

THE EFFECTS OF DRAMATIC PLAY ON VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG PRESCHOOLERS

*Fonny Hutagalung, Lai Liyan & Donnie Adams

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Jalan Universiti, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: fonny@um.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Studies have documented the value of dramatic play in enhancing vocabulary development. However, very few studies in Malaysia have examined the effects of dramatic play on vocabulary development among preschoolers. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of dramatic play on the enhancement of vocabulary learning among preschoolers in Malaysia.

Methodology: The research was a quasi-experimental study with a pretest and post-test design. Preschoolers from two government preschools participating in a vocabulary instruction with dramatic play for eight weeks were compared with preschoolers who did not participate in vocabulary instruction with dramatic play. Comparison of vocabulary scores between the experimental and control groups was gathered using the Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) instrument. Data were analysed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics using *t* test were utilised to analyse the target vocabulary pre-test and post-test scores between the control and experimental groups.

Findings: The study showed there were significant differences in the vocabulary scores after the use of vocabulary instruction with dramatic play in the experimental group compared to the control group. In addition, there were significant differences in the vocabulary scores for female preschoolers in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Contributions: This study is hoped to be useful for early childhood educators in the employment of effective vocabulary instruction to suit preschoolers' learning preferences in order to develop their vocabulary learning.

Keywords: Curriculum-based measurement, dramatic play, language development, pre-schoolers, vocabulary.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dramatic play is a guided enactment using words, actions, or other objects in scripts and scenes that represents the real world (Wright, 2016). During dramatic play, children use reading and writing to express and legalise themselves. The dramatic play in this study refers to a situation where preschoolers are assigned a role or pretend to be someone else by acting them out (Wright, 2016). Studies have documented the value of dramatic play in enhancing vocabulary development (Einarsdottir, 2014; Holmes & Romeo, 2013). Children with limited vocabulary often lack ability to convey a particular thought and experience difficulties in learning to read and write. Vocabulary learning is probably the most challenging aspect in mastering a language (Al Mubarak, 2017; Lateh, Shamsudin, & Abdul Raof, 2019). Therefore, vocabulary development plays a vital role in overall success in school as it aids children's reading and writing (Gillanders, Castro, & Franco, 2014; Hovsepian, 2017; McLeod, Hardy, & Kaier, 2017). Early vocabulary and later reading fluency are correlated with children's mathematics skills and understanding of science concept (Hindman, Skibbe, Miller, & Zimmerman, 2010).

Despite the efforts from educators and policymakers to strengthen students' English proficiency, many of them fail to reach English operational level. Diverse linguistic and multiethnicity backgrounds of Malaysia had caused the children to have not experienced a rich and rewarding English language culture. The structural differences between preschoolers' first language and the English language cause children to have confusion, thus increases their anxiety level in learning English where they need to acquaint with in formal class (Jalaluddin, Mat Awal, & A. Bakar, 2008). The less effective and comprehensive instructional methodologies are also unable to support the language development of young learners. Furthermore, academic performance of children can be affected by socioeconomic status

(Hassan & Rasiah, 2011), whereas children from poor urban communities in Kuala Lumpur have less access to learning materials and nutritious food which eventually lead to these children having higher degrees of literacy difficulties (UNICEF Malaysia, 2018).

Yamat, Fisher, and Rich (2014) indicated that interventions should start from young to increase the exposure to the English language and opportunities to apply them in a variety of meaningful contexts. Studies have documented the value of dramatic play in enhancing vocabulary development (Wright, 2016; Ziv, Smadja, & Aram, 2015). The emergence of vocabulary from objects occurs when the meaning of objects is replaced by words and the language growth of children is enhanced by relating between spoken and written languages during dramatic play (Einarsdottir, 2014; Holmes & Romeo, 2013).

Besides, children are more motivated towards instructional methods that require physical movement and creative imaginary situations (Holmes & Romeo, 2013). Roskos et al. (2008) indicated that understanding scripts and having verbal knowledge of a language also predict a child's competence to learn vocabulary. Dramatic play influences children's early literacy skills by strengthening the development of oral language, metalinguistic awareness, and imagination as well as promotes literacy development by giving children opportunities to relate the written and spoken languages (Einarsdottir, 2014).

