



ENHANCING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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Abstract

Teaching vocabulary using textbooks is sometimes boring and less meaningful due to the lack of context that possibly discourages students to learn. At university level, students are supposed to acquire intermediate to upper level of vocabulary mastery. The situation then becomes a challenge for us to cope. Authentic materials, on the other hand provide real language use which can be positively stimulate students' interest to have sufficient exposure to English. This research is aimed at improving students' vocabulary mastery through written authentic materials. The design of the research is classroom action research. It was conducted in a Vocabulary Building class B consisting of 43 students. The selected authentic materials are texts taken from newspaper, magazine, the internet, recipe, & forms. The result of the study shows that through authentic materials the students' vocabulary mastery in cycle I & II improves and the achievement category is sufficient. Otherwise, students' response towards the use of authentic texts seems increase significantly from cycle I to cycle II.

Keywords: *vocabulary, authentic materials.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

To acquire vocabulary many times students memorize or recall a certain word from their memory. It is not one hundred percent false but it seems that recalling is not an effective way to make the words stay longer in their brain. This is the thing usually doesn't work in developing students' vocabulary because vocabulary should not be learned by memorizing only, particularly when the strategy of consulting to dictionary is used whenever students find difficult words. It is less helpful for if the word is used in isolation. In other words, meaning in context is very important to know the real meaning of words based on its usage in sentence.

In teaching vocabulary, teachers often make textbooks as the main source of their teaching materials. Its practicality might become the main consideration for using them, although

textbooks unfortunately provide several weaknesses. One of them is lack of context. A list of words is put and students are to find their meaning. This activity doesn't stimulate students to use their knowledge background to make meaning. The other words or sentences surround the new word are actually appeared to figure out its meaning. Thus it is less meaningful.

Another limitation of textbook is that it commonly provides monotonous activities. And if it is repeatedly done in the class, boredom in learning will become the next problem for them. Thus, limited variety of learning further discourages students to get involved in the class.

Furthermore, the topics written in textbooks are arranged not based on students' interest. They are tough and far from the portrait of daily life. This resulted in less beneficial usage outside the class.

As stated in the curriculum of English education department of Muria Kudus University Vocabulary Building class is taught the second semester. After students join the class, they are expected to acquire intermediate to upper level of vocabulary mastery. This target would not be achieved if those problems listed above occur to most of the students. Therefore, the writer proposes authentic materials to be used in enhancing students' vocabulary. Authentic materials as many experts have suggested have a lot of prominence comparing to textbooks. Since they are produced by the native speakers for daily communication, they provide real language used in the real setting (Widdowson, 1990). This phenomenon then strongly supports for students to have real exposure of English. According to Tamo (1997), the use of authentic materials gives positive effect on students' motivation. The texts could trigger students' interest to learn, so that they got the texts provide intrinsic motivation. They perceive the materials not only give information, but they can do something with the information or knowledge. So, logically through authentic materials students can develop their vocabulary more easily.

Significance of the Study

This study is conducted to give practical benefit on teaching practice particularly how teachers can assist students in enhancing their vocabulary mastery and the steps of teaching vocabulary through authentic materials.

Research Questions

In this study, the writer formulates the research questions as follows:

1. Can authentic materials enhance students' vocabulary mastery?
2. How is the students' response towards the use of authentic materials in enhancing their vocabulary mastery?

Objectives of the Study

In line with the research questions above, the study aims at finding out whether the use of authentic materials can enhance students' vocabulary and describing students' response towards the use of authentic materials.

Teaching English Vocabulary in Muria Kudus University

Vocabulary is one of the language components which is used in all language skills. Both productive and receptive skills involve the power of words. People cannot convey their message when there is no word produced. In other words, communication will run smoothly when a hearer can understand the speaker's utterance. This becomes the main reason to have Vocabulary as a subject taught separately from listening, reading, speaking or writing.

Based on the curriculum of English education department of Muria Kudus University, the Vocabulary subject is taught for the second semester students with two credits. They are to acquire the intermediate to upper level of vocabulary mastery and able to use it based on its context. Teaching English vocabulary is not merely giving a list of words to remember. As the position of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, it is almost impossible for students memorize all words that come to their ears.

In teaching vocabulary, there are important elements that teachers should consider to implement as proposed by Gairns and Redman (1989) cited in Moraz (2001). They are as follows:

- *Boundaries between conceptual meaning*: knowing not only what lexis refers to but also where the boundaries are that separate it from words of related meaning (e.g. cup, mug, bowl).

