

UTILIZING STORYTELLING TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY

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Abstract: This research aims at: (1) identifying whether Storytelling can improve the students' vocabulary mastery or not, and (2) describing the class situation when Storytelling is implemented in the English class. The research was carried out to the fourth grade students of Elementary School in the academic year of 2012/2013, within two cycles. The research data were collected by using techniques of observation including photographs and notes/field notes, interview, documents, and tests (pre-test and post-tests). The qualitative data which were assembled would be then analyzed through coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistic. The result of the study shows that the use of Storytelling improves the students' vocabulary mastery. It can be seen from the improvements of students' mean scores in each tests. The students' cooperation, motivation, and confidence were also increased.

Keywords: *vocabulary mastery, Storytelling*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is regarded as a difficult subject at a formal school, especially for the students who are at the lower classes, students of Elementary School in this case. In learning English, the students need to understand about each element of language, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Without deeply understanding each of them, the students will not be able to deliver their wants and thinking properly to another.

In learning a language, vocabulary plays a fundamental part. It definitely builds a language to become meaningful and more understandable. Moreover, mastering vocabulary is being prominent in learning a language. Hatch and Brown (1995) propose the definition of vocabulary as a list or set of words for a particular language or a list or set of words that individual speakers of a

language might use. Meanwhile, Hornby (1995) explains mastery as a complete knowledge or complete skill. Thus, vocabulary mastery can be meant as a complete knowledge or skill in learning vocabulary. Then, it is important for the students to learn vocabulary firstly. Because the earlier the students learn vocabulary, the more they become good in building languages up.

Unfortunately, most of the students of Elementary School got difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. The indicators are: (1) some of the students could not spell the words correctly; (2) they could not well interpret the meaning of some words; (3) they felt it was difficult to make sentences using the words they have got before; (4) they found that it was hard to state the words properly. Those difficulties are even worse in line to the class situation

which was too noisy with some talkative and over-react students. As the consequence, they got bored and tired in following the English lesson which was held in the last hour of their school time.

By this condition, the researcher decided to take a solution by utilizing storytelling to improve the students' vocabulary mastery. Storytelling is a longlife tool for teaching and learning something. It is recognized as a good technique to influence the learners, especially young learners in this case. A good story can motivate the students to learn something new by remembering the main aspects both implicitly and explicitly. Despite this conventional function, storytelling can be conducted in teaching the students to remember the words for the production of a wide variety of language learning activities by combining it with pictures, gestures, and interesting follow-up activities which are close to the students who love everything fun. In line to that statement, Phillips (1996: 74) declares "Vocabulary is best learned when the meaning of the word(s) is illustrated, for example by a picture, an action, or a real object". On the other hand, Ellis and Brewster (1991: 33) state that "vocabulary in stories is presented in a vivid and clear context and the illustrations help to convey meaning. Both the context and the amusing situations can make the vocabulary easy to remember." In addition, Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (1992) say that storybook can provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language as it is presented in a context that is familiar to the students. They also state that stories are motivating and fun, they can also exercise the children's imagination by linking it, the children tend to enjoy the stories over and over again, stories can

introduce new vocabulary and sentence structures by exposing language in varied, memorable, and familiar contexts, and the most important point of teaching children using stories is that it can lay the foundations for secondary school in terms of basic language functions and structures, vocabulary, and language learning skills via visual clues like pictures and illustrations, or by doing gestures.

Utilizing storytelling in the English classroom can make the students feel enjoy and comfort in following the teaching learning process. Zaro and Salaberri (1995) state that storytelling is a relaxed and entertaining activity and so it becomes enjoyable for everyone who in turn creates a better attitude in the learner towards learning and using the language. Thus, the students will be more interested and motivated to pay attention to the materials given. Combining storytelling with pictures, gestures, and interesting follow-up activities will increase their enthusiasm in learning English vocabulary. It is in line to Zaro and Salaberri's statements that, "one way of telling stories is simply to read them aloud or listen to pre-recorded tapes. However, storytelling in its true form only takes place when the story is told to the class face to face when the storyteller can use illustrations, visual aids and even mime and gesture to help comprehension." (1995:5). Furthermore, storytelling is also expected to be able to decrease the level of students' boredom.

In doing the research in the classroom, the technique of telling story is built by the researcher herself. The phases of storytelling is determined into three.

The first phase is opening activity. The researcher holds a brainstorming activities whereas the students are invited to

speak their opinions about the learning topics that will be discussed. In this phase, the researcher helps her session by using such kinds of visual aids like flashcards.

The second phase is main activity. In this phase, the students are expected to make themselves ready and relax in following the lesson. After the students are well conditioned, the researcher begins to tell the story. She utilizes the use of flashcards or pictures in the students' book and also the use of mime, expressions, and gestures in telling the story. Here, she emphasizes the spelling and pronouncing the vocabulary by inviting the students to do it together with her. After having a session of storytelling, the researcher explains how to use the vocabulary in constructing simple sentences and also delivers the meaning of the vocabulary itself.

