

**INVESTIGATING GUIDED EXTENSIVE
READING AND VOCABULARY
KNOWLEDGE PERFORMANCE
AMONG REMEDIAL ESL LEARNERS
IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2016

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by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

January 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this thesis has been one of the most significant academic journeys I have ever made, and I hope this leads to even better journeys in the years to come. Though only my name appears on the cover of this work, various people have assisted me in many ways. It is to them that I owe my deepest gratitude.

To my supervisors, Professor Ambigapathy Pandian and Dr Paramaswari Jaganathan, your wisdom and commitment as well as your support for me along the way have been both inspiring and motivating. I could not have asked for better mentors. Thank you very much.

To Emeritus Professor Paul Nation, I thank you for your efforts and encouragement, and to Associate Professor Hugh Rosszell, thank you for your guidance and for making it possible for me to visit Meiji University, Japan, as a Visiting Doctoral Scholar. You have both helped enrich my academic experience and for that, I am grateful.

I also extend my gratitude to the Ministry of Education and Universiti Sains Malaysia for the scholarship as well as the time off from work to focus on my research. To Professor Tengku Sepora (Dean of the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation), I extend my heartfelt thanks for your constant support over the years.

It is also my pleasure to thank friends, colleagues and students who have, in one way or another, positively coloured my journey. You have all been extraordinary, you are all my blessings. A special thank you to two wonderful friends, Ee Pheng and Shahnaz.

I cannot end without thanking my family – my parents, Eddie and Patsy, as well as my sister and brother-in-law, Jessinta and Daniel, and nephew, Joshua. You have given me more love and understanding than one could ever hope for. My thanks and my love.

Above all, I am grateful to the Lord. For His love, mercy and favour.

*Out of His fullness we have all received grace
in place of grace already given. (John 1:16)*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	xii
List of Figures.....	xvi
List of Abbreviations.....	xviii
Abstrak.....	xix
Abstract.....	xxi

CHAPTER 1 – BACKGROUND

1.1	Introduction.....	1
1.2	The Role of Vocabulary in Language Proficiency.....	4
1.3	Reading	
	1.3.1 Extensive Reading.....	6
	1.3.2 Self-Selection.....	8
	1.3.3 Authentic and Simplified Reading Materials.....	9
	1.3.4 Incorporating Post-Reading Activities.....	11
1.4	Statement of the Research Problem.....	13
1.5	Research Objectives.....	19

1.6	Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	20
1.7	Research Significance.....	21
1.8	Limitations and Delimitations	
	1.8.1 Limitations.....	23
	1.8.2 Delimitations.....	25
1.9	Overview of Methodology.....	27
1.10	Definition of Major Terms.....	28

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction.....	33
2.2	The Central Importance of Vocabulary.....	33
2.3	Vocabulary Knowledge.....	40
2.4	Vocabulary Size.....	43
2.5	Testing Vocabulary Knowledge.....	45
2.6	Extensive Reading and Direct Vocabulary Study	
	2.6.1 Extensive Reading.....	51
	2.6.1.1 Extensive Reading in Malaysian.....	54
	Tertiary Education	
	2.6.2 Guided Extensive Reading.....	57
	2.6.3 The Use of Graded Readers.....	59
	2.6.4 The Limits of Lexical Inferencing.....	63
	2.6.5 Negotiating Obstacles in Lexical Inferencing.....	66
	2.6.6 An Integrated Approach.....	68

2.6.7	Direct Vocabulary Study: Comprehensive.....	72
	Vocabulary Worksheets	
2.6.8	Dictionary Use.....	76
2.6.9	Monolingual, Bilingual and Bilingualised Dictionaries.....	79
2.6.10	Effective Dictionary Use.....	85
2.7	Cognitive Constructs.....	87
2.7.1	Cognitive Psychology.....	88
2.7.2	Incidental and Intentional Learning.....	89
2.7.3	Depth of Processing.....	99
2.7.4	Comprehensible Input.....	107
2.7.5	Schematic Orientation.....	111
2.7.6	Expectancy-Value.....	120
2.7.7	Theoretical Framework.....	125
2.8	Past Research.....	126
2.8.1	Reading and Vocabulary Learning.....	126
2.8.2	Other Vocabulary Learning Strategies.....	136

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction.....	140
3.2	Research Design.....	142
3.3	Pretest-Posttest-Delayed Posttest Control-Group Design.....	145
3.4	Sampling.....	149
3.5	Sample Size.....	151

3.6	Participants/Subjects.....	153
3.7	Controlled Variables	
	3.7.1 History.....	156
	3.7.2 Maturation.....	156
	3.7.3 Regression and Instrumentation.....	157
	3.7.4 Experimental Mortality.....	159
	3.7.5 Diffusion and Compensatory Behaviour.....	160
3.8	Intervention.....	161
	3.8.1 Background Information on the Preparatory English.....	166
	Language Course	
3.9	Instruments.....	168
	3.9.1 Selection of the Target Words (VocabProfile).....	169
	3.9.2 Vocabulary Size/Recognition Test.....	170
	3.9.3 Vocabulary Knowledge Scale.....	173
	3.9.4 Oxford Progressive English Readers.....	177
	3.9.5 Instant Book Report.....	179
	3.9.6 Comprehensive Vocabulary Worksheets.....	180
	3.9.7 Oxford's Online English Dictionary.....	181
	3.9.8 Questionnaires.....	184
	3.9.9 Semi-Structured Interview Items.....	187
3.10	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences:.....	189
	Data Analysis Matrix	
	3.10.1 T-Test.....	189

