

IMPROVING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY USING FLASHCARDS

Yosephus Setyo Nugroho*, Joko Nurkamto, Hefy Sulistyowati
English Department Teacher Training and Education Faculty
Sebelas Maret University

E-mail : yosephussetyonugroho@yahoo.com

Abstract

Vocabulary is one of the important elements in teaching English. Based on pre-research, the fourth grade students of SD Negeri II Watuagung in the academic year of 2011/2012 had problems in mastering vocabulary. It could be seen from two indicators: first, their vocabulary score was low. Second, the students did not have motivation during teaching-learning process. To overcome the problems, classroom action research is used. It implemented flashcards as the media. The aim of this research is to improve students' vocabulary mastery and students' motivation using flashcards. There are two cycles of action. In each cycle, the procedure of the research consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In collecting the data, the researcher used qualitative and quantitative methods. The technique of qualitative data was interview, observation, document analysis, and test. For the quantitative data, the data are analyzed by finding and comparing the mean scores in pre-test and post-test (descriptive statistics). Based on interview, observation, analyzing the document, and test result, the students made improvement in vocabulary mastery. The students can learn vocabulary more easy than before. When flashcards are used, in the first and the second cycle, students are active and enthusiastic in joining learning activity. The tests score results shows an improvement of the students' achievement. The students' mean score in the pre-test is 45.70, in post-test 1 is 70.52, and in post-test 2 is 80.13. It can be concluded that teaching English vocabulary by using flashcards as media does improve the students' vocabulary mastery. The result of the research implies that English teachers need to choose the appropriate media in teaching vocabulary; one of them is flashcards.

Key word: vocabulary, flashcards, classroom action research.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the important elements in teaching English. This statement is supported by Hatch and Brown (1995: 1). They say, "Vocabulary is

the foundation to build languages, which plays a fundamental role in communication". It describes that by mastering vocabulary; people can express their ideas and understand the other basic competence well. Students of Elementary School study basic English. They study about simple words or things in their surroundings, it is aimed that students are able to understand simple English used in daily context. However, it is difficult to master the other competences without understanding the vocabulary, because vocabulary is the basic competence that must be reached by students in order to get other competencies like reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Based on the pre-research to the fourth grade students of SDN II Watuagung, they showed that the difficulty of their learning English coming from their vocabulary mastery. It is shown from the statements of majority students who said that English was a difficult lesson. In addition, the researcher find several problems about students' vocabulary mastery such as difficulties in understanding the meaning of words, difficulties in pronouncing words correctly, the students could not spell the words correctly, and the students could not use and understanding the reference well. It is also supported by the fact showing the students' poor score in pre-test. The mean of this English class score in preliminary test was 45.70. In fact, the passing grade for English subject 60.

The facts above show that the students are still low in vocabulary mastery. That matter is indicated from two indicators; first is viewed from vocabulary mastery and second is viewed from the students' motivation during teaching-learning process. From the result of pre-research, the researcher found some indicators dealing with the low level of the students' vocabulary mastery. The indicators are: a) the students had difficulty in understanding the meaning of some words; b) the students mispronounced some English words; c) the students were not able to spell words correctly; d) students were not able to use references correctly. Then, the problems also came from the students' motivation during teaching-learning process. The indicators are: a) some students were busy talking with their friends when learning process was occurring; b) some students were busy drawing picture to their books; c) the students were not actively involved in

the leaning process; they tended to be passive; d) some students ignored the teacher's instruction. From the pre-research and interview, the reseacher foud some reasons why those problems arose. One of them is that the teacher only teaching by doing the task on LKS, so the students did not have enough experience in learning vocabulary. It also made the students bored and were not interested with the lesson. Based on the facts above, it can be concluded that the main reason causing the problem is the teacher not creative to use media in teaching vocabulary mastery.

