



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.3., 2017 (July-Sept.)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

USING WORD GAMES AND PICTURES IN TEACHING AND RETAINING VOCABULARY  
(A CASE STUDY OF TEACHING EFL FOR INDONESIAN RURAL STUDENTS)

Santri E. P. Djahimo & Gracia M. N. Otta

Nusa Cendana University, Kupang-NTT, Indonesia



ABSTRACT

This study reports on using word games and pictures in teaching and retaining vocabulary and it is a case study of teaching EFL students in rural and disadvantaged areas of Indonesia. Two books on *English Vocabulary Word Games and Pictures* have been produced to be used by these EFL teachers and students. Using three schools in three different areas in Indonesia as the sample, this study has revealed that the use of word games and pictures is not only useful but also powerful for both EFL teachers and students. These two techniques are *useful* for teachers to teach and *powerful* for students to retain their vocabulary. There have been several positive changes identified in the teaching and learning process using word games and pictures, namely: teachers can vary the way they teach, they can get their students engaged in the teaching and learning process, students are more active and they seem to enjoy the lessons more, they find it easier to retain the vocabulary they have learned, the atmosphere of the classrooms become positive as both teachers and students can create favorable learning environment, and the teaching style is no longer teacher-centered but student-centered. Data from tests (both pre-test and post-test), observations, and interviews with both teachers and students have been used to come to the main conclusion that the use of word games and pictures is effective and helpful for EFL teachers and students of Indonesian rural schools in teaching and retaining vocabulary.

**Keywords:** Word Games, Pictures, Teaching Vocabulary, Retaining Vocabulary, EFL Students, Rural and Disadvantaged Schools

INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that English is the most popular foreign language taught in Indonesian schools, starting from kindergarten to university levels. As a school subject, English, among other subjects, has a key role in the success or failure of not only students but also teachers. The way to measure this is by looking at students' scores in their (national) examinations. Generally, students' good scores will indicate the successful of teachers in guiding and teaching them in the teaching and learning process, and vice versa.

However, it is not quite as simple as that because in measuring students' learning, we need to take a deeper look into their whole performance of how to use the language they are learning. So, academic

performance in the form of scores is not the best indicator per se, but there are still other indicators, such as their ability to use the language and the progress they are making day by day in developing their English skill.

In order to become successful EFL students, four skills and two language components are expected to be mastered by them. This study will focus on the teaching of vocabulary as one of the important components in ESL/EFL classes. Vocabulary is considered important in playing the major role as a useful and fundamental tool in English language teaching and learning. Its importance has been felt by not only language learners but also practitioners and experts. In emphasizing this point, Wilkins (1972) states that "...while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed". So, it is not too much to say that vocabulary is the heart of a language, in this case, English.

The importance of vocabulary becomes the primary concern of not only teachers but also other practitioners. This has led many people who have this particular expertise to conduct studies about finding out effective and powerful techniques, strategies or ways to teach vocabulary to various levels of students. This writing is a part of an effort to improve teachers' way of teaching and students' way of learning vocabulary.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

When we are talking about vocabulary, we are engaging in words used in a language. So, vocabulary has a very significant role in a language and according to Basanta (2010:175), it is an essential issue in EFL class. This has been described well in a great quote by a famous American author and novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 – 1864) that "words, so innocent and powerless as they are, standing in a dictionary; how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to choose and combine them." In other words, we can use the language we are learning well if we have advanced vocabulary.

As a general term, vocabulary has been defined by many authors in various ways. Despite the differences, they all have similar key words in defining the term. Several of them indicate that vocabulary is the way language teachers teach not only words but also linguistics features of a language which has mostly been applied to ESL/EFL students (Rupley, et al., 1998:99; Finch, 2000:102; Wray, 2002:9; and Ur, 2005:60).

