

# Boosting Students' Vocabulary through Index Card<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

There are thousands of words in English. Learning these words is a big problem for students of English. However, there are ways to solve this problem. One way is to become familiar with the process of word formation. This process enables students to understand how a word is formed. This analysis is important and useful to learn because they are very commonly used in English. Developing some skills in taking words apart will help students better understand what they read, what the meaning of a word, and finally increase students' vocabulary.

One way to learn word formation is through index card games. These games will help students learn how a word is constructed in various ways, and even stimulate them to initiate making new word or sentences using their own interest.

The writers have conducted action research to use the index card to improve the student's vocabulary. To get more successful achievement, the writes limit to teach suffixes only, namely Verb suffixes, Noun suffixes, Adjective suffixes and Adverb suffixes. For one semester, the writers teach suffixes using index cards in different models, such as Match It, Challenge it, Wins or Loses.

The result shows that students may improve their vocabulary mastery (70%), uphold students' motivation (60%), build confidences to speak (40%), generate classroom energy (30%), recognize word formation process (70%), participate in class discussion (25%), and & get better class attendance. From the result above, the writers believe index card is very useful to improve students' vocabulary, particularly in word formation.

**Keywords :** Index Card, Word Formation, Vocabulary Mastery

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<sup>1</sup> Presented in The 1<sup>st</sup> COTEFL International Conference held by Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Fakultas Sastra, 1-2 May 2009

## **A. Introduction**

Vocabulary plays an important role in English learning. Words are base form of a sentence and sentence is the core means of communication, either verbally or written. Good mastery of vocabulary will enable someone to communicate to others effectively and vice versa. This is in line with what a linguist David Wilkins says, that "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Thornbury, 2002:13). It illustrates clearly how important the contribution of vocabulary toward a communication. Swan and Walter (Thornbury, 2002: 14) in the forewords of Cambridge English Course written in 1984 also emphasize on the vital roles of vocabulary in learning English context. They stated that "Vocabulary acquisition is the largest and most important task facing the language learner."

As it is very important aspect in learning English, the English Education Department of Ahmad Dahlan University settle vocabulary as one of compulsory subjects with 4 credits. It is divided into two subjects: Vocabulary I taught in semester 1 and vocabulary II given in semester 2. These intend to equip students with skills to improve the students' vocabulary mastery through scientific and systematic procedures in order to make better communication.

Different from Vocabulary I given in odd first semester, Vocabulary II offered in semester 2 basically stresses more in word formation discussion. Students learn how a word is formed by affixation and how to use in context correctly.

Unfortunately, the students performances are under expectation so far. The test results showed that students' vocabulary is still relatively low. It can be seen from the class average score in which 40 % of the students got C, 20 % D, 25 % B, and only 15% of them got score A. Surely it was disappointing and challenging the teachers to do some analysis and researches to find out why it happens and how to solve this problem.

After doing quick analysis on the first survey, the researchers found some possible factors influencing this case, namely: first, nature of English vocabulary. For Indonesian learners, English is a foreign language, not as second, or even mother tongue. It brings problems and difficulties to them as English has obvious different form Indonesia language in the terms of spelling, pronunciation, meaning

and other features which goes to different linguistic systems. It brings complicated problems for the learners. In Indonesia, a word will be written said in the same way it is. However, it reads and writes differently in English. For example, word "darah" will be pronounced the same "darah" by native Indonesia. Yet, English speaking person will pronounce it "/blad/" for "blood" ( darah) and /buk/ for "book". Ironically, this pattern can not be applied to other words. These differences emerge certain problems in understanding the word's meaning and usage.

