

I-ROLE 2023
International Conference of Research on Language Education

**ESL TEACHERS' USE OF VOCABULARY DIGITAL CONTENT
FOR VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION**

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Abstract

The implementation of 21st century education is undeniably predicted to be a great support for ESL teachers to integrate the technology in their vocabulary instruction. Thus, this case study seeks to determine the extent of ESL teachers' use of digital content for vocabulary instruction as well as the tendency to develop their own vocabulary digital content. Five primary ESL teachers who are currently teaching in the primary schools served as subjects to yield valuable insights in this case study. Data were collected from a series of semi-structured interviews which were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed the use of existing vocabulary digital content for ESL teachers' vocabulary instruction were based on the ESL teachers' beliefs and the suitability of the vocabulary digital content itself. Meanwhile, ESL teachers' tendencies to develop their own digital content were based on the ESL teachers' commitment and ESL teachers' digital competence. Nevertheless, some other probabilities of limitations are not discussed in this study as it is not specified by the ESL teachers; therefore, future in-depth research is recommended.

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Keywords: ESL teachers, vocabulary digital content, vocabulary instruction

1. Introduction

English Language is used globally and, in the context, whereupon it is taught as a Second Language (L2), vocabulary learning is critical and essential (Saleh & Ahmed Althaqafi, 2022). Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed (Wilkin, 1972, pp. 111-112, as cited in Regina, 2022). Vocabulary learning is crucial to all learners regardless their ages. It is stressed that vocabulary is not a series of words to learn but a series of words used in contexts (Rahman & Angraeni, 2020). Hence, expanding one's vocabulary is an essential element of language learning and in vocabulary learning, method for improving learners' memory play a vital role (Weerasinghe et al., 2022).

Ideally, ESL learners' vocabulary prowess is based on their vocabulary mastery. Hence, it remains to be the basic foundation of all core learning skills as one cannot use the language well without ample vocabulary. It is undeniable that young learners enhance their vocabulary gradually, over time. Therefore, it is indisputable that ESL teachers hold huge responsibility to ensure the learning takes place. Nonetheless, since these young learners possess fluctuating vocabulary, it is difficult for the ESL teachers to delineate their young learners' vocabulary acquisition. In addition, teaching vocabulary can also be difficult as young learners might find it hard to recall difficult terms, or get bored easily (Saleh & Ahmed Althaqafi, 2022). In contrast, those who can use the language either for discourse or written purpose as well as either in or out of the classroom settings are assumed to possess vast vocabulary.

Nonetheless, the recent COVID-19 pandemic postulated a huge challenge towards the ESL teachers as they had no choice but to comply with the Movement Control Order (MCO) by switching from face-to-face to completely online teaching mode. Sudden transition of teaching mode had changed the entire educational system (Mazlan et al., 2022). The enforcement of MCO had made teaching and learning to be conducted in a different way called Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) (Wen & Kim Hua, 2020) which had never been implemented before. Due to the rigorous lockdown regulations (Maity et al., 2021), the internet was the only medium for instruction used by the ESL teachers (Wong & Moorhouse, 2021). Even worse, young learners who had struggled learning English in face-to-face meetings faced a more challenging situation when they had to learn it virtually (Lukas & Yunus, 2021) and this was no exception including their vocabulary learning.

To be precise, the impact of the occurred lockdown indirectly does not only accelerate adherence to online platforms but also demand for effective accessibility of the teaching and learning process without compromising on quality (Maity et al., 2021) including the ESL teachers' vocabulary instruction. It is fortunate that the 21st century education has earlier prompted the integration of technology as it offers the potential to enhance teaching processes and facilitate the learning of L2 (Elas et al., 2019). It has undeniably become the great support for the ESL teachers' vocabulary instruction. This is because ESL teachers are already expected to be familiar with the adaptation of new approaches including the integration of technology in their teachings. It is, to some extent, has helped them to reduce the constraint of teaching online which is agreed by Wang (2022) that use of technology to support such pedagogical improvements has become essential to all teachers, especially in this post COVID-19 era.