Finally, the third phase is confirmation and follow up activity. This final phase is planned by various activities which support the main activity. Here, the researcher plans to have some kinds of assignment by giving exercises to the students and conducting word games related to the vocabulary explained.

The aims of this research are the improvements of the students' vocabulary mastery and class condition which are indicated by the increasing of the students' mean scores in each tests, and their cooperation, motivation, and confidence in every meeting.

Thus, the researcher is sure to solve the problems of the students' vocabulary mastery and class condition by utilizing Storytelling in her research.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted from February until June 2013, including doing

pre-research and pre-test, implementing the action, and doing post-tests. The subject of this research was the fourth grade students of Elementary School, which was class IV A taken as the sample. The research method used in this research was an action research. Carr and Kemmis in Burns (1999: 30) state "action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out." Regarding to the subject taken in this action research, the researcher used a type of action research namely Classroom Action Research.

Furthermore, Kemmis and McTaggart in Burns (2010) propose a process of action research which consists of four fundamental steps: (1) identifying the problems and planning the action; (2) implementing the action; (3) observing or monitoring the action; and (4) reflecting and evaluating the action, and revising the plan if necessary.

In gathering the data, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data in this research were the results of the tests, while the qualitative data were gained by interviewing and observing using photographs and notes/field-notes.

Further, the quantitative data were analyzed by comparing the mean scores of pre-test and post-tests. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were analyzed by using McKernan's five essential stages (in Burns, 1999). Those stages are: (1) assembling the data; (2) coding the data; (3) comparing the data; (4) building interpretations; and (5) reporting the outcomes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research was initialized by doing some preliminary activities, the activities were pre-observation, interview the teacher and students, and pre-test. From those activities, the researcher found that there were some problems dealing with the students' vocabulary mastery:

First, the students could not spell the words correctly. Some of them made mistakes in arranging jumbled letters into the proper words. For example, they spelt "uniform" and "clothes" became "unifrom" and "chlotes".

Second, they could not well interpret the meaning of some words. They hard remembered the meaning of words which were given at the previous time. Sometimes, they also felt familiar to the words which was given before, but could not state the meaning properly. They found it difficult to distinguish "pants" with "shorts", and "t-shirt" with "shirt" or "skirt".

Third, they felt it was difficult to make sentences using the words they have got before.

Fourth, they found that it was hard to state the words properly. Most of them pronounced the words poorly. The main cause of this condition was the effect of their mother tongue and their familiarity of pronouncing Indonesian vocabulary which were very different to the way of pronouncing English vocabulary. As the examples, the students used to pronounce "sweater" and "jacket" from /'swet.ə r/ and /'dʒæk.it/ became /'swit.ə r/ and /'dʒAk. et/, as if they pronounced them in Indonesian.

Additionally, the result of the observation showed that the class atmosphere was too noisy with some

talkative students. In contrast, several students had poor braveness in responding the teacher's commands. Most of the students prefer having conversation with friends or doing the other activities to making notes of the materials presented. In consequences, they often felt bored and tired in following their English class. Moreover, the mean score of pre-test was 6.64, it means that the students' mean score was lower than the passing grade which was 7.5.

Furthermore, the researcher decided to conduct the research within two cycles, by utilizing storytelling as a technique to teach the students vocabulary. After conducting the research, the researcher found that there were some improvements dealing with the students' vocabulary mastery and their class condition. The students' enhancements of vocabulary mastery can be seen from the students' score of the tests. The mean score of pre-test was 6.64 and it increased up to 8.13 in post-test 1. While, the mean score of post-test 1 was 8.13 and it increased up to 8.88 in final post-test. From those scores, it can be seen that there was difference between the score of pre-test and post-tests. It proves that storytelling is an effective technique to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Meanwhile, after conducting this research, the students' noisiness was significantly decreased compared to the increases of their achievements in mastering vocabulary. They were also motivated in joining the lesson and enjoyed in learning English. Most of them were confident in answering the researcher's questions. The other positive results were the decreases of the students' non-academic activities and boredom. It can be concluded in the end of the meetings, that the students were happily did their works and their learning activities after listening

stories. They also became more respectable to the researcher's commands. In joining the activities in teaching and learning process, they were enthusiastically involved and worked both individually and collaboratively with their groups.

This research aims to improve the students' vocabulary mastery and classroom situation. The research findings show the two aspects above are successfully improved by implementing storytelling.

The students' vocabulary mastery was improved after the implementation of storytelling. Storytelling is successfully implemented in the teaching and learning process in this research, utilized as a help for the students to comprehend more the English vocabulary. As Zaro and Salaberri (1995) say that most of new language in stories is perfectly contextualized and it is usually repeated more than once so that the listener has more than one opportunity. The improvements of the students' vocabulary mastery in this research involves four aspects, such as: spelling, meaning, word use, and pronunciation.