Second, psychological factor. The survey showed that student's motivation to learn vocabulary was not high. The class was so noisy, students sitting at the back chat each other regardless teacher instruction. They do not pay attention to the teacher, less participating in the class activities, rarely discussion and feedback form the students. most students are passive and silent in the classrooms. Apart from this, students are also lack of interest in joining the course. It can be observed from the increasing number of late students, lack of spirit to do the tasks and activities, unserious ness in accomplishing exercises, no willingness to do the best , copying his or her friends paper sheet, not too worry for getting bad score , and many others. Those facts clearly describe the students' low motivation and interest to take vocabulary II class.

Third, no communicative teaching method. In delivering her teaching, the teacher tended to apply conventional method of teaching in the classroom and fully paper-based. She explain the material in front and the students are passively listening at the back in he row models finishing her lecture, the teacher sometimes asking students' understanding and please them to ask questions, but frequently are not. Then usually she assigned students to do exercise and the likes. This method occurred repeatedly in every single meeting. This traditional method make the students bored and discourage them to be actively involve them in the process of teaching and learning since they merely become passive listeners.

Fourth, big numbers of students in classroom. In UAD, Vocabulary II is classified into big class containing 50-75 students on the assumption that it is not considered as a skill subject which needs small size class such as speaking or listening. This situation is the effect of lecturers and rooms shortages in UAD.

Regarding to these problems, the teacher calls for an alternative teaching method which is more innovative, unconventional, fun, enjoyable, involving students and applicable in a big size class. One way to reach the idea is making use

of game in the classroom. Games fulfill those requirements for it is fun, interactive, and involving students in the class without neglecting the teaching material itself. In addition, one game the writer offers here is index card.

## **B. Literature Review**

### **1. Vocabulary Mastery**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (Hornby, 1986: 959) *vocabulary* is total number of words which (with rules for combining them) make up a language, while *mastery* is complete control or knowledge. This is in line with some terms used by linguists who prefers saying vocabulary knowledge to vocabulary mastery. Both has same meaning, though. So, vocabulary mastery is one's knowledge of number of words which (with rules for combining them)-enables him to make up a language.

Furthermore, the word "knowledge" implies something deeper than only "to know" some words. To Thornbury (2002: 3), there has been some important aspect someone has to know in learning English, such as word classes, word families, word formation, multi-word units, collocations, homonyms, polysemes, synonyms and antonyms, hyponyms, lexical fields, and style and connotation. Therefore, to master vocabulary does not mean only know the meaning of a word, but also to know the its linguistic aspects. And it will produce vocabulary mastery.

Linguists (Thornbury, 2002: 24) suggest teachers some basic principles to reach long-term memory for students. the first is USE principle. It is said that a word should be used by the students a fun or pleasant situation. The second is "actively involve learners in the learning of words". Thus, process of learning vocabulary will be effective when it actively involve learners in an enjoyable or fun situation.

### **2. Index Card Game**

According to Elwell and Clark (2000: 1) index card game is modification improvement of popular games in USA called "Concentration". Its basic principle is to develop English vocabulary mastery by searching, matching, and using the words in a phrase or sentence appropriately. It has

two objectives: first, to explore and develop students' vocabulary mastery. Second, to stimulate the students or players to make conversation in English. Since students more focus on fun games, they are unaware that actually they have learnt vocabulary and made conversation with their friends.

The obvious purpose of vocabulary development is to help students with the meaning of English words. While the second basic purpose is stimulating conversation which is achieved as the students attempt to find the matches. They talk as the game is played, and when the game is over they continue to talk about the game and words in it. Because the games are fun, the conversation naturally keeps going.

Elwell and Clark (2000:2), explain the main materials for this game is 24 cards with 3x5 cm size. The index card should be even because each word has to get one match word. Write an English word on one side of cards, and write number (1-24). The word written in each card must match each other under same topic, while number 1-24 are used to help students find the match words.

Usually, the game is played in groups of two players at least and unlimited at maximum. Each player in a team mention one-match card consisting of a match word. If matched, he has to make a sentence or phrase and get score. If unmatched, another player will take his turn. It continues until the cards over. What an easy, fun and challenging game.

