

International Students' Vocabulary Mastery and Language Confidence in Foreign Language Learning through Student-Centered Method

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ABSTRACT

Among the major problems faced by international students learning Malay language are the limitation of Malay language vocabulary mastery and the lack of confidence in Malay-language question and answer process. This research explores the effectiveness of the Two-Way Question-Answer method as an alternative method in building student's vocabulary and confidence in Malay question-answer. The research involved 30 international post-graduate students of Malay Language Course 1 at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The research was conducted by action research where the data obtained through observation during intervention methods, comparison between conventional and intervention methods' post test score as well as the linkages between variables in the questionnaire form. The data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Sign Rank test for score comparison and Simple Linear Regression tests for the analysis of the association between variables. Results of the research shows that the participants build their vocabulary and self-confidence through a question-and-answer exercises during the intervention session. Comparison analysis between conventional and intervention cycle for both skills recorded a significant difference, with p value of 0.000 recorded by both. Regression analysis showed a significant association between intervention method for both targeted skills, with R Square/ R^2 values for vocabulary (0.751) and verbal answer method (0.711). This finding proves that the use of the Two-Way Question-Answer method has the potential to help second and foreign language learners increase vocabulary and confidence in foreign language.

Keywords: Action Research, Two-Way Question-Answer Method, Foreign Language Learning, Vocabulary Mastery, Confidence in Communication

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The world of education is constantly evolving and changing, in line with current progress. The process of internationalization of the national education system, especially in the field of higher education is seen as one of the efforts to expand and upgrade the existing education system, and as an effort to make Malaysia a regional education hub (MOE, 2015). This advancement in education has the potential to make Malaysia as one of the countries with the world's leading education system, and at the same time, attracting students from abroad to enjoy educational facilities in this country. Based on the statistics in 2021 by the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia, there were 131,255 international students pursuing their studies at various educational institutions in Malaysia. The inclusion of international students has resulted in the recommendation to learn Malay language by Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka (Awang Sariyan, 2011). As a support to the recommendation, the Government of Malaysia through the Private Higher Education Act 1996 has set out that all international students in public institutions

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of higher learning and private institution are to learn the Malay language courses as a requirement to graduate.

Malay language learning among international students in local institutions of higher learning emphasises four main skills, namely listening skills, speaking skills, writing skills and reading skills (National Language Syllabus, MQA 2005:11). Among the four skills, speaking skills are the most important skills of the language (Rao, 2019) because speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real life situations (Rao, 2019). In terms of speech and communication, the highest level of language mastery is the proficiency of the targeted language communication as it is also a foothold in the formation of sentences (Asmah Haji Omar, 2015). Nik Safiah Karim (2015) supports Asmah Hj. Omar in the same case that the language ability of one is at the highest level when they can produce sentences that are accurate and grammatical and in line with the grammar system. Thus, this is the challenge for foreign language learners.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT & OBJECTIVES

Foreign language learning among students now has several issues. First, lack of knowledge in vocabulary mastery is the biggest obstacle for a foreign language speaker to deal with. This is because the main factor that contributes to this difficulty is the knowledge of the words and ability to remember new vocabularies (Bai, 2018). The situation of foreign language learning in classroom shows that vocabulary knowledge possessed by foreign language learners is weak because their failure to build a vocabulary mastery of the target language. Some students also have the difficulty on pronouncing words accurately, making their information delivery are difficult to understand (Kang & Moran, 2014).

Second, failure to master the vocabulary of the language learned can make it difficult for students during the communication process. Vocabulary proficiency in foreign language learning is one of the main pillars that students need to master, because there is a strong correlation between vocabulary proficiency and communication ability in the language. Good vocabulary knowledge affects the wider use of language, and vice versa, where the use of the language learned will increase one's vocabulary knowledge (Teng, 2018). So, weaknesses in vocabulary mastery among students will have a big impact on their communication ability.

Third, in addition to aspects of vocabulary mastery, foreign language students often feel inferior and unsure when they must speak in a foreign language when dealing with native speakers (Sibel Cagatay, 2015; Aulia Nisa Khusnia, 2016). International students also often feel anxious to use target language outside due to fear of making mistakes when speaking, either by using an incorrect sentence, saying something inappropriate or mention any words wrong (Ahmed, 2016). Besides that, they also lost the confidence to speak a foreign language because of the bad experiences they had while in class (Yousif & Bashir, 2015), either due to classmate reactions or criticism from teachers.