Learning English vocabulary can be enjoyable and interesting by reducing affective filters of preschoolers in second language learning such as stress and anxiety, and by adding variations into instructional methods to enhance vocabulary learning of preschoolers. The knowledge of English words of preschoolers can affect their reading comprehension in the upper grades as emergent literacy skills and vocabulary knowledge that are built during preschool years are fundamental for later literacy. The preliminary report of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 stated that enhancing the English proficiency of students in keeping with the shift of ensuring every child is proficient in English in order to produce a competitive global generation. High proficiency in English opens the door to greater chances of higher education and long-term prospects in the future (Andrade, 2009).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Dramatic Play and Children's Language Development

Dramatic play refers to guided enactment where children use symbols such as words, actions, or other objects in acting out scripts and scenes that are representing the real world (Wright, 2016). When children participate in dramatic play, they substitute the objects, develop

imaginary situations, learn to take turns, cooperate, and share, which eventually improve children's self-regulation behaviours (Wright, 2016).

The rule-based nature of behaviour in dramatic play strengthens children's capacity to think before they use adult-like utterances to carry out the roles (Berk, 2013). For example, a child pretends to help a teddy bear to change diaper by acting according to her perception and understanding of the rule-based nature of parental behaviour. According to Vygotsky, children construct meaning of the world through the medium of play (Massey, 2013). The social and appealing characteristics of dramatic play can be useful to a variety of developmental domains, especially language and social competence. It encourages rich and fluency verbal language, increases children's confidence to communicate precisely, and develops narrative competence that builds children's knowledge of the functions of reading and writing (Mayesky, 2014).

The use of props provides opportunity to children to connect the text to the real-world experiences, encourages children's vocabulary development by learning the name of props, and motivates them to be involved in storytelling (Massey, 2013). The meaning of objects is replaced by words, hence the emergence of vocabulary from objects occurs (Holmes & Romeo, 2013). Children need to listen, understand, and provide responses during dramatic play. This would inspire a child to use longer sequence of words, more syntactically complex sentences, and more sophisticated vocabulary when he wants to negotiate with others or elaborate his ideas (Chitravelu, Sithamparam, & Teh, 2006; Mayesky, 2014; Wright, 2016).

Studies showed that children's vocabulary and oral narrative skills were developed when the teacher increased the contexts in which children are exposed to new words in interactive ways such as dramatising or acting out the story (Chlapana & Tafa, 2014; Gillanders et al., 2014). One of the major findings in the study carried out by Riojas-Cortéz (2000) was that the richness of Mexican American preschoolers' English language was revealed when they were involved in dramatic play even though they were minority ethnic group who came from low socioeconomic families.

A study conducted by Han, Moore, Vukelich, and Buell (2010) showed that preschoolers who received explicit vocabulary instruction coupled with dramatic play gained higher scores in Peabody Vocabulary Test compared to the children who received only the regular teaching protocol with no intervention. An action research project conducted at a preschool in Reykjavik, Iceland by Einarsdottir (2014) on the role of dramatic play in enhancing children's literacy skills indicated that dramatic play provides a meaningful learning context for children to practise reading and writing skills. Vocabulary and communicative development of the children from a preschool in Reykjavik, Iceland were improved when they

were involved in dramatic play. Their understanding of the link between objects and symbols increased together with their language awareness.

A study in China by Huang (2008) revealed that dramatic play provided children more opportunities to ‘act’ and ‘interact’ with their peers using the English language. Children learn to use the English language in a more realistic and practical way. In addition, Huang (2008) viewed that dramatic play eliminates the obstructions and anxiety of children in learning a second language and stimulates their interest to express ideas in English.

According to Isenberg and Jalongo (2001), dramatic play reduces anxiety and stress to both teachers and children as there is no need for written lines to be memorised. Learning is spontaneous with the use of props. Moreover, a positive mood will be built up in the young learners which facilitates learning when game-like movements are combined with attractive props and linguistic production. The combination between physical movements with props or verbal symbols such as attributing actions or thoughts to objects or creating a narrative about a person also helps children to build their vocabulary growth (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001).

