

BUILDING VOCABULARY USING THE TEACHING PROFICIENCY THROUGH READING AND STORYTELLING METHOD

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research study was to find out how to use the TPRS method for teaching vocabulary to elementary students, whether it would be more effective than other methods to enhance the students' vocabulary, and what would be the responses of the students to its implementation. A classroom action research study was carried out in three cycles. The subject of this research was a class of 27 fifth grade students. The data were obtained by using tests, observation sheets and a questionnaire. The test results were analyzed using statistics while the results from the observations and the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive explanations. The results showed that the teacher's performance in implementing the activities using the TPRS method improved from cycle 1 to cycle 3, while the students' scores increased about 17% over each cycle. Thus the TPRS method was effective to enlarge the students' vocabulary and the data from the questionnaires showed that the students responded well to the use of the TPRS. Overall it could be seen that the use of the TPRS method was effective for teaching-learning English especially vocabulary.

Keywords: *TPRS, Enhancing Vocabulary, Elementary Students.*

INTRODUCTION

There are some reasons for teaching English at the elementary level as can be seen in the Outlines of the English Learning Program in the

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School Based Curriculum i.e. the need to expose children from an early age to an understanding of foreign cultures so that they grow up tolerant and sympathetic to others; and the need for communication and understanding of new concepts. The new concepts in this case are related to social life, art, technology, and science, which are all part of the basic knowledge that students learn at school.

Learning vocabulary at an early age is supported by Cameron (2002, p. 72) who says that building up a useful vocabulary is central to the learning of a foreign language at primary school level. Consequently, teachers should facilitate vocabulary learning by introducing useful words and by using many strategies to help young learners figure out the meanings of words on their own. This means that the way to present vocabulary really influences the students' achievement in learning it. Consequently, teachers should understand what good ways to deliver this material are.

Introducing vocabulary for learners at elementary school may be different and more challenging than that for students at high school, particularly due to the differences between them. "Children tend to be very excited to learn something new; they love to play and use their imagination; they enjoy repetition and routines that are fun; however they have quite a short attention span and so their teachers need to use a variety of activities" (Slattery & Willis, 2001, p. 27). Furthermore, it is important to help students expand their vocabulary knowledge and help them practice their vocabulary in their daily activities especially in their school time as Cameron (2002, p. 72) has stated since children are clearly capable of learning foreign language words through participating in the discourse of classroom activities; thus, teaching English vocabulary should have center stage in foreign language teaching.

In terms of teaching vocabulary at elementary school, teachers face several problems related to the students and teachers themselves. Many factors can lead to be problems such as 1) the students' interest or lack of interest, 2) the teaching materials, 3) the media used in the classroom, and 4) the method used by the teacher for the teaching-learning process. All of these factors can negatively affect the development of the students' ability to master vocabulary. In this case, Harmer (2007, p. 123) has advised "in the process of teaching-learning, teachers should use appropriate media and techniques based on the students' ability, and that instruction is vital in foreign language classrooms as it can provide comprehensible input for the learner at the right level". However, it needs much experience for the teacher to be able to decide the

appropriate technique and skillful creativity to design good media to stimulate the interest of the students.

Based on my own experiences in teaching vocabulary to students at elementary school, I found many problems with stimulating the interest of the students. The most difficult problems often arose when there was a difficult word to pronounce or a rarely used word came up in the daily activities of the students. Most of the students were not interested in learning vocabulary if the words did not often appear in their daily conversations. They just asked the meaning of the words, but they were careless about the pronunciation of the words and less interested in practicing them.

In addition, I also had some problems to decide learning materials to use for teaching and appropriate methods to apply in the teaching-learning process. The use of materials just taken from the school books and the use of monotonous teaching methods makes learning vocabulary much less interesting. For teaching methods, I've actually used some techniques and strategies such as think pair share, picture and picture, drills, role play and learning by singing. These offer a variety of learning atmospheres with one intention that these young students will not feel bored. However, the repetition of the same strategies again and again eventually also leads to student boredom. This condition is also experienced by students in the learning process that have completely affected their responses toward the acquisition of learning itself. Although, their achievement in English was not a failure but the success of these students' learning could be enhanced if the teacher stopped to explore more techniques or methods as a solution to the problems arising in the process of teaching-learning English.