The researcher finds an appropriate media to solve the problems. The researcher chooses flashcards as his media. According to Cross (1991: 119), flashcard is a simple picture on a piece of card or paper, which is probably the most widely used visual aids in language teaching. It means that flashcard is one of media which can help the teacher to teaching English easily. Flash cards in teaching vocabulary are very simple visual aids and the teacher can make the students more active during the teaching learning process. Flashcards are some kinds of media that can be used by the teacher in the classroom. They can increase their span of attention and concentration to study new words in English. According to Haycraft (1978: 102), flashcards can be used for consolidating vocabulary, practicing structure and words order or a variety of games. The use of flashcards is related to the characteristics of elementary school students as children who commonly feel interested in something with attractive shapes and color.

Based on the background, some problems can be formulated namely; 1) Can the use of flashcards improve students' vocabulary mastery at the fourth grade students of SDN II Watuagung? ; 2) How is the learning motivation of the fourth grade students of SDN II Watuagung when flashcard is used?.

Philips (1996: 5) defines young learners as children from the first year of formal schooling (five or six years old) to eleven or twelve years of age. From Phillips's theory, young learners are mainly recognized based on their age. Moreover, Scott and Ytreberg (1990: 1) divided the children into two main groups

throughout the book, the five to seven years old and the eight to ten year olds. We are assuming that the five to seven year olds are all at level one, the beginner stage. The eight to ten year olds may also be beginners, or they may have been learning the foreign language for some time, so there are both level one and level two pupils in the eight to ten age groups. Teaching to young learners is difficult. In order to teach English successfully to young learners, the teacher has to consider the characteristics of young learners and try to make appropriate technique, so they are motivated and enjoy in teaching-learning process. Scott and Ytreberg (1990: 5-6) state what should be done by an English teacher in his teaching to children namely; 1) Words are not enough, 2) Play with the language, 3) Variety in the classroom, 4) Routines, 5) Cooperation.

According to Ur (1995: 60) vocabulary is the words we teach in the foreign language. It means vocabulary is written or spoken unit of language as symbol of idea in foreign language for the learners. Moreover, Hatch and Brown (1995: 1) state that vocabulary refers to a list or set of words for a particular language or a list or set of words that individual speaker of a language might use. It means that vocabulary as the words of certain language which are used by language speaker in using language. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary of current English (1995:721), the word mastery means complete knowledge; great skill. From this simple definition, the word mastery is tightly related to the complete knowledge, and great skill of something. From those description of vocabulary and mastery, it can be concluded that vocabulary mastery as complete integrated word knowledge (knowing its form, meaning, and use) of certain language.

Ur (1998: 60 – 62) states some aspects that the learner should be mastered and the teacher should be taught in order to help the learners in mastering vocabulary. They are namely; 1) Form (pronunciation and spelling), 2) Grammar, 3) Collocation, 4) Aspect of meaning (*a. Denotation, connotation, appropriateness* and *b. Meaning relationship*), 5) Word formation. From all of the aspects, the appropriate aspects for teaching to young learners in Elementary School are form (its spelling and pronunciation) and the meaning (its denotation

meaning). It is because they are basic aspects in presenting vocabulary. Meanwhile, Nation (1990: 5) mentions two kinds of vocabulary learning. They are receptive learning and productive learning. Receptive learning is the ability to recognize a word and recall its meaning when it is met. Then, productive learning involves what is needed for receptive learning plus the ability to speak or write at the appropriate time.

According to Cross (1991: 11-13) the procedure of teaching vocabulary can be divided into three stages, they are namely: a) Presentation. In this stage, the teachers can use various techniques which are recommended in the previous discussion. However, the teachers have to be careful in selecting the techniques that they used in teaching activity; b) Practice. In the second stage, the teacher give exercises to the students in order to practice the subject items being learnt, making completion, matching, words classification, etc. those are several types of exercise that can be used by the teacher in this stage; c) Production. In this stage the students are expected to apply the newly learn vocabulary through the speaking activities or writing activities.