3.10.2	ANOVA.....	190
3.10.3	Reliability Analyses.....	193
3.10.3.1	Test Reliability.....	193
3.10.3.2	Interrater Reliability.....	194
3.10.3.3	Questionnaire Items Reliability.....	195
3.10.3.4	Interview Items Reliability.....	196
3.11	Procedures.....	197
3.12	Pilot Study Results.....	201
3.12.1	Reliability	
3.12.1.1	Vocabulary Size/Recognition Test.....	201
3.12.1.2	Vocabulary Knowledge Scale.....	203
3.12.1.3	Interrater Reliability.....	206
3.12.1.4	Questionnaire Items.....	207
3.12.2	Post- and Delayed Post-Test Results.....	207
3.12.2.1	Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge Recall.....	208
3.12.2.2	Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge Retention.....	208
3.12.2.3	Productive Vocabulary Knowledge Recall.....	209
3.12.2.4	Productive Vocabulary Knowledge Retention.....	210
3.12.3	Responses from Questionnaires.....	211
3.12.4	Responses from Interviews.....	211

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

4.1	Introduction.....	213
4.2	Results	
4.2.1	Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge	
4.2.1.1	Levene’s Test.....	215
4.2.1.2	Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity.....	216
4.2.1.3	Mixed ANOVA Output.....	217
4.2.1.4	Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge Recall.....	219
4.2.1.5	Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge Retention.....	224
4.2.2	Productive Vocabulary Knowledge	
4.2.2.1	Levene’s Test.....	229
4.2.2.2	Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity.....	230
4.2.2.3	Mixed ANOVA Output.....	231
4.2.2.4	Productive Vocabulary Knowledge Recall.....	233
4.2.2.5	Productive Vocabulary Knowledge Retention.....	238
4.2.3	Summary.....	243
4.3	Secondary Data.....	244
4.3.1	Interrater Reliability.....	245
4.3.2	Responses from Questionnaires	
4.3.2.1	Exposure to English during Research Period.....	246
4.3.2.2	The Preparatory English Language Course.....	246
	and Research Exposure	
4.3.2.3	Extensive Reading.....	247

4.3.2.4	Post-Reading Activities.....	248
4.3.2.5	Summary.....	249
4.3.3	Responses from Interviews	
4.3.3.1	English Language Teachers.....	249
4.3.3.2	The Preparatory English Language Course.....	250
	and Research Exposure	
4.3.3.3	The Preparatory English Language Course.....	251
	and Vocabulary Knowledge Development	
4.3.3.4	Summary.....	253
4.4	Summary of Findings.....	254

CHAPTER 5 – SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1	Introduction.....	257
5.2	Overview.....	257
5.3	Discussion of the Findings.....	259
5.3.1	Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge Recall.....	259
5.3.2	Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge Retention.....	264
5.3.3	Productive Vocabulary Knowledge Recall.....	267
5.3.4	Productive Vocabulary Knowledge Retention.....	270
5.4	Implications.....	272
5.5	Recommendations.....	275

5.5.1	Implementation of GER Plus	
5.5.1.1	ESL/EFL Teachers.....	276
5.5.1.2	Policy Makers and Course Planners/.....	276
	Syllabus Designers	
5.5.2	Emphasising Vocabulary Knowledge Development.....	282
5.6	Limitations.....	283
5.7	Suggestions for Future Research.....	285
5.8	Conclusion.....	286
	References.....	288

APPENDICES

Appendix A:	Instant Book Report
Appendix B:	Questionnaire
Appendix C:	Interview Items/Questions (Teachers)
Appendix D:	Interview Items/Questions (Chief Coordinator of the Preparatory English Language Course)
Appendix E:	Consent Form
Appendix F:	Vocabulary Size/Recognition Test: Results

List of Publications

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 3.1:	Vocabulary Size/Recognition Test scores:..... GER Plus group	201
Table 3.2:	Vocabulary Size/Recognition Test scores:..... GER group	202
Table 3.3:	T-test results for the reliability of the..... Vocabulary Size/Recognition Test (VSRT)	203
Table 3.4:	Pre-test results: Receptive vocabulary knowledge.....	204
Table 3.5:	T-test results for the reliability of the..... Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS): Receptive vocabulary knowledge	204
Table 3.6:	Pre-test results: Productive vocabulary knowledge.....	205
Table 3.7:	T-test results for the reliability of the..... Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS): Productive vocabulary knowledge	205
Table 3.8:	Cohen's kappa coefficient: Interrater reliability analysis.....	206
Table 3.9:	Cronbach's alpha: Questionnaire items reliability analysis.....	207
Table 3.10:	Post-test results: Receptive vocabulary knowledge.....	208
Table 3.11:	Delayed post-test results: Receptive vocabulary knowledge.....	208
Table 3.12:	Post-test results: Productive vocabulary knowledge.....	209
Table 3.13:	Delayed post-test results: Productive vocabulary knowledge.....	210

Table 4.1:	Levene’s Test for homogeneity of variances.....	215
Table 4.2:	Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity.....	216
Table 4.3:	ANOVA summary table for the study of class type.....	217
	to test results	
Table 4.4:	Tukey’s HSD: Mean scores within- and between-groups.....	219
	comparisons	
Table 4.5:	Detailed comparison of post-test mean scores:.....	220
	GER Plus-GER	
Table 4.6:	Detailed comparison of post-test mean scores:.....	220
	GER Plus-Control	
Table 4.7:	Detailed comparison of post-test mean scores:.....	221
	GER-Control	
Table 4.8:	Tukey’s HSD: Multiple comparisons between groups.....	222
	for pre-test	
Table 4.9:	Tukey’s HSD: Multiple comparisons between groups.....	223
	for post-test	
Table 4.10:	Tukey’s HSD: Mean scores within- and between-groups.....	224
	comparisons	
Table 4.11:	Detailed comparison of delayed post-test mean scores:.....	225
	GER Plus-GER	
Table 4.12:	Detailed comparison of delayed post-test mean scores:.....	226
	GER Plus-Control	

