

The Strategy in Teaching English Vocabulary for Students with Special Needs: A Narrative Inquiry Study

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the strategy in teaching English vocabulary for students with special needs. In particular, the students with special needs in this study are categorized into mentally retarded students. They learn English to have basic knowledge of English. The study was carried out at a special needs school in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia in the academic year of 2017/2018. It is a narrative inquiry study typed. The subjects of this study were 2 students of eighth grade of special needs school. The data was gained from observation, interview, and documentation. The results of this study are supposed to reinforce English teaching and learning so that English learning becomes interesting, fun and easier for the students with special needs. This study were supposed to answer (1) Problems which the eighth grade students of special needs school have in learning English vocabulary; (2) How the English teacher overcome the problems which the eighth grade students of special needs school have in learning English vocabulary.

Keywords: students with special needs, strategy, English vocabulary learning, narrative inquiry

1. Introduction

Students with exceptionalities are an extraordinarily diverse group in comparison to the general population, and relatively few generalizations apply to all exceptional individuals. Their exceptionalities can involve sensory, physical, cognitive, emotional, or communication abilities or any combination of these. (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2009). The students with special needs are the children who cannot grasp the information well so that they need the particular treatment from the people who aware of their needs and abilities. It is expected that they will get the better result of learning by giving them the special treatment and education which meet their needs.

Special education means specially designed instruction that meets unusual needs of an exceptional student, and which might require special materials, teaching techniques, or equipment and/or facilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2009). It means that the education for students with special needs should be particularly designed so that it can meet their special needs. The education designed involves the learning materials, teaching techniques and equipment/facilities. This study concerns with students with mentally retarded students in learning English vocabulary. Therefore, the learning materials and the teaching technique to teach vocabulary should suit them so that the students are able to understand the materials given.

In the case of English language learners with special education needs, it is through planning that teachers ensure well-integrated instruction that simultaneously focuses on students' cultural characteristics language needs, and identified disabilities. (Nancy Cloud as cited in Artiles and Ortiz, 2002, p.109). Cultural characteristics language needs help the students to develop their literacy. When the students with special needs read materials (in this case vocabulary materials) with familiar content, their understanding is increased because they are able to make precise predictions.

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The comprehension of students with special needs about the learning materials differs from one disability to others. Therefore, the learning materials and the instructions should suit them. Moreover, special educators can support the development and use of the native language in several ways. They can provide first language instruction to help students develop academically while they are learning English. They can encourage first language development at home. They can welcome the use of the first language at school by having materials available in those languages in the classroom and school library and by featuring them in school publications and communication. (Freeman & Freeman as cited in Artiles and Ortiz, 2002, p. 117). The English teacher can use the students' first language in giving the instruction and delivering the materials while the students learning English vocabulary. The students with special needs lack of knowledge of many words in their first language. They do not know the meaning of many words even in their native language. The use of the first language in the classroom makes the students' comprehension enhanced, because they can make accurate predictions.

Furthermore, second language learners with special education needs appear to benefit in particular from multisensory teaching approaches (e.g., Total Physical Response and drama), computer-assisted and other technology-supported instruction, and whole language/process approaches. These methods are recommended because they focused on meaningful communication and have attributes that aid learning and retention (Artiles and Ortiz, 2002, p. 118). The Total Physical Response is easy to memorize. It really helps students to memorize the words or phrases. In this study, the researcher use it to teach vocabulary connected with actions (e.g. drink, read, etc) and classroom language (e.g. open your book). Besides, it makes the English learning more interesting by doing physical activity from Total Physical Response activity and drama. It is also good for the learners who understand the lesson faster by doing activities rather than by reading and memorizing in the class. Computer-assisted and other technology-supported instruction also makes the English learning more interesting. It can avoid boredom in learning English vocabulary.

This study deals with students with mentally retarded students in learning English vocabulary. Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than a single word: for example, *post office* and *mother-in-law*, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. (Ur, 1996, p. 60). Hornby (1995, p. 1331) defines that 1) vocabulary is the total number of words in a language; 2) list of words with their meanings. Allen (1983, p. 2) states that all the students need is a large number of words, along with the meanings of those words in the students' own language. She also states, in addition to knowing English words and their meanings, one must know also how the words work together in English sentences. It can be concluded that vocabulary is list of words the teachers teach in the foreign language along with the meaning in the students' language and how it works together in sentences.

