From drawings to puppet shows: practical ways in teaching vocabulary to primary school EFL learners

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ABSTRACT

Mastering vocabulary is one of fundamental conditions that determine learners' success to be skilled in learning English. The present study aims to explore how young EFL learners engage in learning vocabulary through puppet shows. Grounded in a qualitative approach, this study employed classroom action research (CAR) consisting of two cycles. 11-12 years-old sixth graders of an Islamic primary school in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia volunteered to take part in this study. Data were collected through classroom observation, written documents, and interviews. The data were analyzed by reducing data, displaying data, and verifying conclusion. Findings of the study show that the young EFL learners were more enthusiastic about learning English and participating in vocabulary activities. The learners were encouraged to actively respond to the question and provide meaningful feedback. By supplying the EFL learners with engaging puppet shows, the researchers set fascinating activities for them to guarantee that they were not bored in class. Many vocabularies had already been introduced to the students when the study was overtaken. This study contributes to empirical insights into how puppet shows are adopted in teaching vocabularies to primary school EFL learners that has shifted from drawings as educational media.

Introduction

One of the languages that are important to communicate in the global era is English. Harmer (2007, p. 56) defines that "a lingua franca as a language that is the two speakers who have different native language use English as the second language for communication." English is an important role in building up and maintaining smooth communication as well as a good relationship among people, it is not often English used in daily life for business relationships, trade, education, etc. According to Guilherme (2007), the language that is spoken the most over the globe is English. Additionally, it is the most often used language in scientific

publishing, international trade, diplomacy, and popular culture. The ability to use English as a means of succeeding in many parts of life stems from internationality and English is also the language that dominates the era of communication to link and transfer the knowledge in society. As a result of its relevance in the modern era, English is one of the most significant topics that students master. These are the reasons for learning English.

The materials for English teaching vocabulary are listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Learning a language cannot be separated from the vocabulary. To strengthen the four English skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, vocabulary is required (Astriyanti & Anwar, 2016). This means that vocabulary is one of the most crucial aspects of learning English. When students lack the necessary vocabulary to understand and speak English, it will be difficult for them to express their thoughts. In addition, Thornbury (2002) states that without vocabulary, nothing can be spoken, and very little can be said without grammar. Vocabulary is the most important aspect of language proficiency since it determines how well learners talk, listen, read, and write (Richards, 2002).

Teaching and learning English in primary schools aims to introduce to students early that there are other languages besides their mother tongue and Indonesian (*national language*) that need to be studied to develop future scientific insights (*future time*). There are many ways to teach English to young students. One of the ways to teach English to young learners that can be used is by using puppet game. A game can be a valuable teaching tool for successful and enjoyable learning. Games can help create contexts where their language is applicable and meaningful (Coyne et al., 2021). Students can learn English more effortlessly and comfortably by playing games. In addition, game can also be used to give practice in all language skills as well as any sorts of communication, which is in keeping with the educational objectives (Huyen & Nga, 2013).

Puppet shows are alternate educational media for young EFL learners and one of the most effective ways to pique their interest. Puppets are widely used in primary schools in areas such as language and social education (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2010; Pitre at al., 2009). Puppet is an interesting, colorful, and amusing character. It's a game that most kids like playing. They can imagine and engage with others. Puppets can encourage students to experiment more with the language because they can develop imagination and creativity (Ozdeniz, 2000). Puppets have the can capacity to engage and inspire young learners, allowing them to express themselves through imagined play during free play (Romanski, 2019). Dunst (2014) states that several advantages of utilizing puppets contribute to a teaching medium, i.e., language development, improved learning, development of creative talents, development of social skills, and improved family relationships. Riyani (2019) follows some of the disadvantages of using puppet to teach vocabulary, i.e., making it easy for the teacher to become tired because the teacher must practice with the kids directly and making bored the students who are unable to actively participate in the puppet practice.

Based on the observation, the researchers discovered certain issues with the teaching and learning processes. The students were uninterested in learning English. The students were also found to be unfamiliar with English sounds and pronunciation. It was evident when the students repeated the teacher's words or responded to the teacher's inquiries. The researchers also discovered a flaw in the teacher's method of instruction. The teacher only utilized a whiteboard to teach English, and the activities were limited, causing the students to become bored in class.

Given the problems and the importance of learning English from an early age that has been described above, the researcher is interested in conducting research using puppet shows. This research intends to explore how puppet shows are adopted to engage young EFL learners in learning vocabulary.

