

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTEXTUALIZATION IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS (REACT: Relating, Experiencing, Applying, Cooperating, and Transferring)

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Abstract: The primary focus of this study is to determine the effect of contextualization on students' vocabulary mastery and to investigate the students' responses toward contextualization in teaching and learning vocabulary. In this study, contextualization is employed through REACT (Relating, Experiencing, Applying, Cooperating, and Transferring) strategy proposed by Crawford (2001). The samples of this study are students of the fifth grade of one elementary school in Bandung that are chosen purposively. By using a quasi-experimental with nonequivalent groups design, both experimental and control groups (30 students in each group) are given pretest of multiple-choice test to find out their initial ability. Then, the experimental group is treated by using contextualization for four meetings. Meanwhile, the control group is treated by using a traditional (non-REACT) method; the grammar translation method. An interview is administered to find out students' responses toward contextualization. The findings indicate that the implementation of contextualization was effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery. It can be seen from the statistical computation result of post-test score of experimental group ($M=78.66$) that is higher than control group ($M=67.33$). In reference to the result of this study, it can be concluded that contextualization using REACT is recommended to be applied in teaching vocabulary to elementary students. Moreover, the teachers who are interested in carrying out contextualization need to choose appropriate context based on students' daily lives or experiences and create a lively classroom atmosphere as well.

Keywords: *Contextualization, REACT, vocabulary*

Introduction

Having adequate vocabulary is one of the requirements for foreign language learners to be able to communicate. However, vast majority of students especially elementary students find that mastering vocabulary is difficult. It might happen

because there are some barriers fortifying the smooth running of vocabulary teaching.

In reference to that, one of the barriers that lead to the failure in teaching vocabulary to young learners is the lack of teachers' competence in designing appropriate way such as approach, strategy, method, and also teaching media in accordance with students' characteristics. Meanwhile, Pinter (2006:41) says that a successful primary class teacher is not only able to transfer the rest of curriculum but also able to notice children's characteristics and their language. On the contrary, Lado (1964:120) asserts that long time ago, vocabulary teaching had something to do with translation; giving listed words and its meaning before starting the material or providing glossaries in the end. From the explanation above, it is clear that the teachers' inability in carrying out vocabulary teaching learning may cause students' difficulties in mastering vocabulary.

With reference to the problem above, in attempt to solve the students' problem in mastering vocabulary, contextualization using REACT (Relating, Experiencing, Applying, Cooperating, and Transferring) strategy could be an applicable strategy in teaching and learning vocabulary. It is supported by Brown (2001:90) who affirms that in improving learner's attention and retention toward the language; contextualization is needed such as, giving story lines, familiar situation and characters, and daily real-life conversations. Besides, Paul (2005:28) says that providing a related situation leads the learners to learn best since they are able to focus their attention on the meaning rather than words form. In conclusion, contextualization can be defined as an attempt to create a real environment based on learners' experience or their real lives situation.

The study, therefore, attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is the implementation of contextualization effective in teaching vocabulary to the elementary students?
2. What are the elementary students' responses toward contextualization in learning vocabulary?

Literature Review

Vocabulary plays a crucial role for everybody to be able to communicate. Since every language in this world emerges with its own vocabulary (Thornburry, 2002:1), one cannot convey his/her purpose without mastering vocabulary. Vygotsky as cited in Thornburry (2002:1) asserts that 'word is a microcosm of human consciousness'. It can be said that vocabulary works for representing the purpose of people when they text something whether it is delivered orally or in written form.

However, Pikulski and Templeton (2004:5) argue that teaching vocabulary is aimed at facilitating text comprehension of students who are assigned to read. Moreover, it is a requirement to easily gain language skills; speaking, reading, listening, and writing. In conclusion, building up vocabulary is one of the important parts in teaching learning English as a foreign language. Meanwhile, Cameron (2001:72) says that early level of schoolings is an appropriate time to maintain useful vocabulary in foreign language learning. In line with that, Pinter (2001:5) argues that when children go at something and act out with adult, they are simply motivated.

However, as has been discussed previously, one of recommended ways in teaching vocabulary to young learners is through contextualization using REACT (Relating, Experiencing, Applying, Cooperating, and Transferring) strategy.

Contextualization is able to be a recommended method to teach vocabulary since it can help students understand the meaning of new words easier (Cameron, 2001). Meanwhile REACT is one of strategies in contextualization proposed by Crawford (2001). In detail, the five stages of REACT strategy can be elaborated as follow:

First, *Relating* plays role as the fundamental stage in contextual teaching strategy. In brief, relating is a process of connecting the material with learners' experiences to their prior knowledge (Crawford, 2001:3). In teaching vocabulary especially to young learners, teachers are required to link the new knowledge and their prior knowledge or experience.