Vocabulary acquisition is perceived as a very important component of language in ESL/EFL classes because it cannot be separated from other skills in learning English, either EFL or ESL. It is the core component of all skills. However, many teachers still think that this component is not as important as another one, that is grammar, and the four skills, which are speaking, writing, reading, and listening. This might be one of the reasons why vocabulary is still neglected in English class. But the main problem relates to the difficulties in finding strategies and techniques to teach vocabulary, especially for teachers in rural schools in Indonesia.

This study has been designed to devise a new technique for teaching vocabulary that can address the main issue. The proposed teaching methodology uses word games and pictures, enabling EFL teachers in rural and disadvantaged schools in particular areas in Indonesia to address the main problem in the classroom and at the same time improve students' vocabulary acquisition.

#### **Word Games**

The use of games is one interesting way in teaching vocabulary to EFL students. It can improve students' spirit and motivation in learning and refresh them from unfavorable classroom atmosphere. Using games in the classroom can encourage students to participate in the teaching and learning process because games are learner-centered activities (Simpson, 2015:3-4; Hansen, 1994:118). Besides, it can make students use the language they are learning without even thinking about it (Lee, 1979:2). These great benefits have led many experts to recommend teachers use games as main and central activities because of their pedagogical values (Lee, 1979:2; Richard-Amato, 1988:147; Silvers, 1982:29; Zdybiewska, 1994:6)

Word games fall into the category of games. Teachers can create many activities through word games which will enable the students to play with words. One of the example is crossword puzzle. According to Blachowicz& Fisher (2004:67-68), teaching vocabulary with word games can gain many advantages; such as, positive atmosphere of the classroom during the teaching and learning process can be created, students' learning motivation can be increased, students' consciousness in learning, understanding and using each and every word (metacognitive understanding) can be improved, and they will be interested in finding out more about the words they play.

Despite all the pros and cons about using games in teaching and learning activity in ESL/EFL class, it has to be admitted that the use of games has many benefits for teachers in teaching and students in learning (acquiring and retaining) vocabulary. Through games, students can learn the language (i.e. vocabulary) naturally that can make them easier to use it in the real communication (Desree, 2002:2).

### **Pictures**

Visual aids can also be effective to be used in teaching vocabulary in ESL/EFL classes (Clark and Lyons, 2004). One of the simplest and most practical visual aids that has been implemented by many researchers is picture / set of pictures. Although many studies have proven that picture/set of pictures has positive contribution on students' achievement, but not all teachers have fully exploited it in their teaching and learning activity.

One of the most powerful effects of using picture(s) in teaching vocabulary is teachers do not have to spend much time in giving long explanation and translation about the meaning of word(s) and/or phrase(s) of the language they are teaching (Brinton, 2001; Carney & Levin, 2002). Picture(s) will automatically do that for teachers. By looking at the pictures(s), students will get the answers or at least the clues of the meaning of each word and/or phrase they want to find out. Other advantages of using pictures have been identified by Kim & Gilman (2008); Moore & Calvert (2000); and Carpenter & Olson (2012). Based on their findings, they support pairing vocabulary and pictures in teaching. They say that it is an effective way in learning new word(s) and/or phrase(s). Besides, it is also helpful for students in retaining vocabulary.

Considering all the advantages of using games and pictures, many types of word games and pictures have been designed and used in this study to find out how useful and powerful they are in teaching and retaining vocabulary for both EFL teachers and students in Indonesian rural schools. These teachers have to remember that it will be easier to enhance their students' way of using English as the language they are learning, if their vocabulary has been enriched. So, this study has been proposed particularly, to encourage teachers in finding out interesting ways to teach vocabulary to boost up students' motivation in learning (acquiring and retaining) it.

