

ENHANCING VOCABULARY MASTERY OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

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Abstract: This study was aimed at examining the application of differentiated instruction in enhancing vocabulary mastery to the students of TK ARKAAN Palembang. This study was a classroom action research. Test and observation were the instruments to collect the data. This study consisted of two cycles, cycle I and cycle II. Planning, implementation, observation, and reflection were the phases of the study. Thirty three of students of TK ARKAAN Palembang were the sample of the study. Data calculation showed that there was a significant improvement of students' vocabulary mastery, the means score in cycle I was 48.48 and in cycle II was 86.36. In other words, the improvement of students' vocabulary score was 37.88. Then, there was also significant improvement of students learning completeness. The learning completeness in cycle I was 24.25% and cycle II was 90.90% and the improvement was 66.65%. In other words, vocabulary mastery of students at TK ARKAAN Palembang was enhanced by using differentiated instruction. The students' perception toward the implementation of differentiated instruction was good.

Keywords: *vocabulary mastery, differentiated instruction, kindergarten students*

Globalization era demands us to have good command of English to connect with most aspects of life, such as: social and academic life. The role of English in Indonesia is not only as a means of communication among nations, but it is also as a means to access the science and technology for national development. English has been a compulsory course which is taught from elementary up to higher level of education in Indonesia.

Based on *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (KTSP, 2006), teaching and learning English is aimed at helping the learners to have

communicative competence. Communicative competence refers to the knowledge of aspects of a language system and how the language is used (Widdowson, 1983). Now that, people who are acquiring English in whole process starting from pre-production stage up to intermediate fluency and when those stages achieved well by them, they will have communicative competence of English subconsciously. At the end, people are able to have a good command of English in order to cope with the global era by learning English.

Vocabulary, as one of elements of English plays an important role in communicative competence. If someone does not have sufficient stock of vocabulary, he or she cannot express their ideas, thought, beliefs effectively. As a result, having sufficient stock of vocabulary can influence someone's act of communication. Therefore, it is important to teach vocabulary to young learners in order to enrich their vocabulary mastery because young learners are the main subject of teaching English. Moreover, it is believed that vocabulary can influence someone's literacy development (Linse, 2006). High level of vocabulary mastery can influence the macro skills of a language, those are: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nuttall, 1989). Therefore vocabulary instruction should be exposed since early age because it will affect someone's academic success later.

Children are natural and unique language learners because they acquire and learn a language automatically. They can learn words and the meanings by the supports of their environments. By perception, listening, and imitating, they learn the language subconsciously. It is in line with Vygotsky (1962) who proposed that a language could be acquired naturally through social interaction. With this regard, it can contribute a meaningful success if we expose a language to very young learners. Based on Krashen's input hypothesis (1982), the amount of language acquired by a learner depends on the amount of comprehensible input in which the learners are exposed. So that, teaching English for young learners is different to adults young learners learn English with fun way.

Based on some preliminary studies conducted at TK Arkaan, the

writers noticed that the English vocabulary teaching and learning process at that school was monotonous. Then, the writers asked one of the English teachers in that school about the English teaching and learning. Based on her explanation, the vocabulary teaching at that school was only based on what stated on the book available without noticing the students' learning styles and their need. Then, the English teachers gave other examples and finally drilled the students. It made the students feel bored and even stressed. They only understood the material for a while, and when they got the new vocabulary, they would forget the previous one.

In order to solve this problem, it needed an effective way of teaching vocabulary to make them interested and motivated during the teaching and learning process. The English teachers should change their conventional method in order to create an enjoyable, fun, and relaxing atmosphere so that it changes the students' previous mind set about vocabulary. Since all learners are unique with their individual characteristics. Teachers should cope with the condition of heterogeneous classrooms. Nowadays, a classroom consists of students who have different characteristics, such as: gender, social economic background, ability, learning styles, and etc. In other ways, the teachers should find the best way or practice to accommodate these diversities. Teachers should consider the different needs among their students. Moreover, the most obvious constraint of planning and conducting the program of teaching and learning is students' interest and motivation. If teachers cannot accommodate the different among their students, it is impossible to get the learners to learn. Differentiated instruction is a teaching

strategy which enables the teacher to accommodate the diversities among their students. In relation to the arguments stated above, the writers were interested to conduct a study to examine the application of differentiated instruction to improve students' vocabulary mastery at TK Arkaan Palembang.