Table 4.13:	Detailed comparison of delayed post-test mean scores:.....	226
	GER-Control	
Table 4.14:	Tukey's HSD: Multiple comparisons between groups.....	228
	for delayed post-test	
Table 4.15:	Levene's Test for homogeneity of variances.....	229
Table 4.16:	Mauchly's Test of Sphericity.....	230
Table 4.17:	ANOVA summary table for the study of class type.....	231
	to test results	
Table 4.18:	Tukey's HSD: Mean scores within- and between-groups.....	233
	comparisons	
Table 4.19:	Detailed comparison of post-test mean scores:.....	234
	GER Plus-GER	
Table 4.20:	Detailed comparison of post-test mean scores:.....	234
	GER Plus-Control	
Table 4.21:	Detailed comparison of post-test mean scores:.....	235
	GER-Control	
Table 4.22:	Tukey's HSD: Multiple comparisons between groups.....	236
	for pre-test	
Table 4.23:	Tukey's HSD: Multiple comparisons between groups.....	237
	for post-test	
Table 4.24:	Tukey's HSD: Mean scores within- and between-groups.....	238
	comparisons	

Table 4.25:	Detailed comparison of delayed post-test mean scores:.....	239
	GER Plus-GER	
Table 4.26:	Detailed comparison of delayed post-test mean scores:.....	240
	GER Plus-Control	
Table 4.27:	Detailed comparison of delayed post-test mean scores:.....	240
	GER-Control	
Table 4.28:	Tukey's HSD: Multiple comparisons between groups.....	242
	for delayed post-test	
Table 4.29:	Summary of test performance between groups.....	244
Table 4.30:	Cohen's kappa coefficient: Interrater reliability analysis.....	245

Figure 3.6:	Modified Vocabulary Knowledge Scale.....	176
	sample item for the present research.	
Figure 3.7:	Comprehensive vocabulary worksheet sample item.....	181
Figure 3.8:	oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com sample item.....	183
	(word entry: ‘agony’).	
Figure 3.9:	Timeline of the research procedures.....	200
Figure 4.1:	Estimated marginal means (Test-Class interaction).....	218
Figure 4.2:	Estimated marginal means (Test-Class interaction).....	232
Figure 5.1:	Protocols for conducting GER Plus.....	280

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
CI	Comprehensible Input
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ER	Extensive reading
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
GER	Guided Extensive Reading
GER Plus	Guided Extensive Reading Plus
H	Hypothesis
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
OPER	Oxford Progressive English Readers
RQ	Research Question
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
Tukey's HSD	Tukey's honestly significant difference
VLT	Vocabulary Levels Test
VKS	Vocabulary Knowledge Scale
VSRT	Vocabulary Size/Recognition Test
WAT	Word Associates Test

**PENGAJIAN PEMBACAAN EKSTENSIF BERPANDU
DAN PRESTASI PENGETAHUAN KOSA KATA
DALAM KALANGAN PARA PELAJAR ESL REMEDIAL
DI SEBUAH UNIVERSITI AWAM DI MALAYSIA**

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan menyokong pembacaan ekstensif, yang tertumpu pada pembelajaran kebetulan (incidental learning), sebagai wadah utama bagi perkembangan pengetahuan kosa kata bahasa kedua/asing. Namun demikian, walaupun ia dianggap berguna bagi pembelajaran kosa kata, tuntutan bahawa pembacaan ekstensif adalah memadai atau mencukupi bagi pelajar memperoleh perkembangan leksikal yang signifikan telah dicabar. Suatu langkah yang lebih mantap merupakan gabungan pembelajaran kosa kata kebetulan (incidental vocabulary learning) dan pembelajaran kosa kata bersengaja (intentional vocabulary learning), dengan pembacaan ekstensif disusuli dengan latihan kosa kata secara langsung (direct vocabulary study). Bersandarkan isu tentang kekurangan pengetahuan kosa kata bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan pelajar tertier Malaysia, maka penyelidikan kuasi-eksperimen ini melaksanakan suatu kaedah pembelajaran kosa kata yang menggabungkan pembacaan ekstensif menggunakan buku bergred dan latihan kosa kata secara langsung (GER Plus) dalam usaha meneliti keberkesanannya bagi perkembangan pengetahuan kosa kata reseptif dan produktif, dibandingkan dengan kaedah yang lain (GER) yang hanya menggunakan pembacaan ekstensif. Penyelidikan ini dijalankan di sebuah

universiti awam di Malaysia dan melibatkan tiga kumpulan pelajar (GER Plus, GER, Kawalan) yang mengambil kursus bahasa Inggeris persediaan, iaitu kursus kemahiran bahasa Inggeris remedial. Pengujian saiz kosa kata prabacaan dijalankan bagi menentukan tahap buku bergred yang sesuai untuk digunakan. Secara keseluruhan, tempoh intervensi berlangsung selama 10 minggu dan setiap peserta kajian (daripada 93) tertakluk pada pra-, pasca-, dan pasca-ujian terlengah menggunakan Skala Pengetahuan Kosa Kata (Vocabulary Knowledge Scale). Keputusan daripada analisis ANOVA bercampur dua-hala menunjukkan bahawa kumpulan GER Plus secara signifikannya menunjukkan prestasi yang lebih baik daripada kumpulan GER dan kumpulan Kawalan, bagi ingat-kembali dan pengekal pengetahuan kosa kata reseptif dan produktif. Di samping itu, semua peserta juga diberi borang soal selidik dan para guru daripada kumpulan yang terlibat serta ketua koordinator kursus bahasa Inggeris persediaan turut ditemubual. Penyelidikan ini menyimpulkan bahawa GER Plus mewakili satu pilihan yang praktikal dan efektif bagi perkembangan pengetahuan kosa kata yang signifikan dan kekal. Hasil kajian ini telah, pada dasarnya, memberikan pandangan menyeluruh tentang potensi serta prasyarat suatu kaedah membaca dan perkembangan kosa kata yang melampaui pembacaan ekstensif konvensional, dan amat signifikan untuk kepentingan para pelajar bahasa Inggeris remedial, guru bahasa dan perancang kursus di peringkat pengajian tinggi Malaysia.

