STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN STUDYING VOCABULARY: A CASE STUDY AT SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS OF MI AL ITTIHADUL ISLAMIYAH AMPENAN IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2018/2019

A THESIS JOURNAL

By:

FAHIMA SALEH

E1D114039

ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM

FACULTY OF TEA TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION

MATARAM UNIVERSITY

2018
JOURNAL APPROVAL

Entitled:

Students' Difficulties in Studying Vocabulary: A Case Study at Sixth grade Students of MI AL Ittihadul Islamiyah Ampenan in Academic year 2018/2019

By

Fahima Saleh
EID114039

has been approved in Mataram on November 2018

First Consultant

Second Consultant

Dr. Lalu Muhaimi, M.Pd
NIP. 196004161987031002

Dr. Lalu Thohir, M.Pd
NIP. 197506152008121005
Students’ Difficulties in Studying Vocabulary: A Case Study at Sixth grade Students of MI AL Ittihadul Islamiyah Ampenan in Academic year 2018/2019

Fahima Saleh

English Department of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Mataram

ABSTRACT

The objectives of the present study are to find out what kind of difficulties in studying vocabulary and factors that contribute the difficulties faced by the students. This study employed a descriptive quantitative research implementing characteristics of a case study. The subject for gaining the data, the researcher used vocabulary test and questionnaire. All the data were analyzed descriptively. The findings showed that the students still faced the problems or difficulties in vocabulary learning. Kinds of difficulties faced by the students were; (1) almost all of students have difficulties in range connotation and idiomaticity, it is proven 89.3% of students could not identify the connotation form in the sentence; (2) 87.2% of students found difficulties in choosing the appropriate meaning of the word; (3) students have difficulties in pronouncing the word it showed 85.1% of students could not choose the right word to complete the sentence; (4) the different grammatical form of a word known as inflections was one of causes of students difficulties in studying vocabulary, 68.0% of students were failed; (5) In the spelling part, 57.4% of students unable to choose appropriate spelling of the word, and the last (6) 40.4% of students have difficulties in length and complexity. There were some factors that causes students’ difficulties in learning vocabulary (1) the common problems was students’ motivation in learning English vocabulary (2) the next is students have problem in identifying past tense form (3) students got problems when they write English vocabulary (4) students not used the dictionary that was available in library (5) students got problems to expressing English vocabulary (6) students did not understand with the teacher material and (7) problems that causing difficulties is they did not like studying English.

Key Words: difficulty, vocabulary, descriptive quantitative.
**Introduction**

In Indonesia, English is also taught from the basic element of our education level: primary and elementary school. The Decree of The Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia No. 0487/4/992, chapter VIII states that English can be taught as extracurricular if it is needed by local community, and if the teacher of English is available. Another Decree of Ministry of Education and Culture No. 060/V/1993 states that English may be given to elementary school students as a local contents. Thus, it depends on the policy and the necessity of the local government in choosing this language to be taught.

English has become a popular subject among teachers as well as students at the beginning level. Nowadays, primary schools are programming English. Teaching English at Primary or Elementary level is sometimes focused on teaching vocabulary. It is intended to improve student’s ability in English.

Teaching English at the beginning level has advantages because the children tend to learn it easily. Widyaningsih (2008) says that childhood is the best period for acquiring a native or near native speaker/ pronunciation because the muscle of speech organ of children are still elastic. Therefore, it is easy for them to learn the second system of the foreign language.

Vocabulary is one of the important aspects in foreign language learning. (Widyangsih, 2008) states that vocabulary is associates with spelling forms and focused on the meaning, because we cannot understand a text if we do not know the
meaning. Concerning the teaching vocabulary, Widyaningsih (2008) states that vocabulary is the main point to understand ideas and expression.

Learning vocabulary in Elementary School, especially for children, is not easy. Teaching children is very different from teaching adult. The teacher should have an extra skill to teach them, because the children have certain characteristic and need a certain treatment. In MI Al Ittihadul Islamiyah Ampenan, for example, English is taught in the third grade students. For the students, English is their first foreign language, so they find difficulties in learning it. It becomes the teacher’s job to find out the suitable methods teaching English, especially in English vocabulary, in order to lead the students to learn English easily. Here, the researcher in doing a research at MI Al Ittihadul Islamiyah Ampenan especially in teaching vocabulary. The researcher wants to identifying what make students hard to learn vocabulary. According to Yulena (2009), most students have low motivation in learning English subject. Because they think it difficult to learn, so they get lazy and have low attention in the classroom. The students will get bored if the materials just focus on the textbook. There are several techniques that are commonly use to learn vocabulary, such as; singing, demonstration, telling stories, puzzle playing activities (Widyaningsih 2008).

