajan and Ismail (2022) observed the use of TikTok as a strategy to improve knowledge acquisition and build engagement to learn literature in ESL classrooms. It demonstrated high engagement of students in learning literature using TikTok and positive students' knowledge acquisition in learning literature was also apparent. Since the studies mentioned investigated the students' attitude, perception, engagement and knowledge acquisition in learning English literature, the focus of this study will be to investigate the effects of using literature on lower secondary school students' vocabulary empowerment.

Methodology

Research Design

Since the researchers provided the intervention that is assumed to be the cause of change in this study and waits until it has created change or has had enough time to do so, it is an experimental research design (Kumar, 2005). Although there are many types of experimental design, this study is categorised as the before-and-after design, which is described as the most appropriate design for measuring the impact or effectiveness of a programme or known as the pre-test/post-test design (Kumar, 2005). Thus, it is the most suitable research design that could answer the research objective which is to investigate the effectiveness of English literary text in empowering students' vocabulary. This before-and-after experimental research design is particularly well-suited for assessing the effectiveness of an intervention, such as the use of English literary texts, in enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition. By comparing the samples' vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention, the study can effectively capture any changes or improvements that result from exposure to the literary texts.

The pre-post test structure allows the researchers to establish a baseline measurement of the samples' vocabulary skills prior to the intervention. After the intervention period, a post-test was administered to measure any progress or changes in vocabulary acquisition. This design provides clear, quantifiable data on the impact of the intervention, making it easier to determine whether the use of literature specifically contributed to the samples' learning outcomes. Hence, the before-and-after design is ideal for studies aiming to measure the impact of specific teaching methods or interventions over a defined period, as it provides clear, interpretable data that can be used to make evidence-based conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention (Kumar, 2005).

Sampling and Population

34 Form 3 secondary students from a public school in Selangor, Malaysia were chosen as samples using purposive sampling strategy (Kumar, 2005; Gupta & Gupta, 2013). Selangor is located on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, surrounding the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. Selangor's population is ethnically diverse, consisting mainly of Malays, followed by a significant Chinese community and a notable Indian population, along with smaller groups from other ethnic backgrounds. The predominance of Malay students in the sample provides insights into how poetry can be used to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, offering a meaningful way to expand vocabulary within a familiar cultural context while still fostering a broader appreciation of the English language.

Since this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using poetry to empower students' vocabulary, purposive sampling is the most suitable type of sampling. Hence, selecting these Form 3 students as a research sample enables the researchers to achieve the objectives of this study (Kumar, 2005; Gupta & Gupta, 2013).

Research Instruments

Kumar (2005) stated that the most crucial part of a research project is building a research instrument or tool because the type of information gathered will determine the findings and conclusions drawn, and the questions asked will determine the data gathered. Hence, this study used vocabulary questions in the form of a crossword puzzle which were taken from a book published by *Penerbit Ilmu Bakti* entitled *A Collection of Poems and Novel The Elephant Man*, written by Yee Sook Fen and Yeoh Wei Tzee (2023). It tested whether the samples understand the meaning of selected words based on the poem introduced when the samples are required to identify the word from a poem based on the meaning given.

Past studies (i.e Rahayu & SriRahayu, 2020; A'yunin & Aminin, 2023; Pohloh & Ma'rifatulloh, 2023) have proven that crossword puzzles are effective tools in improving students' vocabulary. In fact, the use of crossword puzzles for vocabulary learning allows fun learning and students' increased learning interest (Rahayu & SriRahayu, 2020).

Next, the samples were given the meaning of 8 words from the poem that require them to complete a crossword puzzle with suitable words. The crossword puzzle was developed as part of an assessment tool and a learning aid designed to evaluate their understanding of specific vocabulary words from the poem. To select the words, key vocabulary from the text was identified – especially words which are likely to enrich students' vocabulary and challenge their comprehension skills. Hence, 8 words that might be less common and unfamiliar to the samples were selected based on the poem. For each word, a concise definition or clue was formulated to guide the samples in their filling in the puzzle correctly. This process ensured that the vocabulary used in the puzzle is aligned with the study's objective.

