

## THE TEACHER'S STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS

M. Willi Kurniawan<sup>1</sup>, Rosinta Norawati<sup>2</sup>, Hidayati<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Universitas Jambi, Indonesia.

Email: [willikurniawanht@gmail.com](mailto:willikurniawanht@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This study is a qualitative study, which aims to investigate a teacher's strategies in teaching English vocabulary to young learners at SDIT As-Syifa Al Inayah 6 Kota Jambi. It employed three data collection techniques: observation, interviews, and document analysis. The data were provided by an English teacher who teaches lower-grade students. The data revealed that the teacher used several strategies in teaching vocabulary, separated into two stages. For presenting new words, the teacher used a few strategies such as using pictures, using videos and translation. For practicing new words, the teacher used a task-based method, games, learners' active involvement, singing a song, vocabulary notes, and group activities. The strategy that is mostly used in teaching vocabulary is the games, while the strategy that is rarely used is using videos. This study found factors that influenced the teacher when choosing those strategies, such as duration of time, students' abilities, behavioral control of students, and focus of the activity.

**Keywords:** *Teaching Strategies, Vocabulary, Young Learners*

### INTRODUCTION

Mastering English as an international language appears to be a benefit as globalization advances. This language has the potential to connect the cultural and language barriers among people of various backgrounds. Thus, English studies are popular throughout the world, especially in Indonesia. Due to the fact, in Indonesia English is mainly taught starting from the secondary level. Meanwhile, English is only taught as an extracurricular or additional subject in primary school. However, the teaching and learning of English in elementary school equips pupils with English language competencies during the golden era, when children could easily learn everything. According to a study undertaken by Brown (2007), the best age to start learning a second language is before puberty.

Teaching an English lesson to primary school students is a reasonable decision considering that students in elementary school have a period known as the golden age and a critical period, during which children can learn anything quickly as stated by Brown (2007). During this time, their brains are still sufficiently flexible to learn anything, including languages. Furthermore,

children have open views toward different languages and cultures, which help them in learn the languages. Vocabulary, being one of the knowledge areas in language, plays an important role for young learners when learning a language. As we all know, young learners, particularly elementary kids, have a strong memory and can recall all they learn. Brown (2007) also claims that children learn real pronunciation whereas adults do not because it requires the control of so many muscles. In addition, as cited by Lennebergin Najafi (2012), a critical period is arranged of time with a specific onset and offset during which language is easier to acquire. Adults, according to Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis, no longer have the same flexibility as children that allow them to cope with new brain activity. Adults may struggle to achieve native-like fluency due to developmental changes in the brain which affect the nature of language acquisition after the critical period has passed.

Vocabulary is an important component of the English language that should be taught to young learners from a young age. Cameron in Cakir (2006) contends that words are vital in developing young learners' skills and knowledge and that developing effective terms for young learners is essential to basic-level foreign language learning. People's language skills will not develop significantly if they spend a lot of time studying grammar; nevertheless, if they acquire words and expressions, their language skills will improve significantly. Furthermore, according to Richardand Renandya (2002), vocabulary is an essential component of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Vocabulary is fundamental to language and is necessary for typical language learners. A lack of lexical knowledge will result in ineffective communication.

Teachers should be aware of the techniques to improve the vocabulary of young learners. The teacher should know what the young learners need and it refers to strategies used by the teacher in teaching vocabulary. Indeed, they should be familiar with teaching variables such as methods, tactics, and resources so that teachers can transfer the materials effectively while keeping in mind the characteristics of young learners. Richards (2002) defines strategy as a plan, step, or action taken by the learner to make learning easier, enjoyable, self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to other situations. According to Evan and Lang (2006), a good method is useless in the hands of a teacher who does not know how to utilize it, and an excellent teacher cannot be effective if a terrible method is used. As a result, the teacher must be able to select and implement appropriate ways to teach vocabulary to young learners.

Teaching vocabulary requires more than simply introducing new words. Thornbury (2002) identified two major stages for the learning of second language vocabulary. According to Thornbury, there are two stages in teaching vocabulary: presenting and practicing. Furthermore,

Lawrence (2009) stated multiple factors influence teachers to choose the strategies, which are the duration of time, teacher preference, and behavioral control of students, safety in a learning activity, student's abilities, and focus of the study.

The distinction between other studies and this study can be found in the aspect that the researcher investigated. The objective of the researcher in this study is to discuss the teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary to lower-grade students in elementary school.

## **METHOD(S)**

This study utilized a qualitative approach to investigate teacher's strategies in teaching English vocabulary to young learners and the reasons why teacher choose those strategies. According to David Williams (1995), qualitative research is a researcher's aim to collect data in a natural situation. The participant of this research is the English teacher at SDIT As-Syifa Al Inayah 6 Kota Jambi. The participant already taught English especially vocabulary for young learners for 4 years. The researcher conducted observation, interview, and observation. After the data from the interviews had been obtained, the following step was to analyze them. The data analysis with qualitative data is usually always interpretative. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), analysis involves three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In this study, the researcher used the triangulation technique, according to Creswell (2018), research is considered valid if there are no differences between the data given and what actually happened to the object under study. Data will be triangulated from numerous sources, including observation, interviews, and documents. According to Sugiyono (2018), triangulation in this credibility test is defined as evaluating data from several sources in various ways and at different times.

