

SPELLING BEE IN TEACHING VOCABULARY

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Abstract: The study entitled “Spelling Bee in Teaching Vocabulary” discovers the effectiveness of the use of Spelling Bee in teaching vocabulary using descriptive text and discovers students’ perceptions toward the Spelling Bee game. The study implements a pre-experimental design. The sample consists of 26 students of seventh grade students of one of Junior High School in Cimahi. The sample is given Spelling Bee treatment that was adopted from Stone (2010). The data of this study are obtained through a post-test and questionnaire. The post-test is given in the form of spelling test. The data from the post-test are analyzed statistically using SPSS 20 for Windows. The result shows that the lowest score on the post-test is 61.00. Meanwhile, the highest score is an excellent score, 100. Then, the mean score is 86.85. From the result, it can be concluded that Spelling Bee is effective to be implemented in English vocabulary learning since nearly all of the students know and are able to spell the words correctly. Meanwhile, the data from the questionnaire shows that 99.24% of the students agree that Spelling Bee gives positive impact to students’ vocabulary learning. In contrary, only 0.76% of students give negative perception toward Spelling Bee. Spelling Bee is highly recommended to be implemented in English classrooms since it is good for students. Through Spelling Bee, students can practice their spelling skill and create a fun atmosphere in the classroom.

Keywords: *Spelling Bee, Games, Vocabulary, Descriptive text*

Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the important things in learning English. According to Nation (2001), students need to learn large number of words since it is useful for them because learning vocabulary is not a short-term period. Moreover, Cameroon (2001) stated

that the foundation of learning a foreign language is building up a useful vocabulary. Vocabulary helps people, not only students, to build sentences for communication between people, because learning English is a continuous process from Elementary school until students go to the University.

Teaching vocabulary is not easy. Not only the students have to know the words, but they also have to know the meaning of the words. Petty, Walter, and others (1967) mentioned that the problem in teaching vocabulary is that sometimes the words taught to students are not understood by the students although the words are useful in their daily lives or sometimes the words are understood by the students but unnecessary for their daily life. Thus, the teacher should consider to teach the words that are useful for students.

In this study, the researcher used descriptive text as the learning material since seventh grade students are introduced to this kind of text (According to Core and Basic Competence of 2013 Curriculum). Gerot & Wignell (1994, p. 208) stated that social function of descriptive text is to describe a particular person, place or thing. A descriptive text introduces simple present tense, describes some particular things around the students, and also helps students to increase adjectives vocabularies. However,

one of the problems that is faced by Indonesian seventh grade students in comprehending a descriptive text is recognizing vocabulary.

Spelling Bee game can be used as an alternative activity in teaching vocabulary. Besides, it is a good alternative game to practice students' spelling skill. Sebba (2011) defined Spelling Bee as a competition which requires the contestant to spell words (see Maybin and Swann, 2011). Students will get some advantages from this game. One of the advantages of Spelling Bee game is helping students to memorize the correct spelling words (McPherson, 1984).

However, there were still few studies investigating Spelling Bee as an alternative activity in classroom. Recent publications, which are based on paper published in English Department, Indonesia University of Education (see Rahayu, 2009; Ningsih, 2013) mainly concerned the use of Spelling Bee in teaching vocabulary to Elementary School students and eighth grade Junior High School students.

Therefore this study focused on the effectiveness of Spelling Bee in teaching vocabulary and the students' perceptions toward Spelling Bee game.

Literature Review

• Vocabulary

There are many definitions of Vocabulary. Vocabulary consists of words, but most of what is said applied to lexical items of all kinds. Nuttall (1982) defines a lexical item as any word or group of words with a meaning that needs to be learnt as a whole (see Astika, 2007). Meanwhile, McLaughlin (1998) elaborated vocabulary as the collection of words that learned by individuals. Based on *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Vocabulary means all the word that a person knows or uses. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defined vocabulary as “*the sum of words used by, understood by, or at the command of a particular person or group*”. Another definition comes from Cameron (2001, p. 18) who stated that vocabulary is “*...development of words, their*

meanings and the links between them...”

