Using Karuta Game to Enhance Vocabulary Mastery of Elementary School Students in Sidomulyo of Sibiru Biru Sub-District

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Abstract

Vocabulary learning plays an important role in learning English, especially in elementary schools which emphasize English learning on vocabulary mastery. However, vocabulary learning often makes elementary school students feel bored because they are assigned to memorize as many English words as possible while they sometimes do not understand the meaning of the words. Therefore, teachers should find several possible techniques that can attract students' attention and bring out their motivation, one of which is using games, such as the karuta game. This paper aims at describing how the karuta game is implemented in teaching vocabulary and how it enhances the elementary school students' vocabulary mastery. This is a descriptive study taking the elementary school students living in Sidomulyo of Sibiru Biru Sub-District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, as the participants. The data were collected using observations and interviews and were analyzed qualitatively. The results show that (i) the karuta game is easy to use because it does not have a complicated rule; furthermore, it is flexible because it can be modified in several ways following the vocabulary intended to introduce; (ii) the karuta game benefits the students in bringing up their motivation in learning English vocabulary, providing them a comprehensive conceptual meaning of each vocabulary, and improving their pronunciation. It is concluded that the karuta game is a good technique in enhancing elementary school students' vocabulary mastery.

Keyword: Karuta Game, Vocabulary Learning, Elementary School Students, English Learning English

1. INTRODUCTION

In learning English, vocabulary plays a very important role as it is a language element affecting the students' mastery of the four basic language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides, vocabulary is also the determinant factor of smooth communication in English. Therefore, the process of learning English should pay a lot of attention to students' vocabulary mastery. It should be started as early as students start to learn English. In Indonesia's education system, elementary school is the lowest level of education where English is introduced as the local content. Therefore, the learning process of English at elementary schools should emphasize the students' vocabulary mastery. The success of vocabulary mastery will help elementary school students succeed in learning English at higher levels of education and international communication.

The important role of vocabulary in learning English has attracted many researchers, not only in Indonesia but also in other countries where English is the second and foreign language, to conduct studies on students' vocabulary mastery. Some of the studies focus on techniques in teaching vocabulary methods and approaches in teaching vocabulary, and vocabulary mastery improvement. Despite different results of their studies, they all agree that vocabulary plays a very important language in building students' English proficiency.

The results described in the previous studies are in contrast with the vocabulary of the elementary school students in Sidomulyo of Sibiru Biru Sub-District, Deli Serdang Regency. Based on the preliminary observation in several elementary schools in this village, they have a very limited amount of English vocabulary, hindering their ability to speak English. Teaching techniques in their elementary schools may be one of the factors leading to their low vocabulary mastery. The technique

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commonly used by the teachers in teaching English vocabulary was lecturing, one of the techniques in a teacher-centered approach. During vocabulary learning, the teacher explained the meaning of the vocabulary items and modeled their pronunciation, while the students were listening. Then the students were asked to memorize the vocabulary, while they did not know its exact meaning. To overcome such a problem, there should be an effort of finding the right technique to make students active in vocabulary learning and eventually improve their vocabulary mastery. The game can be a good technique to teach vocabulary to elementary school students. Many studies have proved the effectiveness of using games in improving students' vocabulary mastery.

One of the games that apply to elementary school students is the karuta game, an old Japanese card game, mainly designed for memorizing Japanese classical poems, proverbs, or other written expressions. As the game is related to memorizing, it is applicable to be brought into one of the techniques in teaching vocabulary. For this reason, several studies have been conducted on using karuta games in teaching vocabulary. Taynton & Yamada used the karuta game to enhance listening and speaking skills in Japanese learners of English. Besides, Zuharoh used classroom action research to find the improvement of the English vocabulary of the students after being treated by using the karuta game. Moreover, using an experimental method, Mudrikah, Kusrini, and Dahidi studied the effectiveness of the karuta game in memorizing Japanese vocabulary. Furthermore, Fachriyani & Syafe'I discussed the use of the karuta game in teaching vocabulary to young learners. These previous studies suggest some possible variations in using the karuta game in teaching English vocabulary. One of the modifications can be done by modifying the shapes and the contents of the cards. Thus, this paper demonstrates the use of the karuta game with a design different from those used in previous studies.

Based on the rationale elaborated above and based on the possibility of modifying the game design, this paper aims at describing the use of the karuta game in enhancing the vocabulary mastery of the elementary school students in Sidomulyo of Sibiru Biru Sub-District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. Hopefully, this paper can enrich the variation of games that can be used by teachers in teaching vocabulary to elementary school students and can promote fun and enjoyable English learning at elementary schools especially to enhance students' vocabulary mastery.

