Teaching English Vocabulary to Young Learner: Learning from Experience in Teaching Elementary School Students

by Arisandi Setiyawan

TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNER: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

ARISANDI SETIYAWAN
Madura Islamic University
Ase.sun86@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines briefly my experiences in teaching English vocabulary for more than five years in elementary school. The students were 7- 12 years old from grade 1 to 6. Time allocation from elementary school was 35 minutes per hour, while for English lesson was two hours, means that there were 70 minutes in a week. In other hand, English for elementary students seem so hard because English as a foreign language for them. In addition, introducing English vocabularies is one of the objectives in English learning for elementary school students, means that they have to know some English vocabularies meanwhile the traditional technique like memorizing was not too effective for them. They tended to avoided and even ignored when they were asked to memorize some English vocabularies, as a result they got difficulty when I conducted daily exam or when I involved them in conversation. Regarding to that problems, I tried to overcome by implementing various teaching English vocabulary for them then I found that it successfully could help them to acquire English vocabularies.

Keywords: Teaching English vocabulary, Young learners

1. Introduction

I started teaching English from 2008 after finishing my study. My first school was elementary level. I was happy because I thought that the topic for elementary school student is easy and simple. Arrogantly I said to myself that i could teach them easily. I prepared everything from planning, acting and evaluating. I employed very traditional teaching strategy. In my first lesson plan, I designed a simple pattern of English, made list of simple vocabularies, and I also designed the evaluation for the students. In my mind, my lesson plan is good enough and I was ready to teach.

In the big day or in my first day of my teaching, I was still confident with my lesson planed I made. I came into the class, I greeted them with simple greeting and my students answered my greeting. I was so happy. But then fifteen minutes later the situation changed, my students started to be crowded, they yield, spoke with friends and even ran in the class. When I started to explain the materials, they didn't pay attention for me, the situation was not conducive. I couldn't control the class and all the lesson plan I made didn't run like what I planned. I was so busy controlling the students. Next, I tried to calm them down by asking them write the new English vocabularies, I wrote list of new vocabularies in the whiteboard, the students wrote in their book. Then, I ask them to repeat after me and memorized the vocabularies. It was quite successful to control the class but when I did evaluation at the end of the class, some of the students couldn't memorize the vocabularies.

This phenomenon forced me to create the most effective method to help the students to enhance their English vocabularies acquisition. The first thing I did was trying to come into their world, changing the teaching activities in the classroom using games and song, selecting the appropriate book and applying classroom language for young learners. I did it for several months; I tried to modify the classroom activities that are based on the children's world not based on my thought. Surprisingly, after conducting this technique, the students can enjoy learning English, they're happy learning English, they're able to master new English vocabularies, responding my

question in English, describing pictures and even they were able to have a simple conversation. This situation was considered successful in reaching the goal of teaching English for elementary school.

In this paper, I wrote some activities which are effective to help my students to acquire new English vocabularies and apply a very simple English conversation. Finally, I do hope that this paper will be helpful and be an inspiration in teaching English for young learners particularly teaching vocabularies.

2. Characteristic of Young Learners

Ersoz (2007) divided young learners into three group based on the age, those are very young learners (3-6 years old), young learners (7-9 years old) and late young learners (10-12 years old). It means that it is the same as the students for kindergarten to elementary school in Indonesian education system. In teaching English, the teachers have to know the characteristics of the students because every level of age, it has its own characteristics. It is very important to know the characters in order to be able to select the suitable materials and teaching technique to be used during the learning process.

Scott and Ytreberg (1993: 3-4) propose some general young language learners' characteristics as follows:

a. Their basic concepts are formed. They have decided views of the world.
b. They can tell the difference between fact and fiction.
c. They ask questions all the time.
d. They rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to convey and understand meaning.
e. They are able to make some decisions about their own learning.
f. They have definite views about what they like and don't like doing.
g. They have developed sense of fairness about what happens in the classroom and begin to question the teacher's decisions.
h. They are able to work with others and learn from others.

Moreover, other characteristics related to young language learners that Scott and Ytreberg (1993: 2) state are as follows.

a. They know that the world is governed by rules. They may not always understand the rules but they know that they are there to be obeyed and the rules help to nurture a feeling of security.
b. They understand situations more quickly than they understand the language used.
c. They use language skills long before they are aware of them.
d. Their own understanding comes through hands, eyes, and ears.
e. They are very logical —what the teachers say first happens first.
f. They have very short attention and concentration span.
g. Children do not always understand what adults are talking about.
h. Young children cannot decide for themselves what to learn.
i. Young children love to play.
j. Young children are enthusiastic and positive about learning.

From the characteristics of the children above, it can be conclude that the teacher plays important roles in teaching and learning process. The teacher can select an appropriate method and materials for their students. The teacher should also be able to make an appropriate activities in the class based on the children characteristics.

