

# Efforts and Difficulties in Teaching Vocabulary

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**Abstract—**This study aims at investigating teachers efforts as well as difficulties in helping students learn English vocabulary in context. Interview was used to collect data. Three English teachers at one junior high school in Tondano were involved in this study. Teacher's efforts were identified as follows: giving students direct instruction of English vocabulary or words through texts, providing learning of English words through repetition, teaching of English words through context, using various strategies by teachers in teaching English words, and applying various media of teaching. Difficulties teachers were facing: how to be creative, time constraints to apply various media to make the learning more interesting and enjoyable. It could be suggested that (1) English teachers of the school need to hold special meeting each semester to discuss the strategies to teach English in general and especially English vocabulary, (2) English teachers should prepare and provide as many contexts as possible. With various contexts, the students are expected to learn English vocabulary more interesting and enjoyable.

**Keywords—**English language learning; effort; difficulties; vocabulary component

## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional class settings are usually driven by "teacher-talk" and depend heavily on textbooks for the structure of the lesson. There is the idea that there is a fixed world of knowledge that the student must come to know. Information is divided into parts and built into a whole concept. Teachers serve as pipelines and seek to transfer their thoughts and meanings to the passive student. There is little room for student-initiated questions, independent thought or interaction between students. The goal of the learner is to repeat mechanically the accepted explanation or methodology expressed by the teacher [1].

Teaching English as a foreign language covers the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To master these skills, the students are required to have stock of English vocabulary. In other words, if they master many vocabularies, it is easy for them to understand a reading text, to write and speak English [2]. Therefore, vocabulary is regarded as a basic substance in developing the four language skills.

Vocabulary is very important in language learning. It should be recognized as a central element in language instruction from the beginning stages to develop those skills well. If the students master vocabulary well, they will be able to identify quickly and accurately the meaning of most words,

but if they do not master vocabulary, it is impossible for them to use a language. On the other hand, mastering vocabulary allows them to be able to communicate in English and have a strong desire to read simple English book [3]. It can be said that mastery of vocabulary is a good start to develop English skills. The purpose of the study is to analyze how the English teachers of the school develop the students' mastery of English vocabulary through context. It aims at analyzing the English teachers' efforts and difficulties in helping their students learn English vocabulary in context.

Vocabulary is generically defined as the knowledge of words and word meanings. More specifically, we use vocabulary to refer to the kind of words that students must know to read increasingly demanding text with comprehension [4]. It is something that expands and deepens over time.

Thus, vocabulary can be defined as the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning, the way individual words do. Vocabulary addresses single lexical items—words with specific meaning(s)—but it also includes lexical phrases or chunks. A person has first kinds of vocabularies. That is active or use vocabulary, that is the words used in speaking or writing and later is the passive or recognition vocabulary that is the words a person understands when listening and reading [5].

In teaching and learning process, vocabulary is included as one part of the substance of language. In learning vocabulary, the lexical equivalences of mother tongue vocabulary are focused [6]. There are several comments and premises related to the teaching of vocabulary: The words heard by the students during any lesson can be categorized into two parts, including active vocabulary (for production) and passive vocabulary (for recognition) of which they understand when they hear and read them. Vocabulary should be taught in normal speech utterance. Vocabulary items should be focused on one topic [7].

Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas [8]. As students develop greater fluency and expression in English, it is significant for them to acquire more productive vocabulary knowledge and to develop their own personal vocabulary learning strategies.

## II. METHODS

This research is intended to analyze the English teachers' efforts and difficulties in helping their students learn English vocabulary in context. In this case, this research can be classified as a descriptive research. The sources of data are all the English teachers at one junior high school who were interviewed. There are only three (3) English teachers at the school. Some students were also interviewed to gain the data about their teachers' efforts to teach English vocabulary in context.

In investigating teachers' efforts and difficulties through interviews, the following key points as guidelines were used:

- Do teachers provide direct instruction of vocabulary words for a specific text since there are precise words children may need to know in order to comprehend particular lessons or subject matter?
- Are students given opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in a variety of contexts since repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important?
- Does vocabulary learning follow a developmental trajectory? Vocabulary words should be those that the learner will find useful in many contexts. Instruction of high-frequency words known and used by mature language users can add productively to an individual's language ability.
- Vocabulary tasks should be restructured as necessary. Once students know what is expected of them in a vocabulary task, they often learn rapidly". Do teachers implement this?
- Do teachers practice active engagement that goes beyond definitional knowledge? Vocabulary learning is effective. When children 'know' a word, they not only know the word's definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts.
- Do teachers use computer technology effectively to help teach vocabulary?
- Do teachers implement structured read-aloud, discussion sessions and independent reading experiences to encourage vocabulary growth in students? Vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning. Reading volume is very important in terms of long-term vocabulary development.
- Do teachers depend on a single vocabulary instruction method? Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. Teachers must seek to identify, clarify, and understand what it means for students "to know what a word means."
- Variations in students' vocabulary size, levels of word knowledge, as well as which words are taught and how word knowledge is measured must all be considered in shaping our understanding of vocabulary acquisition.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are three English teachers at school. The current research involved these three English teachers. To complement the data for this research, during observation the researcher took pictures of the students' activities in learning English vocabularies in class. As explained in the previous chapter, in conducting interviews to teachers seeking information about their efforts as well difficulties, the following key points as guidelines were used:

- Do teachers provide direct instruction of vocabulary words for a specific text since there are precise words children may need to know in order to comprehend particular lessons or subject matter?
- Are students given opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in a variety of contexts since repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important?
- Does vocabulary learning follow a developmental trajectory? Vocabulary words should be those that the learner will find useful in many contexts. Instruction of high-frequency words known and used by mature language users can add productively to an individual's language ability.
- Vocabulary tasks should be restructured as necessary. Once students know what is expected of them in a vocabulary task, they often learn rapidly". Do teachers implement this?
- Do teachers practice active engagement that goes beyond definitional knowledge? Vocabulary learning is effective. When children 'know' a word, they not only know the word's definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts.
- Do teachers use computer technology effectively to help teach vocabulary?
- Do teachers implement structured read-louds, discussion sessions and independent reading experiences to encourage vocabulary growth in students? Vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning. Reading volume is very important in terms of long-term vocabulary development.
- Do teachers depend on a single vocabulary instruction method? Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. Teachers must seek to identify, clarify, and understand what it means for students "to know what a word means." The sheer complexity of vocabulary acquisition, as evidenced by reviewing critical components such as receptive vocabulary versus productive vocabulary, oral vocabulary versus print vocabulary, and breadth of vocabulary versus depth of vocabulary raise questions worthy of further research.
- Variations in students' vocabulary size, levels of word knowledge, as well as which words are taught and how

word knowledge is measured must all be considered in shaping our understanding of vocabulary acquisition.

The responses of the English teachers towards the interview questions were described in the following sections.

**1) English teacher 1:**

- The students are asked to find out the new words and they can understand the meaning of new words in context.
- Repetition of word recognition should be taught by the teacher in a variety of context.
- The students learn English vocabulary in songs or games.
- When the teacher gives task to the students, some of them can directly catch the meaning of words, but there are still many others who just keep silently and the teacher should have other strategies to make them understand.
- Some students can understand the text by themselves but there are still many students who cannot understand the text because they have poor knowledge about English vocabulary.
- The English teacher always asks the students to use their hand phone or laptop to find out the meanings of new words in a text.
- In many situations the students have their initiatives to learn English vocabulary, but there are still lots of them who should be motivated by the teacher.
- Vocabulary must be taught in context so that the students can rapidly understand their meanings.

**2) English teacher 2:**

- The English words are memorized by the students together with their meanings.
- The English words should be repeated by the students so that they can memorize and understand the words well.
- The teacher explains the meaning of the words and then shows the context in which the words are used.
- The words are not memorized and understood but the students should make use of the words to create good and correct sentences of their own.
- The teacher always uses modern technology such as computer, lap top or hand phone to teach English words to the students.
- The teacher sometimes uses interesting stories, English songs or games to make the teaching of English vocabulary more interesting and enjoyable.
- The English teacher always tries to find out the best techniques to multiply the students' mastery of English vocabulary.

- Sometimes the English teacher should explain the meaning of certain words in Bahasa Indonesia.
- One of the ways to teach English vocabulary is giving the students the English words that they use every day.
- Many of the times the English teacher asks the students to make use of the dictionaries to find out the English difficult words.
- 3) English teacher 3:**
- The students are asked to memorize the words together with their meanings.
- The English words should be repeatedly read by the students till they can memorize and understand their meanings.
- The English words are taught contextually based on the students' life or environment.
- Each time the students enter the classroom, the teacher always reminds the students to memorize or understand the words already learned.
- Sometimes the teacher should speak in Bahasa Indonesia to explain the meanings of the English words.
- In the teaching of English vocabulary, the teachers always use media, pictures, songs or games to help the students easier understand the English words.
- The teachers should have a variety of techniques to be used in the teaching of English vocabulary.

In relation to the data obtained through observation, the following description explains the activities related to the English teachers' activities and the students' activities as well when the teaching of English vocabulary is running in the classroom. The following part describes the: (1) students' activities in learning English vocabularies through the students' textbook; (2) the students' activities in using hand phones; (3) the teachers' activities in using pictures or charts; (4) the students' activities in group discussion; (5) the students' activities in using dictionaries; and (6) the teachers' explanation of words using Bahasa Indonesia.

In general, three English teachers have the same profiles of how to teach English vocabulary in context. Only a slight difference that was found here and there.