2. METHODS

This is a descriptive study describing the phenomenon of using the karuta game in enhancing the vocabulary mastery of elementary school students. The data were the process of implementing the karuta game in teaching vocabulary to sixth-year elementary school students living in Sidomulyo of Sibiru Biru Sub-District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. They were taken as the participants because they had low vocabulary mastery. Observations and interviews were used as the collection data method. The data were analyzed qualitatively to describe the process and the advantages of using the karuta game in teaching vocabulary.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Before the implementation of the karuta game in teaching vocabulary, the only material that needs to be prepared is cards. The cards should be appropriate for the students' physical and mental development. Besides, they must comply with the target vocabulary. Besides, designing the cards should pay attention to several factors (e.g. colorful and eye-friendly images, clear writing, and specific object) to make them interesting to the students. The pictures or images contained in the cards must also be familiar with the students. For example, when introducing animals to the students, they must be those which are found in the students' local environment. In Sidomulyo, the place where this study is conducted, the animals that can be introduced are a cat, dog, goat, cow, etc. This means that animals such as kangaroos, penguins, and giraffes should not be introduced as they cannot be found in this village. At the level of elementary school, students are required to master vocabulary

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related to their environments such as things in a house and school, animals, and plants. In this paper, the cards contain the name of things in a house.

To make the cards interesting or attractive to the students, they are designed with colorful pictures under which the words indicating the meaning of the pictures are written (see Figure 3.1). As shown in Figure 1, each of the cards contains pictures of things that can be found in a house. Then, the English words representing those words are placed underneath. This makes the karuta game described in this paper different from the karuta games ever studied in the previous studies. For example, used the cards containing animal pictures available online. In addition, the use of vocabulary related to things in a house is also different from the pictures of Japanese food in the karuta game studied.
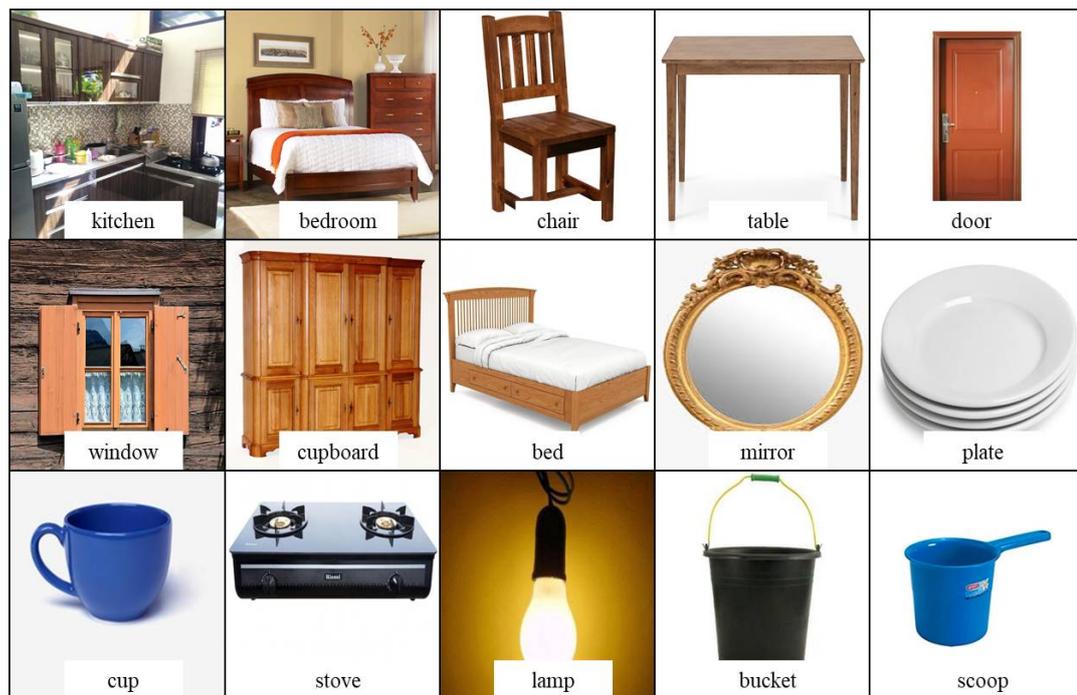

Figure 3.1. Karuta related to things in a house

In the karuta game, the students are divided into groups of 3 to 5 students. They have to be reminded that they are a team that should help one another, so they should not compete with their teammates. Before the game starts, the teacher puts the fifteen cards containing pictures of things in a house (see Figure 1) on the floor. The cards are spread face-up on the floor around the classroom. Then the teacher reads the characteristics of the things described in the cards. The description is simple and easy to understand. For example, the teacher says, "It has four legs and it is a place to sit on". The students listen to the descriptions, and once they can identify the things described, they run to the intended card and snap it. The first student who snaps the card correctly will be allowed to hold it. On the other hand, if he/she snaps the wrong card, his/her group has to sit out the next round; in other words, the group will lose one round. Each of the cards correctly snapped by the students gives their group one point, and the more they take the cards the more point their group gets.