Based on the problems discussed above, a more effective and student-centered method is needed to make the question-and-answer session in foreign language classroom more interesting and fun. Thus, objectives of this research are to explore the effectiveness of Two-Way Question-Answer methods in developing vocabulary mastery and foreign language communication' confidence among students.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The above-mentioned intervention methods combine two main pillars, namely student-centered learning as the main approach and Schramm's (1971) two-way communication theory as the main theory. Foreign language's vocabulary mastery and confidence in foreign language's question and answer are two skills to be applied in students through the methods.

Student-Centered Learning (SCL)

SCL is the main approach applied in the method. SCL is an alternative teaching strategy that replaces teacher-centered teaching, where students become key pillars of actively engaging in a teaching and learning session. Weimer (2013) places four important features that define this SCL conceptual teaching. First, this approach involves the practice of explicit skills. Second, this approach encourages students to reflect on what they have learned and how they have learned it. Third, this approach motivates students through opportunities for them to control their own learning process. Fourth, this approach promotes the value of collaboration and group work. In this approach, the educator (teacher/lecturer) acts as a facilitator and mentor, and not just as information provider (Stefaniak & Tracey, 2015). This SCL approach is applied in the intervention method to provide more opportunities for students to build their own language experience via this method. Through SCL, students carry out their self-explore on the language either by expanding their vocabulary knowledge, learning how to construct an answer or question sentences as well as building confidence to pronounce question and answer sentences in the language learned, even if they **contain** errors.

Schramm Model

Schramm's (1971) model is the main model that forms the basis of the intervention method in this study, namely the Two-Way Question and Answer Method. This model emphasizes the element of feedback in communication, which shows that communication is a process that moves in a cycle rather than a single direction. This is the main idea in the intervention method that emphasizes the two-way concept in question-and-answer activities in the classroom. Compared to the one-way method of teachers - students, question and answer activities should also involve more than one-way that is students - teachers and students - students. In this situation, students answering skills are formed, without students having the opportunity to build their questioning skills. Students do practice by answering questions and building questions on paper. So, the intervention method through this model wants to build questioning and answering skills among students more widely and effectively, so that students can familiarize themselves with oral interactions without being limited to on-paper exercises only.

Vocabulary Mastery

In foreign language learning, vocabulary plays an important role in all types of language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) (Bai, 2018). Broad vocabulary acquisition in a second and foreign language learner became scholar's main concern because, without such vocabulary, one could not use the structure and function of the language learned for communication purposes (Candry *et al.*, 2018).

As part of language, vocabulary plays an important role in the language acquisition process of new language learners (Moody *et al.*, 2018). The development and enrichment of new language vocabulary among learners is an important aspect of their language development (Annisa Awaludin, 2013). Vocabulary knowledge is often seen as one of the pillars of foreign language learning since limited vocabulary affects communication ability in that language (Candry *et al.*, 2018). There is a reciprocal relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use; vocabulary knowledge facilitates use and conversation in target languages, the use of language leads to increased vocabulary knowledge (Nation, 2013). As a form of language learning activity, Trilok Daatt Tiwari (2021) viewed the question-and-answer technique between teachers and students as a tool for developing foreign language vocabulary skills learned, given that vocabulary mastery is essential for meaningful communication.

Self-Confidence in Foreign Language Communication

If vocabulary is seen as a pillar, language confidence is the scaffolding that will strengthen the foreign language acquisition among students. Tunçel (2015) has discussed the aspects of confidence as an important factor in a second / foreign language learner's readiness to change their beliefs and actions toward an autonomous learner. Some scholars such as Genctan and Ozbey have characterized self-confidence as doing something in their own capacity, self-esteem, and awareness of self-emotion (Erol & Orth, 2011) as important features that a student should possess.

When looking at the categorization of self-confidence, Akagunduz (in Ibrahim, 2015) divides self-confidence into two sub-categories, namely intrinsic self-confidence and extrinsic self-confidence; Inner self-confidence is related to one's thinking and emotions, while extrinsic self-confidence involves external factors such as behavior, body language and so on. To be a good student, these extrinsic and instructional elements need to be well integrated, and in this case, teachers should realize that the key elements in improving the quality of education are self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect internally and externally.

Tiwari (2021) sees the role of language teachers in reducing students' uncertainty in the classroom. Among the proposed measures to increase students' confidence in learning a foreign language are by providing experiences and encouragement for students to use the language in real situations, as well as reducing the fear experienced through positive attitudes and encouragement (Akkakoson, 2016).

3.0 METHOD

The study uses a mix method design using action research. Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained for this research. Quantitative data is the primary data to test the research hypothesis and is supported by qualitative data as support data. The Kemmis & Mc Taggart (1988) model is used as the basis model and reference for the implementation of action studies. The rationale for choosing this model is that it is a simple, clear, easy-to-use action research model, and that each stage in the model cycle meets the needs of the researcher in the study.