The nature of relationship between context of dramatic play and language development in early childhood studied by Quinn (2016) revealed that there is a significant correlation between dramatic play and language growth in infants and toddlers. In the study, young children showed more conversational turns in dramatic play which positively predicts language development. A study by Massey (2013) that explored the guided pretend play from the storybook reading context revealed that children’s vocabulary and comprehensive language development were enhanced, and they became active participants in the classroom. Massey (2013) stressed that when preschool teachers scaffold the early literacy skills by connecting storybook reading and giving guidance during pretend play, the positive cognitive impact and vocabulary development of children became more defined.

Dramatic play goes beyond what is perceptually available by narrating a person or an object in the children’s environment (Massey, 2013). Dramatic play helps children to practise and use the words in a context that is real for the children personally, which eventually enhances their literacy skills (Wright, 2016). Children could be at risk of not developing language skills and construction of knowledge if the play is absent in the school curriculum (Wright, 2016).

2.2 Gender Differences versus Language Development of Children

Researchers believed that gender differences in language development of children are affected by the biological influences. Physical maturation rate of girls is faster than boys and thus

promotes earlier development of left cerebral hemisphere which is essential for language growth (Berk, 2013). Boys prefer larger group of physical play such as running, climbing, fighting, or tumble playing while girls are more engaged in functional-related play that involves cooperative roles such as role-play with their same sex peers (Berk, 2013; Holmes & Romeo, 2013). Role-play requires verbal language and narrative competence to communicate precisely in order to make role-play successful which eventually contributes to higher language proficiency in girls compared to boys (Holmes & Romeo, 2013).

The immediate environment of a child also affects his language growth. Parents tend to hold perceptions and expectations of boys and girls differently (Berk, 2013). For example, parents tend to give sons toys such as guns and cars that emphasise action and competition. When interacting with girls, parents provide higher rates of supportive emotional talk with daughters when engaging in pretend play (Berk, 2013). The richness of children's vocabulary is varied with the quantity of conversation with parents and parents tend to communicate more with girls than boys (Berk, 2013). The study of gender difference by Barton (2013) discovered female preschoolers were more encouraged to engage with literacy materials and to use more imagination at home. These contribute to higher competence in language and literacy development among girls.

The study by Hamid et al. (2011) of Malaysian children from a rural district found that academic scores on the Malay and English languages for girls were significantly higher than boys. A study conducted by Son, Lee, and Sung (2013) with Korea preschoolers also showed that girls had higher scores on academic achievement such as language and mathematics as well as social skills. A recent study conducted in Texas by McGown (2016) analysed that girls had statistically significant higher reading scores than boys. The data shown in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness for Reading Test revealed that Grade 3 girls outscored boys in all the Reading Reporting Categories throughout the four years of study. Furthermore, a study by Schleeter (2017) revealed that girls outperformed boys in their growth rates across outcome measure throughout the duration of the study. The results of reading performance of English language revealed that girls outscored boys in reading in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) programme. Whitmire (2010) offered reasons for boys' low reading scores; poor reading instruction, particularly a lack of focus on phonics, and too few books appealing to boys' interests.

There are some studies contradictory to the previous research. A study by Holmes and Romeo (2013) indicated that there was no significant difference in the scores of Peabody Vocabulary Test between boys and girls, yet girls were primarily involved in more pretend play

compared to boys. In the study of Chlapana and Tafa (2014), although girls from the experimental group had significant gain scores in the instructed vocabulary, boys scored higher than girls in the control group. They reiterated that gender is not related to vocabulary developmental but the differences in the learning strategies that boys and girls exhibit in vocabulary learning.

