

Developing Vocabulary Learning Materials Using the Theme- Based Approach for the Third Grade Students of the Elementary School

Faradina Kusuma Dewi
Nury Supriyanti
faradinakusumadewi@gmail.com

Abstract: The objectives of this research are: (1) to find out the target needs of the third grade students in learning vocabulary; (2) to find out the learning needs of the third grade students in learning vocabulary; and (3) to develop the appropriate theme-based vocabulary learning materials for the third grade elementary school students. The materials developed were designed based on the children’s needs. The materials developed provide the integrated skills presented into two cycles, spoken cycle and written cycle. This research is categorized as Research and Development (R&D). The subjects of this research are the third grade students of SD N 2 Adisucipto. This research adapted the steps of materials writing proposed by Jolly and Bolitho (1998). They are conducting needs analysis, developing the course grid, developing the first draft of the materials, getting the materials evaluation by the expert, and revising the materials and developing the final product. The data was collected by distributing the questionnaire to the third grade students and conducting interviews with the English teacher and students. Two types of questionnaire were used to collect the data. The first questionnaire was made to obtain the data for the needs analysis and the second questionnaire was used to obtain the data for the materials evaluation through the expert judgement and the evaluation of the guide book appropriateness from the respondents. The data from the questionnaires defining as quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the data from the interviews were analyzed using qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The final products of this research are a book of theme-based vocabulary learning materials for the third grade students and a guide book for teachers. There are three units provided reflecting the different themes related to the students’ daily life. Considering the students’ learning needs, the input provided is in the form of pictures, conversation, texts, and songs (provided in *Let’s Sing a Song* part). Based on the analysis of the data from the expert judgement, the mean score of all aspects of the appropriateness is 3.77. This value is in the range of $3.25 < X < 4.00$ which is categorized as “Very Good”. Furthermore, it is concluded that the developed theme-based vocabulary learning materials are appropriate for the third grade elementary school students.

Keywords: *vocabulary learning materials, theme-based approach, elementary*

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Introduction

In Indonesia’s newest curriculum, Curriculum 2013, English in elementary school as one of the main subjects is eliminated. In the formal education, learners start learning English in junior high schools. However, there are some elementary schools in some regions that still teach English. Because some schools still maintain English and some do not, students’ ability in English language when starting to study in junior high schools do not spread evenly.

The awareness of teaching English for young learners has grown over periods of time. Arnold and Rixon view that the results of starting to learn English only at the secondary level have not been satisfactory. It is explained that there are more advantages if English is taught since in primary schools. The first is related to time. The time for learners to learn English can be extended. The second is related to the view that younger children are seen as particularly effective language learners. Later, it leads to the term “Younger is Better” (Tomlinson, 2014: 39).

Another support comes from parents’ views which also agree to the statement “Younger is Better” when it is related to the language learning. Parents believe that mastering many different languages from the early age is important for children’s future. Arnold and Rixon state that English became the favored language for primary school learning because it was perceived as the passport to global communication and to increased personal and national prosperity (Tomlinson, 2014: 39). Because of the government’s policy which eliminates English for the elementary schools in the newest curriculum, some parents look for other chances to make their children interested in learning English. Then, they either teach English to their children at home or let the children join an English course.

Besides teaching four macro skills of English, it is also important to pay attention to the vocabulary mastery. Cameron (2001: 7) states that words have a special significance for children’s new language learning. The statement supports the implication of Vygotsky’s theory in children’s development in language learning. Moreover, it is also explained that building up a useful vocabulary is central to the learning of a foreign language at the primary level (Cameron, 2001: 72). In the beginning of learning a language, young learners need to be given the introduction of vocabulary in every topic. To introduce vocabulary to young learners is not as simple as giving them a list of vocabulary then asking them to memorize every single word. It is related to the characteristics of young learners which are absolutely different from adults. Thus, teachers should introduce the vocabulary through fun and creative ways.