## **METHODS**

### **Aim**

This study mainly reports on using word games and pictures not only in teaching (for teachers) but also in acquiring and retaining vocabulary (for students). The additional aim is to introduce the books about *English Vocabulary Word Games and Pictures* to be used as supplementary materials in teaching vocabulary. The type of study is a case study of teaching EFL students in rural and disadvantaged areas of Indonesia. The second grade students of Junior High Schools in 3 rural schools in Indonesia have been chosen as the respondents in this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is expected that this study can introduce the concept of using and exploiting the techniques of games (i.e. word games) and pictures in the classroom to English teachers in general, and rural English teachers, in particular. Through this writing, English teachers are expected to be informed about how word games and pictures can enhance the language teaching, and facilitate the teaching and learning process as well as improve the outcome. In addition, it is hoped that this study can facilitate EFL teachers, particularly, rural teachers, to be able to find interesting, motivating, helpful and enjoyable ways to teach their students and to make them happy learners because it can foster their performance in learning.

### **Subject**

90 students and 3 teachers of the second grade of three Junior High Schools in Indonesian rural schoolshave been chosen to take part in this study. There are some features about students who have been involved in this study, as follows; these students have learned English for one year, since they were in the first grade; they consist of both males and females whose ages are between 13 to 15 years old. The three teachers have been teaching in these three rural schools for 5-15 years. They have different academic qualifications; one graduated from diploma, and two others are holding undergraduate degree.

### **Data Collection**

This study has been conducted for six weeks. There have been 12 meetings altogether (two meetings in each week). The pre-test has been organized in the first meeting. Word games and pictures have been used as tools to teach vocabulary by using *English Vocabulary Word Games and Pictures* books in weeks 2 – 11. Students have worked on their post-test in week 12.

The data in this research has been collected through several instruments. The main instruments are interview and observation. Tests (pre-test and post-test) have been used to validate and strengthen the collected data (methodology triangulation).

### **Data Analysis**

Although mixed methods have been applied in this study, but the main interpretation in this study is qualitatively explained, in order to identify and discuss what word games and pictures can do to both teachers' performance in teaching and students' performance in learning (acquiring and retaining) vocabulary. The results of both pre-test and post-test have been analyzed in a simple analysis to find out the average and the difference of the students' scores.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

There are two vocabulary books have been published to be used in this study. These books have been used to teach the students in these rural schools for 10 meetings. Both teachers and students have then been interviewed to get their true feelings and opinions about using word games and pictures as tools in teaching vocabulary. The following discussion will emphasize more on their answers in the interview sections.

Five questions have been asked to three English teachers in three different rural schools. The answers of the interviews and the result of observation can be seen in the following discussion:

1. *How long have you been teaching?* The teacher of school 1 has been teaching for five years. The second school's teacher has been spending more or less 12 years to teach, and the teachers of school 3 has been dealing with teaching and learning process for about 22 years. The general assumption about the longer the better is not totally true to this circumstance because even senior teachers admit that they don't think their performance in teaching is better than the junior ones. So, being senior teachers aren't necessarily followed by having great teaching performances.
2. *Do you think your students like learning English?* There is a similarity in teachers' answer to this question. Three of them say that most students in the classroom do not really like English. The major reason is because English is difficult and boring. This might be one of the reasons why their level of motivation and participation is considered to be low.

Based on the observations during the teachers' teaching processes, students were very quiet and only teachers dominated the talking. They only answered their teachers' questions in large groups but couldn't do that individually. No clear instruments used to measure their level of motivation, but it could be seen from their performance that most of them didn't have good motivation in learning English. This made them have lack of attention and participation.

3. *Do you use English in the teaching and learning process?* The most junior teacher who is teaching in school 1 says that she tries to use English occasionally but it takes much time and effort to make her students understand what she means. The only possible effort she can make so far is to translate to Bahasa Indonesia, or even to students' local dialect in order to let her them know the meaning of the word(s) and/or phrase(s) she is using in the classroom. Teachers of schools 2 and 3 seldom use English as the language of instruction in the classroom because they don't think their students will understand what they are talking about.
4. *Do you particularly teach vocabulary?* There is an agreement among these teachers in answering this question. They all say that they teach vocabulary implicitly based on contexts. These teachers argue that they have no idea about what and how to teach vocabulary explicitly. This is exactly similar to what has been revealed by Berne & Blachowicz in their study that many teachers don't know exactly how to use vocabulary instruction in their classrooms because they don't know how to start (2008:315). They usually

give their students reading texts and ask them to translate which will eventually fail. No particular activities designed for students for vocabulary acquisition.