VOCABULARY IN LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Learning vocabulary is one of the most important instructional objectives for all content areas (Harmon, Wood, & Kiser, 2009). Vocabulary, as one element of language, plays an important role in communicative competence. Vocabulary is the most basic skill and also central in language teaching because without having sufficient vocabulary stock we cannot understand others or even express our ideas. Wilkins (1972) stated that without any vocabulary we cannot convey one meaning. In addition, Lewis (1993) stated that stock of words or vocabulary is the core of a language. It is impossible for someone to communicate with others without knowing any vocabulary. Having sufficient vocabulary size is very advantageous for learner's literacy development in the future because the knowledge of vocabulary is a building block in children's early literacy development that can help the learners to learn decoding and comprehending text (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). A research study, conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000), revealed that the vocabulary size of a reader can influence his or her understanding toward the text.

YOUNG LEARNERS

Young learners are supposed to be children who are in the first year of school up to eleven or twelve years of age. Ersoz (2007) distinguished young learners into 3 groups as follows:

- **Very Young Learners**
These learners are between three up to six years old. This group is called as preschoolers. This group of learners can learn by listening and speaking. Vocabulary instruction for this level should expose concrete and familiar objects.
- **Young Learners**
Young learners are those who between 7 to 9 years of age (first up to third graders). Listening and speaking are the technique for them to learn. For this level, they can acquire concrete, familiar and even new objects for vocabulary instruction. They start to read and write a word to a sentence level. The teaching of such abstract concepts should be avoided.
- **Older or Late Young Learners**
Late young learners refer to those learners who are between 10 up to 12 years old. They are ready to learn concrete and even abstract vocabulary items. Teaching grammar is through inductive way.

Young learners are natural unique language learners. They can acquire their native language effortlessly and naturally. They are able to learn language using context and their environment. Young learners can learn words through their direct interaction with their social environment (Scott, Nagy, & Flinspach, 2008). It is in line with Vygotsky (1962) who suggested that the learners can learn language by their social interaction. It is a natural phenomenon of a human's life. Based on those arguments, it is clear that

learning vocabulary is better to be exposed since early age.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Nowadays, a classroom consists of students who have different characteristics one to another, for instances: gender, cultural background, learning styles, ability, and etc. Differentiated instruction is a choice that can be used by the teachers to accommodate those diversities in a classroom. Differentiated instruction refers to a set of principles that enable the teachers to meet the broad range of diversities in their classroom by differentiating or modifying the instruction. Tomlinson (1999) suggested that there are three curricular components of a classroom that can be modified or differentiated to accommodate the learners to learn. They are:

- **Content**
Content refers to input or what the students need to learn.
- **Process**
Process refers to what students do to get some experiences in learning something.
- **Product**
Product refers to output or outcomes which students should perform what they have learned. Teacher can modify the product of learning based on Gardner's theory of intelligences or tiered assignments.

It means that in differentiated instruction, the teachers can modify *what* students learn, *how* they are learning, and *what* the students are performing after teaching and learning process. So differentiated instruction will be the solution to cope with all students' diversities occurs in teaching

and learning process. It is in line with Tomlison (2000, p.1) who suggested that differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.

ENHANCING YOUNG LEARNER'S VOCABULARY MASTERY THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Vocabulary instructions should be designed by combining direct instruction and incidental learning (word acquisition), to support word learning for young children. In addition, the growth of vocabulary can take place through incidental and informal instruction. Young learners can learn words automatically by listening and imitating when interactions with others take place. Vocabulary instruction for young learners should be emphasized on exposing concrete and high frequency words. Teachers should expose the words that are usually encountered by the students in their daily life. Based on the first Quadrant of Cummin (2001), pedagogic activities for very young learners should be easy to acquire. It should involve everyday social English and strategies that have high degree of contextual support, for examples: lots of scaffolding techniques, using visual clues, repetition, and reinforcements. It can be concluded the teachers of English should provide their students with high contextual vocabulary items and avoid abstract concept of vocabulary items. In short, the teachers of young learner classroom should emphasize on

teaching high frequency words using daily context for vocabulary instruction.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on the basis of classroom action research that was mainly aimed at examining the students' improvement in vocabulary mastery through the application of differentiated instruction at TK Arkaan Palembang. Classroom action research was done in order to improve the learning quality in the classroom with teacher as a researcher so that the teaching learning process would be better. The study was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of four phases, those are: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The following figure was the cycles of the study:

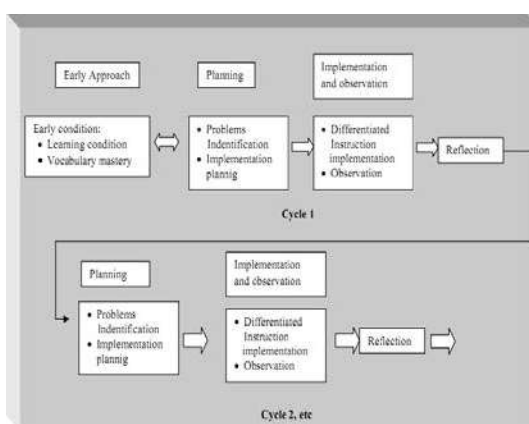


Figure 1. Cycles of this Study

The subjects of the study were all the students of Class A of TK Arkaan Palembang. They consisted of 34 students; 16 females and 18 males. The data were collected using test and observation. Pre-test and post-test were administered in order to see the students' improvement in vocabulary mastery and observation was administered to observe the students' response towards the use of

