

IMPROVING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY THROUGH THE USE OF VOCABULARY GAMES FOR THE SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study was aimed at improving vocabulary mastery through the use of vocabulary games. The data were obtained from classroom observations during the teaching and learning process, interviews with the students and collaborator, and photographs. The data were in the forms of vignettes, interview transcripts, and photographs. Pre-test and post-tests were held as supporting data in order to strengthen the validity of this study. The results of this study showed that there were improvements in students' vocabulary mastery. It could be seen from the results of students' progression during the lesson. The students' motivation and involvement during the implementation of the actions increased. In addition, the implementation of the games and the complementary actions were successful to help the students in learning and understanding new words. In conclusion, the implementation of vocabulary games had improved the students' vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: vocabulary, vocabulary mastery, vocabulary games

Abstrak: Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata melalui penggunaan permainan kosakata. Data yang terkumpul didapatkan dari observasi kelas selama kegiatan belajar dan mengajar, wawancara dengan siswa dan kolaborator, dan dokumentasi. Data terdiri atas catatan lapangan, transkrip wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Data tambahan didapatkan dari *pre-test* dan *post-test*, guna menguatkan validitas penelitian. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat peningkatan dalam penguasaan kosakata siswa. Hal ini dapat dilihat dari kemajuan siswa selama kegiatan belajar dan mengajar. Motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa dalam proses belajar semakin meningkat. Penerapan permainan kosakata dan tindakan pendukung lainnya berhasil dalam membantu siswa dalam belajar dan memahami kosakata baru. Secara keseluruhan, penerapan permainan kosakata telah berhasil dalam meningkatkan kemampuan penguasaan kosakata siswa.

Kata kunci: kosakata, penguasaan kosakata, permainan kosakata

INTRODUCTION

English as an International language has grown much wider these days than in the past. As noted by Graddol (2006) that the increasing growth of English as an International language causes various needs from learners to speak and interact in various context using language, either for travelling abroad, business matters, or other professional reasons (as cited in McDonough, 2013). Consequently, language learners need more efforts in learning language in order to use language meaningfully and communicatively. Richards and Renandya (2002) claim that the fundamental of language competence is vocabulary. Although language learners study pronunciation and grammar of a language well, they still can not communicate meaningfully if they haven't mastered a wide range of vocabulary. It means that vocabulary become the basis of how well learners listen, speak, read, and write. However, sometimes teachers usually do not realize the essential needs of learning vocabulary for their students. In fact, the wide range of vocabulary

mastery could give massive impact to the communicative skills of the students. This is in accordance with a statement proposed by Wilkins, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed" (as cited in Thornbury, 2002: 13). This definition indicates that vocabulary is a fundamental thing needed to be mastered by students in learning a language. Without mastering enough vocabulary, students will have difficulties for example in communication.

Despite the importance of vocabulary, students still have problems with vocabulary. The most common problems faced by students is caused by low vocabulary mastery. According to National Reading Panel (2000), as cited in Willis (2008:80), "the larger the students' vocabulary, the more adept they are at understanding text". This definition indicates that vocabulary mastery is very related to reading competency. The difficulty in understanding a text caused by low vocabulary mastery was found in seventh grade class of one of the middle schools in

Magelang regency. The problem was found in preliminary observations at one of the middle schools in Magelang regency during the implementation of teaching practicum (*Praktik Lapangan Terbimbing/PLT*) from September 15-November 15. The VII B students were still lack of vocabulary mastery. It can be seen from their understanding of a text. The students did not even understand the following instruction in the text. The students were very dependent on their teachers since they were asking about the meaning of the instruction, the meaning of unfamiliar words in the text, and the translation or the English words in answering the question from the text or the teacher all the time. Whereas, based on the interview with the teacher, the lack of vocabulary mastery was caused by low motivation from the students. Therefore, the teacher mainly emphasized the learning process by drilling the students with a lot of vocabulary regarding to the material learned that time. However, in fact, the implementation of massive drilling method will only make the students get more bored. The teacher

also did not provide an interesting teaching media or activity. The material used was mainly taken from textbook, therefore it was monotonous.

There have been many efforts to overcome the problems related to vocabulary mastery. One of the common efforts is by using games. Therefore, this study aims to use vocabulary games to improve students' vocabulary mastery.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study belongs to action research. It focuses on solving the problems of students' lack of vocabulary. This research was implemented in the form of collaborative action research. The four phases model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in Burns (2010) was adopted in this study. They were planning, action, observation, and reflection. In planning, the researcher identified a problem and developed a plan or action in order to improve the particular area of the research scope. The researcher also identified the realities and constrains in the teaching condition and decided the possible improvement. In action's

phase, the plan was applied into the researcher's teaching situation, while in observation's phase, the researcher observed the effects of the action and wrote all the actions and opinions involved and observed the applied actions or known as data collection phase. The last, in reflection's phase, the researcher had to evaluate and describe the effects of the actions. The researcher might continue further cycles of AR, improved the condition more, or wrote the result of the research. The participants were seventh grade students and a collaborator. The class consisted of 16 male students and 16 female students. The collaborator was the student from English Language Department study program who held a research in the same school. The instruments were interviews guidelines, a pre-test, and two post-tests. The quantitative data were in the form of students' vocabulary score which gained from pre-test and post-test. The qualitative data were vignettes and interview transcripts. Vignettes were taken from the observations during the implementation of the action. This vignettes explained the teacher and

