

TEACHING VOCABULARY IN UNIVERSITY CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *Vocabulary plays an important role in learning English. Before students are capable of mastering the four skills, they need to acquire basic vocabulary to help them learn English. This study aims at investigating the classroom activities in vocabulary learning. The researcher tries to analyze the factors affecting the successfulness of vocabulary learning. This study used a case study method by adapting a model proposed by Miles and Huberman. The subjects of this study are students and lecturer in vocabulary classroom. The students take the vocabulary classroom in the 3rd semester of Universitas Indraprasta PGRI. There were 38 students and one lecturer involved in this study. The result of this study proved that there are several factors affecting the effectiveness of vocabulary learning, such as syllabus, learning methods and techniques, materials and media of learning, the role of teachers and students, and also motivation.*

Keywords: *vocabulary, classroom activities, case study*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis aktivitas kelas dalam pembelajaran kosakata. Peneliti mencoba menganalisis faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi keberhasilan pembelajaran kosakata. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi kasus dengan mengadaptasi model yang dikemukakan oleh Miles dan Huberman. Subyek penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa dan dosen di kelas kosakata. Para siswa mengambil kelas kosakata di semester ke-3. Ada 38 mahasiswa dan satu dosen yang terlibat dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa ada beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi efektivitas pembelajaran kosakata, seperti silabus, metode dan teknik pembelajaran, materi dan media pembelajaran, peran guru dan siswa, serta motivasi.*

Kata kunci: *kosakata, aktifitas kelas, studi kasus*

1. INTRODUCTION

The research in vocabulary learning is worth investigating since vocabulary is one of the languages focuses that influences the successful of language learning. Vocabulary plays an important part in language learning. Previous research shows that vocabulary learning is the most important process in learning a second language or other languages (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Vocabulary is the foundation of a language. It is the key to a comprehension of a language. Unlike

vocabulary, people can use a language even if they do not understand proper grammar, although it will sound weird. On the contrary, without having sufficient amount of vocabularies, people cannot understand or use the language.

Mastering vocabulary does not only mean by knowing the word in either English or Bahasa Indonesia. Knowing a word means understanding the concept of the thing represented, synonym, antonym, how to use that word in a sentence, and knowing the denotative and connotative meaning of the word. Students need to master basic knowledge

of vocabulary before they study complex knowledge such as forming phrases, creating clauses, and sentences (Santosa et al., 2020). The most widely used framework of vocabulary division is the one who is proposed by Nation (Schmitt, 2019). Nation divided vocabulary knowledge into nine components e.g spelling, word parts, meaning, grammatical functions, and collocation.

There is a specific subject in English educational program called “Vocabulary”. This is a compulsory subject that all students have to pass in order to graduate their bachelor’s degree. This subject was taken by the 3rd semester students, who are in the phase of the transition between teenager and adult. This subject focuses on the improving students’ vocabulary knowledge.

(Scott, 2016) stated that in learning a language students need to pass three steps: labelling, categorising, and end by network building. In the first-time students hear or read a word, they try to make a full concept of the word and the thing it referred to. After that, students move to the categorising level. They will try to make a connection between each word or things that have similar characteristics, for example dog and cat are pets. Then, students are making web connection between each word for example hard and soft, beautiful, and pretty, etc.

Furthermore, Nunan in (Hakim, 2019) explains four principles of vocabulary learning. Those principles are focusing on the most useful vocabulary; teach with the appropriate techniques, focusing on the mostly used vocabularies, and give chances and enrichments

to the students to reflect their understanding. Vocabulary grading is one of important aspects in choosing which vocabularies need to be learnt by the students. Teacher must start by the most familiar and easiest vocabulary then move to less familiar and more difficult ones.

Learning material and media are other factors affecting the effectiveness of vocabulary learning. The media mostly used in vocabulary learning is dictionary. (O’Neill, 2019) states that although experts agreed that dictionary has powerful impact in vocabulary learning, there were still few teachers used dictionary in their classroom. Dictionary gives many benefits in vocabulary learning. (Lestari & Nuruddin, n.d.) stated that source of the words and the source of the information about those words. Moreover, some dictionary provided exercises of vocabulary knowledge.

While (Silverman et al., 2019) compares three different learning, print text, video, and electronic text, media in improving students’ vocabulary. The result of the research shows that the effect of certain media depends on the age of the students. Video is more effective in improving younger children’s vocabulary while electronic texts combined with video are more effective in improving higher level of students’ vocabulary knowledge.