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Teaching Vocabulary through Context

Context is very essential in determining words' meaning. Context can be defined as words existing around a certain word. Or we can say that context is words' environment. An effective way to figure out meaning is through context. This is in line with what Richard (1980: 428) says: "Words do not exist in isolation. Their meanings are defined through their relationships with other words and it is through understanding these relationships that we arrive at our understanding of words". Thus, the use of context helps students to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words (Candrasegaran, 1980) because "it makes the situation clear and in turn illuminate the meaning of a new word" (Mehta, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to teach how to use context. Nagy, Anderson and Herman (1987) identified six types of context clues:

- definition
- example/ illustration
- contrast
- logic
- root words and affixes
- grammar

Discussing authentic materials could grab people's attention due to the prominence they have. Authentic materials are defined as "spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language" (Nunan, 1991).

There are a lot of advantage of using authentic materials as claimed by Tamo (2006). They are as follows:

- Students are exposed to real discourse, as in videos of interviews with famous people where intermediate students listen for gist. They provide exposure to real language.
- Authentic materials have a positive effect on learner motivation.
- Textbooks often do not include incidental or improper English.
- Authentic materials can produce a sense of achievement, e.g., a brochure on England

Kinds of authentic materials

Authentic materials are varied. They are classified based on the source or place where they are usually attached to. Gebhard (1996) groups them into:

- Authentic Listening: TV commercials, comedy shows, movies, soap operas, radio ads, songs
- Authentic Visual Materials: slides, photographs, paintings, children's artwork, wordless street signs, pictures from magazines, postcard pictures, wordless picture books
- Authentic Printed Materials : newspaper articles, menu, sports reports, lyrics to songs, brochures, university catalogs, telephone books, maps, comic books, greeting cards
- Realia (Real world objects) : coins and currency, folded paper, wall clocks, phones, dolls, and puppets

Review to Previous Research

The previous research concerning to the use of authentic materials are Peacock (1997) and Webb (2008). Peacock (1997) investigated the effect of authentic materials on EFL learners' motivation. Through a classroom action research showed that students' motivation increased when they learned through authentic materials. However, the research reveals that authentic materials to be less significantly interesting than artificial materials. He also recommends teachers to select appropriate authentic materials that could motivate learners. While, Webb (2008) finds out that quality of context possibly gives greater effect on gaining the knowledge of meaning. In contrast, the number of encounters gives more effect on knowledge of form. He strongly highlighted that since to the aim of teaching vocabulary is to increase students' vocabulary mastery, teachers or book writers should present target vocabulary in correct context. It will be contra productive when they provide misleading context.

RESEARCH METHOD

To get the answers of the research questions, a classroom action research was conducted with two cycles. Each cycle consists of four phases: planning, acting, observing and reflecting as Mills (2004) proposed. The subject of the research was 43 students of Vocabulary B Class in academic year 2012/2013. To collect the data, some instruments were used, they are test, observation sheet, and questionnaire.

This research followed what Mills (2004) suggested in conducting a classroom action research by implementing the steps mentioned below:

a. Planning

There were some activities done before implementing authentic materials in the class:

1. Identifying the problem occurred in the class
2. Designing the lesson plan
3. Selecting the authentic texts as the teaching materials
4. Designing the test, observation sheet and questionnaire

b. acting

The authentic materials were implemented in the class during March and April 2013. The procedure of teaching vocabulary by using authentic materials are as follows:

1. Presenting pictures
2. Asking students to respond to the picture
3. Presenting the texts to the class
4. Discussing the texts
5. Asking the students to find out synonym, antonym, word classes and develop them into sentences

c. observing

While teaching through authentic materials, I also observed the students' activities during the class. I noted what was happening and at the end of each cycle, a vocabulary test was conducted.

d. reflecting

After I implemented the use of authentic materials, I had reflection and evaluation of what I had done in the class. Through this phase, I could analyze the positive points and negative ones to have improvement in the next cycle.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Study

Before implementing authentic materials in my Vocabulary class B, I conducted a preliminary study as the base to decide the proper solution to the problem occurred. Based on

my observation, it was found that more than 50% out of the students were difficult to find out the synonym of words, to identify the word class and to develop words into sentences. I presented a text telling about a popular artist and asked students to find out synonym of some words, identify whether a word belongs to a verb, noun, or adjective or adverb. The previous materials were presented through a textbook. This led me to propose a selection of authentic texts taken from menu, brochure, magazine, newspapers and web blog from the internet.