To date, the new Malaysian Education Development Plan stipulates all major subjects including the English Language must integrate 21st Century Learning Skills (CLS) in which it encompasses explicit integration of learning and innovation skills, information, media and digital literacy skills, and life and

career skills (Muhamad & Seng, 2022). In connection to this, many online educational technologies were developed in recent years (Wen & Kim Hua, 2020) as there are innumerable vocabulary digital content can easily be found in the net including the web page and websites, social media, data and databases, digital audio, digital imagery, digital video, video games, computer program and software (Redecker, 2017). In addition, it is also predicted ESL teachers have the tendencies to integrate the technology in their vocabulary instruction as it allows individual teaching professionals to engage in new and flexible ways of learning (Miço & Cungu, 2022).

2. Problem Statement

In reality, though there is vast existing vocabulary digital content on the net, the expectation that ESL teachers are taking full advantage of integrating the existing application towards their vocabulary instruction is merely an assumption and yet to be confirmed. Due to this, the curiosity of the researcher has led towards the need to explore ESL teachers' vocabulary instruction. The first question is to explore ESL teachers' use of existing digital content for their vocabulary instruction. The second question then follows whether the ESL teachers have the tendencies to develop their own digital content that may suit their vocabulary instruction as in the context of Malaysia Educational System, ESL teachers are aware that they are bound to align their vocabulary instruction towards the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)-aligned Framework, *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP)* as well as the Scheme of Work (Malaysian Ministry of Education [MMOE], 2020). Later, the findings of this study may depict some empirical insights towards current ESL teachers' vocabulary instruction.

3. Research Questions

The use of vocabulary digital content may possibly be useful for the ESL teachers' vocabulary instruction. Nonetheless, this study questions in what way do ESL teachers use existing digital content for their vocabulary instruction? Do the ESL teachers have the tendency to develop their own vocabulary digital content?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is an attempt to explore ESL teachers' use of the existing digital content for their vocabulary instruction as well as the tendency to develop their own vocabulary digital content.

5. Research Methods

This was a case study whereby data were collected using semi-structured interviews. In attempt to answer Research Questions 1 and 2, the semi-structured interviews were used as a primary source of the data collection. This method was chosen because Merriam and Tisdell (2015) proposed that the data collected through interviews provided in-depth details about how people interpreted their experiences. The participants, who agreed to take part in the semi-structured interviews, were informed about the

details of the interview protocols before they signed the consent statement. The schedules of the interviews were held as per requested by each of the participants.

5.1. Participants

In this study, five participants were chosen as they fulfilled the four concerned criteria; their working experiences, their engagement perceived as being active users of the internet, their involvement in the teaching and learning activities as well as their experience in using any vocabulary digital content for vocabulary instruction. Table 1 shows a brief ESL teacher's demography of five participants.

Table 1. ESL teachers' demography

No.	Age	Gender	Working Experiences
Participant 1	36	Female	12 years
Participant 2	53	Male	28 years
Participant 3	42	Female	16 years
Participant 4	45	Male	20 years
Participant 5	39	Male	16 years

5.2. Data collection method

The researcher provided the interview questions a week before the actual interview began. This was to enable the participants to have such reflection on their practices of vocabulary digital content for vocabulary instruction. Within the weeks of occurrence, researcher repeatedly consulted each participant twice to triangulate the data since the semi-structured data was the primary source of the data collection for this study to ensure the reliability of the interview data. Then, the interview data were coded and themes were found to answer the Research Questions 1 and 2.

6. Findings

Technological advancements have opened up many opportunities for ESL teachers delivering their vocabulary instruction. In an attempt to answer RQ1, two themes emerge such as 1) ESL teachers' beliefs as well as 2) Suitability of the vocabulary digital content. It indicates both themes have been determined based on their experiences.

6.1. ESL teachers' beliefs

The accessibility to any vocabulary digital content has brought out the ease of integrating the technology for their vocabulary instruction. Nonetheless, at a certain circumstance, the decision whether they would integrate the vocabulary digital content in their vocabulary instruction is highly depending on their beliefs as stated by Participant 2,

...well... depends.. if I believe it can help me.. then I will use...

This was reinforced again by the statement from Participant 3,

... I check many vocabulary apps ... ya ... I choose the one I think can help my students...

Similarly, this was stressed by Participant 5,

...the vocabulary apps is good ...but I choose the one which can help me to teach my pupils...

It is clear that teachers' belief is of paramount as although they believe new technology can effectively benefit the teaching and learning process, they do not fully embed it in their practices (Lukas & Yunus, 2021). Notwithstanding, it remains to be pivotal for ESL teachers to ensure young learners' vocabulary acquisition as it is the main key of the core learning skills.