• The Importance of Teaching and Learning Vocabulary

One reason teachers are concerned about teaching vocabulary is to facilitate the comprehension of a text that students will be assigned to read. Cameron (2001, p. 72) stated that the foundation of learning a foreign language is building up a useful vocabulary.

Nation (1990) suggested that in building up students' new vocabulary, students need to meet the words at least five or six times in the text book (see Cameron, 2001, p. 84). In addition, Decaricco (2001) stated that learning words is not only about knowing the words by memorizing it. Words should not be learnt by only memorizing it, but it should be understood, too.

Laufer (1991) stated that Vocabulary is a good predictor of successful reading. It is supported by Nation (2001) who stated that listening is not enough, at least students need to know 95% of the

words in the oral input so that students have a chance in guessing the context successfully. Ehri and Rosenthal (2007) even believed that vocabulary learning is the most important thing for language development. It is also the central to reading ability and academic achievement.

- **The Use of Games in Teaching Vocabulary**

Games can be the alternative activity for learning vocabulary. Based on *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a game is an activity which involves people or teams compete against each other. Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2006) defined game as “*an activity which is entertaining and engaging often challenging and an activity in which the learners play and usually interact with others.*”

Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2006) also stated some reason why games are used in teaching-learning process. First, language learning is a hard work. In language learning, learners have to understand the foreign language that is being learned and they have to do

some efforts to use the language in conversation or in written composition, so they get new understandings about the language. In this case, games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.

Second, games help teacher to create useful and meaningful contexts. Students want to give participation in class, students have to know what does the written text mean or what the others are saying. Students must speak or write to express their thought or give information. Games help student to experience language rather than study it merely.

Third, repeated use of language items. Games that are repeated in a classroom, help students to have the opportunity to sense working the language as living communication. When playing games, usually it involves the emotions, and the meaning of the language, it is more obvious experience. For that reason, games can be consider as a better absorbed activity than learning based on mechanical drills.

And the last, it is the central of learning. Games provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to language teacher's repertoire and not merely a way of passing the time.

Many experts of language teaching methodology agree that playing a game is a good way to learn vocabulary. As an effective and interesting way of teaching, there are good things to do in teaching vocabulary, such as reviewing vocabulary from previous lessons, checking vocabulary that students have already known, practicing new vocabulary, as an ice breaking activity before starting the lesson (see Sari, 2006).

Evans (cited in Aisyatin, 2013), proposed some characteristics of games that games are entertaining and exciting for learners by the competition and suspense of the outcome and the winner of the game. Games are challenging and helping in improving students' motivation to involve in the learning process. While playing the games, indirectly, students are also learning the lesson that has already given by the teacher.

Through games, students can use the language communicatively in the context created by teacher, exchange information and express their own opinions (Wright, Betteridge, Buckby in Huyen and Nga, 2003). Besides, games also help the teacher to reinforce new vocabulary words to the students (Paris, 2003).

Huyen and Nga (2003) concluded their research that games really give a good contribution if students are given a chance to learn, practice, and review the English language in pleasant atmosphere. Students have a new way of learning by experiencing learning through games. Games give relaxation and fun for students and games help students to learn and retain new words easily. A competitive game like Spelling Bee gives some motivations for students. Students would try to compete friendly with another. It gives a chance to students to participate actively in the class.

- **Spelling Bee**

Spelling Bee was used in this study as a teaching method for learning vocabulary. Uranga (2003) defined Spelling Bee as a

competition when a competitor who spells the word wrongly will be eliminated. Spelling Bee also called *spelledown*. Spelling Bee is not just about how to memorize and spell the letter of the word. It is considered a complicated thinking process.

Sebba (2011) defined Spelling Bee as a competition which requires the contestants to spell words (see Maybin and Swann, 2011). Actually, Spelling Bee have been part of American culture for a long time. The participant of Spelling Bee have to be children who have already been studying spelling, usually in elementary and middle school (Williams, 2008). After the Declaration of America's Independence, the first Spelling book was written by Noah Webster, published by American Press. The American Spelling Book by Noah Webster was being used as a spelling book in the modern sense and was the authority in the spelling bee. It was also so popular in rural areas. Spelling Bee was getting more popular after Webster's death in 1843 (Monaghan & Barry, 1999).