3. Teaching English vocabularies for young learners

After understanding the characteristics of young learners, the teachers should understand how to teach English for them, particularly in teaching vocabularies. In addition, for Elementary School students, teaching English vocabulary is just given as introduction to arouse students' positive attitude toward English. If students have been familiar with English vocabulary, they will be easily taught another English skill. Harding (2007:53) adds that teaching and learning vocabulary is an ongoing process, and will occur in most lessons. Vocabulary is an important part of the English for specific purposes course. Therefore, the teacher should know the objective of learning English, and then select what vocabularies will be taught for the young learners.

Moreover, Harmer (1991:159), teaching vocabulary is clearly more than just presenting new words. It also includes a decision that words should teach the basic of how frequent they are used by speaker of the language. The words are most commonly used are those a teacher should teach first. It means that the teacher deliver vocabularies that will be used regularly by the students, in this case young learners. It could be the vocabularies related to the topic and the learning objective. Finally the teacher should be able to use the vocabularies taught in a simple conversation to the learners.

4. The Importance of Vocabulary Teaching Strategy

Strategy plays a prominent role in language teaching; the success and the failure of a language instruction conduced in a class relive heavily on the strategy applied by the teacher. Therefore, in designing an instructional program strategy must be included as the part.

In relation to the vocabulary teaching strategy, it is expected that the strategy selected can faster the students to increase to establish their vocabulary. To increase vocabulary means introducing learners to new words, while to establish vocabulary means building on and strengthening this initial knowledge of students' vocabulary achievement.

Here are the strategies or ideas I used to teach vocabulary for elementary students:

4.1 routine and repetition

Before going to the main activities in teaching and learning process, I always start with a simple conversation. I always do this activity every single meeting to attract the students' attention, to be a leading question and to warm the student up.

Example 1

Teacher: Assalamualaikum Wr,Wb.

Learners : Wa alaikum salam Wr, Wb

Teacher: Good morning everybody?

Learners : Good morning Mr. Aris

Teacher: How are you today?

Learners : I am fine, thank you, and you?

Teacher: I am fine too, thanks. Ok students, before we start the class, let's pray together. (even though the students didn't understand the meaning of every single word, but they understand the instruction, means that they have to pray together)

Learners : (they pray together loudly)

Teacher: ok then, Andi... Sulis... (checking presence)

Learners : present.... (if student can't attend the class, the other student will say "absence")

At the beginning, the students couldn't answer my question, In other word, the students didn't respond the conversation. When I said good morning, they could still responded by saying "good morning". but the next question, when I asked "how are you?", they didn't answer me. In this case, I explained it in L1.

Other routine activities before to the main topic, I always give 4 simple instructions to the students.

Example 2:

Teacher: Stand up.

Learners : (saying stand up together and they stand up)

Teacher: raise your hand

Learners : (saying raise your hand together and they raise their hand)

Teacher: Sit down

Learners : (saying Sit down together and they Sit)

Teacher: open your book

Learners : (saying open your book together and they open their book)

In this case the same as the first activities. The students didn't know how to respond, they also didn't know the meaning. Firstly, I explain it in L1 and ask them to do my instruction. I do it in slowly then try to do it faster and faster. Then I do this instruction slowly in order but next I instruct them faster randomly. These activities seem interesting for them because they can laugh, they are active. Unconsciously, they are actually analyzing the meaning and responding my instructions. Without asking them to memorize the meaning, they will actually remember the meaning and how to respond. Next, when I look the students understand the instructions, I give another 4 difference new instructions.

4.2 Utilize pictures

Teaching English for young learners will be easier if we use media. Heinich, et al (1982:7) defines instructional media as series of devices that may help to foster better understanding. Moreover, according to Heinich, et al (1982: 62-63, 140, and 164) there are three kinds of media as follows. The first kind of media is visual media. For example: illustration in books, newspapers, billboards, posters, duplicated handouts, and pictures. The second kind of media is audio media. Audio media is a means of various means of recording and transmitting the human voice and other sounds for instructional purposes. For example: phonograph or record players, real tape recorders, cassette tape recorders, audio card readers. The third kind of media is audio-visual media. It is the combination of both media. Media combinations are generally referred to as multimedia systems. For example: radio, television, video, sound slide combination, multi-image systems, variable motion programming, interactive video, multimedia kit, and learning center. Here are Medias that I used in teaching English vocabularies for young learners. The Medias selected are interesting for the students and colorful.

4.2.1   Book

There are many English books for children. I have to be able select an appropriate book that will be used for my learners. The first thing I decided for the books is colorful and provides a lot of pictures on it. An interesting book will encourage the learners to learn more enthusiastic. The young learners will be more easily understand the new vocabularies and its meaning in L2.