Specifically, after doing preliminary study, I found the real problems that were being the base of my idea in doing this research. The findings were first, unvaried media and methods used by the teacher in teaching English made the students bored and not participate in learning. Second, some vocabularies are not familiar with the students that make them lazy to practice it. The student only wanted to know the meaning but they seemed lazy to practice the words at the time of teaching learning.

The method that was chosen to be tried in this research was the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) technique. It is considered a good method to help children to learn vocabulary in a fun way. The TPRS provides the children with excitement, motivation, interest, and allows an incidental acquisition of

vocabulary. It is also believed that the finding and integration of the information about letters, words, and sentence can be driven more automatically by listening to a story many times.

A Classroom Action Research (CAR) method was chosen for this study. By doing this CAR, it was hoped that a solution to enhance the students' ability in mastering vocabulary especially for nouns, noun phrases, verbs and verb phrases can be achieved. As McNiff and Whitehead (2002, p. 17) have said "the main purpose of action research is the use of knowledge which leads to the improvement of understanding that will be beneficial for society".

The research problems were formulated as follows:

1. How will the teacher apply the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) method for teaching vocabulary?
2. Will the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling method be effective to enhance the students' mastery of vocabulary?
3. What will be the responses of the students toward the implementation of the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) method?

So, the aims of this research were:

1. To learn how to use the TPRS method for teaching vocabulary.
2. To find out whether the TPRS method will be effective to improve the vocabulary of the students.
3. To find out what the responses of the students will be to the implementation of the TPRS method.

LITERATURE REVIEW

General Concept of TPRS

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) is defined as a method, based on the definition of methods proposed by linguist Richards and Rodgers (2001) define it as an overall plan for the orderly presentation of the specific content and skills, and the order in which they are taught are specific to the method. Furthermore Lichtman in his paper (2011, p. 1) says "TPRS is a language teaching method designed to develop real fluency. Students and teachers spend class time speaking in the target language about interesting, comprehensible stories". Gross (2006, p. 3) has explained that the TPRS method works in three steps: in step one the new vocabulary structures to be learned are taught using a combination of translation, gestures, and personal questions; in step two those structures are used in a spoken class story;

and finally, in step three, these same structures are used in a class reading.

Further Gross suggests to the teacher to use a number of techniques to make the target language comprehensible to the students. These techniques include: a) careful limiting of vocabulary (each lesson is focused on just three vocabulary phrases or fewer), thus enabling teachers to concentrate on teaching each word or phrase carefully, (b) asking easy comprehension questions, (c) having frequent comprehension checks, and very short grammar explanations known as pop-up grammar (Gross, 2006, p. 3). These steps and techniques in TPRS help teachers to provide as much comprehensible input as possible by making the language spoken in class both comprehensible and connected. Teachers also make sure that the students internalize each phrase carefully before moving on to new material, giving additional story lessons with the same vocabulary when necessary.

TPRS is a Modern Day Methodology

As a modern day methodology, TPRS stems from the Total Physical Response, or TPR. According to Amato (2010, p. 49), the TPR method was started in 1960 by James Asher. The methodology includes giving commands to students and having them respond through actions. An example might be a command such as “sit down” and “stand up” being given in the target language, and expecting students to respond with the appropriate actions.

The TPRS method is an extension of the TPR method, providing ways to teach more obscure concepts. In spite of the advantages which have been associated with the TPR method, there were some limitations. These limitations became apparent when trying to teach students abstract concepts. Stemming from TPR, the TPRS method was later designed by Blaine Ray in 1990, a language teacher from Bakersfield, California (Davidheiser, 2002). As a high school teacher, Ray found the use of TPR to be successful. He later started to realize that students became disinterested in learning a foreign language only through the TPR method, and decided to add stories which resulted in the TPRS. This idea was further solidified from former studies which indicated that with enough comprehensible input students are able to acquire a foreign language naturally.

