Abstract—This study investigated the impact of inflectional and derivational morphemic analysis awareness on ESL secondary school students’ vocabulary learning strategy. The quasi-experimental study was conducted with 106 low proficiency secondary school students in two experimental groups (inflectional and derivational) and one control group. The students’ vocabulary acquisition was assessed through two measures: Morphemic Analysis Test and Vocabulary-Morphemic Test in the pretest and posttest before and after an intervention programme. Results of ANCOVA revealed that both the experimental groups achieved a significant score in Morphemic Analysis Test and Vocabulary-Morphemic Test. However, the inflectional group obtained a fairly higher score than the derivational group. Thus, the results indicated that ESL low proficiency secondary school students performed better on inflectional morphemic awareness as compared to derivatives. The results also showed that the awareness of inflectional morphology contributed more on the vocabulary acquisition. Importantly, learning inflectional morphology can help ESL low proficiency secondary school students to develop both morphemic awareness and vocabulary gain. Theoretically, these findings show that not all morphemes are equally useful to students for their language development. Practically, these findings indicate that morphological instruction should at least be included in remediation and instructional efforts with struggling learners across all grade levels, allowing them to focus on meaning within the word before they attempt the text in large for better comprehension. Also, by methodologically, by conducting individualized intervention and assessment this study provided fresh empirical evidence to support the existing literature on morphemic analysis awareness and vocabulary learning strategy. Thus, a major pedagogical implication of the study is that morphemic analysis awareness strategy is a definite boon for ESL secondary school students in learning English vocabulary.

Keywords—ESL, instruction, morphemic analysis, vocabulary.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to ignore the importance of vocabulary in learning or acquiring any language. Vocabulary knowledge is essential in reading, comprehension and communication. According to [1], both comprehension and fluency are affected if learners have inadequate vocabulary. Thus, it is imperative for educators to expose learners to vocabulary learning strategies that will serve them throughout their lifetime. This is because knowing, understanding, and using words are essential for language development [2].

Recent developments in language learning have heightened the need for vocabulary acquisition [3]. They assert that vocabulary is important because the delay in its acquisition often imposes a handicap on learners’ language growth and also communication [4]. According to [5], sounds, grammar, and vocabulary are three principle components of language and among these components vocabulary plays an essential role in language learning because words are the building blocks of language. According to [6], both comprehension and fluency are affected when learners have inadequate vocabulary. Hence, vocabulary plays an utmost essential role in second language learning (ESL) context. As [7] claims, “without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”.

With respect to the great influence of vocabulary in language learning, many studies have explored the use of vocabulary learning strategies to foster the knowledge of words. Among these, the use of morphemic cues or morphemic analysis is recommended as a strategy to decode words meaning [5]. According to [8], morphemic analysis, which means analyzing word parts, is deemed as a very practical strategy used to unlock the meanings of many polymorphemic words, i.e. complex words that are composed of two or more morphemes. Around 88,700 word families of English language are found in high school books and many of these are formed derivatively (e.g., adapt-adaptation, adaptive, adaptable) [8]. This finding is further supported by [9] who claimed that morphemic awareness is essential to learners because secondary school texts contain many complex words; and if the learners could unlock the meaning of these complex words effectively they can be successful language users.

The purpose of this study is to find whether morphemic awareness is a boon or bane for ESL low proficiency learners to acquire vocabulary effectively. It is significantly important for ESL context because there is no one distinctive approach proven to be the most effective way to teach vocabulary throughout the history of language learning. Also learners with weak vocabulary are in dire need of a more direct instruction for vocabulary acquisition. According to [10], research into ESL instruction shows that there is any universally or best way to teach vocabulary; although, certain approaches are likely to prove more effective in certain situations, blanket prescription is tricky to support theoretically. Having said that, this study is designed to examine the effects of morphemic analysis strategy as a means for acquiring vocabulary among upper secondary school students, in Malaysian ESL context. The study aims to introduce a practical way of learning morphologically complex words effectively. In doing so, this