In this case, I used practical English for children books from PEP. Beside colorful and full of pictures this book also provided by audio cassette, and audio compact disc. It makes me less time consuming to explain the meaning in L1. The activities in audio compact disc also make the learners happy in learning English particularly learning new vocabularies.

Taken from "practical English for children"

Another book that I used was *"a child's growing book"*. It is a serial book based on the theme. The themes are suitable for the young learners. The content is also colorful.

Here is the example of the content in the book; the theme is *play and fun*.

Taken from : "a child's growing world"

By using this book, I can read the learners a very short story while the learners looking at the picture and the vocabularies, next I can ask them to guess the meaning in L1. Some of the students will answer although they sometime make mistake, I can modify the learning activities, such as attaching the meaning in L1. I prepared lists of meaning of the English vocabularies in L1 and ask the learners to attach to the right pictures based on my instruction.

Those are not the only book I used, there are other sources that I used to increase the learners vocabularies. Like I told before that in selecting the book, I had to consider the students' characteristic and interest.

4.2.2   Flash card

Flashcard can be a good media used to teach vocabularies for young learners because it has picture on it. In this case, I use flash card which the content are vary from different topic such as name of fruits, vegetables, profession, etc. we can also made our own flashcard depend on the topic or the learning objectives. There are many activities that I can apply in teaching and learning process such as:

4.2.2.1   Speed

In this activity, I first get the students attention and show the card very fast. Then ask the students to identify the picture on the flash card. In this case, every student tries to answer although sometime they answer in the first language. And I will recall it and ask them to mention in English.

4.2.2.2   Slow down

In this activity, I select 1 flashcard and cover it. Then I move gradually the cover slowly and ask the students to guest what picture is it?

4.2.2.3   Missing thing

In this activity, I stick 5 numbers of flash card, I ask them to mention the pictures using target language, make sure they pronounce them correctly. Next, I ask them close their eyes, while they are closing their eyes; I hide one of the flash card. At last, I ask them open their eyes and mention the missing one.

4.2.2.4   Rhythmic words

In this activity, I stick 5 numbers of flashcards on the whiteboard in row. Next we mention the pictures together in rhythmic. Example: shoes, tie, table, chair, bag (in rhythmic). Next, I remove the first picture and ask the students to mention again in rhythmic, I continue removing the second, the third till all the pictures are removed from the whiteboard and ask the students to mention all the removed pictured in rhythmic.

In this case the students unconsciously will memorize the five pictures. I can continue doing this activity if I see the students have already understood the meaning, memorize and pronounce them correctly.

4.3 Sing a song

Music helps children develop cognitive skills, as well as enhances language skills, by singing song, children learn language appreciation, vocabulary and rhyme (Shipley,1998). There are many songs that can be used in a classroom particularly in teaching English vocabulary. Song can be a solution to avoid boredom for young learners. In selecting the song, the teachers should be able to match to the topic. The lyric also be selected based on the target vocabulary. Therefore, I always made my own song by changing the lyrics. I use a simple and familiar songs but I had modified the lyrics. Here is one of the song I adapted from EEG cassettes (can be downloaded in www.youtube.com/watch?v=db0BstnpMYQ). I used this song to teach vocabularies for young learners in the classroom.

Song 1:
Can you tell me what this is?
Can you tell me what this is?
It's a pen, It's a pen, It's a pen
Yes it's a pen

    Can you tell me what this is?
    Can you tell me what this is?
    It's a Ball, it's a Ball, it's a Ball
    Yes, it's a Ball

Can you tell me what this is?
Can you tell me what this is?
It's a clock, it's a clock, it's a clock
Yes, it's a clock

This song is effective and communicative, it is also easy listening. The students can easily follow the lyric and rhythmic. After the students can sing this song, I usually change the vocabularies from the original lyrics. I started to put the simple vocabularies based on the theme. I also started from the vocabularies around the class. Next, I always ask one of the students to lead the song by

singing the first and second lyrics" *Can you tell me what this is?*"(by showing or pointing the things), and the other students sing the next lyric.(Answering).

4.4 Game

Another activity that can be applied in teaching English vocabularies for young learners is a game. Young learners like to play games because it is their world. They will enjoy and interested in learning if they involved in a game. Game is a tool for children to explore their world.

According to Michael Carrier (1980), the benefits of using games in learning, among others, are: (a) The game can be a variation in the learning situation, (b) Games can be used to change the steps - steps of learning and maintaining motivation, (c) Games can be used to interrupt formal learning that takes longer so as to renew the energy possessed by the students before returning to formal learning, , (d) Games can provide training in language skills unnoticed by students, (e) Games encourage students to participate and be able to remove the barriers that students have the feeling pressured by a formal classroom situation, and (f) Games can enhance communication among students so as to reduce the dominance of the teacher in the classroom.