Besides, Ur (1996, p.60-62) states that in teaching vocabulary, the teachers need to teach: form (pronunciation and spelling), grammar, collocation, meaning, and word formation. To know the form, the learners have to know what a word sounds like (its pronunciation) and what it looks like (its spelling). The other aspect is grammar. When the teacher teaches a new verb, for example irregular verbs, the teacher should give the other two forms. Similarly, when the teacher teaches an irregular plural noun, the teacher should teach the plural form immediately. Collocation is also important aspect in teaching vocabulary. It is important so that the students know in what context they can use the words.

The next important aspect is meaning. The meaning of a word is mainly what it refers to in the real world, its denotation; this is often the sort of definition that is given in a dictionary. The last aspect is word formation. Vocabulary items, whether one-word or multi-word, can often be broken down into their component. It means that for advanced learners, they can create new words by modification of the old ones, for example: using prefixes and suffixes.

It is very fascinating to examine the English learning of special needs students, because English is different from their native language in many ways. Furthermore, teaching English to students with special needs is difficult because they are different from other students in public school. This study examined the strategy in teaching English vocabulary of students with special needs using narrative inquiry study. According to Ary, et al (2010: 31), in narrative inquiry, researchers examine the stories of people, then tell about their lives and co-construct a narrative analysis of those stories. The researcher and those telling their stories have an equal voice in determining the meanings attributed to the experiences. Narrative analysis has also been referred to using terms such as life stories. The researcher explored how the students with special needs learn English vocabulary in classroom then told it in narrative way.

2. Method

This is a narrative inquiry study. The researcher mentioned how the students learn English vocabulary in classroom narratively. The stories mentioned the students' work on English vocabulary, their problems when they learn English vocabulary, how the English teacher figured out the students' problems in learning English vocabulary. A qualitative research was conducted to examine the English vocabulary learning process of students with special needs.

The participants of this study were 2 students learning English as a foreign language. The researcher took 2 students from eighth grade. They are the students of special needs school in the level of Junior High School. These students' first language is Indonesian and these students' mother tongue is Javanese. Student A is a male student. He is 15 years old. It is hard for him to keep silent because he is very talkative. His ability in remembering vocabulary is low. He should memorize the vocabulary several times to remember it. He can pay attention to the teacher in ten minutes first. After that, he lacks attention to the teacher. Furthermore, he cannot do the assignments fast and correctly. He sometimes misses one or two alphabets in writing. He tends to disturb his classmates during the lesson.

Student B is a male student. He is 16 years old. He can pay attention to the teacher well. It is very difficult for him to read. He can only read syllable by syllable. He is very slow in writing and doing the assignments. Therefore, he cannot take note or do the assignments as fast as his classmates do. In addition, his ability in remembering vocabulary is lower than student A's ability. He can grasp the meaning of the vocabulary by seeing the picture from the flashcard. Besides, he is often absent to school and sleepy during the lesson. Due to the poor attendance, more reviews are required for a better result.

In this research, the researcher gained the data by carrying out observation, interview and documentation. The observation was carried out to see the English vocabulary learning process including the students' characteristics, the activities and behavior in the classroom, how the students interacted with the teacher and classmates in the classroom. The observation was carried out while teaching English in the classroom. Through the observation, the researcher gained the data and information which were needed to collect the data. Furthermore, the researcher carried out unstructured interview with the participants and their parents to get some information related to English vocabulary learning. The researcher prepared some questions to be answered freely by respondents. The interview was carried out to know the students' problems in learning English vocabulary and how to solve the problems.

Moreover, documentation was needed to support other sources of data. The researcher took the documents from the students' worksheet, the result of the test, lesson plan and any items that supported the research. The documents can help the researcher to gain more data and information to strengthen the data.

3. Results

Based on the observation, interview and documentation, it was identified that student A (male student) got difficulties in remembering the vocabulary and the meaning of phrases, for example the meaning of phrases in greeting, the meaning of some nouns. He also got difficulty to understand the researcher's instruction. For example: when the teacher gave instruction on how to write the assignment on his book without space line, he still wrote the assignment with space line. The researcher had to explain the materials and the instructions many times due to those difficulties. Since it was hard for him to keep silent, it made him cannot do the assignment fast. The teacher had to remind him not to talk to his classmates most of time during the lesson. Besides, he tended to disturb his peers during the class. To solve these problems, the teacher had to talk to him personally and give him advice.