Data Collection Method

In this research, a poem entitled *The Day the Bulldozers Came* by David Orme was selected since it is part of the literature component in secondary schools, under the Form 3 syllabus. The poem reflects on the destruction caused by urbanisation and human activities, particularly the devastation of natural habitats. Images of nature as beautiful and lively

against the mechanical brutality of bulldozers are included in this poem, providing a better understanding of the selected words (i.e. *bulldozers*, *rooks*, *oaks*, *sizzled*, *scattering*, *leapt*, *stirred*, and *trembled*) and helping students to memorise them. This is supported by Mohamed (2022) which demonstrates that the imagery in poetry enhances students' vocabulary by providing a meaningful context, making it easier to use and remember effectively. Next, pre- and post-tests were carried out to investigate whether poetry is effective in enriching the learners' vocabulary. During the pre-test, the samples are required to complete a crossword puzzle with suitable words. The meanings of the words were given, and participants completed the crossword puzzle with suitable words based on the meanings given. The crossword puzzle was developed based on the 8 selected words from the poem. These words were selected since they are central to the theme of the poem and its meaning, which aids deeper comprehension. Besides, these words are relevant and practical, with a high likelihood of being used in other contemporary contexts. Then, the results of the pre-test were recorded before analysing it using paired sample T-test. The paired-sample T-test was used in this study because it is an appropriate statistical method for comparing the means of two related datasets—specifically, the students' vocabulary scores before and after the poetry-based intervention. Since the same group of students participated in both the pre-test and post-test, the data is considered dependent, making a paired-sample T-test the most suitable choice. This test helps determine whether the observed improvement in vocabulary scores is statistically significant rather than occurring by chance. By comparing each student's performance before and after the intervention, individual differences—such as prior knowledge, learning abilities, and external influences—are controlled, thereby increasing the reliability of the results. The test follows the formula $t = \frac{\delta}{sd\sqrt{n}}$ where δ represents the mean difference between pre- and post-test scores, sd is the standard deviation of the differences, and n is the number of participants. If the computed t-value exceeds the critical value from the t-distribution table, the null hypothesis (which assumes no significant difference) is rejected, confirming that the poetry-based intervention effectively enhances vocabulary acquisition. This statistical approach aligns with best practices in educational research, as highlighted by Pallant (2020), Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), and Hatch and Lazaraton (1991), who emphasize the effectiveness of paired-sample T-tests in analyzing pre- and post-intervention data in language learning studies.

After that, the participants were introduced with the words through the poem. The 8 selected words were highlighted in the poem and they will be taught the meaning of the words. The meaning of the words will be more understandable and memorable as participants can see how the words were used in context. Finally, in the post-test, the participants will be completing the same crossword puzzle they have completed during the pre-test and the results were recorded and analysed.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software v.27 to examine the effectiveness of poetry in helping learners learn the target words. This was assessed by comparing the mean scores of the Pre- and Post-tests to determine whether there was significant improvement or otherwise by the end of the study (Mohd Tahir & Mohtar, 2016). Additionally, vocabulary scores from the Pre- and Post-tests were analyzed using paired sample t-tests. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to evaluate the participants' performance in the vocabulary achievement tests.

Findings

In this section, the result of the study begins with Table 1, that shows the difference in the mean score of the pre- and post-test. Finally, Table 2 shows the result of the paired T-test analysis is presented and the findings are discussed.