## **RESULTSANDDISCUSSION**

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings and connects them to relevant theories from previous research. The first half of the discussion focuses on the strategies that the teacher utilized to teach English vocabulary. The second half of the discussion focuses on the reasons why the teacher used those strategies.

1. Strategies used by the teacher in teaching vocabulary to lower-grade students of SDIT Asy-Syifa Al Inayah 6 Kota Jambi

Before conducting the research at SDIT Asy-Syifa Al Inayah 6 Kota Jambi, the researcher

assumed teacher use strategies in teaching vocabulary for young learners based on Thornbury's theory in his book *"How to Teach Vocabulary."* (2002) After conducting the research, based on the research findings, researcher found that teacher only adapted few strategies that Thornbury stated, and researcher also found that teacher added few strategies that were not align with Thornbury's theory.

a. Presenting stage

1) Using realia

"for that method, there are no real object syetin school, there is no real fruit to be brought to school or there are no animal replicas, so I'd rather use picture media than realia"

The teacher indicated that she had not yet been able to used realia in the process of learning vocabulary since there were insufficient resources to apply the method. She prefers to choose the strategy that is easier to implement and available in school.

2) Using picture

"For vocabularies, usually for children, they cannot be monotonous, so we use image media or for example interspersed with singing a song so we have to be as creative as possible to make the lesson not monotonous. Because if class 1, 2 and 3, especially writing, he is bored, so we have to adjust our material with the games or images that we present."

To keep students from feeling bored, teacher often utilize pictures to facilitate a more creative learning experience.

3) Word association

"that may not be applied yet for grades1, 2, and3, we only learn basic vocabulary on certain topics"

From the information above, the teacher did not use word association in lower-grade classes because the teacher kept it as narrower as it could and learned only about the main topic of the subject.

4) Using translation

Translation becomes a method that must exist when learning English. As stated by the teacher:

"Yes, so I use two languages, of course, for delivery I am using English so that they get used to it, then later I still translate it into Indonesian so that it is easier to convey as well"

### 5) Using video

According to an interview, the teacher sometimes used video methods to teach vocabulary, however this method only regarding specific materials. As the teacher stated:

“Yes, I use videos too, but I rarely use them for every material. Sometimes I also give video assignments to the children, so it adjusts to the material to be taught as well, the goal is to make it more interesting and not boring”

In presenting new vocabulary items for lower-grade students, the teacher used more than one technique, instead of employing one single technique. The teacher adapted using pictures and translation that Thornbury stated as strategies in teaching vocabulary for young learners due to how easy those strategies are to utilize and how students understand them. In presenting vocabulary, the teacher did not utilize word association as one of the strategies because the teacher only focused on the main subject and kept it not as hard as possible for the lower-grade students. Using realia is also not utilized by the teacher due to a lack of learning facilities at school.

### b. Practicing stage

#### 1) Making task

To strengthen students' long-term memory, teacher utilizes task-based methods, so that students keep learning and memorizing words not only at school but outside of school as well. As the teacher said:

“So, for the strategy, maybe after the game there can still be practice, questions still assisted by the teacher, or maybe it can be discussed in groups to strengthen, it might maximize the absorption of vocabulary acquisition. The problem is that sometimes, for example, they meet a word and it appears in the questionnaire, then they ask "Miss, what does it mean?" they will just come up”

However, the teacher stated that in grade 1, the teacher did not give students assignments or tasks that made students feel burdened and also to give students a good impression in English. That statement was based on this interview:

“For a first grade, students did not have an assignment in English subject, so that they will think English is fun, and do not feel burden”

## 2) Game

“Now they prefer to learn while playing but playing in the sense of learning material, and with appropriate material.”

The use of games in education creates a stimulating, enjoyable, and stress-free learning environment, allowing students to enjoy the teaching process. The more times a word is successfully retrieved from memory, the easier it is to be recalled. As a result, effective games motivate pupils to remember terms rapidly. Popular vocabulary games include flashcards, scrabble, bingo, and word cards. The enjoyment of the teaching and learning process resulting from the use of games is meant to increase student motivation.

## 3) Learners' active involvement

"For vocabulary, the strategy must be practiced and as much as possible every day they must input their vocabulary, for example, minimal 2 words every day to continue to learn to add vocabulary, they must practice talking in English every English lesson, for example, they learn English on Thursday, so they speak English on Thursday"

This strategy helps students more likely to use English and implement vocabulary that has been learned in their daily lives. The teacher hoped that the students would have more courage to use English in class, such as when asking for permission or asking questions.

