

## AN INVESTIGATION OF ENGLISH TEACHING STRATEGIES IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY IMPLEMENTED BY A PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHER

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**Abstract:** The need to teach English language appropriately in particular is a challenge for all the teachers in Indonesia. Today, it has become obligatory for the teachers to rethink and renovate their teaching strategies with the changing times. Since there has been a continuous transformation in the teaching methods and techniques all over the world in every subject, methods and techniques for teaching vocabulary need desirable innovation to fulfill students' need of vocabulary learning. This research was aimed to investigate the strategies used by a pre-service teacher to improve students' vocabulary and students' responses toward the teacher's strategies. A qualitative approach with case study design with a pre-service English teacher was used and 35 students in one junior high school participated in this study. The data were collected through observations, interview, and questionnaire. The results showed that the teacher used varieties of techniques in numerous methods as his teaching strategies, such as Contextual Teaching and Learning with neighborhood walk, Silent way with pictures and crosswords puzzle, and Total Physical Response with gamification, to enhance students' vocabulary. The strategies are proven to be appropriate to be implemented in the classroom and leads to the vocabulary collection improvement for most students in the classroom.

**Keywords:** Teaching Strategies, Vocabulary

### Introduction

English is well thought-out as the most vital and influential language in the world. It is used by a large number of people in the world to communicate each other. It has become essential for people throughout the world especially when they enter a worldwide workforce. Almost all top films, books, musics, and even internet contents are published in English. It means that knowing English permits us to access an incredible amount of information and

entertainment or in other words, knowing the world.

Indonesia uses English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which makes English more difficult to be learned. As stated by Thompson (2012) that "it can take up to seven years for learners who are using a language other than their mother tongue to attain the same levels of academic language proficiency as those expected for learners learning in a mother tongue". One

of many cases is students of a junior high school in Bandung that had a little vocabulary collection. Many of them were not willing to learn English because they did not understand most vocabulary that they found in the text which the teacher gave. It appears that the teachers did not really deliver a proper teaching strategy to enhance students' vocabulary learning, which is ironic, considering that students can only understand the learning material if they understand what they are being told and given, as showed by some research that "learners need to know approximately 98 percent of the words in written or spoken discourse in order to understand it well" (Nation, as cited in Schmitt, 2008, p.1).

Nowadays, it has become obligatory for the teachers to rethink and renovate their teaching strategies with the changing times. Since there has been a continuous transformation in the teaching methods and techniques all over the world in every subject, methods and techniques for teaching vocabulary need desirable innovation to fulfill students' need of vocabulary learning.

Meanwhile, pre-service English teachers, as the successor generation, are demanded to be creative in designing and implementing teaching strategies. Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage (as cited in Mergler & Spooner-Lane 2012,

p.66) points out that "pre-service teacher education programs aim to prepare graduates to become quality teachers equipped with pedagogical practices that will serve to meet the increasing demands associated with the teaching profession".

Therefore, the researcher aims to investigate the teaching strategies of a pre-service English teacher implemented to a class of some students with low vocabulary collection in a junior high school in Bandung.

## **Literature Review**

### • **Teaching Strategies**

In teaching, teacher's strategy has a very important role to aid the students to learn. This is in line with Herrell and Jordan (as cited in Thompson, 2012, p.4) that define strategy as, "...the approaches that can be used across curricular areas to support the learning of students" which "...may be used only on occasion" (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison as cited in Thompson, 2012, p.4). Method, which is a part of a strategy and includes techniques, is also vital. Brown (2001, p.210) points out that strategies are particular methods of approaching a problem or task, to achieve particular objectives. While techniques are defined as the specific activities demonstrated in the classrooms that were dependable with a method (Brown, 2001, p.14).

There are some teaching methods that has been implemented for a teaching strategy through century namely The Silent Way, a method where the students respond to visual cues, commands, or question to discover the language, Total Physical Response, which uses physical action as a technique to explain the language (Brown, 2001, pp.28-30) and Contextual Learning, which uses everyday vocabulary as a material so the students can have a meaningful learning.

The Silent Way was found by Caleb Gatteno who believes that learning process can be achieved by discovering or problem-solving involving the material as the technique. Learners should develop independence, autonomy, and responsibility (Brown, 2001, pp.28-29).

Total Physical Response was developed by James Asher who believes that motor activity is a right-brain function that should precede left-brain language processing. He was also convinced that language classes were often too much nervousness, so he invented a method that was as stress-free as possible by listening and acting techniques. "Total Physical Response is also effective in the beginning levels of language proficiency" (Brown, 2001, p.30).

Contextual Teaching and Learning is a method which aids learners to understand the materials they are learning

by relating it to their daily environments (Johnson & Alwasilah, 2002). In Contextual Teaching and Learning, students discover language they found related to their environment, so it urges them to learn because they can see and use it in their daily life.