Table 1

The Mean Score of the Pre- and Post-Tests

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre	3.15	34	1.794	.308
	Post	4.91	34	1.848	.317

Based on Table 2, before the poem was used as an intervention, the samples had a mean score of $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.79$ in the pre-test. After using the poem, the mean score of the samples' vocabulary test scores, however, increased to become $M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.85$, indicating a difference between the pre- and post-vocabulary test ($M = -1.77$, $SD = 1.18$). This increase in vocabulary post-test scores demonstrates the effectiveness of using poetry as a teaching intervention of improving vocabulary. This improvement can be attributed to the engaging and interactive nature of poetry, which uses rhythm, rhyme, and vivid imagery to make learning enjoyable and memorable. By presenting vocabulary in meaningful and relatable contexts, poetry enables students to understand and retain words more effectively. Additionally, the interpretive and emotional aspects of poetry encourage deeper cognitive processing, while its repetitive patterns naturally reinforce learning. These factors, combined with opportunities for creative exploration and active participation, transformed vocabulary learning into an engaging and impactful process, resulting in the significant improvement in scores. Therefore, the finding is aligned with Mohamed (2022) who conducted a study on poetry's images as an effective tool for understanding and memorizing vocabulary. The findings of the study showed that poetry's imagery enriches the students' vocabulary in a way that offers a meaningful context that can be used and remembered effectively (Mohamed, 2022). Apart from that, it shows that literature provides a platform for the students to get exposed to various words and achieve the '+1' level in Krashen's input hypothesis whereby +1 is according to the Krashen, language that is just a step beyond that level (Krashen, 1985).

The pre-test scores, reflecting performance before the intervention, were lower on average (mean: 3.15), while the post-test scores increased significantly (mean: 4.91), resulting in a 56.07% improvement. Notably, every student showed progress, with some achieving modest gains and others experiencing substantial increases. This consistent improvement indicates that poetry was effective for all participants, regardless of their initial proficiency levels. The stable standard deviations (1.79 for the pre-test and 1.85 for the post-test) suggest that the intervention benefited students uniformly without increasing variability. Poetry likely enhanced vocabulary acquisition by providing engaging, memorable, and contextual learning experiences, supported by its rhythm, imagery, and emotional connection. These findings highlight the value of poetry as a creative and effective approach to teaching vocabulary.

The analysis of paired sample T-test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences							
				Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation		Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre - Post	-1.765	1.182	.203	-2.177	-1.352	-8.704	33	<.001

A paired samples T test was conducted to test a significant difference between the samples' scores before and after using poetry in vocabulary learning. Based on Table 2, the paired-samples T-test revealed a significant difference between the score of the students before and after the use of an English literary text $t(33) = -8.70, (p < .05)$. The effect size for the difference was large ($d = 1.52$). Thus, it can be concluded that the use of poetry enabled the students' improved vocabulary, which answered the first research question of this study whereby the use of poetry is effective in enriching the students' vocabulary. Hence the null hypothesis of this study is rejected. This finding is aligned with Mohamed (2022) who conducted a study on the use of poetry as an effective tool for understanding and memorizing vocabulary. According to the study's findings, the use of imagery in poetry may expand pupils' size of vocabulary by providing a valuable context that may be efficiently employed and retained (Mohamed, 2022).

The paired-samples T-test conducted on the students' scores before and after the use of poetry in vocabulary learning revealed a statistically significant difference ($t(33) = -8.70, p < 0.05$). This indicates that there is a substantial change in vocabulary scores attributed to the intervention with the English literary text. Furthermore, the effect size associated with this difference was found to be large ($d = 1.52$), emphasizing the practical significance of the observed improvement. The use of poetry appears to have a considerable impact on enhancing learners' vocabulary skills which is understanding the meaning of a word.

In conclusion, the statistical analysis supports the assertion that the incorporation of English literary texts in the learning process significantly empower students' vocabulary. The substantial effect size underscores the practical importance of this educational approach, suggesting its efficacy in promoting vocabulary development among students.