Previous research findings provide evidence that female preschoolers outperformed the male preschoolers in language achievement (Hamid et al., 2011; McGown, 2016; Schleeter, 2017; Son et al., 2013). However, there is evidence that male preschoolers scored higher than female preschoolers when they are provided with the right learning strategies (Chlapana & Tafa, 2014). The basic limitation in most of these studies was that very few examined the effect of interventions on vocabulary development. Thus, there is a need to examine the effect of interventions such as dramatic play on the enhancement of vocabulary learning among male and female preschoolers. Based on the above conclusions, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of dramatic play on the enhancement of vocabulary learning among the preschoolers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The quasi-experimental research was implemented in this study involving 50 preschoolers aged five from two government preschools in Kuala Lumpur. A pretest was given to both groups before the experiment to assess the preschoolers' current level of vocabulary learning. Then, a post-test was employed after the implementation of the intervention to examine whether the use of the dramatic play has any impact on the experimental group and which method has higher impact on enhancing the preschoolers' vocabulary learning. The subjects of the study were assigned into two groups as follows:

- a) Control group (received no intervention): 25 preschoolers were taught to learn vocabulary through the explicit and direct vocabulary instruction embedded in the storybook reading followed by traditional activities such as drilling and memorisation.
- b) Experimental group (received intervention): 25 preschoolers were taught to learn vocabulary through the explicit and direct vocabulary instruction embedded in the storybook reading with the enhancement of dramatic play.

3.1 Measures

The Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) instrument was used to determine the effects of dramatic play in learning English vocabulary on preschoolers between both the control and experimental groups. CBM is an effective instrument to measure the effects of both dramatic play and traditional method on the enhancement of early vocabulary among preschoolers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2002).

Target vocabulary was measured using a panel with four pictures with one target word and three foils as distractors. For instance, to assess a child's vocabulary of the word 'dress', the four-picture panel contains illustrations of a shirt, trousers, dress, and socks. However, these pictures were not replications of illustrations from the text. To measure vocabulary scores, the child was required to respond to the prompt 'Show me' by pointing to the target picture. They received one point for each correct score. The total score for the vocabulary assessment was set at 20 as the total target words were 20.

Respondents' vocabulary in the intervention group was assessed three times: pretest before the intervention, post-test immediately after the intervention, and four weeks after the post-test. The words to be assessed from the stimulus testing panels were different in order in the pretest, post-test, and delayed post-test. The vocabulary measurement was scored according to a 0-1-point scale in which preschoolers score 1 point for a correct response and 0 point for a wrong response. The total possible score for the test was 20 as the same 20 target vocabulary was assessed during the study.

3.2 Procedure of the Study

Prior to the study, discussion was held with the preschool teachers which resulted in an agreement for permission to conduct this study. Consent forms were given to the parents or guardians of the respondents and the involvement of their children in this study was explained. All the parents agreed to involve their children in this study. Next, the researchers spent two weeks at the schools. The purpose of observation was to allow preschoolers and teachers to become accustomed to having the researchers in the classroom.

To assess the potential effect of dramatic play on the enhancement of the subjects' word learning, the researchers conducted a quasi-experimental equivalent group design of the control and experimental groups across pretest and post-test of CBM. The intact groups from the preschools were assigned as control group and experimental group accordingly. The two groups received intervention for 30 minutes three times weekly for a period of eight weeks in the respective classroom for the research to be conducted. A pretest was carried out on the

subjects before the experiment. Subjects of both groups were given the vocabulary test to determine the subject's current level of target vocabulary learning.

In the study, the control group received no treatment. The subjects in the control group were taught to learn the target vocabulary through the vocabulary instruction embedded in the storybook reading and followed by the routine traditional approach such as memorisation and drilling to enhance their vocabulary learning. Meanwhile, the experimental group received treatment, namely dramatic play. The subjects were taught to learn the target vocabulary through direct vocabulary instruction embedded in the storybook reading followed by dramatic play activity to enhance the subjects' target vocabulary. The storybook reading session followed by dramatic play provided multiple exposure to the target words learnt. Dramatic play provides a heightened level of context and props were provided for children to enact in front of the class or in a small group.

3.3 Data Analysis

To investigate the effects of dramatic play on vocabulary learning of preschoolers, scores from both the control and experimental groups were analysed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics using *t* test were utilised to analyse the target vocabulary pretest and post-test scores between the control and experimental groups.

