TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY THROUGH GAME: VIEWS FROM THE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Vocabulary plays an important role. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together. Before they master the four skills they have to know some vocabularies to support them in learning English. Using games is one such method and it is a popular contemporary trend in Indonesia in Junior High School level. In this research, the researcher wants to know teaching English Vocabulary through Game: Views from the Students. The participants were the students of 7.1 who studied English at SMPN 14 Kota Bengkulu. The instruments to collect the data used interview for the students. While the data analysis and interpretation were based on data from the interview to the participants. The data show that Majority of the students' comment were positive. They said that playing the game is fun, more interesting, challenging, amusing and they enjoy it. Students' positive attitude toward games and activities may show that the students really enjoy the activity with the game. They also give positive views about teachers' teaching vocabulary though game. First, games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new English words more easily. Second, games usually involve friendly competition and they keep the students interested. Learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms. Game is really avoiding the students from being bored in their usual classes where they sit passively.

Keywords: *vocabulary, game, teaching English*

1. INTRODUCTION

In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together. Before they master the four skills they have to know some vocabularies to support them in learning English. This is because vocabulary is an important and essential element in language learning. In order to communicate well in a foreign language, students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately.

In my English classes in Junior High School, the students have nothing to do in a vocabulary learning section but to listen to their teacher. Students only think of vocabulary learning as knowing the primary meaning of new words from the teacher or check the meaning from dictionary. Some researchers such as Nguyen and Khuat (2003) and Uberman (1998) have shown that students are tired of learning vocabulary in traditional methods such as rehearsing, writing words on papers or learning passively through teacher's explanations, and this has created severe problems with learning skills. Nguyen and Khuat (2003) believe Students prefer to learn language in a relaxed environment such as vocabulary games. They believe that in an interesting and communicative class learners can learn 80 percent of what they exposed to. According to Freeman (1986), learners enjoy language games they enjoy communicative involvement in the classroom. He believes that games can provide a healthy and constructive competition. Games can encourage learners discovering and voluntary involvement to the learning process, it can also establish a better bonding between teacher and learners. A good designed language games can create a real communication context in the classroom which can help learners to improve their speaking ability. The students usually only acquire new vocabulary through new words in their textbooks or when given by teachers during classroom lessons. For example, students find many new words in a text and then they ask the teacher to explain the meanings and usages. Learners just wait for teachers to provide new forms of words then they

write those words in their notebooks or complete their exercises in their exercises book (LKS: Lembar Kerja Siswa).

Some of learners may share the same experience of looking up words in a bilingual dictionary to find their meanings or definitions when they encounter new words. They may even write down lines of new words without any idea of the real use of them in context. Working this way, after a short period of time, many students may find out that learning vocabulary in lists does not satisfy themselves, and they think the cause for it is just their bad memorization.

Traditional classroom activities mostly emphasize grammar rules (forms). Teacher in these classes imagine that learning the grammar is equated with learning the language while students are not pleased with grammar. But in communicative approaches such as games, the emphasis is on the meaning and students feel free to interact. Most of the traditional classroom activities consist of many drills which emphasize accuracy and consume a lot of time but communicative activities develop communication skills which stress fluency. The teacher governing the traditional classroom activities corrects students' mistakes when they've made it but in communicative approach it is believed that students should comminute each other. They claim when students are able to communicate, their mistakes will be corrected automatically.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

Teaching methods and learning strategies have been developed worldwide with the express purpose of improving students" English ability (Freeman, 2000). Using games is one such method and it is a popular contemporary trend in Indonesia in Junior High School level. Numerous scholars (Chan & Lin, 2000; Jiang, 2008; Kuo, 2008; Robinson, 1960; Zheng, 2008) maintain that students" motivation and confidence can be enhanced in the process of playing games when they achieve learning goals in a relaxing environment. In addition, it is easier to maintain the attention of students by playing games because having fun satisfies an inborn predisposition toward attentiveness in human subjects (Atake, 2003; Chen, 2007; Deesri, 2002). Additionally, it is a useful tool in improve children's vocabulary acquisition in as natural a way as would be normally achieved through play (Angelova & Lekova, 1995; Atake, 2003; Deng, 2006). By using vocabulary games, learning process is going to be more valuable, this method can make vocabulary learning more enjoyable, so it can help students to retain target words more quickly.

According to The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1995), games are defined as "an organized activity that usually has the following properties: a particular task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players, and communication between players by spoken or written language" (p. 89). Language games are not aimed to kill time or break the ice between teachers and students. Hadfield (1984) said games are "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun".

A game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages, games should be used at all the stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way.