## 4) Singing a song

“There are songs, pictures, or if we learn about animals, we don't always monotonously explain what is in the book but we call the animal as creatively as possible”

Music and song allow children to have fun while also becoming familiar with English words and sounds. Children can learn English in a positive manner by participating in exciting and pleasant activities.

## 5) Taking notes

“Yes, usually directly in class like that, there are some words I ask them to write down "Here are some new words" so they write down what it means. So that the newly learned words are immediately in their notes”

Based on the observation findings, the teacher used the method of making vocabulary notes to teach English vocabulary to students. The teacher urges the students to write down vocabulary words they do not understand. Students should properly write the vocabulary in both English and Indonesian.

6) Group activity

“I help them with group activities so that friends who understand more about the meaning of the word can help friends who are less, like that”

From the research observation, it was found that teacher sometimes uses the strategy of incorporating fellow students into groups to achieve learning objectives and make learning attractive. In practicing stage, the characteristics of students who are quickly bored cause the teacher to choose games more frequently than other strategies. As previously said, the goal of using games is to increase students' learning motivation and make the learning environment exciting rather than monotonous. According to Fauziati (2010), the use of games in learning seeks to establish a comfortable environment in the process of teaching and acquiring vocabulary, allowing students to maintain their motivation and enthusiasm throughout the lesson. However, the teacher did not include making tasks in grade 1, since the teacher considered that in grade 1, we attempt to let students enjoy the learning and not feel burdened by assignments so that it leaves a positive impression in students' minds about how much fun learning English is.

Furthermore, based on the findings, the strategies that are not included in Thornbury's theory are chosen by the teacher for reasons. Using videos to present and teach vocabulary can be an exciting and successful approach for students to learn and understand new languages. Incorporating interactive activities can enhance engagement and keep students interested in learning. The teacher also added making vocabulary notes that require writing. Writing helps students recall what they write down. When students have solid vocabulary notes and encounter a difficult word, they might open it and in directly memorize it. Finally, the teacher utilizes group learning strategies to give students a more dynamic learning experience and to exchange vocabulary, allowing them to discover new words more frequently. The teacher also hopes that group activities can balance the abilities of fellow students.

2. Factors influencing the teacher to apply the strategies in teaching English vocabulary.

According to the theory by Lawrence (2009), there are six factors that influence the teacher to apply certain strategies, such as duration of time, teacher preference, behavioural control of students, safety in learning and teaching activities, students' abilities, and focus of the activity. After the research findings were presented, the researcher only found four factors that influenced the teacher, such as duration of time, behavioural control of the students, student's ability, and focus of the activity.

1) Duration of time influenced the teacher in choosing strategies that consume less time in

preparation or during the implementation. This factor influences teacher in choosing games and using pictures. It cannot be ignored that each student possesses distinctive skills. Great-ability learners are typically distinguished by their great motivation for learning, attention, and seriousness in following the learning process. Learners with low ability, on the other hand, exhibit a lack of motivation to learn as well as a lack of seriousness in following instructions, including completing assignments.

- 2) Learners' ability to learn efficiently can be influenced by their level of intellectual development. Students' abilities influenced the teacher in choosing group activities, learners' active involvement and making tasks.
- 3) Furthermore, the teacher used video as an approach due to number of the students in one class, using the video approach makes the teacher more easily control the students when learning vocabulary. The teacher utilized video strategies because students are primarily interested in watching and listening to the video. As a result, the learning environment will improve. The teacher employs the making-task approach due to the characteristics of students who, at times, enjoy keeping themselves busy. It is intended that by implementing this technique, students would be able to focus on the tasks assigned to them by the teacher while simultaneously in directly strengthening their vocabulary.
- 4) Lastly, the teacher chooses strategies by the focus of the activity. This factor can influence teacher to use any activities according to the learning objective. The strategies that the teacher chose are either combining two or multiple strategies such as using a video and making a task, or singing a song after using a video and making a task after that or it can be only a single strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study demonstrated the current use of strategies for teaching vocabulary to young learners at SDIT Asy-Syifa Al Inayah 6 Kota Jambi for lower-grade students. The teacher's strategies for teaching English vocabulary may not align with the theory's requirements. Then common strategies for teaching vocabulary to young learners can be broken into two stages. For presenting new words, the teacher used a few strategies such as using pictures, using videos and translation. For the practicing new words teacher used a task-based method, games, learners' active involvement, singing a song, vocabulary notes, and group activity. The strategy that is mostly used in teaching vocabulary is the games, while the strategy

that is rarely used is the using videos. The factors that influence teacher are the duration of time, students' abilities, behavioural control of students, and focus of the activity. Based on the findings, it is apparent that further study into young learners' teaching strategies is required. It is critical to evaluate how to effectively execute a variety of strategies and adapt them to different student levels in the classroom.

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