differentiated instruction during the teaching and learning process. In determining the success of the study, there were two indicators used: (1) students' learning achievement, (2) teaching and learning process. Learning achievement in this case was English vocabulary mastery was gained by doing test to check the students' comprehension. The standard of learning completeness based on TK Arkaan Palembang was if the $\geq 85\%$ of students get score ≥ 70 .

FINDINGS

The Results of the Pre-Test and Post-Test of Cycle I

In this cycle, the tests were administered twice, before and after the use of differentiated instruction. The tests given to the students were vocabulary test. In administering the pre-test, the writers showed ten pictures to each student and the student would label or name each picture. Based on the result of the data analysis, the writers found that the highest score was 90 and the lowest score was 0. The mean score of the students' achievement was 14.84 and the learning completeness was only 6.07%. Then, it was concluded that 93.93 % of the students failed the test. It was also revealed that the students' level of vocabulary mastery was categorized as very poor. Only two of them were able to pass the test. It was caused they had their own prior knowledge about the vocabularies tested. Somehow they had studied at home or they went to English course.

After the implementation phase, the students were tested. Based on the calculation done after the post-test, it was found that 75.75% of the students failed the test, and only 24.25% of the students passed the test. The highest

score was 100 and the lowest score was 20. Based on the distribution of the students' score, it revealed that only 8 students who were able to comprehend the materials well.

Then, the average score was 48.48 and the percentage of the learning completeness was only 24.25%. It might be influenced by the use of media and strategy applied in delivering materials. Therefore, it was necessary to improve those three aspects of teaching and learning process; material, media, and method of teaching in order to enhance students' vocabulary mastery and achieve the goals of teaching. The summary of the students' level of vocabulary mastery in cycle 1 was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Level of Vocabulary Mastery of Cycle I

No	Score Interval	N	%	Category
1	86-100	4	12.12	Very good
2	71-85	16	48.48	Good
3	56-70	9	27.27	Enough
4	41-55	3	9.09	Poor
5	0-40	1	3.04	Very poor
Total		33	100	

The Result of the Observation in Cycle I

While the treatments were being done, observation also became the activity which should be done by the researchers. In observation activity, there were two students' main activities which were observed, they were: (1) students' activation in listening teacher's explanation; and (2) students' activation in following differentiated instruction learning process. Based on the data analysis, it was found that the means of activity I was 8.83 and the means of activity II was 11.30. For the level of students' activation, it was

found that 12.12% of the students were categorized in for very good condition, 48.48% of the students were categorized in good condition, 27.27 % of the students were categorized in enough condition, 9.09% of the students were categorized in poor condition, and 3.04% of the students were categorized in very poor condition. In other words, the activities which should be improved were the students follow all of the guidelines in differentiated instruction treatment and the students are having interaction each other when discussion occurs.

The Result of the Post-Test in Cycle II

Based on the data analysis done for the post-test in cycle II, it was found that 90.90% of the students got the score ≥ 70 , it means they enabled to pass the test. The mean score of the students' learning achievement was 86.36 and the learning completeness was 90.90%. The summary of students' level of vocabulary mastery in cycle II was presented in Table 2. It might be they had learned in twice with the improvement of materials, media, and the changing of teaching strategies. Even though the vocabularies tested in the post-test little bit different with the pre-test or test1, they still capable to do the test well. Most of the students felt happy to face the test, they were sure that they knew the answers as they had learned all the materials.

Table 2. Summary of Students' Level of Vocabulary Mastery of Cycle II

No	Score Interval	N	%	Category
1	86-100	20	60.60	Very good
2	71-85	13	39.4	Good
3	56-70	-	-	Enough
4	41-55	-	-	Poor
5	0-40	-	-	Very poor

Total	33	100	
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In addition, the researchers observed students' activation in following differentiated instruction learning process, they are: (1) The students are active in asking questions and serious in listening teacher's reinforcement, (2) The students are watching teacher's explanation based on their learning styles, (3) The students do what the teacher ask in order to check their comprehension about the material given, (4) The students are having interaction each other when discussion occurs.

Based on the data analysis, it was found that the average score of test in activity II was 10.35 and the average score of activity II was 13.18. Based on the categories, 60.60% of the students were categorized in very good condition, 39.4% of the students were categorized in good condition. In other words, there were a lot of students who were successful in comprehending materials well. They were able to follow all of teachers' instruction in the classroom. They could do all of the activities in the classroom. Then, they watched teacher's explanation based on their learning styles. The last, they could interact each other when discussion occurred.