4.0 RESULTS

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of target vocabulary pretest and post-test scores between the control and experimental groups. According to the pretest scores from Table 1, the mean and standard deviation scores for the control group is 5.28 (SD = 1.542) while the experimental group is 5.04 (SD = 1.695) The pretest scores obtained by the preschoolers from both the control and experimental groups are nearly similar without much variance. This indicates that the level of target vocabulary learning of the preschoolers from both the control and experimental groups is almost comparable before the intervention was carried out.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of target vocabulary pretest and post-test scores for the control group and experimental group

Target Vocabulary Scores					
Group	N	Pretest		Post-test	
		Mean (M)	SD	Mean (M)	SD
Control	25	5.28	1.542	5.96	1.881
Experimental	25	5.04	1.695	8.00	2.630

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Nevertheless, the mean and standard deviation scores from the target vocabulary post-test in the experimental group are higher than the control group after the experiment. Table 2 shows that the mean and standard deviation scores for the control group is 5.96 (SD = 1.881) and experimental group is 8.00 (SD = 2.630). It is suggested that the preschoolers from the experimental group had improved and achieved better scores in their target vocabulary learning after the intervention compared to the control group. Therefore, there is a difference in the mean and standard deviation scores between the two groups after the treatment.

An independent samples *t* test analysis was conducted in order to further substantiate the results. In the independent samples *t* test analysis, the target vocabulary pretest and post-test scores for both the control and experimental groups were analysed.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of target vocabulary pretest and post-test scores for the male and female pre-schoolers in the control group and experimental group

Target Vocabulary Scores						
Group	N	Gender	Pretest		Post-test	
			Mean (M)	SD	Mean (M)	SD
Control	13	Male	4.46	1.391	5.15	1.819
	12	Female	6.17	1.193	6.83	1.586
Experimental	14	Male	4.21	1.311	6.86	2.070
	11	Female	6.09	1.578	9.54	2.583

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Table 2 also shows the mean and standard deviation of pretest and post-test between male and female preschoolers in both the control and experimental groups. As for the pretest, the mean and standard deviation scores for the male preschoolers from the control group is 4.46 (SD = 1.391) while the female preschoolers are 6.17 (SD = 1.193). In comparison, the mean and standard deviation scores for the male preschoolers from the experimental group is 4.21 (SD = 1.311) while the female preschoolers are 6.09 (SD = 1.578). The results indicate that the pretest scores for female preschoolers from both the control and experimental groups are higher than male preschoolers before the intervention was conducted.

Furthermore, the results in Table 2 show that the mean and standard deviation scores from the target vocabulary post-test for female preschoolers in the control group is higher compared to male preschoolers. The mean and standard deviation scores on the post-test for male subjects in the control group is 5.15 (SD = 1.819) and female subjects is 6.83 (SD = 1.586). As for the mean and standard deviation scores from the target vocabulary post-test in the experimental group, male subjects scored 6.86 (SD = 2.070) compared to female subjects 9.54 (SD = 2.583). The results indicate that the post-test scores for females from both the control and experimental groups are higher than male preschoolers after the intervention was carried out.

In the independent samples *t* test analysis, the target vocabulary pretest and post-test scores for both males and females between the two groups were analysed.

Table 3: Pre-test vocabulary scores for the target control group and experimental group

Group	N	Mean (M)	SD	<i>t</i> value	df	Sig.
Control	25	5.28	1.542	.524	48	0.603
Experimental	25	5.04	1.695			

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Table 3 indicates that there are no significant differences in the target vocabulary scores for the control group (M = 5.28, SD = 1.542) and the experimental group (M = 5.04, SD = 1.695) before the intervention; $t(48) = .524, p > .05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in vocabulary learning between the control group and experimental group before the intervention.

Table 4: Post-test vocabulary scores for the target control group and experimental group

Group	N	Mean (M)	SD	<i>t</i> value	df	Sig.
Control	25	5.96	1.881	-3.154	48	0.003
Experimental	25	8.00	2.630			

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant difference in the target vocabulary scores for the control group (M = 5.96, SD = 1.881) and the experimental group (M = 8.00, SD = 2.630) after the intervention was carried out; $t(48) = -3.154, p < .05$. Hence, it can be summarised that there is a significant difference in the vocabulary learning between the control group and the experimental group after the intervention.