- **Enhancing Vocabulary**

Vocabulary is vital parts of language. Without words, language will be difficult to be made. Vocabulary can be seen as bricks in a building while the building is the language. It means that by having a good amount of vocabulary, we can use the language well. No one can learn a language without learning its vocabulary. Campillo (2007) points out that vocabulary is obviously a very important element within a language as the overwhelming majority of meaning is carried lexically. Uberman (1998) also found that vocabulary acquisition is progressively considered as vital to language acquisition. Therefore, learning vocabulary is at the midpoint in teaching and learning a language.

The role of vocabulary knowledge of EFL learning has been in recent times recognized by the theorist and researcher. Accordingly, there are various types of methods and techniques to teach vocabulary. Nation (as cited in Mothe, 2013, p.379) properly states that teaching

vocabulary should not only consist of teaching specific words but also aims at equipping learners with strategies necessary to expand their vocabulary knowledge.

### **Methodology**

The research used qualitative research method to comprehend the phenomenon in depth which is based on how the participants in the research perceive it. Observation, interview, and questionnaire were utilized along with a case study design because the researcher focuses on a program, event, or activity (Malik & Hamied, 2016).

- **Participants**

The participants involved in this study were a male pre-service English teacher enrolled in teaching practicum in an eighth grade class of a junior high school in Bandung consisting of 35 students. The teacher was chosen based on availability and the students were chosen based on the school's recommendation in teaching practicum program.

- **Data Collection**

The data was collected using three instruments, observation, interview, and questionnaire. First, observations were conducted to see how the pre-service

English teacher implemented the strategies in the classroom in which the researcher acted as pure observer who did not influence the situation being observed in any way. Second, teacher interviews were utilized to encourage teachers to reflect on their beliefs and language teaching practices. Third, open-ended questionnaire was used to survey the students' opinions toward the strategies which were implemented in the classroom.

- **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed into a brief description of the observation. Then, coding the interview and questionnaire, and creating a brief explanation of the information acquired. The final step was interpreting the data and presenting the description.

### **Data Presentation and Discussion**

The first observation was conducted on April 5th 2016 which was a week after the teacher discovered that there are some students who were lacked vocabulary. The researcher identified that the teacher used Contextual Teaching and Learning method with neighborhood walk, which the teacher believed it was intended to enhance students' basic vocabulary related to their daily life. The activity required the students to identify pronouns, nouns, and adjectives that students found

in objects and people outside the classroom, then report it into descriptive simple presents tense. The use of Contextual Teaching and Learning method is in line with Mothe (2013, p.380) who points out that in order to understand the complete meaning of a word or phrase, students must be aware of the linguistic environment where a word or a phrase occurs. Implementing a good context which is interesting, reasonable, vivid, and has relevance to the learners' environment, is a crucial requirement for vocabulary teaching because it helps in both engaging the attention of the learners and naturally generating the target vocabulary (Mothe, 2013, p.380). Supri (2013, p.5) also states that "it is appropriate to teach concrete vocabulary items which relate to the 'here and now' of their immediate environment and personal experience". That assumption was proven to be accurate when the teacher implemented the activity. The students seem engaged in the teaching process by asking the English words of the object there are pointing. Some of them are initiative to look up the meaning in their dictionaries. It shows that they learn new vocabularies based on their findings outside the classroom.

The researcher conducted the second observation on April 19th 2016 when the teacher used Silent way to teach narrative text by showing pictures and

using crossword puzzle technique. The teacher said that he designed the activity to enhance students' vocabulary related to narrative text by showing them a narrative text which contained some blank spaces which must be filled by the right words. The use of pictures was assumed by the teacher to stimulate the students to discover what the missing words of the text are so that the students will learn the words through the demonstration portrayed in the picture. This is supported by Mothe (2013, p.381) who believes that variation of pictures can be used successfully to express the meaning of words and sentence. The students also required to place the missing words into a crosswords puzzle, which is considered by the teacher as an effective teaching vocabulary tools, as synthesized by Davis, Shepherd, and Zwiefelhofer (2009, p.6) that "crossword puzzles have been shown to be effective teaching tools of terminology, definitions, spelling, and pairing key concepts with related names, resulting in greater retention and memorization of facts". These variations of techniques resulted in a problem-solving task which facilitated the learning process. The activity implemented was in line with Richard and Rodgers, as cited in Brown (2001, p.28) who believes that learning through Silent Way is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather

than remembers and repeats what is to be learned, and by problem solving involving the material to be learned. This strategy resulted in the students to be enthusiast to think and discover new vocabularies. It can be seen that the students compete each other to obtain all the missing words. They even asked the teacher to give a reward for those who finish it first.