Discussion

The extent of improvement in students' vocabulary test scores after learning through poetry is evident from the substantial increase in their post-test performance compared to their pre-test scores. The mean pre-test score of $M = 3.15$ ($SD = 1.79$) reflects the students' initial vocabulary knowledge before the intervention. After using poetry as a teaching method, the mean post-test score increased to $M = 4.91$ ($SD = 1.85$), resulting in a mean difference of $M = -1.77$ ($SD = 1.18$) and a percentage improvement of 56.07%. The results of this study align with Mohamed (2022), who found that poetry enhances vocabulary acquisition by providing a meaningful context that aids comprehension and retention. The statistically significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores after the poetry-based intervention, as indicated by $t(33) = -8.70$, $p < 0.05$, supports the notion that literary texts, particularly poetry, serve as

an effective pedagogical tool for vocabulary learning. This is supported by Hasan and Hasan (2019) who investigated the students' perceptions when literature is integrated in the language programme at Duhok and Zakho universities. The result of the study shows that the majority of the students view the incorporation of literature within their educational curriculum favorably as it enhances their vocabulary, speaking, and reading abilities as well as their overall language development (Hasan & Hasan, 2019). Additionally, the large effect size ($d = 1.52$) underscores the practical significance of this approach, reinforcing previous claims that poetry's use of imagery and context-rich language facilitates deeper engagement and memorization (Altun, 2023).

The improvement can be attributed to poetry's unique features, such as its rhythm, rhyme, and vivid imagery, which make vocabulary learning engaging and memorable. The contextual presentation of words in poetry likely helped students grasp meanings more effectively than through rote memorization or isolated word lists. Additionally, the interpretive nature of poetry may have stimulated critical thinking, encouraging students to process vocabulary at a deeper cognitive level, while the emotional connection fostered through poetic themes likely reinforced their ability to recall and use new words. Furthermore, the consistent standard deviations in the pre-test ($SD = 1.79$) and post-test ($SD = 1.85$) suggest that the improvement was not limited to a specific group of students but was relatively uniform across the sample. This implies that poetry as a teaching method has broad applicability and can be effective for students of varying proficiency levels.

Hence, the results highlight the significant role of poetry in improving vocabulary test scores. The marked improvement observed among students underscores the potential of incorporating poetry as an engaging and impactful tool in vocabulary instruction, particularly for Malaysian secondary school students.

Conclusion

This research investigated the efficacy of incorporating English literary text, particularly poetry, in enhancing the vocabulary of lower secondary school students. Employing an experimental design with a paired-samples T-test, the study analyzes pre and post-intervention vocabulary scores of 34 participants. The results reveal a significant improvement in students' vocabulary after exposure to poetry, emphasizing the effectiveness of using literary texts as a pedagogical strategy. The study underscores the importance of varied materials in language teaching, despite literature not being assessed in major examinations. It highlights the crucial role of teachers in selecting relevant texts and designing engaging lessons. Future research recommendations include strengthening experimental designs with control groups and expanding sample size and diversity for broader generalizability. Hence, the findings contribute valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, advocating for the integration of literature in language teaching methodologies.

In addition, this research contributes significantly to both theoretical and contextual understandings of vocabulary acquisition in ESL settings, particularly through the use of poetry. Theoretically, the study is grounded in Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current proficiency level ($i+1$). Poetry, with its rich linguistic

texture, rhythmic patterns, and emotive appeal, provides such input in an engaging and memorable format. The findings suggest that poetry can serve as a valuable source of comprehensible input, offering contextualized and meaningful vocabulary in a form that stimulates both cognitive and affective learning. This supports and extends Krashen's theory by illustrating how literary texts can serve as authentic input that promotes incidental vocabulary learning in a second language context. Contextually, the study fills a critical gap in Malaysian ESL education, where poetry is often sidelined in favor of more utilitarian texts. By demonstrating that poetry can enhance vocabulary acquisition among Malaysian secondary students, this study highlights its pedagogical relevance and potential to enrich current language teaching practices. It encourages educators to re-evaluate the role of literature in the ESL classroom and provides localised evidence for integrating poetry meaningfully into the curriculum.