Based on a class observation that is conducted in MI Al Ittihadul Islamiyah Ampenan, the researcher found some students’ problems in learning vocabulary. One of them is the teacher technique, from the observation, it was seen that the teacher
used less various techniques. The English teacher applied inappropriate method and served uninterested material. She simply asked her students to remember word by word without giving them opportunity to find out the vocabulary meaning by the students themselves. It made the students bored and unmotivated in the teaching and learning process. It can be showed that some of them were busy with their own business. They talked with each other and did not pay attention to the teacher during the learning process.

Based on those considerations, the researcher was interested in finding the difficulties in studying vocabulary faced by the sixth grade students of MI AlIttihadul Islamiyah Ampenan in academic year 2018/2019

Thornbury (2004) says that one of the important roles of the language teacher is to help their students find the easiest way of conveying new information into the already existing system of the mental lexicon. Moreover, he argues that students need to acquire the ability to store the information for as long as possible. He summarized a research into memory, which suggests principles supporting the process of permanent or long – term remembering. In this summary he listed several techniques to follow to make vocabulary teaching as effective as possible: Firstly repetition, yet what he means is repetition of encounters with a word”.

Furthermore, Thornbury (2004) stresses that the importance of retrieval and use of the new words. While practicing, learners should make decisions about words, example match rhyming words or use new items to complete sentences. Moreover, personalizing in vocabulary practice has proved to be beneficial for remembering
along with spacing, which means that presentation of new vocabulary is divided into wider separated sequences. (Thornbury 2004: 24) Another helpful element is motivation, which is closely linked with attention. “A very high degree of attention (called arousal) seems to correlate with improved recall.

Thornbury (2004) connected to this, emotional value of words should be considered as well. The researcher must definitely agree with Thornbury on this matter, as his conclusions correspond with the researcher own experiences. Finally, Thornbury (2004) advises to visualize a picture for a new word or to link an abstract word with some mental image. Images drawn by students themselves have the best outcomes. Besides imaging, there are other mnemonics, such as making clues from associations with similarly sounding word and its meaning in the mother tongue. Again, Thornbury is claim that students’ own images have the best influence on remembering is in accordance with the research own conclusion.

**Method**

This research used descriptive quantitative research. By using descriptive quantitative, the researcher focused on the students’ difficulties in learning English vocabulary. The researcher present the data in numerical and descriptive form and the instrument in collecting the data are test and questionnaire. Meanwhile, Frankael & Wallen (2003) argue that the goal of quantitative methods is to determine whether the predictive generalizations of a theory hold true. Thus, quantitative research is more concern with issues of how much, how well, or to whom that particular issues applies.
The populations of the research are all of the sixth grade students in MI Alittihadul Islamiyah Ampenan which consist of 47 students and they are put into two classes, A and B. There were 11 male and 11 female students in Class VA so total numbers of Class VA are 22 students, while there were 16 male students and 9 female students in Class B so the total numbers of students in Class B were 25 students. Therefore, the total number of the sample respondent of this research are 47 Respondents.

The samples of this study range from 10% - 15% or 20% - 25% following the procedures developed and applied by Arikonto (2006), but if population less than one hundred, it does not suppose to take sample, it is called as population sample, so the researcher use population sample to obtain the sample.

To collecting the data, quantitative descriptive method used in this research, there were some steps applied to analysed data : (a) Identifying students’ Abilities, the first step is to identify students’ difficulties in vocabulary by analysing students answer sheets then analysed students’ false answer. The score 25 X 4= 100 points. (b) Classifying Students’ Abilities, after identifying the students’ difficulties, it was classified into two types based on their mistakes. If the students get wrong, it means that the students face difficulties on knowing the meaning of words and have difficulties on classifying and translating the words. (c) Identifying the Causes of the Students’ Difficulties, the questionnaire was consists of statements for gathering information from respondents. The survey in this study consists of 8 questions. The questionnaire gave after the test. This questionnaire was analysed by descriptive
analysis to support findings from other sources of data to find out factor that contribute the difficulties.

**Difficulty in Vocabulary**

The first steps in successful teaching vocabulary are to identify the difficulties that faced by the students. Thornbury(2004) purpose some factors that make some words more difficult as follows:

a. Pronunciation

Pronunciation can be defined as the way a word or a language is spoken, or the manner in which someone utters a word. If one is said to have "correct pronunciation", then it refers to both within a particular dialect. A word can be spoken in different ways by various individuals or groups, depending on many factors, such as: the duration of the cultural exposure of their childhood, the location of their current residence, speech or voice disorders, their ethnic group, their social class, or their education. In language learners may have difficulties to learn the words. They may confuse or unfamiliar with the pronunciation the words which make learners difficult to learn the words. Suihartini, (2010) says that words that are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn.

b. Spelling

Sounds-spelling mismatches are likely to be the cause of errors, either of the pronunciation or of spelling, and can contribute to a word’s difficulty. While most English spelling is fairly law-abiding, there are also some glaring irregularities. Words that contain silent letters are particularly problematic: foreign, listen,
headache, climbing, bored, hones, cupboard, muscle, etc.

c. Lengths and complexity

Long words seem to be no more difficult to learn than short ones. But, as a rule of thumb, high frequency words tend to be short in English, and therefore the learner is likely to meet them more often, a factor favouring their “learnability”. Learners may easier to learn the word car than to learn the word carrying, means that they spontaneously remember and understand the short ones.