John Haycraft (1978: 102) states that flashcards are cards on which words and/or pictures are printed or drawn. According to Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary (1995: 94), flashcard is a card with the word or words and sometimes a picture down it. Based on discussed above, it can be taken a general view that flashcards are cards with a word or words, number, or a picture on it for use in the classroom by teacher and students that help to learn and memorize new words. In addition, Haycraft (1978: 102-106) states two types of flashcards. They are word flashcards and picture flashcards. Word flashcards are cards on which words have been printed. When practicing word order, the teacher can use a number of cards representing all the words in a sentence. The cards can be fixed to the board, or given to a student, and arranged correctly either by the class a whole or individual students. The word flashcards also can be used to practice structure. Then, picture flashcards are useful for presenting, practicing and revising vocabulary or as prompts for other activities – for example, to illustrate the characters in a dialogue, to help students improvise. Picture flashcards can be used as prompts for

simple substitution drills. Picture flashcards are also useful for identifying verbs on action.

According to Haycraft (1978: 102) and Cross (1991: 120) there are some advantages of using flashcards in language teaching. They are namely: a) Flashcards can be used for consolidating vocabulary; b) Flashcards are motivating and eye-catching; c) Flashcards are effective that can be used for any level students; d) Flashcards can be taken almost everywhere and studied when are has free moment; e) Flashcards can be arranged to create logical grouping of the target words; f) Flashcards are cost effective/inexpensive; g) Flashcards provide visual link between L1 and the target language; and h) Flashcards also can be used for practicing structure and word order or for a variety of games.

Based on the explanations above, it can be concluded that flashcards have many advantages when used in teaching learning process. Flashcards have a great power in motivating and stimulating the students. Meanwhile, flashcards are easy media to help students and teacher in learning process, especially to teach the students of elementary school. Teacher can use it at any time and in any situation when he wants to teach.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is classroom action research. Kemmis (1983) in Hopkins (1993: p.44) state that action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational)

situation in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices; (b) their understanding to these practices, and; (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. It is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively, though it is often undertaken by individuals and sometimes in cooperation with outsiders.

Meanwhile, the model of classroom action research in this study is model by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (in Burns, 1999: 32) who state that the model of action research is consist of four steps in a spiraling process. There are namely: a) Planning. Here the researcher prepares everything that is needed in doing the action, for instance she prepares a lesson plan, the material that will be used in the action, and she also prepares the evaluation material after conducting the action to give information whether or not the speaking improve; b) Acting. After preparing the lesson plan, the material and the evaluation, the researcher was implemented the plan. In this study the researcher will implements flashcards games in teaching vocabulary, the flashcards games was doing in the group. She also give pretest, the material and the end of the study she do the post test; c) Observing. The researcher observes the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs. Beside that the researcher also makes the observation sheet about the process in teaching learning process; d) Reflecting. After doing the observation, the researcher continue to the next step namely reflection. In this step the researcher reflect how the teaching learning process runs. The function of reflecting is to know the weaknesses and the strengths of the action. She also prepares the other planning if the action was not improved the students' speaking skill.

The model of Action Research can be illustrated as follows:

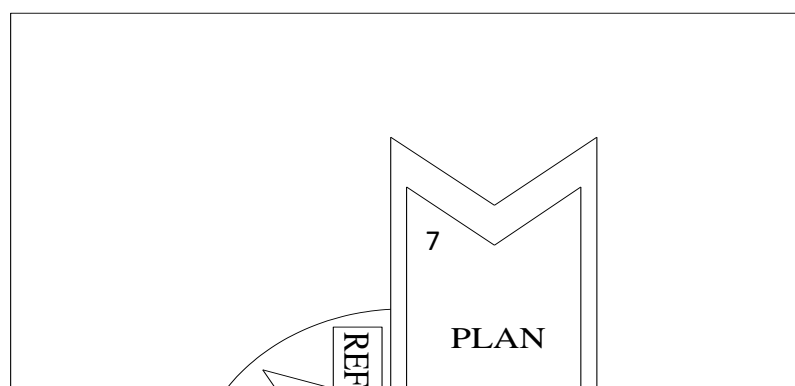


Table 1.1. The Model of Action Research

The four steps at the model can be expanded into six steps which included in the procedure of action research. The procedures are: 1) Identifying the problems. The researcher identified the problem before planning the action. The problem referred to the students' difficulty in learning vocabulary. The problem