Table 5: Pre-test and post-test vocabulary scores for the target experimental group

Group	N	Mean (M)	SD	<i>t</i> value	df	Sig.
Pre-test	25	5.04	1.695	-8.216	24	0.001
Post-test	25	8.04	2.638			

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Referring to Table 5, the result of the paired samples *t* test showed that there is a significant difference in the target vocabulary scores within the experimental group before the experiment (M = 5.04, SD = 1.695) and after the implementation of the treatment (M = 8.04, SD = 2.638); $t(24) = -8.216, p < .05$. Thus, it is revealed that there is a significant difference in vocabulary learning in the experimental group before and after the intervention. The result proposes that the intervention of dramatic play does have an effect on improving the vocabulary learning in the experimental group.

Table 6: Pre-test vocabulary scores for male and female preschoolers in the target control and experimental groups

Group	N	Gender	Mean (M)	SD	t value	df	Sig.
Control	13	Male	4.46	1.391	-3.296	23	0.003
	12	Female	6.17	1.193			
Experimental	14	Male	4.21	1.311	-3.175	23	0.005
	11	Female	6.09	1.578			

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Based on Table 6, the result of the independent samples *t* test showed that there is a significant difference in the target vocabulary scores for males ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.391$) and females ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 1.193$) in the control group before the experiment; $t(23) = -3.296$, $p < .05$. There is also a significant difference in the vocabulary scores for males ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.311$) and females ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 1.578$) in the experimental group before the intervention; $t(23) = -3.175$, $p < .05$. Hence, it can be summarised that there is a significant difference in the target vocabulary learning between males and females in both groups before the intervention.

Table 7: Post-test vocabulary scores for male and female preschoolers in the target control and experimental groups

Group	N	Gender	Mean (M)	SD	t value	df	Sig.
Control	13	Male	5.15	1.819	-2.465	23	0.022
	12	Female	6.83	1.586			
Experimental	14	Male	6.86	2.070	-2.814	23	0.011
	11	Female	9.55	2.583			

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Table 7 indicates that there is a significant difference in the target vocabulary scores for males ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.819$) and females ($M = 6.83$, $SD = 1.586$) in the control group after the intervention; $t(23) = -2.465$, $p < .05$. Meanwhile, there is also a significant difference in the vocabulary scores for males ($M = 6.86$, $SD = 2.070$) and females ($M = 9.55$, $SD = 2.583$) in the experimental group after the intervention; $t(23) = -2.814$, $p < .05$. Thus, it can be

summarised that there is a significant difference in the target vocabulary learning between males and females in both groups after the intervention.

Table 8: Post-test vocabulary scores for male and female preschoolers in the target experimental group

Group	Gender	N	Mean (M)	SD	t value	df	Sig.
Experimental	Male	14	6.86	2.070	-3.120	10	0.011
	Female	11	9.55	2.583			

Note: S.D. = Standard Deviation

Referring to Table 8, there is a significant difference in the target vocabulary scores for males (M = 6.86, SD = 2.070) and females (M = 9.55, SD = 2.583) in the experimental group after the intervention; $t(23) = -2.814$, $p < .05$. Therefore, it can be summarised that there is a significant difference in the vocabulary learning between males and females within the experimental group after the intervention. The results also suggest that the dramatic play intervention does have more effect on enhancing the vocabulary learning of females in the experimental group.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Effects of Dramatic Play on Enhancing Vocabulary Learning among Preschoolers from Kuala Lumpur

The results of the study revealed that both the control and experimental groups attained similar vocabulary scores in the pretest before the intervention. Before the intervention, the vocabulary of subjects from both the control and experimental groups was enhanced using the traditional approach whereby the preschool teachers pointed out to the target word and drilled the preschoolers to repeat the word verbally several times and went on for other new words. It demotivated and constrained preschoolers as their access to print materials was limited and they were only listening to the teacher's instructions and repeating what was shown on the board. Thus, the vocabulary scores for both the control and experimental groups before the intervention exhibited similar scores in the pretest and not much difference between both groups as all the subjects received the same vocabulary instruction and their vocabulary learning was enhanced in the similar traditional drilling approach.