As additional information, researchers suggested varieties of techniques to be applied in vocabulary classrooms (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Lessard-Clouston, 2013; Mokhtar et al., 2017; Poole, 2012; Rezaei & Davoudi, 2016; Sadeghi & Nobakht, 2014). Those are using mnemonics, word cards, word list,

guessing from context, coping strategies for production, using dictionaries, spelling rules, and keeping records, data driven learning. The use of appropriate technique can help both students in improving their vocabulary knowledge.

Based on the explanations above, the researcher is interested in investigating the classroom activities in vocabulary learning. The researcher tries to analyse the factors affecting the successfulness of vocabulary learning in the 3rd semester students of Universitas Indraprasta PGRI.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study are students and lecturer in vocabulary classroom. The students take the vocabulary classroom in the 3rd semester. This is a 3-credit semester class worth 150 minutes every meeting. The classroom lasts 14 meetings in a whole semester. The classroom consists of 38 students. The lecturer named Bunga (a pseudonym) has a master's degree in English educational program and bachelor's degree in English literature. The conversation in classroom uses mostly English and less Bahasa Indonesia.

The data were collected through observation, interview, and document analysis. First, the researcher investigated the documents used in the classroom that is the syllabus.

The observation was done to see the real situation in the classroom. In order to check the researcher's perception based on the

observation, the researcher also did two types of interviews. The researcher asked several questions to the lecturer every before and after learning session in informal situations. The researcher then investigated students' perception by doing focus group discussions in every after the classrooms finished. There were 10 students joined in each session of focus group discussion. There were 7 questions prepared and developed continuing the students' responses.

The data collected then were analysed by using Miles and Huberman method. Miles and Huberman offered steps in analysing the data in case study. The first step is the reduction of the data. Reduction of the data involves summarising, selecting the primary point, focusing on the key points, and determining the topic and structure. As a result, the reduced data provides clearer information and make it easier for the researcher to analyse the data. The second step is the presentation of the data. Data can be presented in various ways such as brief description, charts, flowcharts, graphs, etc. In this study, the data is presented in the form of a brief description. The last step is the conclusion and verification of the data. The conclusion is drawn by answering the research question that has been formulated in the beginning of the research.

3. RESULTS

The findings on the practice of vocabulary teaching are divided into three parts: the syllabus, the learning method, and techniques, and learning material and media.

3.1. The syllabus

The syllabus used in this classroom consists of three parts. The first part gives information about the identity of the lessons. It states:

Faculty : Language and Arts
Department : English Education
Lecture : Vocabulary
Semester/Credit : 3/3
Academic Year : 2014/2015
Coordinator : Bunga, M.Pd (a pseudonym)

In the second part, the reader finds topics discussed in the whole semester. The classroom lasts 16 meetings including 2 times tests, midterm, and final tests. There are about 2 or 3 themes discussed each week. In the last part, the syllabus also consists of reference. There are two books listed in the reference. Both books were practice books published by one of the best-selling-book publishers in the world, Cambridge University Press.

Based on the syllabus analysis done by the researcher, it is concluded that the syllabus still needs some improvements in several areas. In the identity of the subject, there is not stated any goals and indicators of learning. The goals of learning need to be broken down into measurable indicators. The indicators are beneficial to be the guideline for the lecturer in implementing the lessons. Learning indicators are expected to provide criteria in deciding students' progress. It is also useful for the students to do self-evaluation to check their progress of learning. (Peyvandi et al., 2021) states that self-evaluation syllabus promotes the

autonomous learning. The analysis also shows that there is not any type of assessments listed in syllabus. Assessment of students' learning is at the core of university education (Lipnevich et al., 2021).

Another point noticed by the researcher is related to reference. After comparing the module with one of the reference books, the researcher found that there are similar characteristics between those two books. Textbooks are important media in the learning process both in general, and specifically, for example of a language (Ayu, 2020). The use of appropriate textbooks supports the interest of the students and the effectiveness of the learning process (Khashimova et al., 2021). The researcher suggested that the syllabus and material designer need to use more books as reference in terms of avoiding plagiarism. The syllabus and material designer also need to make another module that is more related to Indonesian context, especially the university context.

3.2. Learning Methods and Techniques

The findings about learning methods and techniques show that the lecturer uses module as the guidelines of the activities. Besides using the module, the lecturer also invites students to play vocabulary games every meeting. In the first observations, the researcher sees the game that uses monolingual dictionary as the instruments of the game. The rules of the game are the lecturer mentions a word then students are finding the word in the dictionary and pronounce the word as it is stated in the dictionary. This game is played because the

theme of the meeting is “dictionary usage”. Previous research shows that students have excited experiences in using dictionary in the classroom (Barham, 2017).