Participants

The respondents to this research were 30 international students from Middle East: Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia; Africa: Nigeria and Zambia; South Asia: Pakistan and Bangladesh; Europe: Germany and Russia and Southeast Asia like Laos and Philippines, who took Malay language course at one of the public universities in Malaysia; National University of Malaysia (UKM), under researcher's surveillances as course's instructor. All 30 students were placed in the same group and involved in the first two cycles. Only students who didn't show much improvement after second cycle continued to the third cycle.

Research Instruments

For quantitative data, there were two types of instruments used: pre and post test questions and questionnaire. Two sets of pre and post test questions, Oral Questioning Test, and Interview Test, is an authentic course assessment for Malay language course in UKM. The pre and post test used as the parameter of achievement to compare students' performance after completion of certain cycle and compare it with the previous rolling. The questionnaire serves as an instrument to evaluate student feedback on the intervention process in addition to measuring their achievement of the tested skills. Other than demographic info, the questionnaire comprises five sections; i) Effectiveness Of 'Two Way Question-Answer' Method, ii) Oral Questioning Skills, iii) Oral Question Answering Skill, iv) Vocabulary Mastery and, v) Confidence in Questioning and Answering in Malay.

Data in the form of notes throughout the research cycles are also recorded as qualitative data (refer to Research Procedure). In each cycle, respondents behavior, actions and reactions to the method applied are recorded. In addition, the development of students' skills in both target skills that include sentence construction, language use and pronunciation are also recorded in the notes. The quantitative data were analysed by SPSS, while qualitative data analysed through thematic analysis.

Research Procedure

The three cycles; i) Conventional Teaching as Cycle 1, ii) Intervention Methods as Cycle 2, iii) Improvement Methods for Cycle 3 were conducted in this research. Each cycle was conducted according to the stages of the action research, and for this research, the Kemmis Action Research Model as a guiding principle.

a) Cycle 1: The Conventional

In this cycle, teacher uses the conventional teaching method, which is, module on the question-answer topic. Practices for the topic mostly in writing form, with question paper and exercises in the module. Verbal practice occurs in one way; from teacher to students, and students giving the answer. Upon completion of this cycle, respondents sit for the cycle 1 post-test. Results from the observation notes made during this cycle were evaluated and analyzed.

b) Cycle 2: The Intervention

The Two-Way Question-Answer was innovated as an alternative method to enrich students' vocabulary and build confidence when using the Malay language. This method required two ways of interactions,

teacher-student and student-teacher or student-student. In conventional way, teacher is the one who always threw questions, but with this method, students have to ask questions in Malay too, either to teacher or to their classmates. Students were free to ask any kind of questions in Malay. Verbal questioning and verbal answering skills are the focus throughout the intervention session. Upon completion of this cycle, respondents sit for the cycle 2 post-test.

c) Improvement Methods for Cycle 3 (for students who fail to improve at cycle 2)

Based on the reflection results of cycle 2, several improvements were implemented, namely:

- Teacher emphasises the use of vocabulary through drills and practices.
- Teacher asked students to memorize common vocabulary.
- The scope of the verbal topic is simplified. For instance, students only being asked about themselves, family, and friends.
- Teacher brought two locals (LC1 and LC2) as class chat partners.

Upon completion of this cycle, post test and questionnaire session were conducted with the students. The other students filled the questionnaire form after completing cycle 2.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will focus on findings of the research, which is the effectiveness of Two-Way Question-Answer method in building two aspects: Student's mastery, namely vocabulary mastery and self-confidence in question and answer.

Objective 1: Effectiveness of Two-Way Question-Answer Method in Developing Vocabulary Mastery among Students

Qualitative Results:

During the intervention session in Cycle 2, students demonstrated the development of vocabulary mastery through several evidence. During the intervention session, which question-answer activities took place, students demonstrated an attempt to use new words in their answers and when asking and answering questions, like:

- Asking Question - Instead of '*Apa awak suka makan / What do you like to eat?*', they use '*Apa makanan kegemaran awak? / What is your favourite food?*' or informal form like '*Awak suka makan apa? / What do you like to eat?*'
- Answering Question – Instead of '*Saya makan roti dan minum susu / I have a bread and milk*' for '*Apa awak makan untuk sarapan / What do you have for breakfast*', they have '*Kadang-kadang, saya makan roti canai. Kadang-kadang, saya makan nasi lemak. Untuk minum, saya suka susu.*'

/ Sometimes, I have roti canai. Some other time, I have nasi lemak. For drink, I prefer to have milk.