## **C. Research Method**

### **1. Setting of Research**

This is an action research. Principally, it is a research activity which pay close attention to an object for getting data or useful information in order to improve the quality of an object a researcher attracted to (Arikunto dkk, 2006:2) because this research attempts to improve the quality learning of students, it is conducted in class context which involve lecturer as the researcher and other lecturer as collaborating team and also students as subject in the classroom. (McNiff, 1992:2) it was conducted in Vocabulary II class at the English education department of Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta

from February to November 2008. the subject is 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students of PBI, UAD.

## 2. Indicators

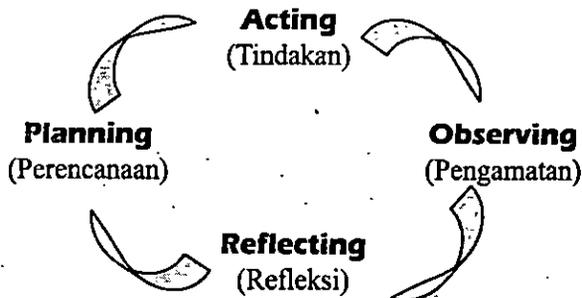
In this research, the indicators used are process and product indicator. First indicator is successful achievement from learning process. It is observed from observation. To some education experts, learning process can be claimed successful if whole or most students (>75%) are actively involved in the learning process physically, mentally and socially. This indicator is analyzed based on information and conclusion of research or observation sheet, filed notes, or interview guideline.

Second is product indicator. It can be seen from students assessment after learning process. After doing some actions in the cycles, it is expected that students' vocabulary mastery increase. This indicator is analyzed based on assessment score given in the end of each cycles. By using range A-D score, it is hoped that number of students reaching score A or B is at least 60%.

Besides, the researchers also use SWOT analysis to recheck the benefit value of existing innovations, to analyze weakness, to define opportunities, and also to analyze threats or problems in the future. The evaluation results will be used as basis for determining actions in the following cycles.

## 3. Research Procedures

The researchers use classroom research diagram proposed by Kurt Lewin loading spiral cycles consisting of some stages, namely acting, observing, reflection.



1. Planning, in this stage the researchers do :
  - a. Preparing lesson plan
  - b. Preparing the teaching material and media
  - c. Preparing equipment or facilities for playing games
  - d. Preparing research instrument
2. Acting :
  - a. Explaining teaching subject, i.e. word formation, using media
  - b. Inviting discussion with students about the subject matter to see students' understanding
  - c. Grouping students of 6 persons
  - d. Describing index cards to students and giving a full set of index cards
  - e. Allowing students play the game as instructions
  - f. Asking students to respond to the game and to discuss their expectation and comments
  - g. Giving exercises
3. Observing: the researchers collect research data employing designed research instruments, namely observation sheet, questionnaire, assessment, field notes and interview guideline. Those instruments are used to gather students' response, feedback, answers, verbal and nonverbal statements and their activities during the research.
4. Reflecting: the researchers analyze and evaluate what has been done and not, what has been resulted, why something happens, and what to do next. Therefore, the researchers will see, plan and design a cycle based on the connections between results of data analysis and standardized success indicators.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Observation Results**

The researchers get early condition of the students from two sources, namely score taken from the students in the previous semester and score from pretest. In the previous period, 20% students got D, 40% C, 25% B and only 15 % students got A. Meanwhile, pretest is used to see current students' level of competence in vocabulary II before index card game conducted. Based on the pretest, the result

was not satisfactory. From 58 students, only 10 students got A (17%), 15 students got B (25%), 25 students got C (43%) and 8 students got D (13%).

