

## IMPROVING ACQUISITION OF BUSINESS VOCABULARY USING TABOO WORD GAME

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### ABSTRACT

*Methods of teaching vocabulary in an ESL context are highly debatable and implicit. Having formal lesson or solely focusing on providing meaning and examples are among the conundrums that language educators must face. Thus, language game is commendable as it allows the students to practice or utilize the knowledge that they acquired in a non-traditional and interesting way. This study explores the effectiveness of Taboo Word Game (TWG) in improving business vocabulary of 23 private college students in one of the private colleges in Malaysia. It also explored students' experiences in using TWG in learning business vocabulary and reports on the pre-post-tests results. Comparison of mean scores on both pre and post-tests was done and reported. The findings revealed that TWG helped to improve students' vocabulary competency. The implication on vocabulary teaching is that even at the college level, games should be incorporated to boost students learning needs and preferences.*

**Keywords:** Language games, ESL, business vocabulary, tertiary education, ELT, Taboo Word Game, Language teaching.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is important in communication. Despite being aware of the importance of English vocabulary, ESL learners are still reluctant and unconfident to exchange ideas in English Language because of not getting the right words to convey (Ina et al., 2015). They would rather talk in their mother tongue with English instructors to feel comfortable. Even if one begins to converse in the target language, the moment a right word did not surface, the participants would keep switching back and forth in their mother tongue and L2. Furthermore, learners find it is difficult to become skilled users of English Language due to many challenges (Ahmad et al., 2021; Yiping et al., 2023; Zin et al., 2023), particularly when English is not their native language (De Wilde, 2023).

Teaching language skills using games have been proven to work with learners, regardless of age (Al Neyadi, 2012). In a study on children aged 6-7 years old, games are found to have a positive effect on the learning process (Al Neyadi, 2012). The beneficial use of games in learning has also been highlighted in language learning where playing online games enhance vocabulary acquisition in language learning (Pozharytska et al., 2023). Many other studies promote the advantages of using games in language learning (Cabrera-Solano, 2022; Hanghøj et al., 2022), suggesting that integrating language games would be a worthy method in teaching and learning vocabulary for all ages. In relation to the present study, there is a noticeable gap between the usage of Taboo Word Game (TWG) and L2 vocabulary enhancement. Thus, the effectiveness of teaching L2 vocabulary using taboo word game would be investigated further in this study.

## 1.1 Background of Study

In Malaysia the Ministry of Education aspires to improve the quality of graduates and to increase graduate employability. The current Malaysia graduate employability rate is at 75% and is aimed to be more than 80% in 2025. Education Ministry's Graduate Tracer Study on 21 public-sector universities and 38 private-sector universities produced reported 60 per cent out of 51,000 graduates annually were unemployed a year after graduation, ("Graduate Employability: A Priority of the Education Ministry," 2020). Graduates unemployment could be reasoned to lack of experience, poor communication skills, low English proficiency, and mismatch of profession and the marketplace (Singh & Singh, 2008; Suryani et al., 2015, Zubir et.al., 2018). Poor vocabulary and inability to communicate their messages during job interviews have impacted their chances of employability.

Concurrently, it has been argued that the methods of teaching vocabulary in ESL contexts are highly debatable and implicit (Kaur, 2012; Panmei & Waluyo, 2023). It was claimed that the teaching of vocabulary is not given the similar weightage as teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides, the methods of vocabulary teaching are incongruent with learners' competency and learning preference and many students faced one form of difficulty or another at different stages of vocabulary learning (Yaacob et al., 2018, Yaacob et.al., 2021)

## 1.2 Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are formulated as follows:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of using Taboo Word Game (TWG) on business vocabulary competency among college students.
2. To explore the students' experiences of using Taboo Word Game (TWG) in enhancing business vocabulary.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Harmer (2007) akin vocabulary to vital organs and the flesh for the body of language and the ability to manipulate grammatical structure is more promising when right words are used. Inspired by his notion, this study adds that effective communication among ESL learners as well as teaching and learning of the second language would be tremendously difficult with the absence of vocabulary.

Previous studies indicated that there are many strategies in acquiring vocabulary and repetition is one of the most important ingredients in learning new words (Al-Ghazo & Ta'amneh, 2022; Sze Wei & Attan, 2013). Specifically, both ESL and EFL teachers prefer incidental vocabulary learning. This approach promotes listening, reading, speaking, and writing activities to enable new words acquisition (Webb, 2016).

Despite the preference, many ESL teachers opt for explicit learning in teaching vocabulary such as emphasizing on word list that learners need to know, deciphering word formation, introducing and building fluency of new words. In addition, (Astika, 2015) also found that the EFL teachers favours teaching vocabulary through the strategy of guessing meaning from the context. The argument given is that to encourage incidentally vocabulary learning, non-native learners should be given more readings so they will get more exposure to English. Taking heed from the studies (Al-Ghazo & Ta'amneh, 2022; Astika, 2015; Webb, 2016), the potential of instructional strategies of incidental learning and guessing meaning in teaching ESL/EFL vocabulary is to be explored.

## **2.1 Teaching of Vocabulary Through Games**

Games are extensively studied in ESL classroom as they are effective in vocabulary acquisition. (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023; Cabrera-Solano, 2022; Klimova & Kacet, 2017; Rasti-Behbahani, 2021) clearly explain the benefits of games in language learning which include providing language exposure, improving language skills, and enhancing learners' communicative involvement. In contrast, they argue that proper use of game in teaching may be hindered by the teachers' lack of knowledge in the computer games (Klimova & Kacet, 2017). Proper use of game is also suggested to be paired with effective teachers' feedback (Cabrera-Solano, 2022).