From that statement, learners seem to be easy to learn the short words than the word which is long.

d. Grammar

Also problematic is the grammar associated with the word, especially if this differs from that of its L1 equivalent. Remembering whether a verb like enjoy, love, or hope is followed by an infinitive (to swim) or an –ing form (swimming) can add to its difficulty.

When the grammar is associated with the words, it may be problematic, it cause the words may bring certain meaning in different grammar pattern for example (I want to swim), it may derive different meaning when –ing is added (I am swimming).

e. Meaning

When two words overlap in meaning, learners are likely to confuse them. Make and do are a case in point: you make breakfast and make an appointment but you do the housework and do a questionnaire. So, overlap meaning here means
learners are confuse to choose the words, whether they use make or they use do.

f. Range, connotation and Idiomaticity

Words that can be used in a wide range of contexts will generally be perceived as easier than their synonyms with a narrower range. Thus, *put* is a very wide ranging verb, compared to *impose, place, position*, etc. Likewise, *thin* is a safer bet than *skinny, slim slender* Uncertainty as to the connotations of some words may cause problems too. Thus, *propaganda* has negative connotations in English, but its equivalent may simply mean *publicity* On the other hand, *eccentric* does nothave negative connotations in English, but it is nearest equivalent in other languages may be *deviant*. Finally, words or expression that are idiomatic (like *make up your mind keep an eye on...*) will generally be more difficult than words whose meaning is transparent (*decide, watch*).

Result

Students result on vocabulary comprehension test. The vocabulary comprehension test given to the students is multiple-choice. The result of this test are categorized by giving five indicators, they are very good, good, fair, poor and very poor.

**Table 4.1 Students individual results on Vocabulary Comprehension Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>AYM</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>AHR</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>HA</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>MAB</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>MAR</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>MZR</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>MZA</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>NUR</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>NRA</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>QAL</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>SAU</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>RAP</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>UA</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>AWR</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>AAF</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>DM</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>FB</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table above shows that the score is categorized *very good* if students get (81-100), *good* if students get (70-79), *fair* if students get (56-69), *poor* if students get (46-55), and *very poor* if students get (0-45).
4.2 The Percentage of Students Category in Vocabulary Comprehension Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>56-69</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
<td>0-45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 shows that in answering vocabulary comprehension test 15 students have “Fair” category. The total number of students with Fair category is 15 students (31.9 %) while the number of students very poor category is also 12 students (25.5%), in poor category is 11 students (23.4%), in good category is 9 students (19%) and in very good category there is no students could reach very good category (0%). However, the highest score that student got is 80 and the mean score of sixth grade students of MI Al Ittihadul Islamiyah was 52.6; it shows that students’ ability in learning vocabulary is poor.

**Discussion**

Based on the finding above, it was found that students’ ability in learning vocabulary was in poor category. It means that more than 50% of them faced difficulties. However, some of them got internal problems. Further explanation could be seen as follows:
1. **The Results of the Students’ Test on Vocabulary Comprehension**

The data of students’ ability in learning vocabulary are provided based on vocabulary comprehension test. The results are divided into five categories; very good, good, fair, poor, very poor. The data percentage showed that 15 students (31.9%) were categorized fair, number of students in very poor category is 12 students (25.5%), 11 (23.4%) students were categorized poor, 6 students (19%) are categorized good category, and no one students is categorized very good category (0%), and The mean score of students’ vocabulary comprehension test was 52.6, this mean that the sixth grade student of Mi Al Ittihadul Islamiyah Ampenan were categorized poor in mastering vocabulary.

The result showed that (40.4%) students gave incorrect answer related to students’ understanding in length and complexity question. The students rarely got questions that use text. So that the students got difficulties to get the information of the text. (Philips and Walter, 1995) Once students have some English then a word which is related to an English word they are already familiar with is easier one which is not. For example, if students have already met the word friendly they should be able to guess the meaning of unfriendly.

Some questions which contain pronunciation identification in vocabulary test are 40 students (85.1%). In question number 1 and 4 there were 16 students (34.0%). In question number 5 there were 24 students (51.0%). The words that are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn. Thornbury(2004) shows that difficult words that contain sound that are unfamiliar to some groups of learners are potentially
difficult to learn. However, students gave incorrect answers in all the numbers of this type of mistakes related to the unfamiliar and familiarity of the words because of their education in which English is unusual to learn. And also Students could not differentiate sound of the words.