They also show interest and enthusiasm to learn new words by asking teacher for a suitable and proper words, like conjunctions (*tetapi* / but, *untuk* / for, *jika/kalau* / if), prepositions (*daripada* / from (for person), *dengan*/with & by), adverbs of time (*sebelum*/before, *biasanya*/usually, *tak pernah*/never) In addition to referring to the teacher as the source references, students also implemented technologies such as online dictionaries, phone apps and online translations to translate the word or phrases.

The process of searching for new words meaning independently and using the words in questions and answers has increased the level of word acquisition among students. This has increased the desire to experiment and play with words among students. Instead of having this kind of answer normally:

Q: *Apa aktiviti awak pada hujung minggu?* / What are your weekend activities?

A: *Saya baca buku dan tonton TV* / I read a book and watch TV.

They have this answer by using the new words they have found:

Q: *Apa aktiviti awak pada hujung minggu?* / What are your weekend activities?

A: *Biasanya, saya rehat di rumah dan tonton filem baharu.* / Usually, I just rest at home and watch a new movie.

They had the courage to experiment and try out new words when asking questions and answering questions, in addition to exhibit a significant improvement in terms of the selection of vocabulary used during the Malay communication. Number of practices during intervention seen to benefit students, especially from the aspect of improving students' pronunciation.

Quantitative Results:2

The simple linear regression analysis was performed to see the association between the intervention method and the development of vocabulary mastery are based on the following hypothesis:

Ho1 : There was no significant association between the implementation of the Two-Way Question-Answer method and the vocabulary mastery among students.

The finding of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) program for simple linear regression test revealed that there was a significant association between the Two-Way Question-Answer method and vocabulary mastery skills among students, with $F(1, 20) = 54.219$, $p < 0.05$, with a $R^2 = .751$ value. The percentage expectation in student vocabulary mastery skills is $Y = .285 + .885 X$ when X is measured in percentages. In this regard, vocabulary mastery increased by 0.885 per cent using the Two-Way Question-Answer method.

Table 1(a) Model Summary the Effect of Two-Way Question-Answer on Vocabulary Mastery

Model	R	R Square	Modified R Square	Expected Standard Error
1	.866 ^a	.751	.737	.22584

a. Predictor: Two-Way Method

Table 1(b) Simple Linear Regression Analysis – The Effect of Two-Way Question-Answer on Vocabulary Mastery

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Min Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.765	1	2.765	54.219	.000 ^b
	Residual	.918	18	.051		
	Total	3.684	19			

Comparison of scores for the post test for cycle 1 and cycle 2 was performed based on the following hypothesis:

Ho2 : There was no significant difference between Cycle 1 Post Test and Cycle 2 Post Test

Based on the results of the analysis performed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, the Z value was -3.833 with a p value (Asymp. Sig 2 tailed) of 0.000. This value was less than the critical value of the 0.05 which indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected at once and showed that there was a significant difference between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 test for vocabulary mastery, with $W(19) = 0.0$, $p = 0.00$, thus proving effectiveness intervention methods in developing students' oral questioning skills based on differences.

Objective 2: Effectiveness of the Two-Way Question-Answer Method in Developing Students' Confidence during Conversation

Qualitative Results:

Students' confidence development during Malay question-answer session and the effectiveness of the intervention method in developing the skills were evidenced by the observation notes throughout the intervention session by the researcher and supported by the results of simple regression analysis of the questionnaire data and comparison Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 test.

For the first aspect which is confidence during questioning, students began to develop confidence in questioning during the second session of week two, during which they were exposed to verbal form of questioning and had begun to master it through number of practices. In the conventional cycle, they were exposed on the formal form of question, and they had it by writing. The intervention sessions exposed the verbal/informal form of questions and oral practices, that makes them more comfortable. Instead of having '*Di manakah awak tinggal?* / Where do you live?', they are allowed to use variation of '*Mana awak tinggal?*' or '*Awak tinggal di mana?*', which gave them more choices instead of just one form. By using this trick, many students do not show their nervousness anymore during questioning. Some raising their hands, indicating they are ready.

In the third and fourth weeks of the study, students showed a lot of improvement. Students are more confidence in asking questions, without hesitation or stuttering. They begin to ask more advance questions like '*Adakah awak selesa tinggal di tempat tinggal awak sekarang?* / Are you comfortable living in your current place?' or '*Berapa minit dari rumah awak ke UKM kalau pandu kereta?* / How long (minutes) from your house to UKM by drive?'. Students also showed improvement in their confidence in asking questions to their classmates, without panic. Students are more confident and without hesitation to throw their friends a question, compare to the previous week, like '*Mengapa awak datang lambat?* / Why are

you late?’ if their friends are late to the the class, or ‘*Mengapa awak jawab dalam Bahasa Inggeris? / Why did you answer in English?*’ if their friend accidentally answers the question in English.