Student B (male student) had the lowest score in the class. He had difficulties in writing and reading. He wrote very slowly. He could only read syllable by syllable. Therefore, it was hard for him to understand the lesson. He could understand the vocabulary and its meaning by seeing the picture from the flashcard. To solve this problem, the teacher had to give him the flashcards while doing the assignment. Moreover, the teacher had to explain the materials to him several times individually and give him the instructions orally, not written instructions. The other difficulty in learning English lies on the learning effort. Based on the observation, it could be identified that his effort in learning was not as great as his classmates. The teacher had to support him to have much effort in learning.

Furthermore, the way to say English word is different from Indonesian word. In Indonesian, the way to say the words is the same as the writing. It is different from English words. It became one of the difficulties in learning English for the students.

The teacher had to drill the pronunciation for several times in order to make the students pronounce well. First, the teacher gave example on how to pronounce the words, then, the students repeat after the teacher. After that, each student repeats to pronounce the words several times.

4. Discussions

According to Kauffman & Hallahan (2009), students with exceptionalities are an extraordinarily diverse group in comparison to the general population, and relatively few generalizations apply to all exceptional individuals. Their exceptionalities can involve sensory, physical, cognitive, emotional, or communication abilities or any combination of these. The students with special needs in this study were categorized into: mentally retarded students. Their exceptionalities involved cognitive ability.

Based on the observation, it was found that there should be different treatment and different way to give instructions for each student. It caused by their intellectual level, their behavior during class, their characteristics and their effort in learning English. The whole class was given the instructions and the materials first. Then, both materials and instructions were given to the students individually based on their needs. The students with special needs need special education. Special education means specially designed instruction that meets unusual needs of an exceptional student, and which might require special materials, teaching techniques, or equipment and/or facilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2009). The teacher explained the materials and gave the instructions for several times to mentally retarded student so that the students could understand the explanation and the instruction well.

According to Freeman & Freeman as cited in Artiles and Ortiz, 2002, p. 117, the English teacher can use the students' first language in giving the instruction and delivering the materials while the students learning English vocabulary. The teacher delivered the English materials and gave the instructions in Indonesian and sometimes in Javanese, because the students sometimes did not know the term even in their native language; for example: the word terrace. The students did not know the term "terrace" unless the teacher mentioned it in Javanese. It might be caused by their lack of knowledge of the certain things. Furthermore, it might happen because the certain things do not exist in their house/environment.

In addition, second language learners with special education needs appear to benefit in particular from multisensory teaching approaches (e.g., Total Physical Response and drama), computer-assisted and other technology-supported instruction, and whole language/process approaches. These methods are recommended because they focused on meaningful communication and have attributes that aid learning and retention (Artiles and Ortiz, 2002, p. 118). The teacher often directed the students to follow her command; for example, the teacher asked the students to open their books, clean the blackboard, close the door, etc. It really helps students to memorize the words or phrases.

This study was crucial because learning English vocabulary is something difficult for the students with special needs because they are different from the students in public school. Moreover, they have impairments/disabilities that became their difficulties in learning English vocabulary. Therefore, it was necessary and fascinating to tell. According to Ary, et al (2010: 31), in narrative inquiry, researchers examine the stories of people, tell about their lives and co-construct a narrative analysis of those stories. In this study, the researcher told about the students' work on English subject, especially on vocabulary aspect, their problems when they learnt English vocabulary, how the English teacher overcame the students' problems in learning English based on the observation, interview and documentation.

5. Conclusion

From this study, it can be summed up that the students with special needs got problem in learning English because of their impairments/disabilities, intellectual level, behavior during class, characteristics and effort in learning English. The special needs students need special education that meets the needs of an exceptional student, which might require special materials, teaching techniques, or equipment and/or facilities to overcome these problems. The English teacher had to apply certain techniques/ do certain ways to explain the materials and give the instructions to the students so that the students can understand the teacher's explanation and instructions well.

Some suggestions are provided after doing this research. It is important to reinforce teacher's awareness on the difficulties of each student in learning English vocabulary to help them deal with their learning. Since English is difficult subject to learn due to the students' impairments/disabilities; the English teacher should have special materials, teaching techniques, or equipment and/or facilities, and instructions which suits their needs.

Finally, this study only focuses on the strategy in teaching English vocabulary; in this case the students are the mentally retarded students; further studies may explore the students with the others impairments/disabilities or may elaborate it into appropriate teaching technique, teaching material, teaching instruction and assessment. Besides, further studies may explore the other aspects or English skills.

6. References

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