Method

Research design

This study employed qualitative research by involving classroom action research (CAR). Classroom Action research is a form of research self-reflection to increase rationality, understanding, and social situation in which a practice is carried out (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The research was split into two cycles in this study. Every cycle contains a relationship. Planning, action, observation, and reflection are all parts of each cycle as shown in Figure 1.
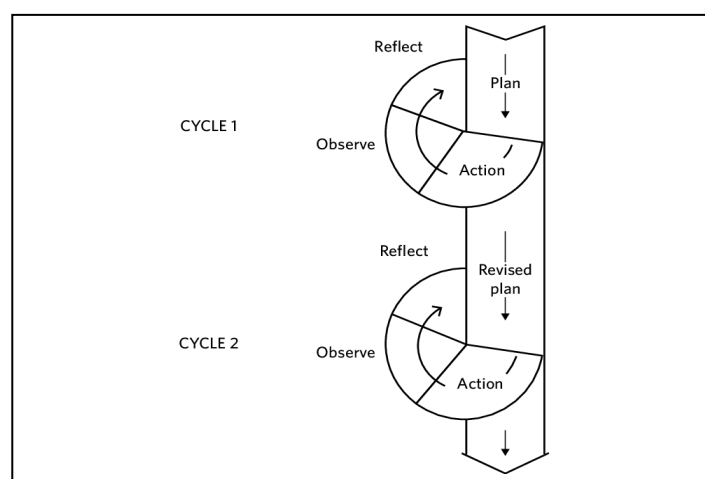

Figure 1. Kemmis and Taggart's action research model

Setting and participants

Teaching vocabulary was chosen as the research context because teaching vocabulary is used in English subjects. Teaching vocabulary is material that is obtained by students in elementary school. This study is about teaching English vocabulary through puppet shows in a Islamic primary school in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia. The present research engages young EFL learners around 11-12 years old. The researchers selected them because puppet shows are alternative teaching for young learners to build the students' interest.

Instructional procedures

There are several processes for employing puppets in teaching vocabulary. To conduct the right approaches in delivering the contents using puppet, the teacher and students must do pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching to ensure that the vocabulary teaching process is clear. In pre-teaching activity, the teacher entered the classroom and then instructed the students to pray together. The teacher then informed the students about the present topic by asking them to open their books. In addition, the instructor used media in their instruction.

In while-teaching activity, the teacher showed the puppet to keep the attention of the students, the teacher introduced the topic of the lesson, the teacher wrote the learning material on the blackboard, the teacher used puppets to guide them to explain about learning material and asked students to say what they saw, and the teacher asked students in groups to do the game. In post-teaching activity, the teacher directed students to conclude the lesson and reflected on the learning activities by asking what students get from the learning.

Data collection

Three methods of data collection were used, i.e., classroom observations, written documents, and interviews. Since action research allows one to offer evidence from multiple sources (such as interviews, document reviews, and observation) to present the whole story, it's a great way to go (Kemmis et al., 2014). Those instruments were designed to collect accurate data and respond to the study questions addressed. Furthermore, throughout the deployment of employing puppet to teach vocabulary, classroom observation was employed to gather data. The observations in the classroom were done twice. Because the researcher acted as the teacher who used puppets to teach vocabulary to young learners, the type of observation used in this study was participant observation (Merriam & Clark, 1991). One of the methods utilized to collect the data in order to answer the study question was a written document. The written documents consist of lesson plans from two meetings of observation, students' checklists, and teacher's field notes. Moreover, during the observation, the interview was used to gather information about the students' thoughts, feelings, answers, difficulties, and expectations regarding the usage of puppet game in their vocabulary practice.

Data analysis

In this study, the research data were analyzed qualitatively using three stages, which are carried out sequentially repeated since data collection was carried out. In qualitative research, data analysis has been started since formulating the problem and explaining the problem, before going into the field, as long as ongoing research, continues until the writing of research results (Sugiyono, 2015). The data analysis used in this study is to use an interactive engineering model developed by Miles and Huberman (1984). There are activities in interactive data analysis, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion/verification (Sugiyono,2015).

Data reduction is summarizing all existing data to make it more understandable, focusing on the most relevant aspects, looking for themes and patterns, simplifying, summarizing, and changing the form of the raw data in the field notes. The data intended to be reduced is the data from the results observation, interview, and documentation regarding vocabulary recognition of elementary school children's English through puppet games. Data display is the data that has been reduced and needs to be presented in the form of a narrative in an orderly manner thorough on every aspect of a child's English vocabulary. Conclusion verification is drawing conclusions about improvements or changes that occur carried out in stages starting from the temporary conclusions drawn at the end.