References

- Abdalrahman, K. K., (2022) Teaching and Learning Vocabulary through Short Stories. (2022). *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v2i2.35>
- Abdelrady, A. H., Jahara, S. F., Elmadani, A. E. A., & Kumar, T. (2022b). The Attitude of Sudanese EFL Students towards Literature to Enrich Their Vocabulary Building. *Education Research International*, 2022, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/7569371>
- Afzal, N. (2019). A study on Vocabulary-Learning Problems Encountered by BA English Majors at the university level of education. *Arab World English Journal*, 10(3), 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no3.6>
- Baaqeel, N. A. (2020). Improving student motivation and attitudes in learning English as a second language; literature as pleasurable reading: Applying Garner's theory of multiple intelligences and Krashen's filter hypothesis. *Arab World English Journal for Translation and Literary Studies*, 4(1), 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol4no1.4>
- Alghonaim, A. S. (2018). Explicit ESL/EFL reading-writing connection: an issue to explore in ESL/EFL settings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(4), 385. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0804.04>
- Altun, M. (2023b). The Use of Literature in Language Teaching: An Effective Way to Improve Language skills. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.23918/ijsses.v10i1p195>
- Ariffin, A. (2021). Effects of Student Collaboration on ESL Learners' Vocabulary Development. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(1), 177. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i1.12627>
- A'yunin, R., & Aminin, Z. (2023). Teachers' voice of using crossword puzzle games to improve students' vocabulary. *RETAIN: Journal of Research in English Language Teaching*, 11(02), 8-14. <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/retain/article/view/54278>
- Atek, E. S. E., Hassan, I., Azmi, M. N. L., Azmi, N. J., & Alias, M. H. Y. (2020). Students' perceptions of the English literature component in Malaysian secondary schools. *Language Related Research*, 11(5), 125–144. <https://doi.org/10.29252/lrr.11.5.125>
- Azlina, A. A., & Saraswathy, K. (2021). ESL learners' challenges in speaking English in Malaysian classrooms. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(2), 983–991.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Fen, Y. S., & Tzee, Y. W. (2023). *A Collection of Poems and Novel*. Penerbit Ilmu Bakti.
- Gupta, M., & Gupta, D. (2013). *Research methodology*. PHI Learning Private Limited.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Hashim, H., & Abd Talib, M. A. (2019). The learning of English literature in Malaysia: A review of literature. *Religación: Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, 4(17), 68–74.
- Hasram, S., Nasir, M. K. M., Mohamad, M., Daud, M. Y., Rahman, M. J. A., & Mohammad, W. M. R. W. (2021, September 1). The Effects of WordWall Online Games (WOW) on English Language Vocabulary Learning Among Year 5 Pupils. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 11(9), 1059–1066. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1109.11>
- Hasan, A. M., & Hasan, Z. F. (2019). Students' Perception towards Literature Integration in the English Language Departments at Duhok and Zakho Universities. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 10(4), 130. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.10n.4p.130>
- Hatch, E., & Lazaraton, A. (1991). *The research manual: Design and statistics for applied linguistics*. Newbury House.
- Krashen, S. D. (1977). Some issues relating to the monitor model. In H. D. Brown, C. A. Yorio, & R. H. Crymes (Eds.), *On TESOL'77* (pp. 144-58). TESOL.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.
- Kumar, R. (2005). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature And Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Malaysia. Ministry Of Education. (2015). *Malaysia education blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher education)*. Ministry Of Education Malaysia.
- Mansoor, A. A. A., Mohammed, O. S. M., Ahmed, H. R., Awadh, A. N. M., Abdulfatah, H. M., & Sheikh, E. Y. (2022). English language teaching through a short story: A technique for improving students' vocabulary retrieving. *Cogent Education*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2022.2161221>
- Melanie, S., & Azlina, A. A. (2019). Systematic review: Approaches in teaching writing skill in ESL classrooms. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 8(4), 450–473.
- Mohamed, E. A. A. (2022). Poetry' images as an effective tool for understanding and memorizing vocabulary: A case study of EFL students at King Khalid University. *International Journal of Linguistics Literature & Translation*, 5(11), 205–212. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.11.24>
- Mohammed, E. M. G. M. (2022). Impact of Teaching Short Stories on Sudanese EFL Learners' Vocabulary learning. *Journal of English Studies in Arabia Felix*, 1(1), 52–60. <https://doi.org/10.56540/jesaf.v1i1.14>
- Mohd Tahir, M. H., Mohd Ariff Albakri, I. S., Mohd Adnan, A. H., & Abd Karim, R. (2020). The Effects of Explicit Vocabulary Instructions on Secondary ESL Students' Vocabulary Learning. *3L the Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 26(2), 158–172. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3l-2020-2602-12>
- Mohd Tahir, M. H., & Mohtar, T. (2016). The Effectiveness of using Vocabulary Exercises to Teach Vocabulary to ESL/EFL Learners. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 24(4).

