

Improving Vocabulary Mastery of Young Learner by Making Use of the Montessori Method

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Abstract

This research aims at identifying whether teaching vocabulary using Montessori Method can improve the students' vocabulary mastery, and to find out how the classroom situation when Montessori Method is applied. The problem highlighted in this research is the low vocabulary mastery of students from one of the kindergartens in Surakarta. The research was conducted in two cycles in two months. The target of the research was the B1 class students at the kindergarten. The procedure of the research consists of identifying problems, planning the action, implementing the action, observing the action, and reflecting on the result of the research. The qualitative data were collected by observation, interview, diary, and photographs. In analyzing qualitative data, the researcher used five stages proposed by Burns which include: assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretation, and reporting the outcomes. The quantitative data were derived from the pre-test and post-test. In analyzing quantitative data, the researcher described the highest, the lowest, and mean scores. The result of the research indicates the Montessori Method can improve the students' vocabulary mastery in two aspects namely meaning and pronunciation. The Montessori Method affected the class situation in two aspects namely the students' self-confidence increased due to the freedom created by the teacher to let the students work on their own and students' participation in the class increased in terms of individual and group activities.

Keywords: *action research, Montessori method, vocabulary mastery.*

INTRODUCTION

English has been taught since 1994 in Indonesian primary schools. This makes various educational institutions compete in creating programs that include English as one of the developed skills. It is a very good condition for the development of English in Indonesia because students will get better mastery of English if they learn it earlier.

Meanwhile, many researchers also stated that for the students to obtain the language easily and naturally, English teaching should be started at an early age.

Children between 0-6 years old learn preferably through game, song, toy, and rhyme. As stated in *Young Learner* by Phillips (1993), the types of activities that work great in teaching children are the activities that implicate coloring, cutting, sticking, simple repetitive stories, and repetitive speaking activities which have a real value of communication. Thus, English should be taught in a natural context for this age group. So, in developing the teaching technique, teachers are expected to be more creative and imaginative in order to make English learning more exciting.

Vocabulary has a crucial part in improving communicative skills. In order to have a good understanding of English, students are necessary to master other components of language, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, not only the four basic skills of language, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

English teachers at one of the kindergartens in Surakarta have good skills in teaching English. The teacher uses several methods in teaching vocabulary, such as singing songs, reading postcards, and practicing vocabulary. However, from the four vocabulary indicators, the learning process is still constrained in meaning and pronunciation because students are often confused about pronouncing words and tend not to pay attention in the classroom. As a result, the use of the words they use is not in accordance with the vocab taught by the teacher, even though the teacher has given appropriate learning, in practice, the teacher still has difficulty in giving direction on how to correctly pronounce and the correct meaning of words as well due to some of these things. Furthermore, the incorrect pronunciation of the teacher leads the students into confusion about what is right. For example, the teacher once pronounces blanket as /'blɛŋkət/ instead of /'blæŋkɪt/.

Moreover, some students feel bored during the English learning process which causes a lack of understanding of English. This is also due to the lack of memory and awkwardness of children in improving English as a foreign language because children have developed their mother tongue. Boredom arises when children are introduced to flashcards teaching media that tend to be carried away in a monotonous atmosphere.

The researcher realizes that teachers should consider the background of students and help them to learn and develop their vocabulary in more interesting ways. Hence, the researcher proposes a solution for teaching English to kindergarten students using a method called Montessori Method in order to improve the students' vocabulary mastery.

This research was aimed to find out how Montessori Method can improve students' vocabulary mastery and how the class situation when Montessori Method is applied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is of critical importance to language. Thus, students need to enhance their vocabulary continually. In order to master the vocabulary, teachers should consider the background of learners and help them to learn and develop their vocabulary.

According to Madsen (1983) vocabulary is the total number of words in a language, words known by a person or used in a particular subject, book, or list of words used with their meaning. Talking about vocabulary, Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert (in Kamil and Hiebert, 2005, p. 2-3) define vocabulary as knowledge of words and words meaning in both oral and printed language and productive and receptive forms. According to Hatch and Brown (1995, p. 1), vocabulary is a set or list of words for a particular language or a set or list of words that might be used by individual speakers of the language.