was caused by the technique of delivering material which was not suitable and interesting to the learners. It was obtained by observing the teaching learning process; 2) Planning the action. There are some activities which were done by researcher: a) Planning the steps and technique for delivering the material in the form of lesson plans. There were 3 lesson plan prepared for the cycle; b) Designing the steps in doing the action; c) Preparing the material; d) Preparing sheets for classroom observation (to know the situation of teaching learning process when the technique is applied); e) Preparing teaching aids; and f) Preparing a test; 3) Implementing the action. The researcher implemented the teaching learning activity of vocabulary using flashcards; 4) Observing and monitoring the action. The researcher observed all activities in the teaching learning process; 5) Reflecting the result of the observation. The researcher evaluated all actions in each cycle. The writer observed the actions to find the problems of the activities that had been carried out in using flashcards in teaching vocabulary; and 6) Revising the plan. Since there were some remaining problems of the activities that had been carried out using flashcards in teaching vocabulary, the researcher revised the plan for the next cycle.

Based on the explanation above, classroom action research is a systematic study and it is a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken or carried out by participants in educational situation rather than outside researches to solve the problem in order to improve the students' ability. In this study, classroom action research means an educational attempt, which was done by the writer to improve the lack of vocabulary mastery in SDN II Watuagung by using flashcards. In this research, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were applied. The qualitative methodology was used to describe how the process of teaching and learning vocabulary ran and the quantitative methodology was used to identify whether or not the students' vocabulary mastery were better or higher than before implementing the flashcards. The quantitative calculation for identifying the improvement of the students' vocabulary mastery was based on the scores of the vocabulary test given twice.

In this research, the data were collected by using some techniques of qualitative and quantitative data collection. The qualitative data were collected from interview, observation, and documents (the photograph and students' worksheet). The quantitative data were collected from tests (pre-test and post test). The analyses of the data were collected by using two techniques, namely: 1) The Qualitative Data. The classroom action research analyzes the qualitative data from the result of interview, observation, and documents. McKernan in Burns (1999: 156-160) states the stages in analyzing the data. They are as follows; a) Assembling the data, b) Coding the data, c) Comparing the data, d) Building interpretations, and e) Reporting the outcomes; and 2) The Quantitative Data. The researcher analyses the quantitative data from the tests (the pre- test and the post-test). The result of the test can answer the problem whether or not the use of flashcards can improve students' vocabulary mastery. It can be identified from the differentiation of the mean in pre-test and post-test.

The mean of the pre-test and the post-test can be calculated with the formula as follows:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{N} \qquad \bar{y} = \frac{\sum y}{N}$$

In which

\bar{x} = mean of pre-test score

\bar{y} = mean of post-test score

N = number of students / subject

Finally, by analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher can make conclusion whether or not the use of flashcards can improve the students' vocabulary mastery. If almost all of the students give positive responses to the teaching learning process and their post-test score is higher than pre-test score, the technique is successful. On the contrary, if the students give negative responses to the teaching learning process and their post-test score is lower than pre-test score, the technique is not successful.

THE RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the research result from the interview, observation (field notes), document (photograph and students worksheet), and test (pre-test and post-test), the researcher gets several findings that answers from the research questions stated in the introduction (problems statement). The research findings include the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery and the improvement from the students' participation.

First, the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery, from the result of the tests (pre-test and post-test) in the first cycle and second cycle showed improvement of the students vocabulary mastery. This improvement could be seen from the increase of the mean students' vocabulary score. It is summarized in the table below:

| KIND OF TEST | Pre-test | Post-test (cycle 1) | Post-test (cycle 2) |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| TOTAL SCORE | 1051 | 1622 | 1843 |
| MEAN SCORE | 45.70 | 70.52 | 80.13 |
| INCREASING OF THE STUDENTS MEAN SCORE | | 24.82 | 9.61 |

Table 1.2 The Finding Result

Second, the improvement of the students' participation, in this sections the result findings from the first cycle and the second cycle are discussed. From pre-observation, the situation of the class was not conducive for teaching learning activity. Students did not focus to the learning process, they were busy doing something outside the learning activity (talking with friends, drawing picture). Moreover, they tended to be passive and ignore the teacher's instructions.