McPherson (1987) stated one of the advantages of Spelling Bee is this game once was used as an activity or contest to motivate the students, and it was perceived as an opportunity for good spellers to display the ability of memorizing words with correct spelling.

Another study related to the advantages of Spelling Bee game is conducted by Ortlieb (2013) who undertook a single-subject study by interviewing a Spelling Bee Champion, Sukanya Roy. Because of Spelling Bee, Sukanya Roy learned many things. Many books has been read by her. Sukanya Roy did not only learn English, but also learned German, Spanish, Italian, and also Greek and Latin root. Becoming a Spelling Bee champion has made Sukanya Roy learning through experiences, identifying and fixing the weaknesses, learned the spelling knowledge detail even knowing the etymology of a word and from what language it was borrowed. Spelling Bee has made Sukanya Roy a better student, be a good reader. She learned many things because she read many books and she also has a

good time management to do the homework, learn for school, and read another interesting book.

A competitive game like Spelling Bee also has some disadvantages. Rahayu (2009) found some problems when implementing Spelling Bee in classroom. The first one is time allocation. Learning new words by using Spelling Bee in classroom spend a lot of time more than study it directly from the textbook. The second is level of difficulty of the words also influenced students' motivation. Students assumed that the longer length of the words were the more difficult words.

Kichura (2008) stated that Spelling Bee help students encourage their spelling words, as well as to learn how to compete with one another. When students feel encourage about their ability of spelling words, it means they will increase their vocabulary which will help in understanding the text, especially descriptive text. In short, Spelling Bee is one of the interesting games for teaching vocabulary. Spelling Bee helps students learn the

pronunciation and know more vocabulary better than before.

- **Descriptive Text**

This study used descriptive text for implementing Spelling Bee. Anderson and Anderson (1998:27) stated that descriptive text describes a particular person, place or thing. Its purpose is to tell about the subject by describing its features without including person opinion.

Descriptive also can be used in reports, descriptive reports classify and describe a phenomenon and its features (Martin and Rose, 2008). Furthermore, Feez and Joyce added the information in Descriptive text that it contains information from the most important to the least important and from the most general to the most specific and detailed (Emilia, 2010, pg. 172).

Descriptive text is one of the foundations of any language system and one of the skills that is mastered in advance by learners. The genre of describing is used in various text types and also a main characteristic of narrative texts giving the explanation for progressing characterization, setting of place and

the themes of the text. (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, pg. 97).

Descriptive text can be found when someone is talking and writing about a thing or picture, a character, a place or an animal and it specifies some of their characteristics (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p.98; Emilia & Christie, 2013, p.36). The social purpose of Descriptive text is to describe, show and provide vivid information of a particular person, place or thing to be described based on its characteristics which can be seen, heard, felt, tasted and smelled (Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Nafisah & Kurniawan, 2007, p.14; Emilia & Christie, p.63).

Emilia (2010, pg. 173) stated that descriptive text also have linguistic features. The linguistic features can be seen as the following.

- Use specific participants, such as Bear, or other participants, such as “my pet”, etc;
- Use present tense, as in: Australia **is** home to 25 of the world’s 30 monitor lizard species; in Australia, monitor lizards **are** called goannas;

Goannas **have** fattish bodies, long tails and strong jaws;

- Use relational processes to describe the characteristics of a thing or people described: All goannas **are** daytime hunters; they are the only lizards with forked tongues, like a snake. Their necks **are** long and may have loose folds of skin beneath them. The legs **are** long and strong, with sharp claws on their feet.
- Use a lot of adjectives, as in: Their necks are **long** and may have **loose** folds of skin beneath them. The legs are **long** and **strong** with **sharp** claws on their feet.

Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of Spelling Bee game in learning vocabulary and students’ perception toward the Spelling Bee, this study used Pre-Experimental research design with one shot case study.

The reason of using this pre-experimental design was the limit in terms of time and cost. First, it was not possible to use true experimental

research because it required a lot of time to apply this experiment. Second, to minimize the expense, it was decided to only use one class as a sample of this study.

There are two variables that measured in this study. In this research, the independent variable was the use of Spelling Bee and the dependent variable was the increasing of students' vocabularies.