6.2. Suitability of the digital content

Most of the time, as claimed by the participants, it could be intriguing but vocabulary learning was not simply remembering a list of words but rather a complex process (Yu & Trainin, 2022) as it carried meanings in context. Participant 1 commented,

... I check the content beforehand before I use it...

Similarly, Participant 2 mentioned,

...It's important of course... need to select the one that is suitable...

This was supported by Participant 3,

...my students love it... but I can't use it all the time... I have to select first..

By taking up these points, the suitability of the vocabulary digital content is also becoming the main concern for ESL teachers' vocabulary instruction as supported by Lukas and Yunus (2021) that teachers should really plan and prepare their lessons beforehand so that objectives of lessons can be achieved and aligned with the curriculum framework. In connection to this, it is observed that there is a lack of appropriate vocabulary digital content as stated in the *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP)* set by MMOE. Therefore, in a real situation, ESL teachers have to choose the right vocabulary digital content for their vocabulary instruction and of course, through thorough examination. It is also highlighted the effectiveness use of technology is depending on the degree to which it has helped both parties; ESL teachers as well as the young learners to achieve desired instructional goals (Angeli & Valanides (2014) and improve ESL teachers' pedagogical skill (Lukas & Yunus, 2021).

Then, in an attempt to answer RQ2, another two themes have emerged such as 1) ESL teachers' commitment and 2) ESL teachers' digital competence.

6.2.1. ESL teachers' commitment

All participants came to an agreement that the tendency to develop their own vocabulary digital content depended on their commitment which included time management as well as time commitment as earlier posited by Gaganao et al. (2022). Plus, it is clear that the advantage of technology-supported vocabulary learning is predicated on the availability of practice (Yu & Trainin, 2022) as shared by Participant 2,

... when I have time ...usually during recess...

This was stressed by Participant 4,

...lack of time .. no plan yet.. .

However, this is contrary with Participant 5,

... .. in future, I intend to build my own...it's good for my pupils...

Hence, it is undeniable that the most salient challenge confronting the ESL teachers is their commitment in terms of their willingness to use the technology to vary their ways of how vocabulary instruction should be feasible. To be precise, it is much depending on their commitment to take the effort to develop their own vocabulary digital content. In this case, ESL teachers' commitment to integrating the existing vocabulary digital content in their vocabulary instruction is seen to be crucial as it is predicted to be one of the key aspects to increase the young learners' vocabulary acquisition purposely in this 21st century education.

6.3. ESL teachers' digital competence

Digital competence can be broadly defined as the confident, critical and creative use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to achieve goals related to work employability, learning, leisure, inclusion and/ or participation in society (Redecker, 2017). In connection to this, the digital era requires a teacher to master cyber- and base technology skills (Ibda et al., 2023). In this case study, ESL teachers' digital competence was as responded by Participant 1 as follows,

...it's hard...but I try my best...

This was strengthened by the statement by Participant 3,

...I had attended a few courses before... so it really helps me now...

It can be summarized that the digital competence results from the development of knowledge and attitudes underpinning the effective use of digital technology in a professional context (Dias-Trindade & Albuquerque, 2022). Additionally, it has proven that the need for digital competence has been clearly being evidenced specifically, during the pandemic situation and becoming a prominent role in communication and education processes (Miço & Cungu, 2022). The fact is that technology becomes the most significant barrier specifically for those who are not technologically proficient (Heng & Sol, 2020, as cited in, Mazlan et al., 2022) and incompetence in using the new technology that caused them to be lack of ability to develop their own vocabulary digital content. Hence, ESL teachers need to be equipped with specific skills and knowledge as teachers of elementary school must be professional and have digital skills in Revolution 4.0 (Ibda et al., 2023).

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, ESL teachers are the experts of their own vocabulary instruction. In tandem with the permeation of technology, ESL teachers have taken the advantage that is, integrating the use of technology which in this study relates to the existing vocabulary digital content in their vocabulary instruction. The findings of this study indicate ESL teachers' beliefs as well as the suitability of the vocabulary digital content influence the frequency use of technology in teachings in the 21st century education. This study also identifies that the ESL teachers are on the right track and there is a possibility that they have the tendency to develop their own vocabulary digital content despite some faced issues in regards to their commitment and digital competence. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that there may be some other probabilities of limitations that are not discussed in this study as it is not specified by the ESL teachers; therefore, future in-depth research is recommended.

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