In the first cycle, students' enthusiastic and motivation increased in joining learning activity. The activities outside the learning activity were minimized; it is because the learning activities and the media which were used by the teacher were interesting for them. But, there were some problems which emerged, namely; the

mastery of the students' words – spelling was still low. When the teacher asked them to write down the names of Fruit, Vegetables, and Animals they wrote as how the words pronounced. Beside that, some students still pronounced the name of Fruits and Vegetables incorrectly. In addition, some students were not active when they did task in group. In the second cycle, students were also active as group members when they did the group task using flashcards. This was the distribution of group member responsibility which made them active in the group. The students words-spelling and pronunciation also increased. Moreover, in the end of second cycle, the interview to the two chosen students showed that they had good respond to this learning type using task and enjoyed learning through this way.

The first two points from observational data and interview show that the students' motivation improved because of teaching activity using flashcards. It goes along with the theory from Haycraft (1978: 102), Cross (1991: 120), and Schmitt and McCarty (1997: 215), they concluded that one of the advantages of flashcards; flashcards can motivate students in learning English. Finally from the explanation, first, based on the quantitative data (pre-test and post-test) it can be concluded that flashcards can improve students' vocabulary mastery. It is proved by the increase of students' vocabulary mastery score. Second, based on observational data (field notes); flashcards can improve students' motivation in teaching and learning process.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After conducting the research of teaching vocabulary at the Elementary School by using flashcards and analyzing the data, the researcher found some research findings to answer the research questions in the introduction (problem

statement). All of the findings were gotten from the data that were collected by the researcher. After analyzing the data, the researcher found the results namely: 1) The students' vocabulary mastery improved. It was indicated by the results of the test. The students' achievement was satisfied enough. It can be said that the existence of flashcards makes the students familiar with certain words. They can see, read, and touch the object. Thus, after the lesson is over, they can memorize the words easily. The increasing attention, motivation, and existence of flashcards improve the students' achievement in mastering vocabulary. It can be shown by the increasing scores of the students in the pre-test and in the post-test; and 2) The students' motivation in teaching and learning process improved. Through the use of flashcards in each activity, there was an improvement of the students' motivations in learning. It could be seen from the students' interest in teaching-learning process which was higher. They also paid more to the teacher's explanation. The students' motivation in learning English influenced their participation in the class. The classroom situation became active and interactive because they enjoyed and they were motivated in teaching and learning process.

Based on the conclusion, the researcher would like to give some suggestions dealing with the teaching of vocabulary. First suggestions are to the English teacher, there are three suggestions, namely; a) the teacher needs to identify the students' behavior first before presenting the lesson. This is aimed to choose an appropriate technique; b) it is necessary for the teacher to use interesting technique and media, such as flashcards, so the students will be interested in joining the lesson; c) the teacher should be able to develop a good atmosphere in the class, so that the students learn at comfortable situation. Second suggestions are to the students, some students might consider English as a difficult subject if there is no motivation to learn. The students should encourage themselves to learn more, to ask more, and to know more. And the last suggestions are to other researchers; this research discusses the implementation of flashcards in teaching vocabulary to Elementary Students. This study is just one effort to improve students' motivation and achievement in learning English. It is

hoped that the result of the study could be used as the additional reference in other research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burns, Anne. 1999. *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teacher*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

- Cross, David. 1991. *A Practical Handbook of Language Teaching*. London: Cassel.
- Hatch, Evelyn and Brown, Cheryl. 1995. *Vocabulary, Semantic, and Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haycraft, Jhon. 1978. *An Introduction to English Language Teaching*. England: Longman
- Hopkins, David. 1993. *A Teacher's Guide to Action Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McCharty, Michael. 1990. *Vocabulary*. Oxford. Oxford University Press
- Nation, ISP. 1990. *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. New York: Newbury House Publishers.
1995. *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Philips, Sarah. 1996. *Young Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scott, A. Wendy & Ytreberg, H. Lisbeth. 1990. *Teaching English to Children*. New York: Longman Inc.
- Ur, Penny. 1998. *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.