Teaching English to young learners is different from teaching English to adults (Cameron, 2001: 1). It is because young learners have their own characteristics which need special treatment. They still have unpredictable mood. For young learners, teachers have to make the language learning process as fun as possible to make children enjoy their learning. According to Cameron (2001: 1), lessons and activities become successful when those are fulfilling learners’ learning needs. Thus, children will perform better in their English learning process.

Nowadays, teachers need to be more creative when designing the teaching and learning process for young learners. Having young learners to sit conventionally in a class and listen to the teachers’ explanation are not the appropriate methods. It is good to have young learners listen to the teachers’ explanation, but it is not the only way to make them learn the language. Teachers can use more resources to complete the materials from the course book. To make young learners interest more, teachers can provide videos or songs related to the materials. There are many resources in the internet which can easily be downloaded by teachers. In addition, teachers also can use media such as puppets or pictures like flashcards to make the explanation clear. It is also possible to conduct games in a class to avoid monotonous classroom activities. The activities with supportive media can be implemented to make young learners acquire more vocabulary. Moreover, teachers need to pay attention to the classroom management. Teachers need to make sure that every learner contributes in the activity.

To introduce the vocabulary to young learners, teachers can provide videos and songs, or using pictures and flashcards. According to Harmer (2007: 229-247), there are several activities in teaching vocabulary, such as mind mapping, matching game, crossword puzzle, and using dictionaries. According to Cameron, introducing words in the new language can be done by “showing them objects that they can see and touch and that have single word labels in the first language” (2001: 7). Those ways can be applied in classroom activities using the theme-based approach. Using the theme-based approach can make it easier for children to learn vocabulary. It is because the choice of words being taught is based on a particular theme. Teachers can choose the themes which are related to the learners’ real life. Then, teachers can apply those themes into a range of teaching and learning activities.

Considering the things mentioned above, the researcher conducted a study on developing the vocabulary learning materials using the theme-based approach for the third grade students of the elementary school. The formulation of the problems of this research are 1) what are the target needs of the third grade learners in learning vocabulary? 2) what are the learning needs of the third grade learners in learning vocabulary?, and 3) what are the appropriate theme-based vocabulary learning materials to be developed in teaching vocabulary to the third grade elementary school students?

Research Method

This research is categorized as an Educational Research and Development (R&D). It was conducted on November 2016 at SD N 2 Adisucipto. The subjects of this research were 23 students (8-10 years old) of grade III.

The procedure of the research was adapted from a model of a materials writing proposed by Jolly and Bolitho (in Tomlinson, 1998: 98). Those procedures are (1) conducting the needs analysis, (2) developing the course grid, (3) developing the first draft of the materials, (4) getting the materials evaluation by the expert, and (5) revising the materials and developing the final product.

The data of this research were collected through distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews. There were two types of questionnaires used in this research. The first questionnaire was made to obtain the data for the needs analysis and the second questionnaire was used to obtain the data for the materials evaluation through the expert judgement and the evaluation on the appropriateness the guide book from the respondents. The data from the first questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The percentage of each answer in the questionnaire was calculated to define the students’ preferences. The data from the second questionnaire were analyzed based on Likert Scale containing four-point scales. Then, the data were calculated by using a formula proposed by Suharto (2005). Meanwhile, the data from the interviews were analyzed using qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Findings and Discussion

The needs analysis was divided into three parts. The first part was distributing a questionnaire that consisted of 25 close-ended questions to the students to get the information about the students and their background knowledge, attitudes towards English, learning styles, needs, and expectations from learning English. The second part was interviewing four students with sixteen questions. The last part was interviewing the English teacher of grade III with

eleven questions to find out things that probably could not be identified from the results of the questionnaire.

There were several learners' target needs found. Related to the goals, the children learnt English because they liked it and wanted to be able to use it for communication. They also stated that they learn English to be able to listen to what people say. In term of necessities, the children stated that they needed to know English vocabulary and its meaning in order to learn English easier. Moreover, they also needed to know English sentence structures and their use. They preferred to learn vocabulary by using anything around them and using pictures or by doing games to make it more interesting. Related to the lacks, the children stated that they had difficulties in reading English written texts. They did not know much about vocabulary and its meaning. For wants, the children wanted to learn vocabulary in English using pictures completed with the vocabulary. Furthermore, they needed vocabulary learning materials containing pictures to improve their vocabulary mastery.