The findings showed that there was a significant increase in the vocabulary scores from the post-test in the experimental group compared to the control group after the intervention. There was a notable improvement in the acquisition of the target vocabulary among the preschoolers in the experimental group compared to the preschoolers from the control group who did not receive intervention. The preschoolers from the experimental group were exposed to the dramatic play as a treatment. They were able to identify the target vocabulary better than the preschoolers from the control group whose vocabulary learning was enhanced using the traditional drilling approach. Improvements in the vocabulary scores which were notably greater in the experimental group suggest that dramatic play is considered significant and had notable outcomes in enhancing the mastery level of the vocabulary learning of the subjects from the experimental group compared to the subjects from control group in the post-test.

The paired sample *t* test results also indicated that there was significant difference in the vocabulary scores within the experimental group before and after the intervention. The subjects from the experimental group made significant achievement in the post-test where the preschoolers were able to identify more target vocabulary in the post-test compared to the pretest. This evidence proves that dramatic play to a certain extent created possibility to enhance the preschoolers' understanding of the vocabulary as well as sustain their concentration level and knowledge gained from the dramatic play, which was lacking prior to the implementation of the intervention. Hence, dramatic play is an appropriate enhancement activity to supplement the vocabulary instruction by sustaining the interest of these young learners during English lessons as they are easily demotivated since English is not their first language.

The findings of this study are supported by the findings from a study conducted by Han et al. (2010) that dramatic play increased the vocabulary learning of young children over the course of the study compared to the young children who did not receive role-play in the protocol. According to Han et al. (2010), dramatic play provides a more influential intervention in vocabulary development and yields a more challenging gain than the traditional approach. The findings of this study claimed that the addition of role-play to the explicit vocabulary instruction leads to satisfying and momentous results, which will only occur if dramatic play can be nourished in preschool settings.

In addition, the findings of this study supported the results of the study that was carried out at a preschool in Reykjavik, Iceland by Einarsdottir (2014) on the role of dramatic play in enhancing children's literacy skills. Einarsdottir (2014) indicated that dramatic play provides a meaningful learning context for children to practise language skills. When children are

involved in dramatic play, their understanding of the connection between objects and symbols increased together with their language awareness, which in turn improved their vocabulary and communicative development. The results of this study are also supported by the study carried out by Massey (2013) that explored the guided pretend play from the storybook reading context. The findings proved that children's vocabulary and comprehensive language development were enhanced when preschool teachers scaffold the early literacy skills by connecting storybook reading and giving guidance during pretend play. The findings of this study acknowledged the credibility of dramatic play by supplementing the direct vocabulary method with dramatic play to teach vocabulary to preschoolers in Kuala Lumpur.

5.2 Effects of Dramatic Play on Vocabulary Learning among Male and Female Preschoolers

The findings from the pretest indicated that there is a significant difference in the vocabulary scores for male and female preschoolers from both the control and experimental groups. Therefore, it is shown that the female subjects from both the control and experimental groups demonstrated higher vocabulary knowledge before the implementation of the protocol. In addition, the findings of the study showed that there is a remarkable gain in the vocabulary scores on the post-test among the female subjects compared to the male subjects for both the control and experimental groups after the intervention. The post-test results indicated that there is a significant difference between the male and female subjects in the vocabulary scores for both the control and experimental groups. The findings of the study also revealed that there was a greater enhancement in the vocabulary learning among the female preschoolers compared to the male preschoolers within the experimental group after the intervention. There was a minor improvement in the vocabulary scores for male preschoolers in the experimental group, but the difference in the results was not as significant compared to the female preschoolers within the experimental group.

The findings of the study supported the results of another study in which the female preschoolers outperformed the male preschoolers in the language achievement. The study conducted by Son et al. (2013) with Korean preschoolers also showed that there were gender differences in Korean preschoolers' academic achievement. Girls had higher scores for academic achievement, especially in language and social skills. Hamid et al. (2011) found that the scores of Malay and English languages of girls were significantly higher than boys in a rural district of Malaysia. Moreover, a recent study conducted in Texas by McGown (2016) analysed that girls had statistically significant higher reading scores than boys. The data shown in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness for Reading Test revealed that Grade

3 girls outscored boys in all the Reading Reporting Categories throughout the four years of study.