Despite the abundance of positive effects of games, past studies also indicate some limitations of games in vocabulary learning (Cornillie et al., 2011). They reported the tendency for learners to only acknowledge the fun in playing games but could not absorb the intended skills. Concurring on precise instruction, effective feedback is also been highlighted as necessary for learning accomplishment in another study (Cabrera-Solano, 2022). Subsequently, vocabulary accomplishment for L2 students is not feasible since there is a proof of restricted yield practice.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Theoretical Underpinning**

This study is underpinned by (Krashen, 1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis and (Davies & Elder, 2004) Technology Acceptance Model. The Affective Filter hypothesis explains the view that affective variables such as motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and personality traits may impede second language acquisition. Krashen further suggested that learning second language advanced better when learners have good self-image and higher motivation.

### **3.2 Participants and The Course**

One private college in Penang, Malaysia was chosen based on convenient sampling. In this study, a total of 23 students who registered in the Certificate of Business Management program were selected to participate. The selected students' achievement level of English was moderate based on their SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). One of the researchers cum instructor and students have 2 hours of face-to-face lecture with 1 hour of tutorial classes per week. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants. Multiple data collection methods were used in this study. They included pre and post-tests, observation, and students' as well as researcher's reflections. Pre-test and Post-Tests were conducted to understand and gain insight of the participants' business vocabulary competency level before and after the implementation of TWG.

### **3.5 Materials Used**

An e-book, 'Business Vocabulary in Use' (Mascull, 2009) was selected because its content especially the vocabularies are relevant for the course. Besides, the contents are not only relevant to improve students' vocabulary competence, but also enable them to learn new information related to their certification program. It is also recommended as a reference material for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in this private college. Tertiary program may include more focus on the specific linguistic demands in a particular study area, for instance business subjects (Catterall & Ireland, 2010).

This study utilized Taboo Word Game (TWG) as an intervention. Taboo is a word-guessing group game in which a player or known as the describer, illustrates the word from a card and the guessers identify the target word. 5 to 6 printed forbidden words were pasted on the cards

that the describer must not use. In TWG, the target word was written in bold on the top of the word cards. Three to five “taboo” words were written in the lower lines and are not to be used. In the game, the player must get their team members to guess the target word on the card.. The researcher selected fifty target words from the e-book and the course structure. In the game, only one set of 50-word cards were split among the players during the first session and the second session. This game cultivates students’ lexical knowledge through reformulation and rephrasing; otherwise, the player is disqualified.

#### 4.0 FINDINGS

The findings in this study are presented based on the pre-post test results for the quantitative data and students’ reflections for the qualitative data. Table 1 shows the findings on students’ vocabulary competencies. In Table 1, the data suggests that the average mean for post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores and the difference between the two mean scores was significant. There is a strong positive correlation between TWG and the post-test

**Table 1.** Pre-test and post-test mean scores of business vocabulary competency

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std Mean Error	Correlation	Sig
Pre_Test	17.1739	23	4.17408	0.87036	0.633	0.001
Post_Test	19.0435	23	3.11124	0.64874	0.633	0.001

Table 2 shows the Pre and Post Test Results of students’ vocabulary competencies. To test the hypothesis of the pre-test (M = 17.1, SD = 4.17) and post-test mean scores (M = 19.0, SD = 3.11), a paired sample t-test was performed. Prior to conducting the analysis, the assumption of normally distributed difference scores was examined. The assumption was considered satisfactory with the t value = 2.746 (22 degrees of freedom). The findings suggest a significance difference of p= .012 between the pre- and post-test scores. This indicates that TWG helped to improve students’ vocabulary competencies.

**Table 2.** Pre and Post Test Results of students’ vocabulary competencies

	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std Error	Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre	1.869	3.26	0.680	0.28	-0.457	2.74	22	0.012	
Post	57			71	71		6		

#### 5.0 DISCUSSION

The aim for this study was set to examine the effectiveness of employing Taboo Word Game (TWG) on business vocabulary competency among Business Diploma students of a private college, and to explore their experiences of using Taboo Word Game (TWG) in enhancing business vocabulary. Our findings indicate that there was a significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores after using TWG, which explains that TWG helped the college students to improve their vocabulary competencies. These findings are in line with other past studies which indicate that games are beneficial for vocabulary acquisition due to the fact that they are fun and challenging (Klimova & Kacet, 2017). Students were found to be more engaged in the vocabulary learning process.

When collaboration with peers is encouraged, their anxiety is lowered, and motivation is increased because they were aware that their teammates would provide support for them and they would not get upset if their attempts were wrong. They were no longer afraid of making mistakes in this fun learning environment. As such, Krashen’s Affective Filter seems relevant in this context whereby when anxiety is reduced, their motivation to learn new vocabulary is

increased. As a matter of fact, they lamented that they communicate more in English during games. Affective Filter becomes a positive push factor during the game time involving collaboration with classmates. The researcher also has personally encountered competitive relationship among highflyers and bliss ignorance among weaker learners. Hence, to witness both league of learners to work together to achieve a common goal was a delighted moment particularly when the collaborative culture of learning is developed in the language classroom. In conclusion, earlier studies have indicated that games could enhance ESL students' vocabulary. We have provided evidence that college students also preferred games to be used as one of the instructional strategies in their English language learning. Therefore, language instructors need to equip themselves not only with technological knowledge but also with technological pedagogical content knowledge to suit the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners' needs and preferences.

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