

**The Word Sorts Strategy:
A Tool for English Teachers in Teaching Vocabulary at Junior High School Level**

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ABSTRACT

This study discussed the use of Word Sort Strategy as a tool in teaching vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary is essential in language learning. The teacher should be able to use appropriate ways for teaching vocabulary so that the students can learn effectively Harmer, as cited in Yulianto (2010:19-20). Most of the students consider that learning vocabulary is difficult so that they lack interest and motivation. Students sometimes could only say and understand some words and could not develop their ideas well in their sentences. Therefore the teachers have a very important role to increase students' motivation to learn supported by interesting ways as Word Sort Strategy. Word Sort Strategy contributes to increasing the students' interest and motivation, making the students has a sense of the context of language and Word Sort can be a specific reference point. It can enhance students' motivation in learning vocabulary.

Keywords: *Word Sort Strategy, Vocabulary*

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INTRODUCTION

Learning vocabulary is primarily about remembering, and students generally need to see, say, and write new words a couple of times before using them. Nation (1990); Root (1999); Ghadirian (2002). Some researchers have suggested various numbers of encounters with a word of learning to take place. Some suggest that an impressive amount of learning can occur when students learn a list of paired items (English word and transition equivalent). However, most agree that repetition is an essential aid to learning. Moreover, actively recalling a word is a more effective way of learning than simple exposure or just seeing a word over (Sokmen, 1997). Another issue to be considered is which vocabulary we want students to use when they speak and write. We want them to recognize and understand but not necessarily produce (Melka, 1997).

Much vocabulary learning research points to the relative success of independent learners, devoting time to self-study, using various learning strategies, and keeping good

vocabulary notes. As GU (2003) summarizes his own and other studies, " Good learners seem to be those who initiate their learning, selectively attend to words, their own choice, studiously tries to remember these words and seek opportunities to use them. " We can help students be better learners and acquire good learning habits by setting structured learning tasks that can be done outside of class. These might include helping students construct a vocabulary notebook, using resources as dictionaries and the internet, and finding opportunities to use English. The acquisition of vocabulary is arguably the most critical component of successful language learning. However, it has been challenging to determine the essential word phrases needed to establish a suitable vocabulary for conversation most effectively until recently.

Vocabulary is all about words. When we use language, we use the word all the time, thousands of them. If we know a language well, we know to write its words and say its words. However, it may be surprising that it is not easy to say what a word means. (Vocabulary Matrix: Understanding, Learning, Teaching). To solve the students' learning vocabulary, we need an excellent way to help them in the learning process. The way is word sort strategy, according to Jennings, Caldwell & Lerner (2014). "In word sorting, students are presented with several words to sort. According to different categories" (p. 218). Students are given cards with words on them, and then the students have to sort them based on specific categories.

Topic of Discussion

Vocabulary is one of the essential aspects of learning English. Without mastering vocabulary, students will find some problems in their learning process. They will be difficult in listening, speaking, reading, and writing because vocabulary is a fundamental component of language proficiency and provides how well learners can speak, hear, read, and write. Using teaching techniques to teach vocabulary is vital to be done by the teacher. One of the activities that can be used is word sort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary has an essential role in English learning, and it is one element that links the four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Hu yen and Nga, 2003). In order to master all those skills, the students need to have good vocabulary mastery. Adequate numbers of words that the students acquire will enable them to master English skills quickly. It will be easy for students to communicate their ideas in written and spoken form and comprehend what people say if they have good vocabulary mastery. Moreover, Dellar H and Hocking D (in Thom bury, 2002:13) also stated that when someone spends his / her time learning grammar, there is no significant improvement in his / her English. However, a significant improvement can be seen if someone learns more words and expressions. Someone can say very little with grammar, but someone cannot say anything at all without words. Those statements show that vocabulary is an essential element in language learning. In this case, the role of vocabulary is not less important than grammar. The lack of vocabulary will bring many troubles to the students in learning because

without good vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, they will get difficulties communicating their ideas. Therefore, vocabulary is essential in English learning because vocabulary will support the students in mastering English skills.