*a) Profile of English Teacher 1:* The students are asked to find out the new words and they can understand the meaning of new words in context. Repetition of word recognition should be taught by the teacher in a variety of context. The students learn English vocabulary in songs or games. When the teacher gives task to the students, some of them can directly catch the meaning of words, but there are still many others who just keep silently and the teacher should have other strategies to make them understand. Some students can understand the text by themselves but there are still many students who cannot understand the text because they have poor knowledge about English vocabulary. The English teacher always asks the students to use their hand phone or

laptop to find out the meanings of new words in a text. In many situations the students have their initiatives to learn English vocabulary, but there are still lots of them who should be motivated by the teacher. Vocabulary must be taught in context so that the students can rapidly understand their meanings.

*b) Profile of English Teacher 2:* The English words are memorized by the students together with their meanings. The English words should be repeated by the students so that they can memorize and understand the words well. The teacher explains the meaning of the words and then shows the context in which the words are used. The words are not memorized and understood but the students should make use of the words to create good and correct sentences of their own. The teacher always uses modern technology such as computer, lap top or hand phone to teach English words to the students. The teacher sometimes uses interesting stories, English songs or games to make the teaching of English vocabulary more interesting and enjoyable. The English teacher always tries to find out the best techniques to multiply the students' mastery of English vocabulary. Sometimes the English teacher should explain the meaning of certain words in Bahasa Indonesia. One of the ways to teach English vocabulary is giving the students the English words that they use every day. Many of the times the English teacher asks the students to make use of the dictionaries to find out the English difficult words.

*c) Profile of English Teacher 3:* The students are asked to memorize the words together with their meanings. The English words should be repeatedly read by the students till they can memorize and understand their meanings. The English words are taught contextually based on the students' life or environment. Each time the students enter the classroom, the teacher always reminds the students to memorize or understand the words already learned. Sometimes the teacher should speak in Bahasa Indonesia to explain the meanings of the English words. In the teaching of English vocabulary, the teachers always use media, pictures, songs or games to help the students easier understand the English words. The teachers should have a variety of techniques to be used in the teaching of English vocabulary.

Based on the data collected from interviews, observations, and teachers' profile it could be inferred that three of them have the same ways to develop the students' mastery of English vocabularies through context. Their efforts and difficulties in helping their students learn English vocabulary in context are almost the same.

There are five points that can be drawn from all of these teachers in relation to the teaching of English vocabulary in context:

- Direct instruction of English vocabulary or words through texts.
- Learning of English words through repetition.
- The teaching of English words through context.

- The use of various strategies by teachers in teaching English words.
- The use of various media of teaching.

These five points are elaborated as follows:

*a) Direct instruction of English vocabulary or words through texts:* Despite the impact of new technologies, textbooks will doubtless continue to play an important role in language teaching in general and vocabulary teaching specially and provide a useful resource for both teachers and students. Textbooks should be regarded as one of the many resources teachers can draw upon in creating effective lessons.

*b) Learning of English words through repetition:* Repetition of word recognition should be taught by the teacher in a variety of context. The English words should be repeated by the students so that they can memorize and understand the words well. The English words should be repeatedly read by the students until they can memorize and understand their meanings.

*c) The teaching of English words through context:* The teaching of English words through context means using real objects to explain the meanings of words, using Bahasa Indonesia to translate the meaning of a difficult word, using everyday words so that the students directly recognize the meaning of words, using dictionaries so that the students directly find out the meaning of words, using sentences to catch the meaning of words, and using students' environment or life to easily understand the meaning of words.

*d) The use of various strategies by teachers in teaching English words:* There are no special strategies of how to teach English vocabularies. It depends on the teachers' creativity.

*e) The use of various media of teaching:* In teaching English vocabulary, teachers should use various media, such as: pictures, hand phone, computer, interesting stories, songs, games, etc. This aims at making the process of vocabulary teaching and learning more interesting and enjoyable.

The points elaborated above shows that teachers have made some efforts to develop the teaching vocabulary to students. At the same time, teachers also face some difficulties to help students' vocabulary learning. However, it is important to identify these issues in order to find appropriate responses which consequently help students develop the master of vocabulary. Moreover, it is suggested for English teachers of the school to hold special meeting each semester, to discuss the strategies to teach English in general and especially English vocabulary. Also, English teachers should prepare and provide as many contexts as possible. By using many contexts, the students are expected to learn English vocabulary more interesting and enjoyable.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

During teaching English vocabulary in context, teachers have encountered some challenges that were to be creative and also time constraints to apply various media to make the learning more interesting and enjoyable. To overcome those

encounters, teachers have done some efforts, including giving students direct instruction of English vocabulary or words through texts, providing learning of English words through repetition, teaching of English words through context, using various strategies by teachers in teaching English words, and applying various media of teaching.

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