Ur (1996, p. 60-62) stated there are several vocabulary aspects that need to be taught or mastered by students in learning a foreign language.

a. Form: pronunciation and spelling

The students should understand what a word sounds like (pronunciation) and what it looks like (spelling).

b. Grammar and the usage of sentences

The teacher needs to teach the students to use the item into correct sentences which can influence the students' skill of communication.

c. Meaning: denotation, connotation, appropriateness

Denotation is the precise or literal definition of a word that could be found in a dictionary. On the contrary, connotation relates to a certain word that refers to the positive and negative association.

d. Meaning: Meaning relationship

How the meaning of one item relates to the meaning of others can also be beneficial in teaching.

Vocabulary mastery is a way of developing vocab well which must contain 4 indicators, namely the clear meaning of vocab, the correct pronunciation of a word, correct spelling and no letters left behind to spell, and also the correct use of words in word selection both in communication and in learning.

Young Learner

Young learners are children from five or six years old who are in the first year of elementary schooling to twelve years old. Nevertheless, children's age cannot always measure their maturity. Yetenberg (1990) characterized young learners as having some problems distinguishing the imaginary world from the real one which could be hard for the teacher to understand their perception of reality and cope with it. According to Phillips (1993), younger children are going to be holistic learners if they are taught at a very young age. They respond to the meaning that underlies the language use without concern about individual sentences or words. Moreover, Slattery (2001) highlighted some characteristics of young learners. They are playful, curious, and imaginative learners. They develop as individuals very quickly and enjoy routines and repetitions. They learn by listening, watching, imitating, and doing things. Due to their short attention span, they need a variety of activities.

Montessori Method

Montessori Method is a method of education for children. According to Lopata, Wallace, and Finn (2005) Montessori education is a sensory-based pedagogy which is based on the belief that children learn at their own pace through object manipulation. In pursuance of Montessori (2009, p. 3) Montessori Method is a method that applies learning while playing in its activities. Montessori's point of view about children is that the child is a creative human and can flourish from the inside. Montessori believed that children's growth is caused by a vital force inside it that appears in some periods with special sensitivity and then disappears at the same time. She noticed that children have special developmental needs and different needs with respect to their normal peers. But she believed that all children have a lot of needs that can be addressed and met in the environment of education. She noticed that any child learns in its own manner and speed and on this basis, she innovated a comprehensive attitude which considers all children's needs as a whole that was individually quite unique for every child (Habibi, 2011). Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the Montessori Method is an educational method that emphasizes teaching by the senses and independent learning in children who combine play and learning. The environment in the Montessori Method was formed to help children become independent learners by allowing them to make choices while teachers direct their work in an inviting and warm environment.

According to Bradley in Handayani (2012), most steps done by some Montessori Method teachers that have been modified are as follows:

- a. First of all, the teacher divides the class into some groups. Each group is given some tools such as pictures/ cards/ letters/ games equipment.
- b. Secondly, the teacher sits at the table/ floor with the students. The teacher should be on the same side of the table/ floor so that she is looking at the same words that she builds from the same perspective. The teacher shows the role of the game.
- c. Most Montessori Method uses matching activity games where the students try to find the word in a picture form/ sounds/ things indicating the meaning.
- d. The next step is building the word indicated by a picture card together. Show the picture card to the children and then show the students how to build the word.
- e. The next step is checking the work. If the word is spelled correctly, then move on. As the students become more comfortable with identifying letters and spelling the words, the teacher can let the students work on their own.
- f. Then, the students are directed to pronounce the word they have arranged and the teacher guides them to correct the mispronounced words.
- g. The final step is asking the students to build sentences using the words they learn. The students will make some sentences using the vocabulary related to the items.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of this research is Classroom Action Research. This research was focused on finding out whether Montessori Method can improve students' vocabulary mastery, and how the classroom situation when Montessori Method applied. The researcher acted as an observer and practitioner.

The subject of the research was the B1 class students from one of the kindergartens in Surakarta. The class consists of thirty students, sixteen boys, and fourteen girls. The time allocated in a teaching time was forty minutes per week every Monday. The research was conducted in two cycles for two months.

