

Chapter 27

FREERICE: Vocabulary Acquisition and Humanity Combined!

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Abstract

Bilingual proficiency is one of the six attributes that every 21st century student should possess according to the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013. Shift 2 of the Blueprint aspires to ensure every child to be proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English. However, students in Malaysia generally possess limited vocabulary to use English effectively. Hence, this study explored the effectiveness of an alternative teaching method in improving students' vocabulary acquisition utilising *FreeRice* as an ICT tool. In this intervention, teacher assigned students to play the game in the application and gather the minimum of 5 unfamiliar words that they had just learnt from playing the game. The newly-learnt vocabulary then turned into word-cards which contain meanings of the words and correct examples of sentences using the words. This would enhance students' vocabulary repertoire. The findings showed that the students were highly motivated to acquire new vocabulary and their writing quality had improved. Other teachers may want to examine ways on how the approach can be successfully employed to improve students' other skills.

Keywords : ICT, Freerice, Vocabulary, Word-cards, Writing

Introduction

The Ministry of Education in Malaysia has introduced the new Education Blueprint. This will be implemented in three waves starting from 2013 until 2025 with the objective to elevate the Malaysian education standard to international level and by doing so the ministry hopes to fully equip the Malaysian children for the needs of 21st century. The Malaysian Transformation Plan (the new Education Blueprint) is inspired as an approach to improve the education system in Malaysia as it is acknowledged to play a fundamental role to develop Malaysian human and economic capital.

In the same vein, the fourth industrial revolution embraces intelligent, integrated digital systems such as Industrial Internet of Things (IoT). It prompts the urgent needs for transformation in the way teachers teach in class. As education is primarily formulated to produce useful human capitals, teachers inevitably need to move away from the conventional methodology and transform the instruction in accordance of the requirements of the 21st century workforce quality. The World Economic forum estimates that by 2020 more than a third core skills required by occupations will have changed. This scenario poses a problem - skill gap. The education system needs to ready the students by equipping them with the necessary skills to thrive in the rapidly changing landscape of the global workforce demands in this fourth industrial revolution. The human capitals produced must be both specialists and multi-skilled in the now advanced manufacturing environment

Therefore, changes must be made in the ways children are taught in school to meet the demands of the ever-changing workplace. The *FreeRice* application certainly fits the requirement as it is an unconventional way of teaching medium which incorporate flipped classroom learning. It promotes benevolence and builds vocabulary repertoire at the same time. Students primarily need to download

the application into their hand phones or tablets and start playing online at once. The game can be done individually or in groups.

FreeRice is an application, which is also a website, that is owned by the United Nations World Food Programme. It is 100 per cent non-profitable and supports the World Food Programme. The *FreeRice* was built with two goals; namely providing education to everyone for free and helping end world hunger by providing rice to hungry people also for free. The player of the game needs to correctly answer as many questions as he/she can. The banner advertisement will be displayed while a player is playing, showing the amount of money a player has managed to generate to buy 10 grains of rice to help reach Zero Hunger. A correctly answered question will earn the hungry 10 grains of rice, hence, the playing is directly helping the needy.

The database provides questions at different levels of difficulty. Players are given vocabulary questions of increasing difficulty. If a player gets a question wrong, he/she goes to an easier level. Three consecutive correct answers upgrade a player to the next level. Hence, a player may get addicted to the game as he/she will be engaged and motivated to go to the highest level possible.

Content

Students were asked to play the *FreeRice* game at home and to report to teacher the highest level they could achieve after 15 minutes of playing. The database could actually measure and improve the students' vocabulary size as the level was displayed. They were reminded to stick to the time limit to enable their level be recorded by teacher for future reference of their proficiency level.

Teacher instructed students to compile word-study cards. The words must come from the new words that they learnt after playing the *FreeRice* game. The objective of this is to encourage students to use the new words learnt as frequent as possible in their speaking and writing of English. In doing so, students incorporated the new vocabulary in their daily life.

The application makes learning new vocabulary easy as it gives instant feedback on the students' performance. If students get an incorrect answer, the correct answer is displayed instantly. Therefore, students learn from their mistakes! This can be newly-acquired vocabulary for them. Students also learn new vocabulary as they get a second chance at guessing the meanings of the words. The words that they answered wrongly previously will reappear and this compels them to remember the synonyms and simultaneously keep the words in their long-term memory.

To monitor the students' use of the application as their tool in their vocabulary acquisition, teacher instructed them to list their five favourite new vocabulary learnt from *FreeRice*. Then, they discussed and shared their new words with other classmates. This way, other students were also exposed to the new vocabulary. The next activity was they were asked to write an essay and accurately incorporate the five newly-acquired vocabulary in it. Teacher gave a controlled topic, so students needed to use their creative and critical thinking skill to use all the newly-learnt words appropriately while at the same time adhering to the topic given. The challenges here were to use the vocabulary correctly while making sure the essay still made sense sticking to the topic given.

Students were interviewed about the utilization of this method in the teaching and learning of English and positive responses were obtained. They enjoyed the game as it tested and improved their vocabulary simultaneously. The flipped learning also ensured their newly-acquired knowledge being practised in classroom environment.

However, students could get addicted to the game. They might spend too much time on it. Some students who did have their own gadgets needed to borrow other family members'.

Students also showed the ability to use the newly-acquired vocabulary correctly while adhering to the topic given. This boded well to the successful and more frequent employment of the *FreeRice* application in the teaching and learning of English classroom.

Conclusion

This study was carried out to experiment on the utilization of *FreeRice* application in classroom instructions. The application primarily promotes the learning and improving students' vocabulary.

The novelty of playing the game however is students get to be smarter and charitable at the same time. They take part in fighting world hunger while having fun learning!

This study proved that students could have it all - have fun, learn new things and be altruistic: all at one go. Students responded positively and showed ability to use the newly-learnt vocabulary appropriately. The activity was tailored as such to enable students to practise using the words and to retain the vocabulary in their long-term memory. The approach was effective, motivating and inspiring according to the students after interviews were carried out.

However, the issue of some students sans own gadgets needs to be addressed. This activity can probably be carried out in the school ICT laboratory during class hours to solve the problem. There are also possibilities that students fail to use the newly-acquired words correctly in the controlled essay given or even forget the word usage altogether after some time.

Nevertheless, the approach is commendable despite the identified limitations. The teacher's initiative to promote students' vocabulary acquisition using flipped classroom learning which is student-centred seemed to be successful based on the students' work and the interview analysis.

Other researchers may want to examine how the *FreeRice* application can help students in other area of learning as this study only researched on vocabulary learning. The application also offers other subjects for examples Mathematics, Sciences, Geography and Chemistry. Other teachers may want to incorporate this *FreeRice* application in their classroom teaching and learning and have the students be smarter and greater at heart simultaneously!

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