- Nation, I. S. P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Ni, C. K., Jong, B., Dison, M. A., Thomas, S. A., Yunus, M. M., & Suliman, A. (2020). Enhancing Malaysian Primary Pupils' Vocabulary Skills using Pocable Game and Pear Deck. *International Journal of Learning Teaching and Educational Research*, 19(6), 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.6.9>
- Nor, F. M., Mazlanb, M. H., & Rajab, A. (2015). English Language Teachers' Perceived Difficulty of English Skills Faced by ESL Learners. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 1(1), 12-18.
- Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Pohloh, A., & Ma'rifatulloh, S. (2023). The Use of Crossword Puzzle to Improve Vocabulary Mastery (An Experimental Study At Ban Chokok School Thailand). *IRecall Journal*, 1(01), 1-14.
- Rajan, S. T., & Ismail, H. H. (2022). TikTok use as strategy to improve knowledge acquisition and build engagement to learn literature in ESL classrooms. *International Journal of Learning Teaching and Educational Research*, 21(11), 33–53. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.11.3>
- Rahayu, Y. S. & Srirahayu, A. (2020). The Effectiveness of Crossword Puzzles Game Towards Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery. *ELang | An English Language Education Journal*, 5(2), 46–55. <https://doi.org/10.55222/englisheducationjournal.v5i2.922>
- Saadiah, D., & Kaladevi, S. (2009). Error analysis of the written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(3), 483-495.
- Scrivener, J. (2011). *Learning Teaching*. 3rd Ed. Oxford: Macmillan Education.
- Sharon, L. P., & Parilah, M. S. (2020). Relationship between reading anxiety, reading strategies, and language competence of rural ESL secondary learners. *Creative Education*, 11, 126–142.
- Tahir, M. H. M., Albakri, I. S. M. A., Adnan, A. H. M., Shaq, M. S. Y., & Shah, D. S. M. (2020). The Application of Visual Vocabulary for ESL Students' Vocabulary Learning. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(2), 323–338. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no2.23>
- Tahir, M. H. M., Shah, D. S. M., Shak, M. S. Y., Albakri, I. S. M. A., & Adnan, A. H. M. (2021). Explicit vocabulary instruction: Effects of vocabulary learning on Form Two ESL learners. *Deleted Journal*, 8(3), 1227–1247. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v8i3.19539>
- Thornbury, S. (2002). *How to teach vocabulary*. Longman.
- Tran, T. Q., & Duong, T. M. (2020). Insights into listening comprehension problems: A case study in Vietnam. *PASAA*, 59, 77–100.
- Ukat, J. A., & Ismail, H. H. (2022). Teaching literature in Malaysian English classrooms: A review on its challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(12), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v12-i12/15700>
- Wai, T. L. K., & Hafilah, Z. A. (2020). Learning poetry: Attitude and challenges faced by ESL students. *LSP International Journal*, 7(2), 55–69.
- Zimmerman, C. B. (2014). Teaching and Learning Vocabulary for Second Language Learners. In Celce-Murcia, M. Brinton, M. & Snow, M. A. (Eds.), *Teaching English as a Second Language* (4th ed., pp. 288-302). National Geographic Learning.