In this case, I choose games which matched to the topic and make the students easily recognize the vocabularies in that games. Moreover, the selected games should be interesting and easy to play. Mostly, I divided into group and let them to compete with other group in playing the games. It trains the students to work in a group or it can be as a way to build their cooperative. I also avoided a complicated game. The vocabularies as a material in a game also selected based on the topic and easy for young learners. Here are the examples of games applied in the classroom.

4.4.1   Board Race

It is a fun game that can be used for delivering new vocabularies and revising vocabulary as well. This game can also be used at the start of the class to get students' attention. The teachers can use this game to test or to check the vocabularies mastery. This is best played with 6 students or more - the more, the better. I was successfully applied this game at all grades from grade 1 to grade 6.

How to play:

Split the class into teams and give each team a colored marker. The members of the teams is according to the number of the students

Draw a line down the middle of the board and write a topic.

The students must then write as many words related to the topic in the form of a relay race. The point is counted from each correct word. Any words that are unreadable or misspelled are not counted

4.4.2   Simon says

This is an exciting game for young learners. The students will be happy, they can laugh together and have fun. It can be used to teach new vocabulary, phrase and even listening comprehension.

How to Play:

I Stand in front of the class (I am as a Simon), all the students also stand and face me.

I say Simon Says and give instructions. Then the students must copy what i say. (action)

The common instructions in this game are: touch your nose, touch your hair, close your eyes, etc.

Next, I give other instructions but this time I omit 'Simon Says'. The students are out of the game and sit if they obey my instruction in this part of the game.

The winner is the last student standing.

4.4.3   Mystery Word

I like this game very much because the students will be more enthusiastic in learning. The try to be the winner, unconsciously they are learning new vocabularies. This game also encourages teamwork among the students and brings a sense of competition.

How to play

I split the class into teams.

I give each of the team guidance (map).

1=A	7=G	13=M	19=S	25=Y
2=B	8=H	14=N	20=T	26=Z
3=C	9=I	15=O	21=U	
4=D	10=J	16=P	22=V	
5=E	11=K	17=Q	23=W	
6=F	12=L	18=R	24=X	

I also ask the team to select one of the members to be a writer. (give him/her a pen)

I prepare a word written by the number. Example: 2-1-14-1-14-1

I give each team a word written by the number and ask them to solve the word inside.

One who find the word, write on the white board.

The faster and the correct one is the winner.

4.4.4   Pictionary

This game is played n group or team. The learners don't feel like they're learning, this game can be used also to measure weather the learners can still memorize the words or vocabularies taught in previous meeting.

How to play:

- I prepare some words before starting the class and put them in a box.
- I Split the class into group and make a line in the whiteboard.
- Give a board marker for each team and ask them to choose a word from the box.
- Tell the students to draw the word as a picture on the board and ask the team to guess the word.
- The team will get the point if they can answer correctly.

This paper describes my experience in teaching English for elementary students from grade 1 to grade 6 at Lawangan Daya Elementary school. Located in Pamekasan, Madura, East java. Vocabulary is a part of language and the student had limited vocabulary mastery. By understanding the characteristic of the young learners, I designed lesson plan which is suitable for them in teaching English particularly teaching vocabularies. By observing the class progress, I found that some of them are able to master new vocabularies easily and have a simple English conversation. They are also like to learn English. Finally, I do hope that this paper will be consideration in teaching English vocabulary for young learners.

REFERENCES

Carrier, Michael & The Centre for British Teachers. 1980. *Take 5 : Games and Activities for the Language Learner*. Britain : Nelson

öz, A. (2007). *Teaching English to young learners*. Ankara: EDM Publishing

Heinich, R., Molenda, M., & Russel, J.D. 1982. Intructional Media and the New Technology of Instruction.New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Harding, Keith. 2007. English for Specific Purposes. New York: Oxford University Press.

Harmer, J. 1991. The Practice of English Language Teaching. New York: United States of America.

Scott, Wendy A. and Ytreberg, Lisbeth H. 1993. Teaching English to Children. Longman.

Shipley, Dale. (1998). *Empowering children*. Second Edition. Canada: International Thomson Publishing.

Teaching English Vocabulary to Young Learner: Learning from Experience in Teaching Elementary School Students

| 8 | Student Paper | <1% |

| 9 | **Submitted to Infile**
Student Paper | <1% |

| 10 | **www.unilorin.edu.ng**
Internet Source | <1% |

| 11 | **Submitted to Flinders University**
Student Paper | <1% |

| 12 | **www.nou.edu.ng**
Internet Source | <1% |

| 13 | **Submitted to Walla Walla College**
Student Paper | <1% |

| 14 | **Submitted to Grand Canyon University**
Student Paper | <1% |

| 15 | **eprints.uny.ac.id**
Internet Source | <1% |

| 16 | **etd.lib.metu.edu.tr**
Internet Source | <1% |