**INVESTIGATING GUIDED EXTENSIVE READING
AND VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE PERFORMANCE
AMONG REMEDIAL ESL LEARNERS
IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA**

ABSTRACT

Research supports extensive reading, which draws on incidental learning, as a primary tool for second/foreign language vocabulary knowledge development. However, while it is deemed useful for vocabulary learning, the claim that extensive reading on its own is sufficient for learners to experience significant lexical gains has been challenged. Instead, a more fitting measure appears to be a combination of incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, with extensive reading followed by direct vocabulary study. Given the issue of Malaysian tertiary students lacking English vocabulary knowledge, this quasi-experimental research implemented a method of vocabulary learning incorporating extensive reading using graded readers and direct vocabulary study (GER Plus) in an effort to observe its effectiveness for receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge development, as compared against another method (GER) in which only extensive reading was utilised. The research was carried out in a Malaysian public university employing three groups of students (GER Plus, GER, Control) registered for a preparatory English language course, a remedial English language proficiency course. Pre-reading vocabulary size testing was conducted to determine the graded reader level at which to start the participants. On the whole, the

intervention period lasted approximately 10 weeks and each of the 93 participants was subjected to a pre-, post- and delayed post-test using the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale. Results from two-way mixed ANOVA analyses indicate that the GER Plus group performed significantly better than the GER and Control groups for both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge recall and retention. In addition, to establish better data certainty, all the participants were administered questionnaires and the teachers of the involved groups as well as the chief coordinator of the preparatory English language course were interviewed. The research concludes that GER Plus represents an option that is both viable and effective for significant and sustained vocabulary knowledge development. The findings of this research have, in essence, provided a comprehensive insight of the potentials as well as the prerequisites of a reading and vocabulary development method that go beyond conventional extensive reading, and are particularly vital to the interests of remedial English language learners, language instructors and course planners at the Malaysian tertiary level.

Chapter One

Background

1.1 Introduction

Over the years, reading has been postulated as a productive approach to improving word power, with researchers frequently advocating the inclusion of extensive reading programmes as part of language course structures. According to Hunt and Beglar (2005), who emphasised the essentiality of extensive reading, reading is the primary means by which we can immerse learners in a word-rich environment that can potentially result in vocabulary knowledge development.

The term ‘extensive reading’ (ER) was originally introduced by Harold Palmer, a British language-teaching theoretician (Kelly, 2006). According to its broad definition, ER exposes learners to large quantities of reading materials within their linguistic competence (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

There are several reasons why extensive reading is deemed extremely fitting for language learning. For one, it is considered a pedagogically efficient approach as two activities – reading and vocabulary acquisition – can occur simultaneously (Huckin & Coady, 1999). ER also facilitates learner autonomy, can be pleasant and motivating, and with specific regards to improving word power, provides learners

with the opportunity to meet words in their context of use (Thornbury, 2002), increases sight vocabulary (Coady, 1997; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985) and can result in substantial receptive and productive vocabulary learning (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006).

Extensive reading on its own mainly draws upon incidental learning and a significant number of learners have benefitted from it. However, the claim that ER alone is sufficient for vocabulary learning has been challenged (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 1993, 1989). Rashidi and Adivi (2010) remarked that while admitting some vocabulary is certainly gained incidentally through extensive reading, there are researchers who believe it to be insufficient and suggest some direct vocabulary study to make the learning process much more fruitful. Some studies have observed sole reliance on extensive reading to be rather ineffective, with learners enjoying relatively low rates of lexical improvement (Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010; Schmitt, 2008; Waring & Nation, 2004).

The solution appears to be a compromise between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, with the findings of various studies observing that combining both elements leads to greater vocabulary gains and retention (Guo, 2010; Sonbul & Schmitt, 2010; Min & Hsu, 2008; Rosszell, 2007).

The distinction between incidental and intentional learning operates within definitions originating from cognitive psychology, definitions which generally highlight the element of attention. According to Ellis (1999), “intentional learning requires focal attention to be placed deliberately on the linguistic code (i.e., on form or form-meaning connections)” while “incidental learning requires attention to be placed on meaning (i.e., message content) but allows peripheral attention to be directed at form” (pp. 35-36).

Hulstijn (2003) noted that the popular perspective is basically that of immersion versus study; incidental learning corresponds to the idea of immersing oneself in a language via, for instance, the reading of texts in the target language which potentially allows one to incidentally learn words and structures, whereas intentional learning generally corresponds to conditions in which explicit vocabulary study or instruction is prominently featured.

Rieder (2003), however, cautioned that just because vocabulary learning occurs as a by-product of reading it does not automatically imply that no conscious processes are involved. Similarly, Schmidt (2001, 1993) asserted that attention to input is a prerequisite for any form of learning to take place and observed that it seems to be a necessity for the understanding of nearly every aspect of second/foreign language learning.