Population in this research were the students of seventh grade of SMPN 4 Cimahi, which enroll in academic year 2014/2015. Besides, the sample was a class of seventh grade in SMPN 4 Cimahi. The class consists of 26 students.

Spelling Bee as the treatment of this study was given in every meeting. There were four meetings. In every meeting, the students were given a descriptive text and the students were asked to read it first. Then they played Spelling Bee game. The words of the Spelling Bee game were taken from the descriptive text from students' text book entitle "When English Rings the Bell". After receiving treatments, the post-test, in a form of spelling test, was

conducted to measure the ability of students' vocabulary after the treatments were given. After conducting post-test, the questionnaire was given to discover students' perception toward the Spelling Bee game.

Data Presentation and Discussion

After collecting data by conducting treatments, post-test, and questionnaire, the result is displayed in the following section.

**Table 1.1
Statistic of Post-test**

Post-test Score			Total
	N	Valid	26
		Missing	0
	Mean		86.8462
	Median		88.5000
	Std. Deviation		10.85428
	Variance		117.815
	Range		39.00
	Minimum		61.00
	Maximum		100.00

Table 1.1 shows that the lowest score of the post-test that is 61.00. Meanwhile, the highest score is an excellent score, 100. The range of the scores was 39.00. Dealing with the central tendency, the average score is 86.8462 and the midpoint fell on 88.500. Then, the table also presents standard deviation which indicates the average variability of the scores from mean is 10.85428.

From the post-test result it can be seen that the average of the scores is 86.85. Then, the result compare to students' *KKM* score that is 75. It can be concluded that Spelling Bee is effective in teaching vocabulary since the average score is higher than the *KKM* score. It can be concluded that Spelling Bee helps students in improving their vocabulary.

From the result of questionnaire, it shows that 99.24% of students give positive perceptions toward the use of Spelling Bee game in learning vocabulary. Only a few of them give negative perception. It means mostly the students agree that Spelling Bee gave positive impact to students' vocabulary learning. Moreover the questionnaire result shows that there are three important things of the students' perception spelling bee games in learning descriptive text, which are

- **Spelling Bee helps Students improve Vocabulary Mastery**

This category consists of statement number 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9. 99.4 % of students agree that

Spelling Bee helps student in improving their vocabulary mastery. Only 0.6 % disagree with those statement. In short, it can be concluded that Spelling Bee is one of a vocabulary games that can improve students' spelling skill, vocabulary mastery, and also comprehension toward the text. Games help the students know the meaning of the language that students listen to, read, speak, and write because students experience it directly by themselves and therefore it helps to memorize word well better remembered (Wright, 1984).

- **Spelling Bee Brings Students a Fun Way Learning**

This category consists of number 1, 5, and 8. 98.7% of the students agree that Spelling Bee brings a fun way learning in classroom. It brings relaxation, and also a flexible and communicative activity. Only 1.3 % of the students who give negative perception toward the statements in this category. Therefore, it can be concluded that Spelling Bee creates relaxed and fun atmosphere in the classroom. It is

supported by Huyen and Nga (2003) who stated that games bring relaxation and fun atmosphere to the classroom and help students to gain new words easily. By using games in learning vocabulary, students get a chance to practice and to learn new words by their own. Students have no any pressure to learn vocabulary through games. It is because students can learn the language without any stress, so they enjoy learning the second language as if they learn their mother language (Lewis, 1999).

- **Spelling Bee encourages Students' Motivation in Learning Vocabulary**

All of the students give positive perceptions to the statement number 10 about how Spelling Bee improve their learning motivation. This is supported by Lewis (1999) who stated that games add variation to the lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. In addition, games are highly motivating activity because of amusing and also challenging (Ersoz, 2000). Usually, games provide the meaningful and useful language in real context. It

gives a chance to students learning vocabulary not only from the textbook but also from an interesting activity such a Spelling Bee game.

From the result, it can be seen that Spelling Bee helps students to improve their vocabulary mastery. Besides, students get a new fun way of learning. Students learn vocabulary in fun and relaxing atmosphere. Indirectly, students learn many words after getting some clues such as definition of the words, alternative pronunciation, the use of the words in the sentence and kinds of the words (noun, adjective and verb). Meanwhile, all of the students can participate in this game. Even passive students desire to come forward to involve in the game.