Positive Aspects of TPRS

The positive aspects of TPRS had been shown by Davidheiser's analysis of TPRS (2002), which concluded that TPRS was insightful. Based on his study and experience of teaching German using the TPRS method, Davidheiser reveals varied information regarding the process of using TPRS, specifically in regard to the teaching of the German language. According to Davidheiser there are some reasons why TPRS is considered to be so successful. These are as follows: 1) it is active learning, 2) TPRS helps students take ownership of their learning: they listen to and can physically act out the story even rewriting it, 3) students get more comprehensible input in a TPRS class, 4) students feel incorporated, 5) TPRS is fun. This is clearly shown as there is a correlation between the use of TPRS and students' enjoyment in the acquisition of a foreign language.

TPRS Skills and Techniques for Presenting the Lesson

TPRS can be presented in many ways, one of these, which was created by Ray and Seely (2012) starts by limiting the new words or phrases introduced to no more than three new words or phrases in each lesson. More words than this may be introduced during the lesson, but the three key words or phrases are the only ones that the students will be *expected* to learn and know. These three words or phrases are emphasized by repetition.

Ray and Seely (ibid) than suggests that these vocabulary phrases or words are repeated many times in context using the "circling" technique. About the repetition, Ray and Seely (ibid) says that repetition helps the students to internalize the words thoroughly. In addition, the same words are used during the class reading, giving even more repetitions. If after this the students still aren't comfortable with the target words, the teacher can simply tell a new story using the same vocabulary phrases in the next lesson. This method continues to review all previously covered vocabulary in every lesson, finding ways to work the old vocabulary structures into the new class stories and class discussions. Furthermore, Ray and Seely (2012) explains that the TPRS method involves using body movements and gestures to begin instruction in the target, second language. After students have mastered basic movements and commands, the next step is to begin telling stories.

Gross (2006, p. 9) concludes that the techniques involved in TPRS include using some settings, such as: 1) introducing the vocabulary, 2) practicing the vocabulary, 3) repetition, 4) assessing acquisition of

vocabulary, and 5) comprehension. In terms of introducing vocabulary, Gross (2006, p.10) has suggested doing it for only ten to twenty minutes at a time for only three or four new words. The steps are: 1) introduce 3 to 4 new words at a time. If the new words are verbs, it is suggested that they be presented in the 3rd person singular; 2) write the words or phrases on the board and translate them into the L1; 3) the teacher must pronounce each new word carefully and use a gesture to signify each phrase; 4) explain the meaning of each new word or phrase and how the gesture relates to the word. If possible use a mnemonic device, memory aid, association or visual concept whenever you can; and 5) explain any grammar in the vocabulary for about 15 seconds.

To practice the vocabulary in the TPRS method, Gross (2006, p. 10) supports implementing the Total Physical Response. The teacher teaches the vocabulary to the students via commands such as: stand up, sit down, touch the table, and touch the floor. The teacher should become a model making all the gestures. At first the teacher models the actions as he gives the commands. Soon the teacher stops the modeling and the students continue to respond to the commands on their own. As student comprehension grows, the teacher arranges the familiar commands into new combinations such as stand up beside the table, sit down on the floor. It is also suggested to give group and individual commands using the new words and phrases. To give the commands, Ray and Seely (ibid) says that there are many ways that teachers can vary the commands such: a chain of commands (give commands quickly in succession, 1-2-3), play commands, give silly commands, like: eat your hand, three ring circus (one student cries out; one student screams; another jumps) or other combinations, and then recycle the new words with earlier vocabulary.