There were several learners' learning needs based on the needs analysis data. For the input, the children preferred to read English stories containing more pictures. In addition, they wanted to learn several themes, namely animals, fruits and vegetables, and hobbies. Related to the procedure, the results showed that the children liked to listen and check for listening activities and mentioning English words for speaking activities. For reading activities, they preferred to read and sort pictures while for writing activities, they liked to write the vocabulary based on the pictures. For the main vocabulary activity, they liked to match pictures with the names.

In the term of setting, the children liked to do activities in groups and did not have any problems with mixed-group activities. Meanwhile, related to the teachers' role, the children preferred a teacher who explained and encouraged them to experiment with different ways of creating and using language. Lastly, related to the learners' role, the children tended to be active learners and needed their teacher to motivate them if they made mistakes in the learning process.

After analyzing the students' needs, the researcher developed the course grid as the reference to develop the materials. The course grid was developed based on the results of needs analysis and using theme-based approach. There were eight main components of the course grid. They are unit number, themes, title of the unit, basic competences, indicators, learning materials, procedure, and resources.

The next step was developing the first draft of the materials. There were three units developed in the first draft of the materials. Each unit of the materials followed a certain unit pattern. They are Unit Cover, Let's Get Ready, Let's Listen and Speak Up, Grammar Corner, Let's Read and Write, Let's Play a Game, Let's Sing a Song, Let's Sum Up, and Ask Yourself.

After developing the materials, the researcher asked an expert to conduct the materials evaluation or the expert judgment process. A questionnaire was given to the expert in order to evaluate the materials. There were six aspects assessed in the questionnaire. They are the appropriateness of the materials, appropriateness of the teaching and learning activities, appropriateness of the language content, appropriateness of the learning input, appropriateness of the book design, and appropriateness of the teachers' guide book. Based on the expert judgment result, the mean value of the materials is 3.77, which is categorized as "Very Good". In addition, another questionnaire was distributed to ten teachers of English for children in order to find the teachers' opinion on the teachers' guide book. There were three aspects of the teachers' guide book evaluated. They are the

appropriateness of the language, content, and layout. It is concluded that the mean value of the teachers' guide book is 3.76, which is categorized as "Very Good".

Conclusions

Based on the results of the needs analysis, the target needs of grade III students of the elementary school are: (1) the students of Grade III of the elementary school learn English to be able to listen to what people say; and (2) the students need to learn vocabulary and English sentence structure using pictures and games.

Based on the results of materials evaluation, the developed materials were considered to be appropriate. The expert categorized the developed materials as "Very Good" with the mean score 3.77. In addition, the

English teachers categorized the teachers' guide book as "Very Good" with the mean score 3.76. The developed materials were considered to be appropriate since they have fulfilled some criteria explained in the following part.

The developed materials were written based on needs analysis results, in terms of target needs, learning needs, and the course grid. The developed materials emphasized on developing children's vocabulary mastery. In addition, the developed materials provided activities related to vocabulary learning. The activities provided aimed to develop, practice, improve, and recall children's vocabulary mastery. There were 3 units provided in the developed materials. Unit 1 entitled *Do You See a Giraffe?* reflected the animals theme. Unit 2 entitled *I Like Apples and Carrots* reflected the fruits and vegetables theme. Unit 3 entitled *What Are You Doing?* Reflected my hobbies theme. Each unit was developed based on needs analysis results and the course grid. Each unit also contained two cycles: spoken cycle and written cycle.

The developed materials also provided various learning activities, such as saying the names of things, matching pictures and words, doing crossword puzzle, doing word search, and interviewing friends. The activities could be done individually. However, there were activities which should be done in pairs or even groups. The developed materials had a colorful design with pictures and illustrations provided to make it easier for the children to learn vocabulary. There was also a guide book for teachers containing the explanations of each unit's steps which should be followed by the teachers in using the vocabulary learning book. The answer key and mini flashcards were also provided in the guide book.

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