The same activity is conducted until all the cards are taken by the students. The group collecting more points becomes the winner. The winner gets a reward, while the losing groups are given punishment. The punishment should be related to English practices, such as singing English songs, saying 10 English words, counting down, and reading a story in front of the class. At the end of the game, the teacher asks the students to pronounce the words listed in the cards through a drilling technique. Also, the teacher describes the meaning of the words listed in each of the cards to give the students a complete understanding of the conceptual meaning of the words. While playing the game, the teacher goes around the class to ensure that all of the students take a part in the game.

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The first advantage of using the karuta game is bringing out the students' motivation in learning English. Motivation plays a very important role in foreign language learning and has been examined to have the highest correlation with the students' achievement in learning a foreign language. The games are speedy, competitive, and exciting which can motivate the students to play, while they simultaneously learn English vocabulary related to things in a house. Bringing up the students' motivation is not an easy task, but once they are motivated in the learning process, the students will love to learn English. Eventually, their vocabulary mastery can be improved.

The ability of the karuta game to bring out the students' motivation in learning vocabulary solves the previous problem related to students' boredom in learning vocabulary. In this game, all students are actively involved because they do not sit on their chairs listening to their teacher's explanation, but they do certain physical activities. Furthermore, they do not focus on memorizing the vocabulary by themselves. They do it unconsciously while playing. They can learn the vocabulary from their classmates who can identify the vocabulary described by the teacher.

The second advantage is providing students the complete meaning of the vocabulary listed. Through the implementation of the karuta game, the students are introduced to the description of each vocabulary listed, its reference, and its spelling. This is correspondence with the theory of meaning known as the three dimensions of meaning. When the students completely understand the conceptual meaning of a word, it will be much easier for them to memorize the word. Therefore, they will improve their vocabulary mastery. This can solve the problem of vocabulary mastery frequently mentioned in several previous studies where students forget the recently memorized vocabulary. The main factor in such memory condition is the students are not introduced to the comprehensive meaning of the words.

Providing complete meaning of the vocabulary solves the previous problem faced by many elementary school students. They used to be asked to memorize the vocabulary without knowing its meaning. It can be imagined how hard such a task is, i.e. memorizing many unknown words. By using the karuta game, the students can memorize the vocabulary easily because they are introduced not only to its simple meaning but also its descriptions. In addition, due to their understanding of the meaning, they can use it in their communication.

The third advantage is improving students' ability in pronouncing English words. Vocabulary mastery has a close relationship with pronunciation. Since the focus of learning English at elementary schools is emphasized on oral skills (i.e. listening and speaking), pronunciation helps students develop their vocabulary mastery. Incorrect pronunciation hinders the students' ability to understand the English word or vocabulary. The students' vocabulary mastery is measured by how they can use their vocabulary in the classroom context, such as listening to and giving simple instructions, asking and answering questions, and communicating ideas. Through a drilling technique during and after the karuta game, their pronunciation can be improved.

The level of difficulty in the karuta game can easily be adjusted to increase the challenge. For this purpose, the teacher should be able to design several levels of difficulty in vocabulary mastery. The difficulty can be based on the number of sounds, the difficulty in pronouncing the sounds, the number of syllables, and the familiarity of the words. As the students in one class have a different level of English proficiency, this is particularly important to challenge students with a higher level of vocabulary mastery. Sometimes, the students with a higher level of vocabulary mastery feel bored when they already know all the vocabulary introduced in the game.

4. CONCLUSION

The discussion on the implementation of the karuta game shows its appropriateness to be used in teaching English vocabulary to elementary school students. It is not costly and easy to play. It does not require the students to understand a complicated rule. Besides, it is flexible as it can be modified based on the learning needs. The implementation of the karuta game supports the student-centered learning approach, where the students are active during the learning process and the teacher only serves as the facilitator. In addition, the use of the karuta game in teaching vocabulary benefits the

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elementary school students in Sidomulyo of Sibiru Biru Sub-District, Deli Serdang Regency in (i) building their motivation in learning English vocabulary; (ii) getting more comprehension on the English vocabulary; and (iii) improving their pronunciation. These advantages help students improve their vocabulary mastery.

The use of the karuta game discussed in this paper focuses only on vocabulary related to things in a house; therefore, it opens the opportunity for other authors to modify this game with other sets of vocabulary needed by elementary school students. In addition, the karuta game discussed in this paper uses a conventional instrument, motivated by the local environment where this game is applied. However, in the regions supported by more advanced technology equipment, this game can be applied digitally. The cards are not printed out, but they are provided on the projector screen and the students snap the cards on the screen. The process of counting the point obtained by each group is also made digitally. This paper only used a description method; therefore, it is suggested to other researchers to empirically explore the effectiveness and advantages of this game either through experimental research or through classroom action research.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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