

CONTEXTUAL CLUES TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY

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Abstracts

This classroom action research is conducted to improve the students' achievement on vocabulary through Contextual Clues Technique (CCT). The subject of the study is Class VIII^C students of SMPN 1 Labang Bangkalan in the academic year of 2013/2014. The class consists of 40 students. This study was conducted in three cycles and in each of the cycles is ended with one additional meeting for vocabulary teacher-made test. In this study, there were two types of data, the quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected through pretest, test 1, test 2, and posttest. The qualitative data were collected through observation checklist and field note, teacher's diary, questionnaire, and interview. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistic to compare the mean scores of each test and also using T-test analysis to find the significance of the improvement. The qualitative data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis to know their improvement toward the use of CCT in learning vocabulary.

Keywords: *contextual clues technique (cct), achievement, vocabulary.*

Background

Vocabulary is one of the most important components in English. It is considered to be the most important ones for students in learning English as a foreign language. Because of their limited vocabulary, they cannot communicate their ideas transmitted to them (Kufaiishi, 1988). Vocabulary mastery must be acquired by students in order to get other competencies like listening, speaking, reading and writing. In other words, vocabulary mastery takes important role in mastering the four skills of English.

In relation to the four skills of English, teaching reading and vocabulary mastery at the school are still a problem for both teachers and students. One of the existing problems in the vocabulary mastery is the number of new/unknown words in textbooks or other supporting obstacles in reading comprehension. The students felt difficult to understand the content of the text because they did not know the meanings, most of the unknown words appearing in sentences or text.

Another factor is that most of teachers there taught language components, especially vocabulary, using improper methods or

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techniques of teaching vocabulary. They just frequently follow up the instruction in the students sheets, such as; giving the students explanations about the components they taught, then giving them some examples, after that, asking them to do the tasks in the worksheets. For example; some English teachers tended to apply translation method during the learning process. They asked the students to translate the reading passage from English into Indonesian. And then the teachers discussed the results of the students' translation with the whole class. These activities made the students feel bored and less challenged in learning English. Consequently, their vocabulary mastery was low. Such situation often made the students feel bored so that they were not interested in learning English. As a result, their vocabulary achievement was low; it was below the minimum passing grade of the school.

Based on the problems above, the writer was interested to teach vocabulary integrated with reading skill because vocabulary and reading skill cannot be separated one another. It is impossible to teach vocabulary without reading text. And also vocabulary and reading skill is to be the most important part in their national examination. Thus, this study focuses on improving the students' achievement on vocabulary through Contextual Clues Technique or CCT. This study also is intended to know the students' perception toward the use of the technique in understanding the meaning of unknown words appearing in sentences or a text by relating to their contexts.

Method

A collaborative classroom action research was conducted, involving 40 students of VIII^C of SMPN I Labang Bangkalan in the academic year of 2013/2014. This design comprises four steps namely planning, action, observation and reflection. In doing the research in the classroom activities; there are some activities done by the researcher; drawing the students' attention to clue words, phrases, or sentences, leading questions to direct the students in a step-by-step search for and use of context clues, and preparing vocabulary exercises that facilitate the students to guess meaning of those words independently.

To obtain the required data, teacher's diary, observation and field note, questionnaire, interview and also vocabulary teacher-made test were employed. Teacher's diary were used by the researcher to record what was happening in the classroom after the teaching-learning process done. Observation checklists and fieldnotes were used by the peer teacher to record the teaching-learning process when the researcher implemented contextual clues technique/CCT. The information recorded were in term of explanation and detail information and also description of how the technique was implemented by the teacher. The questionnaires were used to obtain information from the students' opinions toward the technique use. Interviews were used to obtain deeper information about the students' opinion, motivation, interest, and feeling toward the technique

used. Vocabulary teacher-made tests were used to know to what extent the students' achievement on vocabulary be improved through the technique after the implementation of the technique in each cycle of the study of the research cycles. They were administrated at the end of each cycle in the research cycles of the study.

The Results

The Improvemnet of the Students' Vocabulary Mastery

Based on the results of the students' vocabulary teacher-made test scores done in the research cycles, it was found that the students' achievement on vocabulary improved significantly from pretest to the posttest of the last cycle, where the mean score in the pre-test was 61.80, 69,75 in the first cycle and 89,31 in the last cycle. Five students (12%) got scores above the minimum passing grade of the school (70) in the first cycle. Meanwhile, fourty students or 100% got the score above the minimum passing grade of the school. It means that the CCT was a good technique in learning English, vocabulary especially. It also indicated that the technique was succesfull in handling the meaning of unknown words appearing in sentences or a text by relating to their contexts.

The Students' Responses toward the Implementation of the Contextual Clues Technique

Based on the results of questionnaires, it could be concluded that all of the students gave positive responses toward the activities given during the treatments through the technique. They also gave good performances in learning vocabulary through the CCT. They liked it very much and they also said that they were much happier in the classroom activity. They could answer all of the text-based questions since all the students had understood the meaning of unknown words found in sentences or text. They had been accustomed to using the technique in learning the unknown words. They were certain that they could guess the unknown words more easily in the last session than what they had done in the previous cycles.