The procedure of the research consists of identifying problems, planning the action, implementing the action, observing the action, and reflecting the result of the research. The qualitative data were collected by observation, interview, diary, and photographs. The observation is conducted to observe the teaching and learning process vocabulary from beginning to the end of activities in the real classroom for B1 class students. The interview is carried out to gain information from the students about their personal perceptions, experiences, opinions, and ideas related to the implementation of the Montessori Method to study vocabulary in the classroom. In the writing diary, the researcher writes for each meeting during the preliminary research and the acting stage. During the teaching and learning process, the researcher took photographs of the students' behavior while the method was conducted in order to provide more accurate data.

In analyzing qualitative data, the researcher used five stages proposed by Burns which include: assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretation, and reporting the outcomes. The quantitative data were derived from the pre-test and post-test. In analyzing quantitative data, the researcher described the highest, the lowest and mean scores.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the students' vocabulary mastery improved significantly. Before the researcher implemented Montessori Method in conducting vocabulary instruction, students' vocabulary mastery was low. After implementing the Montessori Method in the learning process, some improvements could be seen as follows:

1. The Improvement in Meaning

Using the Montessori Method was effective to motivate the students' curiosity in learning new vocabulary. Through the Montessori Method, the students learned naturally to learn new words. Using the Montessori Method, students did not learn vocabulary by listing the sum of words then memorizing those words but understanding the meaning of words based on the facts introduced in an amusing way. The students understood the definition of the words in the way they played the game in this method. Real objects or realia helped the students memorize new words better. After implementing the Montessori Method in their learning activity, the students got a larger number of vocabularies and memorized a large number of definitions. The use of the Montessori Method supported the students to explore their imagination freely. The researcher directed the students to find the meaning and definition in an actual way. This method used media such as pictures, realia, music video, and flashcards to help the students understand and memorize the meaning better.

2. The Improvement in Pronunciation

The students showed a satisfying improvement in their pronunciation after implementing the Montessori Method in cycle 2. The students were introduced to a song

which was involved in the game to attract the attention of the students and help them memorize the pronunciation of new words and pronounce the words. This improved the achievement of the students in the pronunciation aspect from cycle 1. The students were also drilled to pronounce the words as often as possible so their tongue was accustomed and familiarized with English accent and pronunciation.

The application of the Montessori Method results in the development of two aspects of vocabulary. The explanations are as follows:

a. How Montessori Method improves Meaning

In cycle one, the students' ability in deciding meaning improved. Students got more vocabulary from learning words they got from the game. Students' ability in deciding meaning increased, students got more words from learning words based on the game they experienced. By implementing the Montessori Method, they can stimulate their move and ability in thinking. They learn the language through their experience in playing games. They understand the words well and they have improved in understanding the meaning. When the researcher asked them using flashcards, most of the students could answer the questions correctly.

The Montessori Method implemented in cycle one showed when the student played "Foods" game, and had many times playing with some food flashcards, at an opportune moment the researcher drew near them, and took the two different cards, the cupcake, and the chili cards, and showed them and said, "This is cupcake"; "This is chili." The two words only, cupcake and chili, were pronounced several times in succession with a strong emphasis and with very clear pronunciation, "This is cupcake, it's sweet, manis, hmm", "This is chili, it's spicy, pedas, haaah; after which there was a moment's pause. Then the researcher, to see if the child had understood, verified with the following tests: "Coba kasih Us yang sweet. Sekarang coba kasih Us yang spicy." Again, "Yang mana rasanya sweet." The students would reply, "Cupcake". "Sekarang, mana yang rasanya spicy." The students would reply, "Chili". "Coba kasih Us yang sweet." Then there is another pause. Finally, the researcher pointed to the objects in turn, and asked, "What is this?" If the child understood, he would reply with, "Sweet," "Spicy."

b. How Montessori Method improve Pronunciation

In the first cycle, the students still counted on the teacher's instruction and clues to help them decide the correct pronunciation. The researcher helped students to pronounce the words by using games.

The improvement of the pronunciation aspect was gained by combining the games with songs. Song was effective to motivate the students to learn the words' pronunciation in a familiar and natural way. Every lyric of the song supported the students to memorize the pronunciation of the words when they were sung repeatedly. Song worked effectively through the students' sense of hearing.