In grammar identification Most of students gave incorrect answers, 32 students (68.0%) gave incorrect answers related to the word choices to complete dialog in certain tenses, students gave incorrect answers related to their ability in determining the appropriate response to certain expression. Students did not know the pattern of the sentences in past tense. Thornbury (2004) When the grammar is associated with the words, it may be problematic, it cause the words may bring certain meaning in different grammar pattern.

The question which consists of range, connotation idiomaticity identification in vocabulary test then students gave incorrect answer, there were 42 students (89.3%), provided incorrect answers. Thornbury (2004) Words that can be used in a wide range of contexts will generally be perceived as easier than their synonyms with a narrower range. Furthermore, students gave incorrect answer for the all number of this type of mistake related to students’ unfamiliarity to the expression, so that students did not understand what it means. They also got difficulties in guessing the meaning of the expression because of their lack of words.

There are four questions which contain meaning. There were 41(87.2%) students who fail in answering the question. Thornbury states, when two words overlap in meaning, learners are likely to confuse them. So students provided
incorrect answer for all the number of this type of mistake related to their difficulties in translating word meaning.

There were 4 questions which contained spelling form, 27 (57.4%) students provided incorrect answer. The incorrect answers that students provided in this type of mistake are related to familiarity of the word whether the word use certain spelling or others. Philips and Walter (1995) states, the difficulty of a vocabulary item is often depends on how similar the items is in the form and meaning to the students first language. Words which are similar in the first language and English may be misleading rather than helpful.

2. The Causes of Difficulties in Learning Vocabulary Faced by Students

Students’ learning activities in getting the goal of English learning, the students have to do the learning activities seriously. Students’ learning activities consist of the frequency of studying vocabulary at home and students’ attendance in English class. The common problem was students’ motivation in learning vocabulary because they did not use their time when they are at home. It was proven that 70.2% of them did not use their time to learn at home. When the grammar is associated with the words, it may be problematic, it cause the words may bring certain meaning in different grammar pattern, and students get the problem in identifying past tense form. It is proven that 63.8% of them got a problem in identifying past tense form. The written form is different from the spoken form in English, so it is also makes students got problems when they write the English vocabulary, it is proven 55.3% of them said that they got the problems when they write English vocabulary. The
learning facilities’ factor is used to support in teaching and learning to reach the goal, then 42.5% of students did not use the dictionary that was available in library given.

Factors that cause trouble in understanding these students associated with less support feelings of the heart (emotion) student’s to study in earnest. Then 36.1% many of them did not use the change to express their ability in vocabulary.

The written form is different from the spoken form in English. When the students want to write word “muscle”, they just write word that they heard “mussel” it is caused by differences between Indonesian and English. Then 34.0% they got problems to express English vocabulary.

Teacher should provide some activities in teaching process to get students attention, teacher can make games or role plays, then teacher should provide problem solving to anticipate commotion or misunderstanding when learning process. Then 14.8% of them did not understand with the teacher materials.

**Conclusion**

Based on the finding of the research, it can be concluded that there are several types of difficulties in studying vocabulary faced by the sixth grade students of MI AL ITTIHADUL ISLAMIYAH APMENAN. There are six categories of difficulties which are; length and complexity, 28-42 of the students (59.5% - 89.3%) fail to provide correct answer. Meaning, 4-41 of the students (8.5% - 87.2%) fail to provide correct answer. Pronunciation, 16-40 of the students (34.0% - 85.1%) are wrong to provide correct answer. Grammar, 10-32 of the students (21.2% - 68.0%) fail to
provide correct answer. Then spelling, 11-27 of student’s (23.4% - 57.4%), unable to choose the right spelling of the word. And the last is Range, connotation and idiomaticity, 13-19 of the students (27.6% - 40.4%) are unable to provide good answer.

Meanwhile the factors causing students’ difficulties in studying vocabulary is students’ interest learning vocabulary. It was proven that 70.2% of them did not use their time to learn at home. The next problem is that they got the problem in identifying past tense form. It is proven that 63.8% of them got a problem in identifying past tense form. Furthermore, students got problems when they are write the English vocabulary, 55.3% of them said that they got the problems when they write English vocabulary. Then 42.5% of students did not use the dictionary that was available in library given. Then 36.1% many of them did not use the change to express their ability in vocabulary. Then 34.0% they got problems to expressing English vocabulary. Then 14.8% of them did not understand with the teacher materials. And the last problems causing students difficulties is they did not like English it is shown that 12.7% of them did not like studying English.
References


Philips, D & Walters, S. 1995 Teaching Practice Handbook