Meanwhile, the researchers triangulated the data by analyzing it using field notes from the teaching-learning process, the interview transcript, some experts' theories, and other

notes linked to the data, such as notes on the students' progress, achievements, and errors during the process. To keep track of class activities and supporting documents such as the lesson plan, field notes were used. After that, the researcher conducted an interview with the students to learn how they felt about the class activity and to gather some comments, perceptions, and ideas concerning the actions.

Findings and discussion

Adopting puppet to teach vocabulary for young EFL learners: practical ways

In the planning phase, before beginning the activity, the researcher had to prepare everything, such as the teacher preparing the content that would be taught in the classroom and the teacher creating a lesson plan. The researcher intended to introduce vocabulary using puppet media in this cycle. The researcher asks the students to describe what they saw based on the whiteboard and write the material on their own books.

In the action phase, the researcher and the English teacher entered the classroom together. The researcher welcomed the students to class by praying basmalah and checking their attendance. On that particular day, the researcher clarified that the goal was not to teach, but rather to do research. First of all, the researcher stimulated the students' interest by asking them to talk about the places they had visited. In the classroom, the researcher utilized English. The students were still hesitant to speak, so the researcher allowed them to respond in Indonesian first. Then, the researcher explained the topic. The first set of materials, titled "public places" was used by the researcher.

The researcher introduced public places using puppet. The researcher explained the name of the puppet, age, and occupation. The students listen to be careful with the researcher's explanation. The researcher asked the students about explanations in English. Students answered with no confidence. After that, the researcher asked the students "is it clear?" and students answered "yes". Then, the researcher asked, "are there any difficult words?". The students responded that they were still confused about public places. As a result, the researcher asked the students to describe the types of public spaces they are familiar with. The researcher scribbled them in Indonesian and English on the whiteboard. The researcher said the words out loud and had the students repeat them.

The researcher congratulated the students on their excitement and double-checked their comprehension. The students were asked to read the names of the public places one by one. The researcher corrected the pronunciation of several students who had mispronounced the words. Then, the researcher presented a lesson conclusion and then made a closing to bring the class to a close.

During the observation phase, the teacher made notes while the researcher carried out the action and completed the observation checklist sheet to monitor the teaching and learning process. Meanwhile, in the reflection phase, the researcher and collaborator reviewed the action once it was completed. The conversation was based on observations made during the teaching and learning process, as well as the viewpoints of the students and collaborators. At each meeting, the members of the research team reviewed the challenges and answers, and at the end of the cycle, they discussed the entire cycle as a factor for planning the next cycle.

In cycle 1, to encourage the students, the researcher used classroom English. When the researcher discussed the contents and asked the students questions, the researcher did it in English. When the students had trouble understanding, the researcher would utilize Indonesian. The students used both English and Indonesian to respond to the researcher's queries. The researcher also gave the students some fun exercises to do while learning vocabulary. As evidenced in the following interview vignette, the English teacher responded positively to the researcher.

> It's been good. I see also more children enthusiastic about learning. I was even afraid at first that they would be naughty with new people. But apparently not (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, September 25, 2021, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview data, there were certain issues with teaching vocabulary in Cycle 1 that needed to be addressed. To begin with, the students were unmotivated to study English, particularly in learning activities, and they were also unsure about their ability to speak in English in the prior meeting. The researcher agreed to employ puppet performance as their final exercise to overcome this challenge. Students have the opportunity to speak and converse with their peers during this activity.

The students got more active as a result of doing the activities with their friends, according to the study. They communicated with one another and had to work together to solve the situation. But in the activity the pupils were quite rowdy and did not listen well during the prior meeting with the teacher. As a result, the researcher and the teacher decided to explain the material using puppet. Because it was a novel experience for the students, especially in the first meeting, they focused entirely on the researcher's puppet. The children enjoyed looking at the puppet and used them in the final activity. It can be seen from the interview excerpt:

> It is exciting Miss. You are cute, you wear puppet too. The learning is fun (Student 1, Semi-structured interview, September 25, 2021, Researcher translation).

> So much fun, Miss. I'm more excited to learn it. Although not all of my vocabulary is memorized, but now my vocabulary is much better than yesterday (Student 2, Semi-structured interview, September 25, 2021, Researcher translation).

Drawn in the interview vignettes, the implementation of teaching by using puppet was generally successful in introducing vocabulary. The use of puppet was employed to boost students' vocabulary proficiency and increase their engagement in class (Egusa et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2010). The majority of the students were actively participating in the events. Based on the interviews held after the action, those indicated that they were enthusiastic about the activities.