5. *What do you think about using word games and pictures in teaching vocabulary?* Teaching vocabulary using word games and pictures is not a new issue for the teacher of school 1. She mentions that she used to learn it through *Language Games and Songs* subject when she was sitting as an undergraduate student. However, she adds that it is not always easy to practice what seems easy. In the area where she's teaching, she can't easily find reliable teaching resources to facilitate her in teaching vocabulary. After looking at the books about *English Vocabulary Word Games and Pictures*, she is really positive about starting developing her students' vocabulary acquisition. The two other teachers have no experience of using these two tools but they admit that it is an effective technique to use in teaching vocabulary, looking from their students' improvement. They agree with the first teacher that resources become the main problematic issue in rural schools. One of the most common resources to be used is textbook which sometimes can limit teachers' creativity in exploring and giving more variation into the lesson. They feel positive about the use of supplementary materials (i.e. word games and pictures) in enriching their teaching activities to make their students participate well in the teaching and learning process.

It's clear that the three teachers have positive attitudes toward the use of word games and pictures in vocabulary teaching and learning. Other interviews have been conducted to five students from each school. Three questions have been designed to find out what these students think and feel about the use of word games and pictures in learning vocabulary. The results are as follows.

1. *Do you like learning English?* There is only one out of 15 interviewees says that she likes English with the reason that she really wants to go abroad. This shows that she has already had a good expectation and perception in learning. Other 14 representatives honestly admit that they don't like English because the subject is boring. They also provide several other reasons not to like English by claiming that it's a difficult language, they don't understand what they are doing in the lesson, and they aren't interested in listening to their teachers' long explanation (they hate spending a – 90 minute period only by sitting and listening to teachers' explanation). This has been supported by their academic performance in the pre-test which was very low as presented in the following table:

**Summary of the pre-test scores**

School	N	Average Pre-test
School 1	30	49.01
School 2	30	40.73
School 3	30	45.25

2. *What do you think the most difficult part(s) of English?* The students give various answers to this question, such as speaking, listening, reading, structure, and pronunciation. However, they all have similar statement that they can neither speak nor understand English because they have lack of vocabulary. Students of school 1 assert that their teacher used to ask them memorize 10 English words a day for about a week but they fail to do this because they easily forget all the words. Observations have been made to students of these three schools on this point and it has been noticeable that they didn't have enough knowledge about English vocabulary, even the simple words couldn't be used by them. This has made them passive English learners. When they were passive, their level of attention and participation in the teaching and learning process tended to be low.
3. *Do you think it's easy or difficult to use word games and pictures in learning vocabulary?* Before interviewing them, several positive changings identified in the teaching and learning process using word games and pictures have been noted during the observations. Some of them have even started being active since the first time using word games and pictures. The longer word games and pictures are used, the better the students' performance in vocabulary acquisition is. Obviously, there are several positive changings of students' performance, they are; they start engaging in the teaching and learning process, and they are more active and seem to enjoy the lessons. In addition, the atmosphere of the classrooms

becomes positive as both teachers and students can create favorable learning environment, and the teaching style is no longer teacher-centered but student-centered. Based on the students' answers in the interview, it can be claimed that they find it easier to acquire and retain vocabulary they have learned through word games and pictures. They also think that if their teachers use word games and pictures in their classes, their English will improve day by day because they can both memorize and use the word(s) and/or phrase(s) they are learning. The results of observations and interviews are supported by the students' scores in the post-test. All of them can achieve higher scores. The following is the average of the students' post-test:

**Summary of the post-test scores**

School	N	Average Pre-test
School 1	30	80.88
School 2	30	77.23
School 3	30	78.13

And this is the difference between the students' pre-test and post-test. It can be clearly seen that there is an improvement in the students' scores after they have been taught by using word games and pictures for ten meetings.