students activities both verbally and nonverbally. The interview transcripts were gained from the interviews which were held before, during, and after the action was implemented, while the quantitative data, vocabulary tests, were given before the action and at the end of each cycle. The results of the vocabulary tests were then calculated. The data analysis technique used to analyze the qualitative data is qualitative analysis techniques developed by Miles and Huberman as cited by Madya (2011). The qualitative analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman consists of three interrelated components; data reduction, data display, and conclusion (Madya, 2011: 76). In order to strengthen the data, several triangulations were applied in this research. Based on the four type of triangulation stated by Denzin (1978, as cited in Burns, 1999: 164) which are time triangulation, space triangulation, investigator triangulation, and theoretical triangulation, there were only three of them applied in this study. They were time triangulation, researcher triangulation, and theory

triangulation. The five validity criteria proposed by Anderson et. al (1994: 30-3) as cited in Burns (1999: 161) also applied in this study. They are democratic validity, process validity, outcome validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims at finding out on how vocabulary games could improve students' vocabulary mastery seen from qualitative and quantitative perspective. From the qualitative perspective, the data of the students' progression had been elaborated in the reports, reflection, and summary in each cycle. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were obtained from pre-test and post-tests.

The actions implemented in this study were successfully improved the students' vocabulary mastery. First, applying vocabulary games proved that it could increase the students' motivation. Before the actions were implemented, the students had low motivation in learning new English words since the teacher could not motivate the

students and the learning activities given were less varied. After implementing the vocabulary games in the lessons, the classroom observations showed that the students were very enthusiastic when it came to playing the games. The interviews with some students also showed that games were the most-liked activity in the learning process.

Before the actions were implemented, the students were very dependant on the teacher (the students' autonomy were still low). In the games time in cycle 1, some students were not involved in group work. They just relied on their friends' work. Therefore, the researcher revised the plan and planned to have prizes as rewards for the winners of the games in cycle 2 and it increased the students' participation. Moreover, the students kept begging to continue the game when the researcher just came to the class.

The implementation of matching games in cycle 1 was seen took too much time. Therefore, the plan was revised and changed to apply guessing game in the lesson. Before

the actions were implemented, the students were afraid of making mistakes. However, having the guessing game proved that it could train the students to not be afraid of making mistakes.

Second, communicating the objective of the lessons in the beginning of the lesson had the students to understand and focus on what they would learn since it gave clear directions of learning activity of the day. In several meetings in cycle 1, the students still remembered about the previous topic or material when they were asked by the researcher in the beginning of the lesson. Based on the interviews with some students, the explanations of the materials were too fast and some asked the researcher to re-explain the material, therefore the researcher planned to apply better explanations and time management in cycle 2.

Third, giving handouts for each topic proved that it could facilitate the students to learn deeper than in the textbook, since the materials in the textbook were limited. Before the actions were implemented, the materials used were mainly taken from the textbook. Therefore,

handouts would give variations in their learning. The handouts designed by the researcher were also focused on providing various vocabularies so that they could explore and look for the meaning of the words after the lesson had finished.

Fourth, practicing pronunciation and giving feedback on it contributed to increasing their confidence in reading certain texts in English. Before the actions were implemented, the students' pronunciations were still poor. The researcher drilled the pronunciation of the students in each meeting and gave feedback such as correcting and praising them.

Fifth, asking the students to work in large and small groups proved that it trained the students to be more independent. As it was explained earlier, the students' autonomy was still low. Therefore, having them in groups allowed them to be more active and not relying on the teacher. In the game time in cycle 1, some students did not participate in group work. However, when the students were playing the guessing game in cycle 2, most of the students took part more

active in the group work compared to the matching games in cycle 1.

The last, asking students to bring dictionary also contributed in the students' autonomy. Before the actions were implemented, most of the students did not want to bring or borrow the dictionary. Therefore, the researcher planned to apply a rule in which having the students to bring the dictionary on each meeting. Having dictionary with them allowed them to be more independent. Bringing dictionary was also effective for the learning process, since they did not have to borrow their friend's dictionary.

From all the explanation above, it could be concluded that the implementation of vocabulary games accompanied by several complementary actions above were effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery. In addition, from the quantitative perspective, the pre-test and post-tests which were used as supporting data indicated that there were improvement in students' scores. The result is statistically significant for the p value is lower than the significance level; $0,002 < 0,005$. Therefore, it could be

concluded that the implementation of vocabulary games influence the students' vocabulary mastery.

CONCLUSION

There were several changes in the students after the actions were implemented. Before the actions were implemented, the class observations showed that the students' autonomy was still poor. They mostly relied on the teacher, mainly when they found unfamiliar words. The students often asked the words to their teacher, rather than checking in their dictionary. One of the causes was because they were not motivated to learn English. Therefore, it could be concluded that the problems were not only the students' autonomy and lack of vocabulary mastery, but also lack of motivation to learn English. In addition, based on the interviews with the students, their main problems in learning English was vocabulary mastery. Most of the interviewee confirmed that the biggest problems was not knowing much vocabulary.

After implementing the actions stated above, the results show that

the students became more motivated in learning English and they were excited following the lesson, since there were many games in the lessons. Implementing various class activities by grouping the students also made the students become more active and confident. Some of the students also became more confident in asking questions or reading texts. Most of the students expressed a great enthusiasm in the class during the actions of this research. Based on the interaction in the class, supported by their scores of assignments and tests, the students' vocabulary had increased.

According to their assessments, the students made better improvement in post test compared to their pre test. An examination using a paired-samples t-test was conducted. The result is statistically significant for the p value is lower than the significance level; $0,002 < 0,005$. Therefore, it could be concluded that there is an improvement in the students' vocabulary mastery taught by using vocabulary games.

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