1.2 The Role of Vocabulary in Language Proficiency

The crucial role that vocabulary plays in language competence and literacy development has been increasingly acknowledged in language acquisition studies, especially so within the domain of second/foreign language acquisition research. Hunt and Beglar (2005) underlined that the heart of language comprehension and use is the lexicon, in tandem with Singleton (1999) who pointed out that the major challenge of learning and using a language, whether as L1 or L2, lies not in the area of broad syntactic principles but in the nitty-gritty of the lexicon. In a similar vein, Zimmerman (1997) acknowledged that vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner. Nation (2001, 1993, 1990) also emphasised the importance of developing an adequate vocabulary since a learner's skill in using a language is heavily dependent on the number of words he or she knows.

It is found that students with inadequate vocabulary knowledge are typically at a much higher risk of performing poorly in high school, community college or university (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Hazenberg & Hulstijn, 1996) and that the extent of students' vocabulary knowledge relates strongly to their reading comprehension and overall academic success (Baumann, Kameenui, & Ash, 2003; Becker, 1977). Likewise, Ellis (1997) argued that having inadequate vocabulary knowledge hampers learners' reading comprehension in a way which makes it more likely for them to face difficulties in the path of academic achievement. This is

supported by Bromley (2004) who, in a comprehensive review of research on vocabulary development, concluded that vocabulary knowledge boosts reading comprehension, promotes reading fluency, enhances thinking and communication skills, and improves academic achievement.

Although there is no absolute consensus on the best way to teach or to learn a language, there is an important area of agreement, that being the central importance of vocabulary knowledge for language proficiency. According to Schmitt (2008), the one thing that researchers can agree upon is that vocabulary development is an essential part of mastering a second/foreign language.

In parallel with this is the increasing awareness that vocabulary size can be a particularly useful indicator of proficiency. As noted by Yuksel and Kavanoz (2010), existing studies in the field have revealed vocabulary size and overall language proficiency to be significantly correlated; the more extensive one's vocabulary, the higher their proficiency level is likely to be and vice versa (Nation, 2001). Various correlation studies have also documented the reciprocal relationship between vocabulary knowledge and proficiency in specific language skills (Chapter Two: section 2.2 provides an elaboration on this).

1.3 Reading

This segment first introduces extensive reading as a whole (section 1.3.1), followed by sections concerning self-selection with regards to reading materials, arguments in favour of simplified texts, and the inclusion of post-reading activities (1.3.2, 1.3.3 and 1.3.4 respectively) which form the primary basis of Guided Extensive Reading (GER) and Guided Extensive Reading Plus (GER Plus), the intervention methods employed in the present research. GER Plus differs from GER in that the former incorporates post-reading direct vocabulary study, thus drawing from both incidental and intentional learning. GER, meanwhile, relies solely on incidental learning via extensive reading alone.

1.3.1 Extensive Reading

The correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading has long been noted. According to Harmon and Wood (2008), vocabulary knowledge enables students to comprehend what they read and the act of reading itself provides the opportunity for students to encounter and learn new words. Stahl and Nagy (2006) suggested that this reciprocal relationship underlines the importance of reading volume in increasing students' vocabularies. The notion that we could learn a lot or most of our vocabulary through reading, or more specifically comprehensible written input, is now entrenched within second/foreign language teaching (Waring & Nation, 2004).

Various studies have consistently highlighted the positive effects of extensive reading on language learning at different ages and in many ESL (English as a Second Language)/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings (Sheu, 2003). The benefits are manifold, namely in the areas of receptive and productive vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, reading speed, grammatical knowledge, writing, and in developing positive attitudes towards reading (Tamrackitkun, 2010; Nation, 2008, 2001, 1997, 1990; Bell, 2001; Camiciottoli, 2001; Coady, 1997; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Tsang, 1996; Constantino, 1995; Davis, 1995; Lai, 1993a, 1993b; Elley, 1991; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Robb & Susser, 1989; Janopoulos, 1986; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983, 1981).

Simply put, ER is reading – a lot. To read extensively is to read independently, broadly and in quantity, and to read over a continual period of time. The chief aim of ER programmes is “to get students reading in the second language and liking it.” (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 6). Day and Bamford (*ibid.*) identified the following criteria found in successful ER programmes:

- 1) Students read as much as possible;
- 2) A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available;
- 3) Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students;
- 4) Students select what they want to read;
- 5) Students read for pleasure, information and general understanding;
- 6) Reading is individual and silent;

- 7) The reading rate or speed is usually faster;
- 8) Reading is its own reward;
- 9) The teacher is a role model of a reader, an active member of the classroom reading community;
- 10) Students are oriented to the programme's goals, given guidance, and their progress tracked.

While the listed criteria are associated with effective ER programmes, Day and Bamford (*ibid.*) demonstrated that they cannot be strictly implemented as a whole; for instance, a choice has to be made between Criterion 6 and Criterion 9 as the former approach indicates that the student should read outside of class (when and where the student pleases) whereas the latter approach indicates that teachers should read in class with their students. Dependability between criteria is also apparent as Day and Bamford (*ibid.*) noted that the fulfilment of Criterion 7 is dependent upon the provision of Criterion 3.

1.3.2 Self-Selection

One of the working definitions of extensive reading is that students get to choose the materials that they want to read. However, there is no consensus as to how far the extent of self-selection should extend (Susser & Robb, 1990).