In cycle two, the researcher applied songs to help the students memorize the new vocabulary pronunciation easily. For example, in the second meeting of cycle 2, the researcher used a "Head and Shoulder" song to introduce the students to obtain the exact pronunciation. The students felt amused and happy to sing this song. They repeatedly sing this song and they can pronounce the parts of the body with good pronunciation. This method seemed successful in improving the students'

pronunciation. Besides using songs, the researcher also used drilling activities to ensure the students got better pronunciation. The application of songs in several games in the Montessori Method proves that the students' ability to pronounce new vocabulary increased. The song engages the students to be directly involved in a familiar way of memorizing sounds. Song gives the students a free area to explore their creativity in developing their pronunciation mastery. The students feel secure to do confirmation on pronunciation correctness inside the songs. When the song is often repeated, the sounds of some words are memorized maximally. This strategy succeeds in developing students' pronunciation ability.

c. The class situation when Montessori Method was implemented in the English class

During the implementation of the research, the students' self-confidence increased. This was due to the freedom created by the teacher to let the students work on their own. In the Montessori Method, group works were applied in most meetings. It showed that the students explored their capability as well as they played the games. The students worked together with no pressure and enjoyed the vocabulary instruction with their natural intuition. The confirmation from the friends in one or even other groups contributed to the students' mental condition. It helped the students find their secure areas where they felt free to express their ideas and showed their ability confidently. The teacher released the pressure from the students' mind and built a more joyful class condition.

In cycle two, the researcher played an animal game called "What animals do you hear?". It is a game where students performed in front of class and imitated the sound and movement of certain animals while other students tried to guess the animal. The students were thrilled when they competed with other groups to guess the animal.

The students' participation in the class also increased. They are actively involved in both individual and group activities. Each student was busy with their own work - exploring something that was surely different from his/her friend. This kind of treatment gave the spaces to students to develop their personal ability and facilitated the group to maintain solidarity. This situation was different compared with pre research. Before the action, the class atmosphere was not conducive and the students easily lost their focus. Only a few students dominated the teaching and learning process. Those problems were solved during the implementation of the Montessori Method.

In cycle two, the researcher played a "Hang Your T-Shirt" game to introduce the students with colours. Before the activity started, the researcher asked the students about their favourite colour. The students responded with enthusiasm, even told the researcher about their toys in their favourite colours. The vocabulary instruction using Montessori Method encouraged students to be engaged in the learning process.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

After implementing the research in two cycles and getting the result of the research, the conclusions are as follows:

1. The use of the Montessori Method can improve the students' vocabulary mastery in two aspects: meaning and pronunciation.

Using the Montessori Method, students did not learn vocabulary by listing the sum of words then memorizing those words but understanding the meaning of words based on the facts introduced in an amusing way. The students understood the definition of the words in the way they played the game in this method. Actual things or realia helped the students memorize new words better.

The students were introduced to a song which was involved in the game to attract the attention of the students and help them memorize the pronunciation of new words and pronounce the words. This improved the achievement of the students in the pronunciation aspect. Moreover, the students were also drilled to pronounce the words as often as possible so their tongue was accustomed and familiarized with English accent and pronunciation.

2. The classroom situation was affected during the implementation of the Montessori Method. During the implementation of the Montessori Method, the students' self-confidence and participation in the classroom were improved. However, the implementation of the Montessori Method often needs extra time. It can also cause class noises due to the students' over self-confidence.

Montessori Method performs language teaching in a simple, easy, and interesting way. By using the Montessori Method, the researcher helps the students to develop their brain capacity, build mental discipline, and strengthen their motivation and spirit. Games seem familiar to children. A new game in each meeting encourages the students to find different new vocabularies through natural way of thinking. The game motivates the students to memorize the number of new words in an interesting and easy way. They enjoy understanding meaning and memorizing new words without any pressure from the surrounding so that they feel free to choose their activities which enable them to get more language acquisition.

Montessori Method solves the students' problem on: (1) interest. This strategy shows a good impact to attract the students' attention and to stimulate the students' curiosity to what will happen next. Students' interest improves; (2) motivation. The students' motivation was increasing because the students enjoyed playing the game. They have good intentions of learning English because the games in each meeting are different; (3) concentration. The students found different games in each meeting and it urged them to get better concentration in each meeting; (4) the group works show that the students explore their capability as well as they play the games; (5) The students' self-confidence increases very rapidly during the implementation of the research. When the students are familiar with the vocabulary instruction, they become more confident to show their ability to their classmates and sometimes dominate the class activities. This is due to the freedom created by the teacher to let the students free to do the work.

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