The third observation was conducted on April 26th 2016. The teacher used Total Physical Response Method with gamification technique to enhance students' verbs collection, containing infinitive, regular past form, and irregular past form verbs. The activity was designed to trigger students' motor activity in order to increase their memory in learning by listening and acting, which is in line with Brown (2001, p.30) who believes that memory is increased if it is stimulated, or traced, through association with motor activity, by doing a great deal of listening and acting. In order to implement this method, the teacher used a game that requires the students to act based on the verbs which the teacher gave them. It also can gain the favor of the students as learners like dramatizations and can simply learn through them (Mothe, 2013, p.380). The teacher's intention of using a game was to increase students' attention and engagement toward learning process which is supported by some researches

which show that game can increase the amount of attention students give to the material, thus increasing retention (Klepper, 2003) and could increase students' attitudes towards language learning and that the proper use of games can improve learning (Lui, 2015, p.96). The teacher also said that by adapting gamification, students can experience winning and losing, making mistakes and being given a reward. "Students learn that making mistakes or even failure is not the end but provides an opportunity to learn and improve their skills and knowledge" (Lui, 2015, p.92). Haun, as cited in Davis, Shepherd, & Zwiefelhofer (2009, p.5) reports a number of benefits to using games in the classroom, including teaching alternative techniques to studying, impacting cognitive development, motivating students to learn instead of simply memorizing, and boosting students' confidence when they get a correct response. These theories support the fact that the implementation of this strategy raised students' motivation, engagement, and excitement proven by students' eagerness to win the game by looking up their dictionary and guessing to identify what vocabulary that other students demonstrate. Thus, it enhances their vocabulary.

The data analyzed from the interview with the teacher revealed that the teacher

believed it is important to give students a meaningful learning to make English more functional, considering Mustafa (2002) who found that the lack of exposure to functional uses of English makes it complicated for students to see learning English as a useful and relevant activity. Therefore, the teacher used variety of interactive activity in order to engage students' attention to create a good learning atmosphere. The teacher designed the strategies based on his reading on innovative teaching websites. However, when asked about methods and techniques that he used, he only knew that he used Total Physical Response as his method, and mention crosswords puzzle and gamification as his technique. When asked about students' responses toward the classroom activities, the teacher admitted that most of students were engaged in the learning process although a few students sometimes seemed unaware of the teaching process because of the teachers' ability to control a large group of students was still developing. When asked about students' vocabulary improvement, the teacher found that most of students' score improved and he belief that it was the result of concentrating vocabulary teaching and learning activity.

The data analyzed from the questionnaire shows that students had varieties of opinion toward the teaching

strategies implemented by the pre-service English Teacher. When the students were asked whether those activities can help them to remember new words and why, 72% of them (25 of 35 students) said yes, some of them said the activities can help them to remember new words because it was fun, others said it was interesting, and a few said it was good, while the other 28% (10 of 35 students) said no, some of them said they did not like English and were too lazy to follow the activity, some of them said they did not understand the teachers' instruction so they chose to chat with their friends or draw something on their book or a paper, one of them said that she had known the vocabulary before and was not introduced new words and the other one did not attend those three classes at all.

Positive and negative comments are given by the students regarding the implementation of teachers' strategy. The overall response was very positive, as many students claimed that they like and enjoy the activities because it was not boring like they used to have. It shows that the students engaged in the learning process which leads to students' vocabulary learning improvement (Schmitt, 2008, p.2). Students also gave constructive feedback in improving ways of designing teaching strategies in the future. Some suggest the teacher should

pay attention not only to the engaging students but also to the confused one by reducing the level of activities' difficulty because sometimes the activity was too complicated to be followed by some students, and there was a suggestion for the teacher to add a few unfamiliar vocabularies for high-achiever students so every student can develop their vocabulary level.

### **Conclusions**

The research showed that the teacher used varieties of techniques in numerous methods as his teaching strategies, such as Contextual Teaching and Learning with neighborhood walk, Silent way with pictures and crosswords puzzle, and Total Physical Response with gamification, to enhance students' vocabulary. The implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning with neighborhood walk shows that it facilitates the students to enhance vocabulary by observing and identifying things in their environment using English so they can grasp the realization of the meaning of the word by daily-life relevant activity. The implementation of Silent way with pictures and crosswords puzzle shows that learning vocabulary is not only about being told, but also problem-solving. It can be an appropriate way for students to discover and retain new vocabulary because it is the

product of the time they invested (Brown, 2001, p.29) to facilitate the learning process. Total Physical Response with gamification is proven to be engaging and stress-free which is stimulate the students to improve they learning quality. It can facilitate learning experience, and the use of games in the classroom is very beneficial for students (Barab, Gresalif, & Arici, as cited in Lui, 2015, p.91).

The researcher also found that the strategies used by the teacher have a similarity, which is creating an interactive learning, which is important in any learning, as stated by Dorn, as cited in Davis, Shepherd, and Zwiefelhofer (2009, p.5) that "making students' interaction with material active rather than passive is important as the mind is an instrument to develop rather than a receptacle to be filled".

As a final point, by analyzing the questionnaire of students' opinion, the teaching strategy implemented by the pre-service English teacher is proven to be suitable, as it is enjoyable and engaging, to be implemented to enhance vocabulary for most students in the classroom, regardless of the weaknesses and the evaluation of the teaching strategies which still need to be improved in the future.

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