DISCUSSION

At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to the diversities among the learners in the classroom. Differentiated instruction can be used, whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience, differentiated

instruction can be used. According to Tomlinson (2000, p. 1), teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile: (1) content—what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information; (2) process—activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content; (3) products—culminating projects that task the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit; and (4) learning environment—the way the classroom works and feels.

Based on the data analysis and reflection of differentiated instruction implementation, it revealed that there was a significant improvement of students' vocabulary mastery. It created joyful environment so that the students could comprehend the materials given by the teacher well. The following table showed the students' improvement in vocabulary mastery towards the use of differentiated instruction.

Table 3. Students' Score Improvement of Vocabulary Mastery

Student	Cycle I	Cycle II	Improvement
1	20	90	70
2	20	80	60
3	30	70	40
4	70	90	20
5	10	80	70
6	50	80	30
7	60	80	20
8	20	70	50
9	30	60	30
10	40	90	50
11	20	70	50
12	30	100	70
13	40	60	20
14	20	90	70
15	50	70	20

16	100	100	0
17	50	70	20
18	80	100	20
19	60	100	40
20	60	80	20
21	30	50	20
22	30	80	50
23	100	100	0
24	70	90	20
25	100	90	-10
26	20	60	40
27	60	90	30
28	40	80	40
29	70	100	30
30	40	70	30
31	50	80	30
32	20	70	50
33	100	100	0
	1690	2850	1160
	48.48	86.36	37.88
	24.25%	90.90%	66.65%

Based on the table above, it showed that there was a significant improvement of students' vocabulary mastery, the means score in cycle I was 48.48 and in cycle II was 86.36. In other words, the improvement of students' vocabulary score was 37.88. Then, there was also an improvement of students learning completeness. The learning completeness in cycle I was 24.25% and cycle II was 90.90% and the improvement was 66.65%. The charts below showed the improvement of students' learning completeness.

In addition, based on analysis of students' observation, in cycle I, the students who had high competence in English dominated the teaching and learning process. They were active in discussion session; they wanted to show themselves up. They wanted to answer all the questions given by the teacher. On the other hand, the students who had

low competence in English, they were shy to do all activities. They even seemed to be silent and did not want to perform themselves. If the teacher asked questions, they just followed the dominating one without understanding the real meaning of questions. They were not confident in doing the actions.

After doing the treatment in cycle II, there was a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery. More than 85% of the students were active in active performing their action in front of the class. The students who were not active in the first cycle could give more contribution in the classroom. The prerequisite of learning completeness was if 85% of the students got score ≥ 70 . Based on the learning completeness criteria, the means score of the students was 86.36 and learning completeness was 90.90 % in cycle II.

In the implementation of cycle II, all of the students tended to be active in following all the instructions given by the teacher. They were interested in the materials delivered by the teacher, they were enthusiast following activities in the classroom, and they got more confidences in performing in front of the class.

Along with the treatment of differentiated instruction in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery of TK Arkaan Palembang, the researchers got some positive findings, they are:

- There was a positive interaction among students, teacher and researchers
- The students were more creative in showing up their performance
- The students were more enthusiast and active in joining the teaching and learning process
- The teacher got more solution in facing the multi class group

because of their different learning styles, ages, and needs.

- The teacher got more solution in finding more suitable teaching media, materials, and strategies.

However, the researchers also got some problems during the implementation of differentiated strategy:

- It was difficult to handle the class if they were divided into three groups based on their learning styles because of the limitation of rooms;
- The teacher had to improve herself in preparing the materials and managing her classroom.

CONCLUSION

Based on results and discussions it could be concluded that vocabulary mastery of students at TK ARKAAN Palembang was enhanced by using differentiated instruction. It revealed that the application of Differentiated Instruction can help the teacher to solve the problem regarding with the students' mastery in vocabulary. There are some activities done in the implementation of that strategy; (1) teaching students based on their learning style, (2) maximizing the use of technology in the classroom, (3) using varied methods in teaching in order to make the students interested in teaching and learning process, (4) using varied materials based on the students' needs in order to optimize the students' skills, and (5) considering the students' ages and needs in learning English.

In addition, the students' perception toward the implementation of differentiated instruction was good. The result of vocabulary test in cycle I with means score 48.48 and its learning completeness 24.25%, it was

categorized poor. In order to improve the score and fulfill the prerequisites of learning completeness, cycle II was needed. Based on the result of vocabulary test in cycle II with means score 86.36 and its learning completeness 90.90%, it was categorized very good. In other words, the implementation of differentiated instruction to enhance students' vocabulary mastery of students at TK ARKAAN Palembang was successful because of its significant improvement.

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