Past observations on the use of class readers (teacher-selected titles read by all members of a class) in ER settings have suggested that they can be challenging, rewarding, motivating and pleasurable (Rosszell, 2010; Nuttall, 1996; Hill, 1992). On a more specific note, Mulling (1995) pointed out that students should *ideally* be allowed to choose whatever they wish to read, but that absolute self-selection can be problematic when it comes to developing word knowledge mainly because it is the reading materials that will serve as the source for target vocabulary.

1.3.3 Authentic and Simplified Reading Materials

In ER settings, it is important especially at the initial stage that reading materials fall within the linguistic competence of the students. According to Day and Bamford (1998), most reading materials are too complex for L2 students to cope with because of their limited linguistic knowledge. Hence, the logical solution would be to produce simplified texts for them, a move which goes against the popular assumption that authentic materials should be used in language teaching and learning. This assumption is based on the idea that authentic materials written by and for native speakers – and not specifically for language teaching and learning – are superior to materials specially written or simplified for language learners. Part of the cult status of authenticity is the idea that the very complexity of authentic materials qualifies them as valuable learning tools (Day & Bamford, *ibid.*).

While authentic materials are often regarded as the best reading materials for the improvement of linguistic competence, they can be potential setbacks for students who are not ready for them. Williams (1983) cautioned that the use of authentic texts often has an effect opposite to that intended when a learner encounters ungraded materials too soon.

The use of graded readers in second/foreign language reading programmes is often based on the premise that learning is more effective when students have access to materials that they can largely comprehend and enjoy, instead of having to decode texts that are beyond their linguistic abilities. According to Nation and Wang (1999), the strongest argument in favour of graded readers is that without them second/foreign language learners would not be able to experience reading at a level of comfort and ease approaching first language reading because the vocabulary load of unsimplified materials is so high.

Existing literature presents numerous criticisms against simplified texts, deeming them unnatural, bland, stilted and distorted (Nuttall, 1996; Wallace, 1988; Davison, 1986). However, it is also true that there are many well-written graded readers available (Nation & Wang, 1999). David Hill supplied a useful list of these in Day and Bamford (1998). Graded readers constitute a major language teaching and learning resource and if critics were to insist on only using materials written for native speakers, it can prove detrimental to the interests of learners (Hill, 1997). Nation (2005) also pointed out that because learning from extensive reading should

meet certain conditions which include focusing on the meaning of the text as well as getting learners to engage in and enjoy substantial quantities of reading at appropriate levels, it is necessary to make use of simplified materials like graded readers.

1.3.4 Incorporating Post-Reading Activities

The foregoing discussion of extant literature has observed that ER can play a vital role in the development of receptive and productive word knowledge (e.g., Nation, 2008, 2001, 1997, 1990; Tsang, 1996; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983, 1981). What remains inconclusive, however, is whether explicit vocabulary instruction has a place in ER, an approach which mainly draws on incidental learning.

Although incidental vocabulary learning, inferring word meanings from contextual clues, is a useful strategy for consolidating known vocabulary (Nassaji, 2003) and for vocabulary growth (Stahl, 1999; Nation, 1993), it is crucial to also recognise its limitations. Contexts have been found to be unhelpful as the odds of accurately predicting a word's meaning from written context is relatively low (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Researchers on second/foreign language acquisition have also put forth that inferring word meanings from contextual clues is both haphazard and inefficient (Haynes, 1993; Laufer & Sim, 1985) and characterised it as a lengthy and error-prone undertaking which by itself is an ineffective manner of mastering lexis (Harley, Howard, & Roberge, 1996).

This, however, should be tempered with the knowledge that a major reason contributing to unsuccessful attempts at inferring word meanings through the use of contextual clues is a learner's lack of vocabulary knowledge to begin with. According to Prichard (2008), research has shown that learners should possess a vocabulary size of at least 3,000 word families in order to comfortably attempt lexical inferencing, a situation which can, to a certain extent, be remedied through the use of suitable reading materials such as graded readers.

In terms of maximising vocabulary development, there is growing evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of combining reading with direct vocabulary study. This approach, not without its critics (see Lehmann, 2007; Mason & Krashen, 2004), is deemed to be more effective than relying exclusively on incidental vocabulary learning (Peters et al., 2009; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Coady, 1997; Hulstijn, Hollander, & Greidanus, 1996). However, incorporating explicit vocabulary instruction into an extensive reading setting contravenes one of the fundamental criteria of ER as defined by Day and Bamford (1998): "Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises after reading." (p. 8).

Interestingly, Day and Bamford's (*ibid.*) apparent dismissal of the use of post-reading activities is contradicted by Chapter 13 of their book (*Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*, 1998) in which they elaborated on the rationale for using post-reading activities as well as on ways to design and implement them.

In a comprehensive review of instructed vocabulary learning, Schmitt (2008) suggested that the best method may be a combination of incidental and intentional approaches, such as by using explicit post-reading tasks to consolidate the vocabulary initially met during reading. In addition, researchers concerned with incidental and intentional vocabulary learning seem to have concluded that although reading alone does contribute to the development of vocabulary knowledge, a supplementary regime using specific vocabulary exercises appears to produce more significant and well-retained gains (e.g., Guo, 2010; Rosszell, 2007).

Providing time for extensive reading is essential for it is one of the most useful vocabulary learning strategies available. For the purpose of maximising vocabulary development, however, reliance on large amounts of reading alone is apparently inadequate and there seems to be a need to accompany it with direct vocabulary study, which has proven to be a useful adjunct to contextualised vocabulary learning.

1.4 Statement of the Research Problem

It is disturbing that after years of compulsory English classes, Malaysian tertiary students are still confronted with a lack of receptive and productive English vocabulary knowledge, a predicament that in turn translates to poor proficiency in the language. The dominant role of English in today's world has resulted in the

prioritisation of English proficiency, by which an individual's inclusion or exclusion – particularly with regards to the domains of education and the economy – is influenced. This leaves Malaysian students with no choice but to become adept users of the language.