Games provide language teachers with many advantages when they are used in classroom. One of these advantages is that learners are motivated to learn the language when they are in a game. McCallum (1980, p. ix) emphasizes this point by suggesting that "games automatically stimulate student interest, a properly introduced game can be one of the highest motivating techniques." Games are advantageous at this point because they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence because learners do not afraid of punishment or criticism while practicing the target language freely (Crookal, 1990, p.112). Games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of vocabulary is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and effective but the teacher have to consider the best game for the students.

One useful strategy to encourage learning a foreign language is using language games. When using games in the classroom, it is beneficial for teachers to have a complete understanding of the definitions of games, which usually are defined as a form of play concerning rules, competition, and

an element of fun. Teachers should also consider the advantages of games: the ability to capture students' attention; lower students' stress; and give students the chance for real communication. Lastly teachers need to assess how to use games appropriately in the classroom. It is important to choose an appropriate time and integrate them into the regular syllabus and curriculum.

Teachers should be careful about choosing games if they want to make them advantageous. First of all, the teacher should decide on the purpose of a game. A game may seem appropriate and useful. The fact that games are the most suitable instructional activities for young learners. Nedomová (2007) argues that "young learners are not able to pay their attention for more than 10-20 minutes and after that they start to be bored and tired." So that, the teachers have to decide the best game for their students. Nedomová (2007) underlines the fact that we "should consider whether the game-like activity is for children only to make the lesson more attractive and protect them from being bored or whether we tend to revise and practice some particular part of grammar, vocabulary, etc." Teachers have to decide the level of game for the level of the student. Considering the level of the game is equally important while choosing games. Teachers must decide whether the level of the game fits students' language level because a game may become difficult when it is beyond the learners' level or it may become boring when learners find it too easy to carry on. When a game's value in grammar teaching is considered, teachers tend to use them for practice or to reinforce a specific grammatical aspect of language only if a game is suitable for learners' level so that the grammatical knowledge can be used easily as they are playing the game. If the game is beyond the students' level, it can make them bored easily in doing that game.

To avoid the feeling bored of the students, teachers should consider some factors in choosing the appropriate game to their students. The factors are about the number of the students in the classroom, level of age, level of grade, time duration of the game, and the difficulties of the game. According to Carrier (1990) teachers should first consider the level of the game to fit their students' language level. They should choose the game that fits the purposes of that class or the content. Moreover, teachers should consider students' characteristics: whether they are old or young, serious-minded or light-hearted, and highly motivated to learn or not. They should also consider when the game should be used.

Teachers should be well aware of their roles while using games in their classes. Since it is rather difficult to find a game that meets all the needs of the learners, careful preparation of the teacher is necessary. The teacher should organize the game before the instruction. The teacher may need some extra equipment or materials to play the game and most of the time these equipment and materials are not available in the classroom. Before explaining the rules to the class, the teacher should first understand how the game is played. Especially when working with children, the teacher should always be prepared to adapt the game to the givens of the class. After choosing the game, the teacher should explain its rules to the learners in a direct and non-complicated way. Especially for young learners, it may be necessary to use the mother tongue because if these learners cannot understand how to play the game, there is no educational purpose in playing it. Therefore, demonstrations may be beneficial because they can help young learners understand the rules clearly and easily.

From the view above, we can be seen that teaching English vocabulary through game would make teaching and learning process more interesting. The unforgettable moments when they play the game will help students to memorize the acquired vocabulary easily or it will encourage students to have long term memory about the vocabulary. By playing game, the students will be motivated in learning English vocabulary. It also encourages and increases cooperation. In this case, it is assumed that students' views about teaching English vocabulary through game would be fun, interesting, challenging and effective. This study expected it would be useful for the contribution of strategy in teaching vocabulary in Junior High School level especially at SMPN 14 Kota Bengkulu. This study is also expected the result of this research would be useful for the next researchers who are interested in teaching English through game in every level of education. This is not to prove any hypothesis and confirm that these views are the best one.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was designed to know the students' views about teaching English vocabulary through game that done by the English teacher. Researcher chose SMPN 14 Kota Bengkulu as the place to carry out this study, because researcher is one of the English teachers in this school and researcher felt convenience to carry out this study here. Convenience factor should be taken into consideration to support the researcher to carry out the research (Aswasilah : 2009 cited in Refdi: 2012). The researcher is also familiar with the participants as well as professional relationship with them that also helped researcher to carry out this research even researcher does not teach English in grade 7. Researcher herself is   English teacher for grade 9. The participants of this study were 20 students in Junior High School who studied at SMPN 14 Kota Bengkulu in grade 7.1. Before doing interview to the students, researcher did observation in grade 7.1 English classroom in this school. This observation was done to see the students' respond to the game that is used by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary through game.