2. The Enhancement of Students' Vocabulary Mastery

To find out how authentic materials could improve students' vocabulary mastery, two cycles of a classroom action research were conducted. The first cycle was conducted in March 2013. It consisted of four meetings. It aimed at introducing authentic materials to students. There were four topics, i.e.: traditional menu, joining seminar, vacancy and relationship. They were selected from recipe, brochure and newspaper. The teaching procedure was designed as follows:

- a. Selecting the topics taken from menu, brochure, newspaper and web blogs
- b. Presenting pictures in the class
- c. Asking students to read the texts
- d. Showing the clues of certain words from each text
- e. Discussing the texts
- f. Asking students individually to fill in blanks to find out synonym and antonym of words

Before the second test was given, I conducted the second cycle in April 2013. The authentic materials were presented with the following design:

- a. Selecting the topics taken from newspaper and web blogs. They are about joining organization, popular artist, and tourist object.
- b. Presenting pictures to the class
- c. Asking the students to read the texts
- d. Asking the students to be aware of the contexts
- e. Grouping students into 8 groups

- f. Asking students to discuss words' meaning with their group and develop words into sentences

The test of the two cycles was designed to be individually done. The table below presents the result of students' score of their vocabulary mastery in each cycle.

Table 1

The students' score of vocabulary mastery taught through authentic materials.

	Cycle I	Cycle II
Mean score	73	77
Achievement category	Sufficient	Sufficient

From the table above, it is found that the students' vocabulary mastery taught by using authentic materials both in cycle one and cycle two are categorized sufficient. The students' mean score in cycle one is 73 and in cycle two is 77.

Based on the finding, the students' mean score seems improved but it is not very significant. In cycle one, dictionary dependence to gain the synonym of unknown words occurred to most of the students. Looking up dictionary could be an effective strategy when context clues are not provided and it aims at getting words' meaning. However, it is contra productive when it is done repeatedly during reading activity. Students were not fully aware of the words surrounding the unknown ones. Another possible factor attributing to this result is the content of the texts. The topic chosen did not really attract their interest to read. Therefore, the texts seemingly led them to not totally concentrate in doing the worksheets.

In the second cycle, students got higher score although the increase still belongs to sufficient category. Here, I changed some activities done in the first cycle. Formerly I had individual work for students to do the worksheets, but then I changed into group discussion. This affected them to have interaction with group members and share ideas to figure out the meaning of certain words. They were also reinforced to activate their guessing skill in finding the meaning of unknown words based on the contexts. By implementing this strategy, there are some strengths appear. First, through discussion, students got fun learning activity. They

did not do monotonous things, so they perceived it was not a boring class. Furthermore, they also got interesting texts to read since the topics are close to their daily life. This makes them easier to relate their background knowledge and the new information they had so that they could extend their understanding by developing words into sentences.

Students' Response

To find out the response given by the students during the learning process through authentic materials, a simple questionnaire consisting three items was used. The detailed findings can be seen in the following table.

Table 2
The students' response toward the use of authentic materials

	Cycle I	Cycle II
The effectiveness of the use of authentic material	58 %	72%
Most interesting topic	relationship	Tourist object
Level of difficulty	Quite easy	Average

The table above shows that in cycle I, there was 25 students (58 %) perceived that the use of authentic materials is effective way to enhance their vocabulary mastery. While, it increases significantly in cycle II, there are 31 students out of 43 (72 %) thought that their vocabulary mastery can be improved through the use of authentic materials.

Among the selected topics presented, in cycle I, students think that the most interesting topic is relationship. Meanwhile, in cycle II they perceived that tourist object (Karimun Jawa) becomes the most favorite text to read. The two topics satisfied their interest since they are close to their daily life, and especially the text telling about Karimun Jawa brought their curiosity and passion to see and experience themselves.

In the level of difficulty, according to students, the materials presented in the first are classified quite easy. Meanwhile, they claimed that the level of difficulty of the texts in cycle II is average. This finding is in line with the theory that in presenting the teaching material.

we start from easy level that enables students to accomplish the task. After that more challenging materials could be given to them. It is important to do due to motivating the students engaging to the class.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings, there are two conclusions can be drawn. First, authentic materials are seemingly useful to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. This can be seen from the vocabulary mastery of the students taught through authentic materials which belongs to category sufficient. The students' mean scores are 73 (cycle I) and 77 (cycle II). Second, students' response towards the use of authentic materials seems significantly increase.

Based on the finding and conclusions above, I propose some suggestion. To have effective use of authentic materials, teaching materials should be selected based on students' interest & level of difficulty. Their interest could be investigated through simple survey to students. Teaching materials is fundamental in contributing successful learning process. And to make group discussion run well, there should be clear instruction & involve all group members.

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