According to Mohini, Aziz and Rosnani (2008), Malaysian students in public universities and other institutions of higher learning in the country possess disturbingly low levels of proficiency in English; a case in point is the MUET (Malaysian University English Test) scores of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's 2007/2008 intake whereby from a population of 2,916 new students, 72.7% scored within the lowest bands of 1, 2 and 3 (1.7%, 18.7% and 52.3% respectively) (see also Shahrier, Anton and Mohd Faiz (2011) who underlined that MUET Band 1, 2 and 3 students require remedial help).

A lack of vocabulary knowledge has consistently been shown to be a major contributor to learners' incapacity to cope with the four language skills, which ultimately hinders them from achieving mastery of the target language. Torres and Ramos (2003) and Nation (2001) are among numerous researchers who posit that with adequate vocabulary knowledge, learners are better able to cope with English. By the same token, Yuksel and Kavanoz (2010), Schmitt (2008), Hunt and Beglar (2005) as well as Laufer and Nation (1999) have observed vocabulary knowledge to be central to language proficiency.

According to Naginder, Nor Hayati and Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan (2008), various studies conducted at secondary schools as well as at the tertiary level have demonstrated lexical paralysis to be a major contributor to learners' inability to read, write, listen and speak competently in English. They also pointed out that a lack of vocabulary knowledge is ultimately a major hindrance in terms of our graduates' employability.

A study by Ahmad Azman et al. (2010) involving Malaysian tertiary students enrolled in various academic programmes revealed that a majority of them performed poorly in the Passive Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 1990) as well as the Controlled Active Vocabulary Test (Laufer & Nation, 1995). The researchers expressed their concern and observed that despite more than a decade of formal exposure to English, Malaysian tertiary students still clearly lack sufficient vocabulary knowledge and are therefore likely to experience difficulties in terms of reading, writing and communicating in English.

In a similar research aimed at estimating the English vocabulary knowledge of Malaysian tertiary students, Sankaran, Mathai and Jamian (2004) found that on average their subjects, comprising Arts and Science students, fared poorly. The subjects were tested using Nation's (1990) Passive Vocabulary Levels Test and the Oral Vocabulary Test. In agreement with Nation (2001), the researchers stressed that focusing on vocabulary development is unavoidable because there exists a strong reciprocal relationship between word knowledge and overall language proficiency

(see also Norzanita, 2009; Rosemala, 2008; Tengku Intan Suzila, Mohd Yusri, & Harlina, 2008; Zaira Abu Hasan, 2008; Ahmad Mazli Muhammad, 2007; Nambiar, 2007, for research relating to limited English vocabulary knowledge among Malaysian tertiary students).

The employability of Malaysian graduates has received considerable attention and a lack of proficiency in English has been identified as one of the main causes of unemployment among them; a range of studies over the years have been carried out to gauge whether Malaysian graduates are meeting industry standards and the recurring theme is that our graduates lack proficiency in the English language (Morshidi et al., 2012; Lim, 2011; Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005; Sibat, 2005; Lee, 2003a).

Pertaining to the correlation between English proficiency and graduate employment opportunities, Noor Azina (2011) found that employed graduates generally possess better English proficiency than unemployed ones. Meanwhile, Sasikala (2010) observed that graduates who are poor in English are likely to suffer unemployment as the corporate sector prioritises those who are competent in the language whereas reliance on the civil service to absorb graduates into its workforce is an impractical solution. Moreover, studies on workplace communication have reported that most organisations in Malaysia insist on satisfactory competence in English and have listed this criterion as one of their core hiring conditions (Lee, 2003a; Shameem & Mohd Salleh, 2003; Megat Johari et al., 2002).

It is also important to note that limited proficiency in English can severely affect access to knowledge and information as a considerable amount of printed and digital resources are presented in English (Harison, 2011; Gill, 2005; Mohammed, 2004; Ridge, 2004; Awang Had Salleh, 2003; Schewe, 2001). Gill (2005) stressed that the amount of knowledge and information available in English increases with such alarming speed that the inability to access it would certainly disadvantage and marginalise people.

The issue of poor English proficiency among Malaysian tertiary students has resulted in serious concerns, with the Malaysian government announcing its intention to initiate intensive English programmes for undergraduates grouped under the lowest proficiency MUET bands of 1 to 3, as well as for those with a Cumulative Grade Point Average of below 3.0 (Sasikala, 2010). In addition, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007), formulated to augment the government's efforts in achieving Vision 2020, emphasises human capital development and among its core thrusts is the improvement of students' proficiency in the English language.

As advanced earlier, it is apparent that Malaysian tertiary students are confronted with a lack of English language receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, a predicament that translates to poor English proficiency as word knowledge has been repeatedly shown to be a major contributor to overall language proficiency. It has also become all too obvious that individuals with a lack of

proficiency in English can be seriously marginalised and suffer both short- as well as long-term consequences.

Given that, there exists an urgent need for effective vocabulary knowledge development strategies that can benefit our tertiary students. It is unfortunate that despite the benefits that extensive reading in English can offer, in terms of improving word knowledge and overall language proficiency, it appears to be unpopular in Malaysian tertiary education (Normazidah, Koo, & Hazita, 2012; Gopala et al., 2009; Naginder, Nor Hayati, & Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan, 2008). The present research emphasises the use of extensive reading as the basis for effective vocabulary learning. The effectiveness of GER Plus, a method involving a division of labour between incidental and intentional learning (extensive reading and direct vocabulary study) is compared against that of GER, a method which relies exclusively on incidental learning via extensive reading. To the researcher's knowledge, particularly within the Malaysian context, there is no published research so far implementing the ER and vocabulary development method/design employed in the present research. Furthermore, apart from emphasising both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, the present research also focuses on short-term retention (recall) and retention over time. The scope of a substantial number of existing studies is limited to the receptive and with regards to retention, to the recall stage.