Repetition is a part of the technique that should be applied in TPRS. The teacher should do repetition in many ways. The teacher must learn how to not go forward in the story but how to just keep asking the same questions over and over in interesting but different ways. The teacher has to learn to scaffold, to build up detail a little at a time. Thus the teacher asks a question and then recycles it. In the process of repetition, it is better to add a detail and then to go back and ask more questions about known information (Gross, 2006, p. 2). There are various techniques that can be used in order to recycle questions such as using the question words - what, who, where, when, and how, Personal Questions and Answers (PQA), etc. Further, Gross (ibid) has explained that students can answer questions with just one or two words. The point of asking these questions is not to force the students to speak; rather, the questions are a method of

checking comprehension while simultaneously repeating the target vocabulary in context. Therefore students need not worry about speaking in full sentences, and indeed this would detract from the process of concentrating on the input provided by the teacher. By answering using single words or very short phrases the students can keep their attention focused on the words being learned.

Without daily assessments, the teacher cannot get a clear idea of what the students actually know. Students, in general, reflect back to the teacher what they think the teacher wants them to do. To assess acquisition of vocabulary in TPRS, Slavic (2009) suggests a quick quiz. The quick quiz is a short assessment of the content of the lesson that day whether it was PQA, a story, or a reading. He also suggests doing a test every ten minutes during the story. The teacher can ask for ten finger comprehension checks on a scale of ten how much they understand. If numbers are below eight we go back and retell, slowly and deliberately, until everyone understands. About the quick quizzes, Slavic (ibid) says “As an authentic interaction, quick quizzes must be given fast without stopping a story. The interaction is done with techniques such as: an eye contact test, an L1 to L2 matching test, and/or a write-in test”. Quick quizzes help the teacher create excellent classroom discipline although each one takes only a few minutes. It also makes the testing easy, students will be assessed on most of what happened during the class, and they conclude that they can succeed only if they pay attention.

To check the comprehension in the TPRS method, Slavic (2009, p. 2) says “the teacher in the TPRS class should pay attention to the barometer students. It is important to make sure everything goes through the barometer students and coach the barometer students to tell every single word”. The barometer students mean those few students who have the lowest capability. He suggests to check for comprehension with the barometer students on every new word and to keep recycling each new word until the barometer students completely comprehend the word.

In presenting this technique for comprehension, Slavic (2009) suggests that the teacher should not pace the class by teaching to the top of the class. The teacher teaches the students by the technique of teaching to the eyes and using pauses after each question. It is important to give the students time to comprehend each question and to point to the question words and pause for them to process the question words. The teacher also has to repeat the process if she gets a zero response.

To make the class atmosphere more fun at the time of comprehension, it is recommended to let the students use a signal to

inform the teacher that they do not understand a word, or an instruction is not clear or even if the teacher has been speaking too fast. The signal could be by crossing fingers, a time-out sign, a hand on the head etc. Students might not use the signal but the teacher must constantly check for comprehension anyway.

At the time of telling the story, the teacher should read it slowly. The aim is not to make the students get through the story but to make the students hear the target words many times, slowly. Input is made comprehensible by considering the class at the barometer student's pace of comprehension. Considering that initially the students do not understand about the words or phrases that are being taught, so the teacher can observe the barometer student listen to the translation and establish the meaning because it make the student easy to learn and get more aid in the learning process. About translating, Gross (2006, p. 2) has said that translating reading in TPRS means translation the text from the target language to the L1. At this stage, the students translate the entire reading to the class .The teacher can ask a student whose target language is good to be a volunteer and choose the fastest of these students to translate the text into the L1. The translation has to be done in small bits to make it easy for the barometer students to follow the translation process. The teacher should make sure to repeat the target words and any problems in the story to keep it comprehensible and to ensure there are repetitions of the target words. The teacher should make sure to keep using the target words.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design for this research study was a collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR) study. CAR was chosen as it has characteristics of the problem and the aim of this research that is to improve the quality of the teaching-learning processes for English classes. In this research, the researcher wanted to implement the TPRS method with her English class to improve the quality of her teaching-learning processes. So, this research was intended to make a contribution to the improvement of the teacher's knowledge, performance in the classroom and insight into the behavior of both teacher and students. This research was conducted at SD Negeri Arun Lhokseumawe. The research setting was chosen for a couple of reasons; first, the researcher is one of the teachers at this school; second, the essential reason was the researcher's own problems in

teaching vocabulary, she found that her students needed help in building their English vocabulary. The subject of this research is a class of 27 fifth grade students.