Nevertheless, the findings of the study are contrary to the research carried out by Holmes and Romeo (2013), which showed that there is a positive correlation between pretend play and vocabulary development which contributes to higher competency in language and literacy development. However, the results of their study denoted that there was no significant difference in the Peabody Vocabulary Test scores between boys and girls, yet girls were primarily involved in more pretend play compared to boys. The study of Chlapana and Tafa (2014) viewed that gender was not the variable that influenced second language learners' vocabulary development, but it has been related to the instructional strategies used in the second language learning. In their study, although girls from the experimental group had significant gain scores in the instructed vocabulary, boys scored higher than girls in the control group. A study conducted by Ghabour (2015) also showed similar findings that no significant differences were found in the early basic literacy skills between boys and girls in both Dual Language Immersion Programme and regular language programme. Moreover, significant differences in language acquisition based on gender were not found in the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) assessment conducted by Meraz (2015). The findings showed that boys had non-significant higher scores in both reading and speaking assessments while girls made greater gain in both listening and writing aspects.

The findings of this study show that the experimental group who received the dramatic play as an enhancement to learn vocabulary gained higher achievement compared to the control group that only learnt through the traditional method of drilling and repetition activities. Dramatic play makes language learning more engaging and meaningful by motivating children to have a positive attitude towards the vocabulary learning, so they are more likely to take risks without worrying of making errors during the language lesson.

6.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the limitations in this study is the small participant sample size. The scope is limited to the preschoolers who are staying in Kuala Lumpur. There were only 50 preschoolers from two intact groups who participated in the study. This is because testing with larger samples might generate samples of individual differences in the effectiveness of the intervention examined. Hence, there is a need for a replication of this study involving larger and more diverse child samples such as children at risk of experiencing reading difficulty and those from socioeconomically marginal backgrounds. This would be advantageous for the early childhood

educators as it determines the efficacy of dramatic play when preschoolers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are taught to learn English vocabulary.

Another limitation of this study is its brief duration. For future research, it is important to carry out the intervention with children for a longer period to better understand how their English vocabulary developed using not only curriculum-based measurement of word learning but also standardised measurement of overall vocabulary knowledge. An ongoing assessment should be carried out in the future to assess the long-term growth of children's vocabulary development and to revise the instructional method in order to promote such learning growth. Finally, although there is no participant with special needs or known to have any language delays involved in the study, this is likely to happen and may affect the results of the study.

Therefore, future research should consider a potential differential effect of the dramatic play between children with no language delays and children with special needs to determine the effects of dramatic play on the young learners with language delays to employ this approach in acquiring their early vocabulary.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study brought insights into the effects of dramatic play on the enhancement of vocabulary learning of preschoolers in Kuala Lumpur. Vocabulary learning of the subjects from the experimental group was significantly improved within an eight-week period compared to the control group. Thus, the researcher concluded that the rendered intervention, namely dramatic play, attributed to the significant gains attained by the experimental group.

This study shows evidence on how dramatic play offers a learning context for language development, especially in vocabulary learning among young learners. This can be seen when the subjects from the experimental group were more motivated to learn through the intervention of dramatic play during the English lessons compared to the subjects from the control group in which the traditional approach of drilling activities was employed. These preschoolers from the experimental group made tremendous gain as the dramatic play assists them to attain the words, they learnt from the storybook reading by connecting the actions to words. Dramatic play integrated the combination of senses such as visual and auditory with the use of props and game-like movements simultaneously that were effective in sustaining preschoolers' memory retention of the words they learnt. Besides, the active engagement of preschoolers in the dramatic play enables them to have favourable attitude towards the lesson, thus reduces their affective filter such as stress and anxiety in learning the English language which is unfamiliar for them.

In conclusion, this study shed greater light on early childhood educators in the employment of effective vocabulary instruction to suit the preschoolers' learning preferences in order to develop their vocabulary learning. The findings of this study proved that dramatic play is an effective intervention which yielded significant and positive results in the vocabulary learning of preschoolers. Hence, dramatic play can be considered as one of the successful and manageable approaches for educators in addressing the vocabulary learning of young learners.

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