1.5 Research Objectives

Given the issue of Malaysian tertiary students lacking English language receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, the present research involved the implementation of vocabulary learning strategies based on extensive reading. Guided Extensive Reading Plus (GER Plus) incorporates both incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, whereby contextual learning via extensive reading is combined with direct vocabulary study. On the other hand, Guided Extensive Reading (GER) involves only incidental vocabulary learning – i.e., contextual learning via extensive reading alone. The present research places emphasis on receptive as well as productive vocabulary knowledge, and focuses on knowledge retained at the recall stage (short-term retention) and knowledge retained over time.

The research was conducted using Malaysian tertiary students. Specifically, remedial English language learners composed of those grouped under the lower proficiency MUET bands of 1 to 3 and undergoing a preparatory English proficiency course at a Malaysian public university. Three groups of participants were involved – the GER Plus group, the GER group, and the Control group. The objectives of the present research are as detailed below:

- 1) To assess the effectiveness of the GER Plus method against that of the GER method with regards to vocabulary knowledge development;

- 2) To measure the receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge recall (short-term retention) differences between the GER Plus group, the GER group, and the Control group;
- 3) To determine the receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge retention (retention over time) differences between the above-mentioned groups.

1.6 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge

Recall

RQ1 Is there a difference in the receptive vocabulary knowledge recall between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group?

H₁ There is a significant difference in the receptive vocabulary knowledge recall between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group.

Retention

RQ2 Is there a difference in the receptive vocabulary knowledge retention between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group?

H₂ There is a significant difference in the receptive vocabulary knowledge retention between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group.

Productive Vocabulary Knowledge

Recall

RQ3 Is there a difference in the productive vocabulary knowledge recall between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group?

H₃ There is a significant difference in the productive vocabulary knowledge recall between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group.

Retention

RQ4 Is there a difference in the productive vocabulary knowledge retention between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group?

H₄ There is a significant difference in the productive vocabulary knowledge retention between the GER Plus group, the GER group and the Control group.

1.7 Research Significance

This research is primarily meant to benefit Malaysian tertiary students who are confronted with a lack of English language receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, a condition that has been evidenced to translate to poor English proficiency. The contributions of this research are also of relevance to comparably equivalent individuals faced with similar linguistic difficulties.

Although extensive reading is recognised as a useful means of improving both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, the claim that ER alone is sufficient for vocabulary development has been challenged. Thus, investigating the effectiveness of GER Plus, a method adapted from conventional extensive reading and comprising incidental as well as intentional vocabulary learning, is a worthwhile endeavour. Additionally, a research which explores extensive reading, direct vocabulary study and vocabulary development is a valuable undertaking as it helps to afford insights into the cognitive processes involved.

Thirdly, this research is vital to language instructors and course planners as its findings provide a more comprehensive insight of the potentials as well as the prerequisites of a reading and vocabulary development method that go beyond conventional extensive reading. This is helpful in terms of designing lesson plans and course structures, particularly at the remedial level.

The present research is also significant to the shared aim between the Malaysian government and the tertiary institutions in Malaysia to improve the English language proficiency, of which vocabulary knowledge is an important determinant, of Malaysian tertiary students. As mentioned, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007), formulated to augment the government's efforts in achieving Vision 2020, emphasises human capital development as well as the improvement of our students' proficiency in English.

This research also fills the gap which currently exists in ESL/EFL research, especially within the Malaysian context. Although studies on extensive reading and vocabulary development are available, more studies on reading interventions that also incorporate the element of intentional vocabulary learning are pertinent. To the researcher's knowledge, none of the available studies published so far have implemented the ER and vocabulary development method/design employed in this research. In addition, more comprehensive studies at the tertiary level are necessary; apart from its emphasis on both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, the present research also focuses on short-term retention as well as retention over time. On the whole, the present research is of significance to the domain of second/foreign language acquisition, specifically in the development of vocabulary knowledge among learners, allowing us to extend our existing knowledge base in the field.

1.8 Limitations and Delimitations

1.8.1 Limitations

To promote equivalence, it is recommended in educational research for researchers to have the same instructor teach all the research groups involved (Ary et al., 2009). This, however, is often beyond the researcher's control and is governed by matters such as scheduling and administrative decision (Ary et al., *ibid.*; Bradley, 2009). For the present research, two English language teachers were involved and as

such would likely have contributed to disparities pertaining to the participants' classroom experience during the course of the study. This limitation is to a reasonable extent controlled for in that the teachers were comparable with regards to their teaching experience as well as their management of the respective group(s) under their charge (e.g., use of the same course outline and module, and covering the same themes/topics in class).

The present study also employed the use of intact groups and as such does not equal the strength of true experimental research. Due to the nature of the study, however, a quasi-experimental approach was considered more suitable as it allows for the approximation of a study's settings to the actual conditions being examined (Brewer, 2000). Additionally, it is to be noted that although purposive sampling, the procedure employed for this study, affords a researcher the justification to make generalisations (Black, 1991), representativeness can be transferred exclusively to specific cohorts (Babbie, 2008).

Furthermore, the interval between post-testing and delayed post-testing was relatively short at two weeks, due to constraints posed by the number of available weeks per academic semester and that course groups do not respectively advance to the next semester as a cohort.