Types of Vocabulary

Vocabulary can be classified into oral and print (Hibert and Kami, (2005:3). The form of vocabulary when someone speaks orally or reads orally belongs to the oral form. Conversely, when someone reads silently or writes something, vocabulary will be seen in printed form. Furthermore, Hibert and Kami (2005:3) also stated that vocabulary could be classified into two types; productive and receptive vocabulary. Those types are:

a. Productive vocabulary

Productive vocabulary is usually used when someone shares their speaking or writing; he/she usually uses the words familiar to him/her. This Kind of word belongs to productive vocabulary. According to Hebert and Kami (2005:3), Productive Vocabulary is a set of words that a learner can use in writing or speaking. It also considered familiar words and used them frequently. While Hay craft in Hatch and Brown (1995:370) stated that productive vocabulary words the students understand, Pronounce correctly, and use constructively in speaking and writing.

b. Receptive Vocabulary

Receptive Vocabulary is a set of words that a learner can assign meanings in listening or reading. These words are often less familiar to students and less Frequent (Hebert and Kamil, 2005:3). Receptive vocabulary is words that the students recognize and understand when they occur in context but which he/she cannot produce correctly. (Hay craft in Hatch and Brown, 1995:370).

The aspects of Vocabulary

According to Lado, as cited in Mardianawati (2012: 11), five aspects of vocabulary need to be learned. They are (1) Meaning, (2) Spelling, (3) Pronunciation, (4) Word Classes, and (5) Word Use. Those aspects are:

1. Meaning

Meaning becomes one of the essential aspects that the students should learn because meaning refers to how the word gives meaning to the language users. Frequently, a word may have more than one meaning when it is used in a different context. For example, the word "present" as a noun has meaning: a time that is happening now. The word "present" as a noun also can be defined as something that you give to someone, usually for a particular occasion. Therefore, the Students

need to know the meaning of the word because it will help them understand the message from that word when it occurs in different contexts.

2. Spelling

Although incorrect spelling does not often prevent understanding a written message, it can adversely affect the reader's judgment. Bad spelling is considered as a lack of knowledge. One reason is that spelling is difficult for students between the sounds of a word and how it is spelled is not always apparent. A single sound (or, more correctly, a single phoneme) may have many different spellings (*paw, poor, pore, pour*), and the exact spelling may have many different sounds (*or, word, information, worry, correspond*). In order to help make things clear, our students need to focus on a particular variety of English (British or American English, for example) as a spelling model for them to aspire.

Nevertheless, we should also make them aware of other spelling varieties, drawing their attention to dictionary entries that show such differences. Furthermore, a teacher can draw their attention to spelling problems and explain why it occurs. Copying from written models is one way to do this; when the students see and reflect on their copying mistakes, their spelling 'consciousness' is raised (Porte 1995).

3. Pronunciation

When the students learn vocabulary, they also need to know what a word sounds like (its pronunciation). It will help the students to understand what the other means to say. If a word sounds incorrect, it will be difficult for someone to understand it. Therefore, the students need to know how to pronounce a word correctly to avoid misunderstandings in spoken communication.

4. Word Classes

Word classes can be defined as categories of words. It is an essential feature in semantic feature analysis. The categories of words can be classified into some categories such as nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and prepositions. The classification of the words of a language in this way depends on their function in communication.

5. Word Use

Word use refers to the function of a word is used in a language. Word use may also involve grammar and thus be the subject of profound analysis (Mardianawaty, 2012:11).

In this research, the teaching-learning process will focus on meaning, word use, and pronunciation. Those aspects become the focus on word sort strategy, and they are suitable for the word sort strategy that will be implemented in the class.