This study applied a descriptive qualitative method based on the classifications of the research design from Djajasudarma (2006), this study can be characterized as a qualitative study and it categorized as a case study because the research was carried out in a limited or small scale single case and not to be generalized. In this study, the research only dealt with analyzing particular document from the students' answering to the interview. Then, the result was not to be generalized as general conditions of the whole students in Kota Bengkulu. The descriptive data analysis was employed to analyze the obtained data. In analyzing data there are some steps proposed, transcribing, coding and interpreting the data. The first step is transcribing the data; interview needs to be transcribed to enable data analysis for this study. Transcribing the interviews is in fact initial data analysis (Gibbs 2007; Rapley 2007; Bailey 2008, as cited in Liamputtong, 2009). In this study, data were analyzed in detail by researchers herself. Researcher transcribed the interview herself. Secondly, the data were coded in form of label. According to Charmaz (2006) as cited in Prisilya (2014), that "coding is the process of defining what the data about". The last step is interpreting the data. These steps were conducted to ease the reporting step in finding and discussion section; description of the finding of this study.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data analysis and the discussion of the study. It is about students' views toward teaching English vocabulary throughgame.Through my observation could be seen that the students were happy to play the game and to have the activity where they can interact with each other. It also could be seen that everyone in the classroom wanted to participate to the game. Students' positive attitude toward games and activities may show that the students really enjoy the activity with the game. This may mean that the students really want to have the opportunity to play games, as they provide an active and supportive environment in the classroom. Game is really avoid the students from being bored in their usual classes where they sit passively. Based on the data gained from interview majority of the students' comment were positive. As one of them said:

" *belajar sambil main game enak nian…kami dak meraso kalo lagi belajar bahasa Inggris."*
(Study English while plying game is fun… we do not feel that we are studying English…")

From the students' answering to the interview, they said that playing the game is fun, more interesting, challenging, amusing and they enjoy it. They can remember the words easily. It is shown as:

"Ambo ingat vocab bahasa Inggris kalo main game ini."
(I remember this English vocabulary if I play this game)

Students can acquire vocabulary more quickly and easily by doing actions during game playing (Angelova & Lekova, 1995; Atake, 2003; Deng, 2006). According to Dewey"s "learning by doing", children learn best by doing and by acting in the world (Pound, 2005). When children touch something, they get to realize what the object is and how it feels; when they do some action, they get to know its meaning. By using a game which offers children lots of opportunities to do, to act, and to

move, children can acquire a greater quantity of meaningful vocabulary and they also not afraid of making mistake in saying a new word. As one of their statement:

> "Kami dak takut kalo salah ngucapnyo yang penting kawan kami ngerti maksud kami"
> (We do not afraid of making mistake in pronouncing the word, the important is our friend can understand what I mean)

From the student's statement above, it could be seen that students felt confidence in saying something in English without afraid of making mistake in pronouncing the word. Games help many students to shed their inhibition and be able to participate more actively in the meaning making process. As pointed out by Huang (1996) as cited in Pillai, N (2013), "learning through games could encourage the operation of certain psychological and intellectual factors which could facilitate communication heightened self-esteem, motivation and spontaneity, reinforcing learning, improving intonation and building confidence'. Games can also help shy students to shed their inhibitions and come up to the centre of the classroom. This added advantage helps in all students of the spectrum to actively participate in the language classroom. Games are also advantageous in a sense that through their use in the classroom, students are able to 'interact' with each other more freely as compared to a traditional teacher centered classroom. Another advantage associated with games is that students' anxiety towards language learning decreases as games are employed. In language classes, learners feel stressful because they think that they have to master the target language that is unknown to them.

5. CONCLUSION

Learning vocabulary has been considered a boring subject for a long time and the traditional way of learning vocabulary by mere copying and remembering has shown to be less than effective. This research reveals that games contribute to vocabulary learning if they give students a chance to learn, practice and to review the English language in a pleasant atmosphere. From the research, we found that students are demanding a new way of teaching vocabulary, and they themselves are in search of a new way of learning this subject as well. They also give positive views about teacher's teaching vocabulary though game. First, games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new English words more easily. Second, games usually involve friendly competition and they keep the students interested. Learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms. The results of this research suggest that games are used not only for more fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence.

Whole process of conducting this research about students' views about teacher's vocabulary teaching strategy has contributed to my professional development in term of providing me as an English teacher and other English teachers with knowledge of the strategies in teaching vocabulary effectively. However, because of the limitations of the syllabus, games often cannot be used, as much as they should be. Therefore, it may be challenging for teachers to try to add some games in class in order to develop students' English proficiency of the target language. The researcher hopes that this result of this study can give more information for the readers that game is one of strategies in teaching English. This research can be used as reference or source to do the research with the same matter. The area of teaching English vocabulary among teachers could very well be studied further.

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