In conducting this research, the researcher followed the procedure proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) by doing a preliminary study before started the research. The preliminary study was done before the researcher began the action research and during the teachers classes to see what problem really existed during the English teaching-learning process. The activities of this research started after conducting the preliminary study, and the teacher/researcher did the class observations during some classes for teaching English at the beginning of the semester.

After having discussions, the researcher implemented the study by referring to the procedures for action research. The processes for this action research started from (1) planning the action, (2) implementing the plan, (3) observing the actions and (4) analyzing and reflecting on the result of the actions. The collaborator was responsible for observing the actions, and all the results from the observation were investigated together with the researcher to find out the effects of the action in the classroom on the students' improvement in building vocabulary.

Research Instrument

The instruments which were used to collect the data for this research consisted of a test, an observation checklist and a questionnaire.

Test

In this research, a test was used to measure the students' improvement in mastering vocabulary. The test was given at the end of each cycle to find out whether the students had reached the success indicator as stated in this research or not. The researcher prepared 20 test questions, 10 questions were multiple choice and 10 questions were to translate words from Indonesian into English. For each correct answer, the students got 5 points so the total possible score was 100. All questions related to nouns, verbs or phrases related to the topic.

Observation Sheet

To record the data concerning with the researcher's performance in implementing the TPRS, the researcher designed the observation sheet that contained the researcher's activities based on the predetermined procedures on the lesson plan. In addition, the observer might write something to comment about what he had just observed on the observation sheets. The observer noted them down on the field notes during the teaching-learning process.

The Questionnaire

To get the data about the students' responses to the implementation of TPRS in her English class, the researcher and her collaborator prepared questionnaires. In this study, a questionnaire was given at the end of each cycle in order to find out the students' perceptions to the implementation of the TPRS to build their vocabulary. There were ten closed questions on each questionnaire that were in Indonesian. Open questions were avoided since they can be time-consuming and also tiring especially for children who are inexperienced in writing. In each questionnaire, all the questions were designed to answer the third research question; which was about the students' responses to the implementation of the TPRS. Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 related to the students' perception of the TPRS, 5, 6 and 7 were about the material presented and the last questions numbers 8, 9 and 10 were about the atmosphere of the classroom when the process of teaching-learning TPRS was running. All the questions related to the implementation of a substantial part of the TPRS. It was expected that the results from the questionnaire could provide further information that might be helpful to answer the third question for this research.

Data Analysis

To make the data analysis more accurate, the researcher and her collaborator compared the result of the notes during the teaching-learning process and had discussions on the students' responses to the implementation of the TPRS. The data obtained from the observations and the questionnaire was categorized as qualitative data. Meanwhile, the data obtained from the tests was categorized as quantitative data. The qualitative data was analyzed by using qualitative analysis (categorization), and the quantitative data was analyzed by using simple percentage analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the observer's observations, in the while - activities, the researcher's weaknesses were about minimizing the variety of commands in the total physical response (TPR) activities, the ways to ask questions in the Personalize Questions and Answers (PQA), and the role of being a model in the storytelling phase. In this case, the observer suggested that the researcher simplify the variety of commands in the Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, grouping the students to make the actions more effective in time management and to simplify physical movement in the action of storytelling to make the students concentrate more on the learning objectives. Subsequently, as a result of reflections in the third cycle, all of the above activities were performed well by the researcher.

Based on the results from the research, it was found that the TPRS method was effective in improving the students' mastery of vocabulary. Thus, from the results of the tests after the first cycle only 52% of the students were able to score 65 or above. However, this increased after the second cycle to 74% and then to 85% after the third cycle.