DISCUSSION

Strategy in teaching vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary is essential in language learning. The teacher should be able to use appropriate ways for teaching vocabulary so that the students can learn vocabulary effectively. According to Harmer, as cited in Yulianto (2010:19-20), there are some techniques for teaching vocabulary as follows:

a. Using Reality

Reality can be defined as the actual object that the students can see. To convey the meaning of a word, the teacher can directly show the natural thing to the students to quickly understand the meaning. For example, if the teacher wants to convey the meaning of the word "pen," it can be easily conveyed by showing the pen to the students. This method is effective in making the students understand well the meaning of a word. However, this technique has limitations because the teacher cannot show everything in the real object. It is limited to certain single things or words that the students can quickly take to the classroom or find.

b. Showing Pictures

When the teacher wants to teach vocabulary by showing pictures, the teacher can use some media such as wall pictures, blackboard drawings, charts, flashcards, tables or statistics, etc. Those Media can be used as visual representation such as the picture of Doctor, police, teacher, etc.

c. Mime, Action, and Gesture

Sometimes it is almost impossible to explain the meaning of a word by using natural or showing pictures. In this case, the teacher can easily use mime, action, and gesture to explain the meaning of a word to the students. Commonly, a teacher uses this technique when the teacher needs to convey the meaning of a verb, such as a walk, run, jump, cry, etc.

d. Contrast

In this technique, the teacher can explain the meaning of a word by contrasting it with its opposite. For example, the word "lazy" is contrasting with the word "diligent."

e. Enumeration

This technique can be used by the teacher when the teacher finds difficulties in explaining a particular word. One example is the teacher wants to explain the meaning of "transportation," the teacher can elicit the word "transportation" into categories, such as bus, motorcycle, car, etc.

f. Explanation

When the teacher wants to teach a new word to the students, the teacher can explain a particular word. The teacher can use one or more sentences to explain a word. For example,

when the teacher wants to introduce the word "scissors," the teacher can explain using a sentence like a tool for cutting paper, hair, etc.

g. Translation

Sometimes, when a word is challenging to understand, the teacher can translate that word into the student's language or mother tongue.

Steps in Vocabulary Learning

There are five essential steps in vocabulary learning (Brown and Payne in Hatch, 1995:3473-390):

a. Encountering New Words

The first essential step in vocabulary learning is encountering new words. Thus, the students need to have sources to find new words. There are many sources to find new words, such as books, television, radio, newspaper, and magazines. The student's strategies here included "learning new words by reading books," listening to TV and radio," and reading newspaper and magazines" (Payne in Hatch and Brown, 1995:373). Therefore, reading books is not the only way to encounter new words. The students can find new words by watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, and listening to the radio.

b. Getting the Word Form

Getting the word from here means getting a clear visual or auditory image or both of the vocabulary items. The importance of having a clear image of the form of a word becomes apparent when the students think about what happens when they try to retrieve words. The importance of getting the form of the words also appears when the learner is asked to define words (Hatch and Brown, 1995:378).

c. Getting the Word Meaning

The third essential step in vocabulary learning is getting the word meaning. There are several ways to get the meaning of words. The typical way of getting the word meaning is by using a dictionary. Another way of getting a definition is by having a bilingual friend or teacher explain. The popular way for a learner to get the meaning of words is through context. Learners guess the meaning of words from the situation, discourse, or context they are used to and from the words themselves. (Hatch and Brown, 1995:384).

d. Consolidating Word Form and Meaning in Memory

In this step, the learners need to consolidate the word form and meaning in their memory. To strengthen the form-meaning connection, the teacher can use many kinds

- of vocabulary learning drills such as flashcards, matching, exercises, and crossword Puzzles, etc.
- e. Using the Words
- The last essential step in vocabulary learning is using the words. Using the words, the students will have a chance to memorize the word and its meaning deeply on their minds after learning it. (Hatch and Brown, 1995:390).

Understanding of Word Sort Strategy

The Definition of Word Sort

Word sort is a simple individual or group activity. Students list keywords from a reading selection. (Alternatively, the teacher may provide a list of terms before the reading activity). Students identify the meaning and properties of each word and then “sort” into a collection of words with similar features. This “sorting” process links students’ prior knowledge to the basic vocabulary of a reading selection (Reading Educator, 2015). According to Jennings, Caldwell & Lerner (2014), “in word sorting, students are presented with several words to sort according to different categorize” (p. 218). Usually, students are given cards with words on them, and then the students have to sort them based on particular limitations. Jennings, Caldwell, and Lerner mention that “words can be sorted according to Sound or spelling patterns” (p.218). For example, if students are given the list of words: ping, pat, ring, sing, mat, and fat. They could organize them by sound because they either end in –ing and –at. The words can be a word from a book, vocabulary words, words of the week, and so much more. Words sort can either be open sorts or closed sort. In an open sort, students can choose their categories for sorting. In a closed sort, the teacher determines how the students need to sort the words. A word sort can be done individually, in a small group, or a whole group. In addition, categorizing into groups involves students using a higher-order level of thinking essential as a 21st-century learner.