In the pretest, the questions were given in multiple-choice form containing four main topics; those are noun suffix, adjective suffix, verb suffix and negative prefix. On average, students could answer 10 questions out of 21. The most obvious mistakes are made when they deal with noun and adjective suffixes. Therefore, cycle 1 will be focused on adjective suffixes followed by Verb Suffixes, and Noun suffixes at last. Negative prefixes are not researched as most students could answer them. As a whole, the researcher did 3 cycles, that is Cycle 1 with 2 sub cycles, Cycle 2 and Cycle 3. Each cycle will follow same procedures, i.e. Planning, Acting, Observing and Reflecting subsequently.

### **Cycle 1-sub cycle 1**

#### **Planning**

In the first cycle, the researcher made planning before implementing some actions. The planning covers lesson plan arrangement, teaching material preparation for adjective suffixes (able, -less, -ful, -ous, -y, -ary, -al) in power point, provision of index card games equipment, and organization of supporting instruments such as observation sheet, field notes, assessment sheet and questionnaire.

#### **Acting**

In implementing action stage, the researchers managed the time proportionally, that is 30' for presentation or teaching, 45' playing games, and remaining 15' was used to open discussion and assessment. In the meantime, the observer takes position at the back side to observe the class comprehensively. After explaining the adjective suffixes (able, -less, -ful, -ous, -y, -ary, -al) in PowerPoint for about 15', the researchers instructed students to play index card games. In this occasion, the researchers apply **Flash and Match! Game**. the class was divided by 10 groups of 5 students in it plus a jury. The winner is a group that can match the cards correctly faster. Each group receive one set of index cards containing 24 cards that match one to another. The jury is responsible to calculate correct answer and determine the winning team. When the researchers say *:Ready...Go!*, each player matches one card to another which facedown. If the words match, he will get score 1 point. If it is wrong, next player will replace him. the students play the game for 45'. the last 15' is used for assessment of 10 questions about the material given.

## Observing

The researchers distribute questionnaire to 20 students randomly to get their response of the learning process. Table 3 shows result of questionnaire. The data then is crosschecked with statement of the observer and resulted data as follows:

1. The learning process has been running well in general. Respondents, researchers and observer has the same opinion on it. (see table 3 and field notes 1).
2. The respondents complaint the number of adjective suffixes. It seems 7 adjectives suffixes are too much for students. It can be seen from unsatisfactory result of assessment in which students on average can answer 4 correct answers out of 10. The observer justifies this condition by writing many students look blank and confused to answer the assessments and some of them are doing cheating.
3. From researchers' teaching instruction aspect, more than 50% respondents say they not really understand the instruction due to fast speaking speed and spoken in English. The observer thinks the instruction is quiet clear as there is none asking questions to the teacher.
4. All respondents agree index card game is enjoyable. They feel happy and enthusiastic. They suppose it *Good, meaningful, amazing, enthusiastic, and so forth* to the activities. So did the observer. (see table 3 & 5. the researchers has a problem with big number of students in vocabulary II class. Ideal number for such class is 30-35 students, but there has been around 60 students in the researchers' class. The class is so crowded and not every student can fairly get their chance to play the games. Unfortunately, this condition is unchangeable all the time as it is institutional policy. Point 7 of questionnaire 1 mentions 50% respondents believe the condition brings dominancy and passive students. However, observers says most students shows active involvement and great enthusiasm during the activities.

## REFLECTING

Discussion between researchers and observer results in reflection as follows :

- a. Quality of learning process is nt satisfying yet indicated by 50% respondents feel confused in understanding the material. the research target is at least 75% students are active physically, mentally, and socially in the class. So, in the first cycle, the process indicator is not achieved yet, because the students are not cognitively or mentally active yet.