The responses of the students can also be one of the considerations to claim whether the use of TPRS was a success or not. For that reason, the researcher gave the students questionnaires with 10 items. All the 10 questions were designed to answer the third research question which was about the response of the students to the implementation of the TPRS. The first until the fourth questions related to the students' perceptions to the TPRS technique, the fifth to the seventh were about the material presented and the eight to the tenth were about the atmosphere of the classroom when the process of teaching-learning with the TPRS was running. All the questions related to the implementation of a substantial part of the TPRS.

There was improvement in the responses of the students about the implementation of the teaching-learning processes for the TPRS rising from the first cycle to the second cycle and the third cycle. After the second and third cycles, the responses of the students to the method and the techniques applied in the TPRS teaching-learning process were even more positive. This was because the students were happy while the atmosphere of the classroom was really enjoyable for them. The students also gave positive responses to the materials used.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the research findings and the discussions presented in the previous sections, some conclusions can be made as answers to the research questions.

To implement TPRS method, the researcher applied three steps, namely Total Physical Response (TPR) as the first step to introduce the new words or phrase. The phrases were written on the board and translated into the students' first language. This step was continued with the Personal Questions and Answers (PQA) to promote simple grammar and to provide as many spoken repetitions of the new structures in context as possible. This creates the foundation for student recognition of the structures during the storytelling time. The second step was storytelling. The stories were short, simple, and interesting. The actions in the stories were acted out by all the students in the group. The third step was reading. This was a class reading, where the researcher used an overhead projector to project the text onto the wall and then the students read and translated the text into their L1. The reading text was based on the stories that the students had learned in step two. At the reading time, the researcher began by reading aloud and translating it into Bahasa Indonesia. Other portions were read by students individually and translating orally. Every time the researcher used the TPRS from cycle 1 until cycle 3, she made some improvements or revisions to her preparations or her performances in the classroom. The student's and the observer's responses were the basis for these improvements or revisions either in conducting pre-, while-, or post- activities. Subsequently, as a result of these reflections in cycle III all the activities were performed well by the researcher.

The implementation of TPRS in an English class was effective to overcome the problems in teaching-learning English for young learners because this model of learning led to improvement in the student's mastery of vocabulary. By implementing this model of learning, the teacher could facilitate interaction between a student and the text, interaction amongst the students, and interaction between the students and the teacher. This was proven when the student's scores increased from one cycle to the next. From the results of the test conducted after the first cycle, only 54% of the students scored 65 or above. After the second cycle, 75 % of the students scored 65 or above. Finally, after the third cycle 87.5% of the students got 65 or above. This indicated that the

students were successful in meeting the objectives of learning English especially vocabulary (nouns, noun phrases, verbs and verb phrases).

Finally, the students responded positively toward the implementation of TPRS in learning English. This statement was proven from the answers to the questionnaire. The percentages of the students who chose the option “agree” to the positive statements gradually increased from the first cycle to the third cycle.

Suggestions

To follow up on the findings of this study, there are some suggestions proposed for the researcher herself, for other English teachers, for principals, for the local education department, and for other researchers.

After conducting the study, the researcher really realizes that action research can give numerous benefits for her own teaching, including changes in her actual classroom practices, especially for teaching vocabulary. The greatest impression was when the researcher reflected on and shared the results of her efforts in each cycle with the observer. Sharing information among practitioners, and then continuing to benefit the students over time are very important to get to predetermined goals. As a result, the teachers should plan to use time in the lessons as effectively as possible based on the needs of all the students.

Based on the result of this study in which the vocabulary of the students was increased by applying TPRS, it is suggested that English teachers of young learners consider this method as one of their alternative teaching-learning strategies. Furthermore, for teachers who use storytelling, it is better for them not to translate the story into L1 after each sentence but instead repeat or act out the story, over and over again, until each student can grasp and memorize the English vocabulary very well.

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