For the second aspect which is confidence in answering questions, students demonstrate the development of confidence when giving spontaneous answers and answering in full sentences. Instead of having ‘*Kereta rosak / Broken car*’ for ‘*Mengapa awak datang lambat? / Why are you late?*’, they tend to add apologizing phrases in their answer like ‘*Maaf. Saya lambat sebab kereta saya rosak*’. Normally, they will take a few minutes before answering the question or they construct the answer on a paper and just read it. After the intervention, students are no longer constrained to formulate spontaneous answers, though some minor grammar errors in sentences:

Q: *Di mana awak beli telefon ini?*

A: *Saya beli ini telefon di mall di Cairo.*

Finally, students also showed confidence in using words in asking questions and answering questions. They are not afraid to try new words in developing questions like ‘*pernahkah keluarga awak berjalanan di Malaysia / Have your family ever going around Malaysia?*’ and using more common ‘*berjalanan*’ instead of ‘*melawat*’. Students are more likely to try new words in a question. If there is an error in the usage of the word, the teacher will correct it.

Quantitative Results:

The simple linear regression analysis was performed to see the association between intervention methods and confidence building during questioning and answering are based on the following hypotheses:

Ho3 : There was no significant association between the implementation of the Two-Way Question-Answer method and the confidence that students had when questioning.

Tables 2 (a) and Table 2 (b) show a simple linear regression test that demonstrates significant correlations between the Two-Way Question-Answer method and the current confidence question among students, with $F(1, 20) = 44.192$, $p = 0.00$, with a value of $R^2 = .711$. The percentage expectation in students' confidence when questioning was $Y = Y = .178 + .920 X_1$ when X was measured in percentages. In this regard, confidence in question-and-answer increased by .920 per cent using the Two-Way Question-Answer method.

Table 2(a) Model Summary the Effect of Two-Way Question-Answer on Students's Self-Confidence while using Malay

Model	R	R Square	Modified R Square	Expected Standard Error
1	.843 ^a	.711	.694	.26017

a. Predictor: Two-Way Method

Table 2(b) Simple Linear Regression Analysis – The Effect of Two-Way Question-Answer on Students' Self-Confidence while using Malay

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Min Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.991	1	2.991	44.192	.000 ^b
	Residual	1.218	18	.068		
	Total	4.210	19			

Findings of the research that have been stated in the previous section have rejected all three null hypotheses. For the Ho1 and Ho3 that examine at the association between intervention method and targeted skills, the null hypothesis has been rejected to state that there is an association between intervention method with vocabulary mastery and confidence in language communication. This connection exists because interventions in the form of question-and-answer and basic conversations cause students to ask questions, in addition to answering teacher questions. To answer questions and construct questions, students need to use a wide and varied vocabulary. The need for intervention methods causes them to be bound to update their vocabulary knowledge and increase their confidence when answering questions and questioning teachers or friends. As stated by Nation (2013), vocabulary knowledge is the most important component because vocabulary plays a key role as a basis in all types of language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For Ho2 who looked at the score difference between pre-test and post-test, the significant value of 0.000 displayed showed the effectiveness of the intervention method in making changes to the vocabulary mastery, compared to conventional methods. The use of intervention method makes the session more engaging.

As a form of alternative method for existing boring method, the intervention method is equipped with skills that enable students to; i) improve oral questioning skills, ii) improve oral answering skills, iii) expand foreign language vocabulary knowledge, iv) train oneself to be confidence in questioning teachers and classmates, v) familiarize yourself with conversations so not to be awkward when communicating outside the classroom. This smart method can be applied in other foreign language learning, such as Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, French etc. Question and answer techniques between teachers and students in L2 / L3 learning are seen as tools for developing vocabulary skills in the target language (Moody *et al.*, 2018).

5.0 CONCLUSION

To ensure the acquisition of Malay language among international students occurred across the board, speaking and communication skills need to be built within them as speaking and communication are at the among the highest level in language skills. For that purpose, the question-and-answer aspect is a basic skill that needs to be given a focus as the question-and-answer aspect is the basis of oral communication skills. The language of the students needs to be guided and assisted by a teacher, a friend in Malaysia as well as the surrounding community so that students can use the Malay language in the truest sense. Malaysian society should play a larger role of helping them on the practical aspects of foreign languages practices, being as a friend or language partner to talk to, for them to hone their Malay language skills better.

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