- b. In assessment test, the average score is 5. it means the students do not really understand the uses of adjective suffixes. In discussion with observer, it is concluded that 7 suffixes in one meeting is too many for students. the researchers will reduce these suffixes in the following cycles, so hopefully the students can understand the material easier and do more correct answers in assessment.
- c. The researchers' class instruction is quite clear. The students look more interested in presentation through powerpoint. Language mixture used in the class is acceptable, in which researcher speaks in English to explain the material to get students accustomed with English instruction. And the researchers turn into Indonesian when explain the game for it is rather complicated and crowded class.
- d. In relation to index card game, it runs well. The students feel happy and enjoy doing the games. They may share, show their quality, tease wrong students, and soon. But , putting 6 students in a group seems not right as not everybody can be active there because they have only one set of index cards played by six persons. Therefore the researchers will reduce the team members to 3-4 persons per group.
- e. To some respondents, The game , Flash and Match , is not challenging. For that reason, the researchers will modify the game, I.e. the students have to match the words and then make a phrase of the word in the right context.

## **Sub cycle 2**

### **PLANNING**

Principally , planning in sub cycle 2 is almost similar to previous sub cycle. The difference lies on the number of study load. In this cycle, students remain learning adjective suffixes, but only study 3 suffixes, namely *-ish*, *-ive*, *-ic* . besides, the researchers will divide the class into groups of 3-4 students in order to stimulate students' activeness and involvement. The researchers purposely teach adjective suffixes again since it has more content, frequently used in daily learning, and the student's understanding is still low.

## ACTING

After 30' presentation and discussion of the adjective suffixes, the researchers explain how to play the games. Type of game is the same, that is Flash and Match. The students are grouped of 4 students and given a set of cue cards. One exceptional group has 6 members. No jury or score keeper. The chairs are arranged so 2 students compete with 2 other students in each group. The cards are placed face down on the board. Each player open 1 card and find the match. If correct, he has to make a phrase or sentence using the watchwords and get score 1 for a correct making. Conversely, he does not have score if failed making phrase or sentence. It continues until all words has got the match. The researcher go around the class to make sure game runs well and give assistance for any troubles to students. The observer actively survey the process of learning activities and fill in observation sheet. As usual, the last 15' is used to assess students understanding and review.

## OBSERVING

The researcher distribute 22 questionnaires randomly to get their response of the activities. The results are as follow :

1. the learning process significantly indicates positive effects. The observer sees the students are very active leaning within 90'. None of students sleepy or busy with themselves. They are very active and enthusiastic playing the game. Observer write one student even out of her chair in excitement while several clapped and screamed!.100% respondents says all students are active in the learning process. 60% respondents states the dominancy decreases. 73% respondents say no more passive students, and 95% of them mention the learning process run successfully.
2. 90% respondents and the observer agree to say, the teacher already delivered the material clearly. But, the observer can-not know whether the students really understand or not as no feedback of them while teaching.
3. on the matter of study load, giving 3 suffixes in one meeting is adequate. It is indicated by the result of assessment where student on average can answer 8 out of 10 questions (80%) correctly.
4. no problems occurring index card game. Working in a group of 4 make students get fair chance to play, no dominant members, and 73 % respondents claims no passive students anymore. The observer repeat her statements to say the class is so positively crowded and the students are very enthusiastic.

## REFLECTING

Important points for reflection are :

- a. The researchers has reached the target, that at least 75% students has been active cognitively, physically and socially. Average score for class assessment is 80 (75%), 100 % students are involved actively in activities, and they show social interaction while doing the game.
- b. Result of learning is highly influenced by number of study load and group composition. Getting 3 adjective suffixes enforce students understanding. Small numbers of students in a group (4) enable students to be active and to participate in. these factors improve students understanding on the subject, so they can do assessment better (>80%). Thus, the researchers and observers have the same-opinion to end the subject and give another suffix in the following cycles.
- c. The Index card game in this cycle can run well because there are only 4 students in a group, the equipment is sufficient and the students comprehend how to play the game, indeed.

## Cycle II

### PLANNING

Different from the previous cycles, the researchers will give new topic in the cycle, that is Verb Suffixes. Except this matter, all procedures of planning in the cycle is similar as previous cycles.