Puppet shows to teach vocabulary for young EFL learners: reflection

In the planning stage, the researcher and the English teacher conducted a reflection after completing Cycle 1's actions. Based on the first cycle's reflections, they agreed to continue similar actions, such as using classroom English, playing a puppet game to introduce vocabulary, and using puppets to teach the topic to the students.

The researcher was inspired by an English teacher to include a visual activity in the game to pique the students' interest. Based on the first cycle's reflections, some of the students still struggled with pronunciation, therefore the researcher devised a plan to drill the students on

vocabulary. In Cycle 2, the researcher had the students describe something in order to assess their comprehension. The researcher expected them to do better in the speaking exercise if they described it.

In the action stage, the topic of the meeting was "Hobby". The activities in this cycle were nearly identical to those in Cycle 1. The researcher used it to introduce the lesson, elicit the topic to be learned, give instructions for the tasks, and close the lesson. The puppet was delivered by the researcher, and the students were more fascinated after seeing it again. The researcher used the puppet to convey the content and put the words on the whiteboard. The students were instructed to repeat all of the words back to the researcher. The researcher next asked the students to play the "Puppet game" to see if they understood.

First, the researcher divides the students into two groups. each group must memmemorizesorize the vocabulary that has been learned. Second, the students were asked to come to in the front of the class as many as 6 representatives. one student as a leader and the others as players. Third, each group got 5 vocabularies but they are answered in turns. Fourth, the players had to guess the vocabulary by the way the leader demonstrated the vocabulary. Fifth, each question was given in one minute. Last, the group that answered the most questions correctly was the winner.

In the observation stage, during this cycle, the teacher made notes while the researcher carried out the action and completed the observation checklist sheet to monitor the teaching and learning process. Moreover, in the reflection phase, following Cycle 2 of the action's implementation, the researcher and the English teacher emphasized the need to reflect based on observations made during the action's implementation as well as interviews with the English teacher and students in Cycle 1. The puppet employed in Cycle 2 has the potential to increase students' interest in learning the subjects. Many of them attempted to answer the questions in English based on their understanding, and the researcher occasionally corrected their vocabulary errors. The kids' vocabulary learning process increased as a result of this cycle.

The researcher continued to focus on vocabulary in Cycle 2. The students were asked to mention their vocabulary and to assist with their English by the researcher. The researcher and the English teacher discovered that the students had increased their vocabularies. The English teacher complimented the teaching-learning process as well.

The study findings demonstrate that the students improved in four of the primary difficulties addressed in this study after completing the first activities. During the first cycle, the students' vocabularies were expanded. Students could learn more new vocabulary by using puppet. The researcher also quizzed the students on several material-related words and assisted them with their English-speaking abilities. The efforts in Cycle 2 were aimed at improving spoken learning indicators and establishing a conducive teaching and learning process.

Second, the students' speaking skills improved as they became more familiar with English sounds and more comfortable speaking English. In individual tasks, they were able to communicate more than previously. While playing the game, the students also grew more competitive than previously. Third, the numerous tasks keep the researcher's materials interesting enough that they did not get bored in class. The last, giving rewards to pupils who received the highest grade in each assignment was an excellent way to push students to study

English. Furthermore, the students enjoy playing games and making jokes. As a result, kids became more competitive and pay attention to others. This is evidenced in the following teacher interview vignettes:

> Good, very good. If I see from the meeting by meeting the students were more active in speaking. Obviously, they are easier to recognize English vocabulary (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 2, 2021, Researcher translation).

Drawn in the interview data, the researcher continued to focus on vocabulary in Cycle 2. The students were asked to mention their vocabulary and to assist with their English by the researcher. The researcher and the English teacher discovered that the students had increased their vocabularies. The English teacher complimented the teaching-learning process as well.

According to the research findings, this study was successful in introducing vocabulary to young learners through a puppet game that was accompanied by additional activities such as pronunciation correction and game application. It can be seen from the students were more enthusiastic about learning English and participating in vocabulary activities. Students were encouraged to actively respond to the question and provide feedback. In the foreign language learning, games can serve as a framework for establishing a meaningful setting for language learning. According to Saleh and Althaqafi (2022), games can help learners enhance their understanding of written and spoken English. Learners can use games to practice pronouncing and spelling words and structures in context. Despite the fact that most teachers are unaware of this as a learning approach, games play a significant part in language learning in the classroom.