The second game played by the students is chain words while they were learning about adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. The rules of this game are the lecturer decides a theme whether it is adjectives, adverbs, or prepositions. Then she asks a student to mention a word and asks one other student to mention a word that the first letter is the last letter of the previous word. The game continues until all students get their chance and all the three topics are practiced. The next meeting, the lecturer uses power point presentation as the media in playing games about numbers. This time, the lecturer prepares slide shows consists of various questions such as how to appropriately write, find the correct answer, correct the mistakes, and how to correctly pronounce date, time, amount of money, and other types of numbers. The last activity is watching a video and finds the differences between American and British English.

Based on the interview, the lecturer says that she uses games in classroom interaction to get students interest in learning. She assumes that students, which are teenagers, still need motivation in learning. They love to be challenged. The lecturer adds that games can reduce students’ anxiety. She argues that anxiety was the biggest obstacle that influenced students’ achievement in learning. She also thinks that monolingual dictionary is one of the powerful media in improving vocabulary knowledge. This is the reason why she insisted

the students to always bring monolingual dictionary into the classroom. She also thinks that even a monolingual electronic dictionary from the similar publisher do not have as complete information as stated in printed one.

The results of focus group discussion shows that students feel enthusiast in learning vocabulary since there are a lot of games in every meeting. All students say that the activities are stress free and they really enjoy the games. They agreed that the process of learning succeeds in improving their vocabulary knowledge. Besides all the good things mentioned by the students, they complain about the policy made by the lecturer, which is all students, must bring printed monolingual dictionary to the classroom. They argue that the information in online dictionary managed by oxford consists of similar information with what it is stated in the printed one. This argument makes the researcher interested in paying more focus in the difference between online and printed dictionary.

The fun learning concepts adapted by the lecturer is one of the powerful factors in improving students’ vocabulary knowledge. The lecturer’s arguments are suitable with students’ perception. A research conducted by (Hounhanou, 2020) proves that a stress-free classroom is effective in improving students’ vocabulary knowledge. The students who are teenagers really enjoy all the classroom activities. Students are motivated to participate in every game. By bringing games to the classroom, teacher provides the challenging ambivalent in the classroom (Ashrapovich, 2021). Challenges given by the lecturer

become the trigger of the students in doing the best they can do.

The result of the focus group discussion proves that all the activities effectively succeeded in improving students' vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, a student number 23 claims that vocabulary is the best lesson he learned in the university. The activities not only help the students in raising their vocabulary mastery but also help them in social life. 17 of 38 students confess that they intentionally share the knowledge they get in the classroom in their social media or blog. They become more confident in creating social media status in English after learning vocabulary in the classroom.

3.3. Materials and Media of Learning

Learning materials studied in this course consist of 6 topics which are divided into 30 units. The topics are word formation, phrase building, parts of speech, notional concepts, English variations, and Topics. This learning material is organized in a module that becomes the guideline of the learning process. Furthermore, lecturers also add other materials from other sources such as books, magazine or newspaper articles, and video. The lecturers use various learning media such as modules, dictionaries, power points, and videos downloaded from YouTube.

Learning material designed for this lesson is suitable with the principles of effective learning material proposed by (Scott, 2016). The materials are arranged by the most into the least familiar vocabulary. The vocabularies then are arranged based on the vocabulary used in

daily conversation into the vocabulary used only in specific area. After that, the vocabularies are arranged in terms of the learnability. The easiest vocabularies to be learned are vocabularies that have fixed structure such as prefixes and suffixes. The certain rules of word form help students in making concepts of each vocabulary. The most difficult ones are arbitrary vocabularies such as numbers, partitives, and the difference between American and British English.

Media becomes another factor in improving students' vocabulary mastery. The use of various media will always attract the students in learning. The best media is the media that can activate all senses of the students (Rahmah et al., 2020). By activating all senses of the students, it can help the students in getting the meaning or concept of each vocabulary. All types of media such as video, power point presentation, word cards, magazine, newspapers, or even textbooks or modules can give similar impact to students' progress of learning if it is used appropriately with the students' needs and goal of learning. This statement becomes the warning for lecturers or teachers to always update information about students' interests.

As stated in previous part, the researcher pays attention on the dictionary usage. Experts agreed that dictionary is a useful media in learning vocabulary. Based on that statement, the lecturer makes a regulation that all students must bring monolingual dictionary into classroom. In contrast, the students feel that this regulation is not effective. They claim that they can access similar information with the one

they get from printed dictionary in an online dictionary. Previous research shows that electronic dictionaries are gaining more popularity towards the printed dictionary (Şevik, 2014). Based on this situation, the researcher is interested in investigating the differences between online and printed monolingual dictionary. The printed dictionary analysed is Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary while the online dictionary is accessed in <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>.