Moreover, students improve social skill with a good cooperation in the group. After getting a clue, students have to discuss the answer in a minute. It gives a chance for students to discuss the right answer and the how to pronounce the letter correctly.

Based on the questionnaire result, it can be seen that Spelling Bee give positive impacts to

students. Spelling Bee improves students' vocabulary mastery. Most of the students agree that Spelling Bee improve the ability of memorizing words and how to spell the words correctly. It is supported by McPherson (1984) that one of the advantages of Spelling Bee is help students to memorize words with the correct spelling words. And then, Students' comprehension toward the words and the text is better after playing Spelling Bee. Students become more active in answering the question, definition of the words and also the content of the descriptive text given. Wright, Betteridge, Buckby (2006) notes that games help students experience the language rather than study it merely. Another positive impact to students is that Spelling Bee brings a fun and relaxing atmosphere. Students learn the language without any stressful. When students learn in the relaxing atmosphere, it gives a chance to students to learn new words easily (Huyen, 2003). Then, Spelling Bee improves students' motivation to learn vocabulary. Students got themselves to be more confident.

Students learn without feeling any burden. Even though, the students have answered incorrectly, Spelling Bee has encouraged students to answer again until get the right answer. By using Spelling Bee, all of the students are motivated to involve in the game activity.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Spelling Bee is one of an effective games to improve vocabulary mastery for junior high school students, and also Spelling Bee give positive impacts to the students.

Conclusions

Previously, the study on the effectiveness of Spelling Bee has been conducted by some researchers. This study confirms the findings of those studies that the Spelling Bee give positive impact to students, especially in learning vocabulary (Rahayu, 2009; Ningsih, 2013; Ortlieb, 2013).

In terms of the effectiveness of Spelling Bee game in learning vocabulary, the result of post-test shows that the mean score of the spelling test is higher than *KKM*

score. Nearly all of the students get excellent score in spelling test. It can be concluded that Spelling Bee is effective to be implemented in English vocabulary learning classroom.

In terms of students' perception toward the Spelling Bee game, the questionnaire result shows that most of the students agree with the positive statements. It proves that Spelling Bee is appropriate to be implemented in the classroom.

In short, Spelling Bee is effective for teaching Junior High School students' vocabulary.

However, this study has some limitation, in which it only focused in one group of sample so the result of Spelling Bee game cannot be compared whether there is a significant difference or not. It is better for the further study to use a quasi-experimental design or pre-experimental design with one group pre-test post-test so the significance result of Spelling Bee can be seen. Besides, teacher should give clear instruction, clear pronunciation, and have good strategy to attract

students' interest in learning English.

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APPENDIX

• **Result of Questionnaire**

Number of statement	Strongly Agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Disagree (D)		Strongly Disagree (SD)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	12	46.	14	53.	-	-	-	-
2	20	76.	6	23.	-	-	-	-
3	19	73.	7	26.	-	-	-	-
4	20	76.	6	23.	-	-	-	-
5	10	38.	15	57.	1	3.	-	-
6	13	50	13	50	-	-	-	-
7	12	46.	13	50	1	3.	-	-
8	13	50	13	50	-	-	-	-
9	13	50	13	50	-	-	-	-
10	14	53.	12	46.	-	-	-	-
Total	146	561.6	112	430.8	2	7.6	-	-
Average	14.6	56.16	11.2	43.08	0.2	0.76	-	-
	Total for (+) perceptions = 99.24%				Total for (-) perceptions = 0.76%			

• **Result of Students' Spelling Test**

No	Participant	Aspect 1 (Spelling Error)
1	Student 1	88
2	Student 2	66
3	Student 3	80
4	Student 4	90
5	Student 5	79
6	Student 6	87
7	Student 7	61
8	Student 8	89
9	Student 9	96
10	Student 10	100
11	Student 11	100
12	Student 12	98
13	Student 13	88
14	Student 14	100
15	Student 15	90
16	Student 16	86
17	Student 17	96
18	Student 18	92
19	Student 19	75
20	Student 20	95
21	Student 21	91
22	Student 22	84
23	Student 23	91
24	Student 24	86
25	Student 25	62
26	Student 26	88
Total		2258
Average		86.8462