However, there are numerous advantages for pupils in the learning process. To begin with, the game keeps teachings from getting monotonous and dull. On the other hand, They promote a productive and positive classroom environment that values students and their learning. Games are usually entertaining for the students, therefore they hold their attention better than traditional lessons. With the use of games, students learn the language while also having fun in the classroom. Even shy and hesitant children respond well to them (Ronfard & Corriveau, 2016). This enhances children's motivation because they can play as an alternative to learning, which motivates students to stay focused on the subject and continue working. They decrease the burden of learning a new language in this way (Schmidt et al., 2016; Yolanda & Hadi, 2019).

During the teaching and learning process, students were more engaged in activities. By supplying the students with engaging puppets, the researcher set fascinating activities for them, guaranteeing that they were not bored in class. Many vocabularies had already been introduced to the students as a result of this researcher's explanation. Students can learn English more easily if they have a strong vocabulary. All the words in the word list in the classes or books, all the words that one individual knows, are considered vocabulary (Chou, 2014; Victoria, 2008).

Vocabulary, on the other hand, is defined by Hornby (2000, p. 151) as "all the words a person knows or uses, terms that individuals use when they talk about a particular subject." As a result, vocabulary refers to all of the words that are used in speaking, writing, and communicating; it also refers to the alphabet in the form of words that are used to convey information about various topics. As a result, the researcher concluded that English puppet

could improve students' vocabulary mastery after performing research in the primary school in Pekalongan, Central Java.

Students in both cycles were given puppet to use to teach vocabulary. During this cycle, pupils appeared to be eager to listen to the subject. Objects and obstacles they faced were replicated in the simulation. Children chose the space, as well as the components of disease management that were essential to them, and they felt more at peace (Suzan et al., 2020). Students are more responsive to learning when they are comfortable (Banfield, 2020; Puspitasari et al., 2019). Students are also exposed to authentic examples of the second language through puppet as presented in the following figure.

Figure 2. Puppet shows in teaching vocabulary

Figure 2 depicts that puppet is adopted in teaching vocabulary to young EFL learners. One technique to motivate students to learn English is to use puppets in the classroom. Puppets are well-known as effective teaching tools for young students (Packer & Moreno-Dulcey, 2022). Puppets can assist young learners in internalizing linguistic patterns, improving listening skills, developing risk-taking skills, and increasing student confidence, as well as providing chances (Karolis, 2020). Using puppets with young students can be an effective technique to encourage passive students to express their feelings and engage in group classes and discussions (Aranguren-Gassis, 2017).

In cycle 1, students were assigned the duty of asking questions of their peers and gathering information with the help of a puppet. The students grew more active and engaged in attempting to communicate with others in order to obtain knowledge. The puppet clearly assisted the youngsters in speaking more. Ahlcrona (2012) reports on their ability to create something new when children play with a puppet. Children may be able to overstep the barriers between the 'real' and the 'imagined' world when playing with puppets, improving creative conversation. Puppets can motivate students to try new things with language and 'have a go' when they might otherwise be quiet (Elmahida et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016).

When a child communicates through the puppet, it is the puppet rather than the child who is thought to be making mistakes, and children find this freeing. Puppets serve to broaden a discussion (Remer & Tzuriel,2015). Children are encouraged to share their own examples and experiences when a puppet is utilized to provide personal examples and experiences to a debate. Remer and Tzuriel (2015) state how a puppet can serve as a role model for asking inquiries and providing explanations. The ability of a puppet to help children

relax leads to communication. According to Caganaga and Kalmiş (2015), puppets can aid in the development of conversational abilities because youngsters feel more at ease talking with a puppet than with a teacher. The learners' engagement in learning vocabulary is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Young learners' engagement using puppet

The study findings portray that the young EFL learners were more enthusiastic about learning English and participating in vocabulary activities. Students were encouraged to actively respond to the question and provide feedback. During the teaching and learning process, students were more engaged in speaking activities. The researcher asked the students to write down the difficult vocabulary they learned during the game. Every meeting also included a variety of activities, as well as a puppet game that piqued students' interest in participating in the activities.

Conclusion

This study was successful in introducing vocabulary to young learners through a puppet game that was accompanied by additional activities such as pronunciation correction and game application. It can be seen from the students were more enthusiastic about learning English and participating in vocabulary activities. Students were encouraged to actively respond to the question and provide feedback. During the teaching and learning process, students were more engaged in activities. By supplying the students with engaging puppets, the researcher set fascinating activities for them, guaranteeing that they were not bored in class. Many vocabularies had already been introduced to the students as a result of this researcher's explanation. As a result, the researcher concluded that English puppet could improve students' vocabulary mastery after performing research in the Islamic primary school in Pekalongan, Central Java.

Acknowledgements

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