Second, *Experiencing* has something to do with carrying out the material into the classroom in attempt to give hands-on experiences. This stage is aimed at helping the students who have no relevant experience with the material that are going to be taught.

Third, *Applying* can be defined as as the stage that giving opportunity to students to learn putting the concepts to use in a real activity Crawford (2001:8). In this stage, teachers can create a realistic and relevant exercise. In line with that, Kesuma (2010:61) states that through applying stage, the students are able to solve the problem by putting the concept.

Fourth, *Cooperating* is defined as learning in the context of sharing, responding, and communicating with other students (Crawford, 2001:11). In increasing students' achievement, cooperating is a recommended strategy since Slavim (1995) cited in Zulmaulida (2011) claims that cooperating enable students to learn together; sharing their opinion, maintaining students' responsibility to the learning goal.

Fifth, *Transferring* means learning in the context of existing knowledge, or using and building upon what the student has already learned. In addition, transferring is a teaching strategy that we define as *using knowledge in a new context or novel situation—one that has not been covered in class* (Crawford, 2001).

Methodology

This study applied a quasi-experimental method involving experimental group and control group. Both groups got pre-test and post-test and both got different treatment. In this study, two classes of fifth grade students of elementary school have been involved as samples; class V A as an experimental group and class V B as control group.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Having prepared the instructional materials and the research instruments for both groups, the researcher administered try out test to investigate the test validity and reliability prior to conduct pre-test involved multiple-choice test. It was administered to 34 fifth grade students of a different elementary school in Bandung. Then, both control and experimental group got pre-test in multiple - choice format to gain the students' prior knowledge.

In this study, contextualization using REACT was given to experimental group; whereas the control group got a traditional (non-REACT) method; grammar translation method. Post-test was administered to investigate significant differences between the score of the two groups having different treatment, more importantly, in this study; post-test was aimed at finding out the effectiveness of contextualization using REACT strategy. The data gained was calculated by using statistical computation, SPSS 16.0. Finally, an interview was given to the experimental group to know the students' responses toward the implementation of REACT in the end of meeting.

This study is an effort to investigate the effectiveness of implementing contextualization in teaching vocabulary. The result of statistical computation depicts that contextualization is effective in teaching vocabulary to elementary students especially to students of the fifth grade as the major subject of this study.

The result is supported by several related statistical measurement results such as the result of analyzing pre-test and post-test score. The result of pre-test which is conducted to find out the initial skill of two groups; experimental group and control group shows that there is no significant difference between the mean of the experimental group and the mean of control group since the probability (0.405) of independent *t*-test is higher than 0.05. Therefore, the initial ability of the two groups was equal. In other words, the research can be kept on further for giving different treatment to both groups.

Meanwhile, the means of experimental and control group on post-test were different significantly having received different treatments. Experimental group

(M=78.66) has better score than control group (M=67.33). Therefore, the probability of independent *t*-test (0.001) is less than 0.05. It means that the hypothesis is rejected; there is a significant difference between the means of experimental and control group. In short, contextualization using REACT is highly beneficial in teaching vocabulary to elementary students.

However, in the control group with grammar translation method, the lesson was begun by giving students a particular vocabulary based on the theme of the lesson. They were required to translate English vocabulary into Bahasa Indonesia. Then, teachers asked them to memorize them. When the students were given a particular text, the teachers assigned them to translate the text into Bahasa Indonesia after they read aloud the text without checking their understanding about what they read.

Based on the interview result, contextualization using REACT is effective since it brings the students fun during the lesson so, students can enjoy the teaching-learning activity. Besides, it can assist the students to comprehend and memorize vocabulary in a long-term. This happened because contextualization serves the activity that is related to the students' experiences that makes them easy in grasping the materials given. Contextualization also motivates students to learn English. It is the result of the advantages contextualization in keeping students fun during the lesson. The last, contextualization creates a lively atmosphere in the process of teaching learning. Lively classroom is embodied by arranging the classroom into real-life like as well as possible as a result, the students feel like at one situation.

Conclusions

Contextualization using REACT strategy is a recommended strategy in attempt to improve the quality of teaching English especially to young learners. For English teachers, contextualization may be a recommended method to improve the students' vocabulary mastery. It can be applied to the whole aspects of language proficiencies; listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Besides, for

further researchers who want to investigate the effectiveness of contextualization deeply, it is better if it is conducted in other levels of schooling and other language skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

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