### ACTING

The researchers explain teaching material about verb suffixes for 30'. Then, the researchers instruct students to play index card game called Challenge Match. One team consists of 6 players. Each player holds 4 cards. Two teams challenge each other. For example, a player of team 1 put down one card and challenges a player from opposing team. If the challenged player is correct, he takes the first card and ask another match cards. Game finishes when all cards are match, and the winner is a team getting more matched cards. Observer actively write situation in the class in the observation sheet.

## OBSERVING

The researchers share out questionnaire for 27 respondents randomly. The results are :

1. learning process flows well. Most Students are very happy joining the class. Observer reports majority students enjoy the game, 81 % feels enthusiastic, 88% considers their motivation increases.
2. 98% respondents can catch teachers' explanation. Only 2 % think unclear because of low voice and too fast.
3. learning the four verb suffixes is relatively easy for students. Students ordinarily could answer 8 out of 10 questions.
4. 87 % respondents like the game. But, 13 % respondents claimed that the equipment is not enough, and the observer admit it, too. Only 55 % respondents are active, and 62% becomes dominant.

## REFLECTING

Points of discussion between researchers and observer are :

1. In fact, students understood with the presentation. But, observers judge class achievement is not more than 60%. It is caused by too many members in a group and inadequate equipments.
2. Students can understand the material well. The indicator is average score for class assessment is 8 (80%).

## Cycle 3

### PLANNING:

Teaching noun suffixes (-ion,ment,ness,-ance)

ACTING: The researchers divide the class into groups of 6 students. They play challenge match game again with some modification. All members in a group will face each other. Each person holds 8 cards. First player free to challenge another player. If successful, he gets score. Otherwise, another player will take the authority to challenge. The winner is one with more match cards. The researchers walk around the class to supervise and give any assistance. The observer writes activities in observation

**OBSERVING** : 28 questionnaires are shared to 28 students randomly. The students' response is crosschecked with observer's notes. The results are :

The learning process goes well. All students active in learning during the activities. 90 % respondents believes the students are very enthusiastic in playing the game. Only 3% says that dominancy still exists. 85% of them mention no more passive students. and 100% respondents agree to say the teaching and learning process run very well, 65% respondents see students have equal chances to play the game, and average score in class assessment is 87. SO, four noun suffixes ( ancy, -ency,-tion, -ance,-ment) is moderate to be given in one meeting with small number students in a group

**REFLECTING**: The important points of reflection are :

1. The researchers has reached the target, that at least 75% students has been active cognitively, physically and socially. Average score for class assessment is 80 (75%), 100 % students are involved actively in activities, and they show social interaction while doing the game.
2. Result of learning is highly influenced by number of study load and group composition. Getting 3 adjective suffixes enforce students understanding. Small numbers of students in a group (4) enable students to be active and to participate in. these factors improve students understanding on the subject, so they can do assessment better (>80%). Thus, the researchers and observers have the same opinion to end the subject and give another suffix in the following cycles.
3. The Index card game in this cycle can run well because there are only 4 students in a group, the equipment is sufficient and the students comprehend how to play the game, indeed.

## **CONCLUSION**

1. In learning process aspect, there is a stability on students' understanding toward the subject. In the earlier cycle, 85% respondents understand the material, and in the last cycle more than 95% of them could understand the material very well. It is influenced by factors such as the teacher researcher could explain and instruct the students more clearly with stable speed and louder tones, students has been well accustomed with the games, students put more attention and respect toward teacher researcher, and student's motivation increases.

2. Index card games run well. These games contributes much toward the success of learning process. The students are not getting bored , they may active n the group activities, they can compete with their classmate, and they learn vocabulary enjoyably. It is indicated by : high level of students' enthusiasm (83%), students' satisfaction on the sufficiency of equipment and tools to support the games (90%), good skills of playing the games (89%), and positive responses of students upward the games, such as (the games are) interesting, excellent, good, wish keep playing more and more, enjoyable, and so forth).

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