This is also supported by the results of the interviews, the students replied positively on the use technique to understand the meanings of the unknown words in sentence or a text. One of the four students being interviewed by the researcher said that the CCT was a good technique because he could guess or understand the unknown words after several times learning vocabulary. The underlined clues were really helpful for them in guessing the unknown words. Dealing with the method's attraction using the technique, they answered confirmatively about it. This happened since they badly liked learning English using the CCT. Furthermore, in responding to the involvement in the learning process using the CCT, they became much more active compared to the previous meetings in the first and second cycle. The other said she tended to be

passive in the teaching-learning process since she could not understand the whole content of the text before knowing the technique. But it was really different from what she had done after knowing this technique; she was badly motivated to guess the unknown words. The others said that they became very active in the teaching-learning process because they really liked the CCT. Dealing with the use of the technique to comprehend the text content, all of the students stated positively about it. They said that the CCT was really helpful for them to understand the content of the text since the unknown words had been understood by them. In relation to the dictionary dependency, the students had positive ideas about it, they did not use their dictionaries anymore whenever they encountered unknown words found in sentence or a text since the text had been equipped with underlined or clear clues. The last students also gave a strong response on the technique use, she said that she always asked her friends, looked up dictionary as well as asked teacher whenever she found any difficult or unknown words in sentence or text. She thought that dictionary was not as a way to solve the problem after knowing the technique.

Discussion

The findings of the study showed that the CCT was a very good technique in learning vocabulary. This technique could help the students guess the meanings of the unknown words appearing in sentences or text by comprehending its context. This is in line with Carmine; et al. (1990) stated that contextual clues analysis is an essential skill since it allows students to determine the meanings of many unknown words. In line with this, Clarke, Nation, and McCarthy, 1988 stated that the strategy can help the students or learners to comprehend the ideas in the text and bring some background knowledge to the text.

Before the research started, the students found that the activity of comprehending a text and answering some questions related to it was completely hard to do. It was because the reading materials in their textbook were not supported with sufficient clues when dealing with unknown words. When they had to answer some questions provided below the text, they made a lot of wrong answers for not understanding the context. That was why they made insufficient scores in the initial test; the mean score was only 69.75. This is in line with Hulstijn (1992) points out that learners frequently make incorrect guesses about meanings because L2 contexts do not always provide sufficient information to make a correct guess possible even when a learner has been trained to use all the semantic and syntactic clues available (Prince, 1996).

In three research cycles, there had been several things conducted by the researcher to improve the students' achievement on vocabulary and also their performance in learning activity. CCT was introduced and applied to assist the students to understand the whole text and to answer

the text-based questions. When teaching students how to use contextual clues, an instructor had to be very explicit in his/her description and modeling of how to use the strategy with the text. This is in line with (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, and Watts - Taffle, 2006 and Bishop, Reyes, and Pfaum, 2006) stated that the teacher or instructor will need to guide and encourage students as they try to use the strategy, slowly decreasing the reading difficulty of the text.

When firstly, written clues was added to the text to give the students a better understanding of the unknown words, it showed the researcher that it could help them a bit, but it did not answer the research questions yet. When finishing the first cycle, the students only showed the researcher that they started to know CCT and the mean score they made at the end of the first cycle was 69.75.

The following things conducted as the steps of the action in the classroom were underlining the clues, as the second step, and when it was not optimally helping the students guess the unknown words (with mean score 77.63), the last step was eventually done by having the students work in pair. Through this way, the students could feel more comfortable and confident doing the exercises. In the last cycle, the students mean score was 89.31. This is consistent with Jones, Levin, and Beitzel, (2000) who say when students are taught to work together, perhaps with effective learning strategies, performance benefits can be seen at both the individual and group-testing levels. Students who work collaboratively can learn from each other and gain more knowledge from the conversations they produce. In line with the same study by (Jones, Levin, and Beitzel, 2000) produced the result that students who learned in pairs recalled more definitions and story information than those students who worked individually did.

The interviews with four of the students, given by the teacher in the research cycles, gave positive description of the implementation of CCT in learning vocabulary. It was also supported by the data obtained from the questionnaire where 85% of the students liked to learn vocabulary through the technique.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The Study shows that CCT improved students' vocabulary mastery. Thus it can be concluded that CCT was an effective technique to teach vocabulary. The students could guess the meanings of the unknown words appearing in sentence or text through the technique. They were able to answer text-based questions and finally they could comprehend content of the text. Besides, this technique also could make a good environment in the classroom activities. They liked learning English through the CCT. They were much more active in the teaching-learning process.

Suggestions

Considering the findings of the study, it was suggested that English teachers apply this technique in teaching vocabulary because the students can study faster and show good performance in studying English. They will be more enthusiastic and active in the classroom activity compared with those who use traditional way of comprehending reading text.

The students' achievement on vocabulary could be improved through this technique. In the pretest, their mean score was 61.80 (insufficient level) and in the posttest of the last cycle of the study, their mean score changed into 89.31, it was categorized into a very good level.

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