The Procedure of Word Sort

- a. Before sorting :
- Make sure you have headers for each category.
 - Model at least one or two words for each category. Use the headers as support by showing the students how she/he can compare the word against the headers.
 - Do a think-aloud of what you think as you model the wording.
- b. During sorting :
- Make sure the students read the words first as she/he sorts.
 - If you are doing pictures and words, the students have to sort the pictures first, then the words.
 - If the students do not know the words, tell them what to keep the ball rolling. Please do not make it into a guessing game.

- If the student makes a mistake with the first few words, then provide guidance and support because she/he may not understand the task or may be confused.
- If the students have sorted some words correctly and then make mistakes, let them self-correct.
- c. After sorting :

Make sure the students read down each category to check their work before the teachers do. If the students make a mistake and do not self-correct, then provide scaffolding to help the correct error. Have students verbalize what each category has in common. When appropriate, focus on sound, patterns, etc. Have the students reflect on what they learned.

Steps of Word Sort

1. List between 10 and 20 key vocabulary words from a reading selection on the smartboard or index cards
2. Divide the class into small groups consist of 4 or 5 students. (Distribute the index cards if this method is used.)
3. For a close word sort, provide students with the categories into which they will sort the vocabulary words. For an open word sort, instruct the student's team to suggest categories for organizing the words.
4. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for the student's teams to assign the words to the appropriate categories.
5. Conduct a class discussion with each group, presenting their word list for one of the categories. Require the students to defend their sorting of terms by asking about the standard features of the categories and how each specific word meets these criteria (Read strong, 2001).

Types of Word Sort

Three-word sorts correspond to the three layers of English orthography: alphabet, pattern, and meaning.

a. Alphabet

In an alphabet sort, students compare and contrast word by sound. They do this to categorize similar sounds and associate them with letters sound and letters and letter combinations, syllable patterns, and spelling conventions. For example, Words spelled with – op like to, pop and hop, are compared with words spelled with – to like hot, cot, or pot.

- #### **b. Next, students compare and contrast words by looking at consistent spelling patterns.**
- For example, words spelled with – oi like join or coin are compared with words spelled with-oy like joy or annoy. Both sets of words have the same sound but follow a unique spelling pattern.

c. Meaning

Finally, students categorize words and word parts by meaning, use, and parts of speech. For example, adjectives that end in -y like chilly, misty, or breezy are compared to adverbs ending in –ly like quickly, quietly, or smoothly.

Benefits of word sort

Some benefits of word sorting are that it is interactive, promotes higher-level thinking skills, and provides oral language development opportunities built on students' prior knowledge. Word sorts can also use across content areas in diverse classroom environments.

CONCLUSION

Learning English vocabulary will be enhanced if the learners are given opportunities to apply the vocabulary learning in their speaking and writing actively. Through speaking, learners can practice producing more vocabulary and practice their pronunciation and spelling very well. Through writing, learners can practice producing phrases, clauses, and sentences following the grammatical aspects of the language features needed to be applied.

SUGGESTION

The suggestion for this study deal with input and recommendations for English teachers and learners.

1. Suggestion for English teachers

Teaching vocabulary to learners comprehends the learning is not easy. However, if the learners have opportunities to apply the vocabulary learning in appropriate contexts, they are helping to achieve the learning goal. English teachers are supposed to provide vocabulary exercises for learners to practice using the word sort strategy. The learners can get more new vocabulary, and then they are not bored during the learning process.

2. For the learners

Learning vocabulary through word sort strategy can help learners to improve their vocabulary. Learners are supposed to practice applying the vocabulary learning into related Vocabulary exercises actively. After that, the learners should create a text and practice their speaking. Learning by word Sort strategy, learners can reinforce their Vocabulary mastery much better.

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