**The difference between the pre-test and post-test**

School	N	Average Pre-test	Average Post-test	Difference
School 1	30	49.01	80.88	31.87
School 2	30	40.73	77.23	36.05
School 3	30	45.25	78.13	32.88

By looking at the results and discussion earlier, it is clear to make a statement that the use of word games and pictures is not only useful but also powerful for both EFL teachers and students. Data from tests (both pre-test and post-test), observations, and interviews with both teachers and students have become the evidence that using word games and pictures is effective and helpful for EFL teachers and students of Indonesian rural schools in teaching and acquiring as well as retaining vocabulary.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Vocabulary is an important component in language learning, so it's better to use effective teaching tools to make a difference in teachers' way of teaching and students' way of learning (acquiring and retaining vocabulary). By using powerful tools and techniques, teachers can create interesting instructions in teaching vocabulary which will lead to the improvement of students' level of attention, participation, and motivation in learning. Word games and pictures provide opportunity for teachers to encourage their students not only to play with words but also to explore and use them in the real communication

**REFERENCES**

Basanta, C. P. (2010). A Second-Generation CALL Vocabulary-Learning Program ADELEX: In Search of a Psychopedagogic Model. *Insights into Non-Native Vocabulary Teaching and Learning* (2010), pp. 175-185.

Berne, J. I. & Blachowich, C. I. Z. (2008). What Reading Teachers Say about Vocabulary Instruction: Voices from the Classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(4), pp. 314-323.

Blachowicz, Camille, L. Z. & Fisher, Peter. (2004). What Research Says about Reading: Vocabulary Lessons. *Educational Leadership* ( March, 2004), 61(6), pp. 66-69.

Brinton, D. M. (2001).The use of Media in Language Teaching, in Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.) *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 459-475). Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Carney, R. N. & Levin, J. R. (2002).Pictorial Illustrations still Improve Students' Learning from Text. *Educational Psychology Review*, (March, 2002), 14(1).

Carpenter, S. & Olson, K. (2012). Are Pictures Good for Learning New Vocabulary in a Foreign Language? Only if you think they are not. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 38(1), pp. 92-101. Retrieved on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017.

- Clark, R. C. and Lyons, C. (2004). *Graphics for Learning: Proven Guidelines for Planning, Designing, and Evaluation Visuals in Training Materials*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.
- Finch, Geoffrey. (2000). *Linguistic Terms and Concepts*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- Hansen, M. (1994). Grajmy w języku francuskim. *JezykiObce w Szkole*, March-April, pp. 118-121.
- Kim, D. & Gilman, D. A. (2008). Effects of Text, Audio, and Graphic Aids in Multimedia Instruction for Vocabulary Learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 11(3), pp. 114-126.
- Lee, W. R. (1979). *Language teaching games and contests*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, M. & Calvert, S. (2000). Brief Report: Vocabulary Acquisition for Children with Autism: Teacher or Computer Instruction. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 30(4). Retrieved on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2017.
- Richard-Amato, P. A. (1988). *Making it happen: Interaction in the Second Language classroom: From Theory to Practice*. New York: Longman.
- Rupley, W.H., Logan, J.W., & Nichols, W.D. (1998/1999). Vocabulary Instruction in a Balanced Reading Program. *The Reading Teacher*, 52(4).
- Silvers, S. M. (1982). Games for the Classroom and the English-Speaking Club. *English Teaching Forum*, 20(2), pp. 29-33.
- Simpson, Adam. (2015). Using Games in the Language Classroom. *Downloaded E-Book*. Smash Words Edition License Notes. Retrieved from myweb.sabanciuniv.edu/adams on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017.
- Ur, Penny. (2005). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilkins, D. (1972). *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Wray, David. (2002). *Classroom Interaction and Social Learning: From Theory to Practice*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Zdybiewska, M. (1994). *One-Hundred Language Games*. Warszawa: WSiP.
-