The researcher opens the dictionary randomly and found the word "grass". These are information listed in printed dictionary about "grass".

Grass /gra:s ; AmE græs? noun, verb

> Noun **1** [U] a common wild plant with narrow green leaves and stems that are eaten by cows, horses, sheep, etc: *a blade of grass* * *the dry grass caught fire*. **2** [C] any type of grass: *ornamental grasses* **3** [sing., U] (usually **the grass**) an area of ground covered with grass: *to cut / mow the grass* * *Don't walk on the grass*. **4** [U] (slang) MARIJUANA **5** [C] (BrE, *slang*, usually *disapproving*) a person, usually a criminal, who tells the police about sb's criminal activities and plans-compare SUPERGRASS IDM **the grass is (always) greener on the other side (of the fence)** (saying) said about people who never seem happy with what they have and always think that other people have a better situation that they have **not let the grass grow under your feet** to not delay in getting things done **put sb out to 'grass** (*informal*) to force sb to stop doing their job, especially because they are old - more at SNAKE n.

> verb [v] - (**on sb**) (also, **grass sb up**) (both BrE, *informal*) to tell the police about sb's criminal activities PHR V , **grass sth <-> 'over** to cover an area with grass

And below is the information got from the online dictionary about "grass"



grass noun

 A2

 /gra:s/

 /græs/

Idioms

1   [uncountable] a common wild plant with narrow green leaves and stems that are eaten by cows, horses, sheep, etc.

• *a blade of grass*

• *The dry grass caught fire.*

2  [countable] any type of grass

• *ornamental grasses*

SEE ALSO [elephant grass](#), [lemongrass](#), [marram grass](#)

3   [singular, uncountable]

(usually **the grass**)

an area of ground covered with grass

• *to cut/mow the grass*

• *on the grass* *Don't walk on the grass.*

• *Keep off the grass.* (= on a sign)

• *on grass* *He plays better on grass* (= on a grass court, when playing tennis).


+ Extra Examples

TOPICS [Gardens](#) 

+ Oxford Collocations Dictionary

4  [uncountable] (*informal*) [marijuana](#)

TOPICS [Social issues](#) 

5  [countable] (*British English, informal, usually disapproving*) a person, usually a criminal, who tells the police about somebody's criminal activities and plans

COMPARE [supergrass](#)

TOPICS [Crime and punishment](#) 

Based on the above findings, the researcher concludes that the online dictionary gives as complete as information stated in printed dictionary. Moreover, the researcher also found that online dictionary is better in

terms of pronunciation. Online dictionaries provide audio which students can hear native speaker appropriately pronounce the word. It is more helpful for the students than guessing the correct pronunciation by seeing the phonetics symbol stated in printed dictionary (Ambarwati & Mandasari, 2020).

3.4. Other Factors of Learning

Based on the analysis of the data, the researcher concludes that there are several factors affecting the effectiveness in vocabulary learning, that are teacher / lecturer's role and students' motivation. The researcher finds that students are enthusiast in learning because of the contiguity between the lecturer and the student. The lecturer puts herself as the facilitator and motivator of the students instead of source of the knowledge. The students are the ones who actively engaged in the activities (Setiawan & Wiedarti, 2020). The result of focus group discussion showed that the interaction leads by the lecturer decreased the level of anxiety of the students.

It is also found that motivation becomes another factor of the effectiveness of vocabulary learning. Students that have internal motivation tend to be more succeeds in vocabulary learning than the ones that have external motivation (Abdulrahman & Basalama, 2019). It is proven by the result of focus group discussion compared to the score given by the lecturer.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, this study proved that there are several factors affecting the effectiveness of vocabulary learning, such as syllabus, learning methods and techniques, materials and media of learning, the role of teachers and students, and motivation. The study showed that the syllabus still needs improvement in terms of the objectives of the lesson, types of assessments, and reference.

The syllabus and module designers need to be more careful in using reference as their source of products. While fun learning concept adapted by the lecturer is effective in getting students' interests and improving students' vocabulary knowledge. The students really enjoyed all the activities brought to the class. The interaction leads by the lecturer also influence the students' interests in learning. The lecturer put herself as the facilitator and motivator while the students were the ones who actively engaged in the activities. Another factor in learning is motivation. Students that have internal motivation tend to be more success in learning than others who have external motivation.

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