To improve the students' ability in spelling words, the researcher did some activities such as telling the stories (including spelling and pronunciation practices), explaining, and giving assignments both written and orally. Mostly, those activities were done in each meetings of this research implementation. The students were expected to repeat the researcher's spelling which was helped by using flashcards to make the students understand more in conveying the meaning of the words. The result of the spelling test indicates that the students were able to spell the vocabulary after storytelling was implemented. The mean score was improved from 3.82 (pre-test) to 4.85 (post-test 1) and

improved again up to 4.90 (post-test 2). Meanwhile, The researcher improved the students' ability in grasping meaning by doing some activities such as doing brainstorming by using flashcards, telling stories, giving exercises both orally and written, and conducting a game. The result of the meaning test indicates that the students were able to grasp the meaning of the vocabulary after storytelling was implemented. The mean score was improved from 4.59 (pre-test) to 4.90 (post-test 1) and improved again up to 4.92 (post-test 2). Wright (1995) states that students want to find meaning in stories, so they listen with a purpose. If they find meaning they are rewarded through their ability to understand, and are motivated to try to improve their ability to understand even more. Besides, in word use aspect, the researcher used some activities such as explaining, and giving assignments both written and orally. Mostly, all of those activities were done in each meetings of this research implementation. The students were expected to arrange the vocabulary to be good sentences. The result of the word use test indicates that the students were able to use the vocabulary after storytelling was implemented. The mean score was improved from 2.62 (pre-test) to 3.41 (post-test 1) and improved again up to 3.87 (post-test 2). Wright (1995) says that stories also introduce students to language items and sentence constructions without their necessarily having to use them productively. Lastly, The researcher improved the students' ability in pronouncing by doing some activities such as pronunciation practices and giving assignments orally. Those two activities were done in each meetings of this research implementation. The students were expected to be able to pronounce the vocabulary

properly. The result of the pronunciation test indicates that the students were able to pronounce the vocabulary after storytelling was implemented. The mean score was improved from 2.26 (pre-test) to 3.10 (post-test 1) and improved again up to 4.08 (post-test 2).

The second improvement is classroom situation. In this research, storytelling is able to improve the situation of the classroom. In conducting this research, the researcher did some activities which were expected to decrease the students' noisiness in the classroom. She employed both written and oral activities in order to make the students became more respect to her commands. The activities were always must in fun and enjoyable condition, so the students were focused and motivated to following the lesson. Then it made their noisiness decreased significantly. As far as the decrease of the students' noisiness, storytelling was also able to make the students focus in following the lesson. Their non-academic activities like chatting with friends, and the other activities were constantly reduced. It was supported by Zaro and Salaberri's statement, that storytelling is a relaxed and entertaining activity and so it becomes enjoyable for everyone who in turn creates a better attitude in the learner towards learning and using the language (1995). Lastly, storytelling is able to reduce the students' boredom. Wright (1995) states that students have a constant need for stories and they will always be willing to listen or to read, if the right moment is chosen.

The observation results which are supported by interviewing the students and the teacher, and some photographs also show the differences of the students' interest and behaviour before and after the

implementation of storytelling. After the researcher conducted the second cycle, she interviewed two students and the English teacher. When the researcher asked about the students' feeling, they said that storytelling is fun and enjoyable for helping them in learning English. The teacher added that the students' attention was increased when the researcher conducted it in the meetings. They also gave more respect and participation in every single activity.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

There are two conclusions based on the research findings and discussion. The first is about the success of the implementation of storytelling towards the students' vocabulary mastery. The researcher's analysis shows that the implementation of storytelling in teaching vocabulary can improve the students' vocabulary mastery. For example, the students were finally able to spell, grasp the meaning, use, and pronounce the vocabulary correctly. It shows that there were any improvements of the students' vocabulary mastery after the researcher conducted the research. The second is about the improvements of the English class situation when storytelling is implemented. During teaching and learning process using storytelling, the students paid more attention to the researcher's stories and explanation, and focused more on the involvement of the teaching activities. The students' activities were as follows: (1) answering the researcher's questions confidently; (2) doing pronunciation and spelling practices; (3) listening to the stories told by the researcher quietly; (4) paying attention to the researcher's explanation about the word use; and (5) doing written and oral assignments respectively. Moreover, storytelling can

create an enjoyable and fun condition in the classroom.

There are many important aspects in teaching vocabulary using storytelling. The students show many positive attitudes that help the process of achieving vocabulary mastery by conducting storytelling. The important aspects that can be taken from implementing storytelling are: (1) inviting the students to do pronunciation and spelling practices; (2) telling the story and giving meanings of the vocabulary by using flashcards and gestures; and (3) explaining the way of arranging the vocabulary into proper sentences.

Based on the conclusions, the researcher proposes some suggestions dealing with the practice of utilizing storytelling to teach vocabulary.

For the teachers, it is recommended for them who will use this technique to consider their ability in arranging words into good sentences when delivering the story. It is because storytelling is rely so much on words, so the one who will be a storyteller should have good dictions. Besides, it is also recommended for them to use additional aids, for example pictures in delivering the story.

Moreover, regarding to the use of storytelling, the school should serve the needs of the teachers and the students in conducting it. The providing of storybooks and a “story-corner” in the library can be one of the most appropriate solutions.

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