

**Improving Elementary School Students' English Vocabulary
Through Local Cultural Content Materials**

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Abstract

Elementary students of a certain public school in Indonesia had difficulties in learning English. One of the crucial problems was learning English vocabulary. In an attempt to help the students learn and improve English vocabulary, the researchers decided to use CAR to teach English vocabulary with local cultural content materials. The aim of this study was to investigate how the teaching of English vocabulary with local cultural content materials contributed to the improvement of the students' English vocabulary mastery. The topics covered in the materials were selected based on schemata theory. Vocabulary learning process was done through several activities provided in the materials: classroom and outside vocabulary learning. The results showed that the teaching of local cultural content materials have contributed to the improvement of the Elementary students' vocabulary mastery. The schematic knowledge found in the familiar topics has aroused the students' interest and motivation in learning English vocabulary. Students who were more familiar with the topics could respond to the vocabulary learning better than those who were not familiar with. The vocabulary mastery was more successful only if the students participated in both classroom and outside vocabulary learning process.

Keywords: Vocabulary Mastery, Vocabulary Improvement, Local Cultural Content Materials, Vocabulary Learning, Schemata

Improving Elementary School Students' English Vocabulary Through Local Cultural Content Materials

The use of inappropriate learning materials could be the causes of English language learning problems at Baratajaya Elementary school in Surabaya, Indonesia. One of the most critical problems encountered by the students was vocabulary mastery. The researchers noticed that a lot of previous words learned were usually forgotten even before the students started learning the new ones. When the tests were administered, the average score was 32, quite low from the minimum passing grade, 75. As observed, students did not seem to have an interest in learning English; they perceived that English was difficult because of two things: learning materials and time allocation. Most of the topics covered in the materials were not consistent with the students' needs. They were prone to be half-hearted in their learning process. In addition, the lack of allocated time, two hours a week, has led the students to be unable to optimize their English learning process.

According to Elley (1991), interesting materials result in very significant increases in vocabulary growth. To provide interesting materials, Xiaowen (2008) opines that the teacher must involve students' daily life in the learning process. When the words are connected to their everyday lives, the students will enjoy learning the words, always remember the words and their meaning, and know how to use them in real life. In line with Xiaowen, Hedge (2000) argues that in learning vocabulary, the learners acquire not only new words but also new meanings associated with their knowledge of the world. Students' knowledge is active when the students can explore more of their prior knowledge: situations, objects, events, or actions they already know by associating their prior knowledge with the new information provided in the text.

English text books which were enriched by schematic knowledge could reinforce the students to acquire English. Many books were written based on schemata theory: English text

book for Venezuela by Nunez (1988), English text book for Turkey Dede and Emre (1988), and English text book for Saudi Arabian students by Al-Quarishi et al. (1999). In their book, Dede and Emre illustrated the cultural content of an English textbook for Turkey. The main themes include Turkish food, history, and weather, all discussed in English. Nunez described the local geographic features in the text of the English learning materials in Venezuela. The sociolinguistic situations, such as asking for and giving directions, also took place in Caracas, Venezuela. According to Hinkel (1999), the textbook written by Al-Quarishi et al. enriched with schematic knowledge such as making Arabian coffee, going to Mecca, and Arab geographic maps encouraged the students to talk about their culture in English.

Considering the background, the type of schematic input to be presented to the learners has become one of the salient issues in foreign language pedagogy. It is very crucial to consider appropriate selection of content in the learning materials developed for foreign language students. Therefore, this study was aimed to investigate the use of local cultural content materials in improving the Baratajaya Elementary school students' vocabulary mastery.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were thirty eight students at fifth grade of an Elementary school in Surabaya, Indonesia, consisting of the same local ethnic group (Javanese): 22 males and 16 females who were around 11-12 years old. The researchers have been teaching English as a foreign language for more than 10 years and acted as the teachers in this study. The collaborator observing the teaching-learning process during the study has been teaching English to young learners for more than 5 years.

The Classroom Action Research

As the main objective of this study was to describe some interventions used by the teachers in order to improve a particular linguistic aspect in a classroom, Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted through 3 cycles (McNiff, 1992). Every cycle was carried out through four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

Planning: During the planning phase, the vocabulary learning materials were developed using some sources taken from books, magazines, articles, and the internet. The development of the materials was based on the schematic knowledge of the students associated with their everyday lives and local environments (Xiaowen, 2008). The materials were in the form of short reading passages provided in twelve different topics; each topic consisted of several learning activities: watching video or doing role play, brainstorming, reading, word study, doing exercises, and home assignment. All the topics were delivered through video except the ninth and eleventh topics which were delivered through role plays. The first topic was ‘Traditional Market’ in which the situations, activities, and the things sold in the local market were exposed. The second topic was ‘Game and Sport’ exposing a local game, “Makan Krupuk” Competition. The third topic was Music and Dance presenting Remo Dance, a local welcome dance from East Java. The fourth topic was ‘Food and Drink’ discussing about local food and drink of Surabaya such as *Rujak Cingur*, *Tahu Tek*, and *Rawon*. The fifth topic was about ‘Family Gathering’ talking about family members who gathered in a special occasion. The sixth topic was about My ‘Holiday - My Experience’ discussing a holiday to local places of interest in the city of Batu. The seventh topic was about ‘My Spare Time’ talking about some people who did their activities in their leisure time. The eighth topic was about ‘Birthday Party’. The ninth topic was about ‘Asking and Giving Direction’ exposing a direction from Galaxy Mall Surabaya to Suramadu Bridge. The tenth topic was discussing the things and activities in a ‘School Library’. The eleventh topic

was about describing friends' physical appearance and characteristics. And the last topic was about some famous public places in Surabaya: Juanda Airport, Pasar Turi Railway Station, Tanjung Perak Harbour, and many other places.

Action: The action phase consisted of seven vocabulary learning activities provided in the materials: watching videos, doing role plays, brainstorming topics, reading passages, translating words, doing written classroom exercises, and doing home and field assignments. The teaching process was implemented in three cycles based on the selected learning topics developed by Anderson (1977) as follows: Cycle one (3-19 March 2014) focusing on the students' knowledge of environment through the teaching of topic 1 to topic 4, Cycle two (21 March – 10 April 2014) exposing the students' personal lives and experiences through the teaching of topic 5 to topic 8, And cycle three (11-30 April 2014) illustrating the students' geographic and social lives through the teaching of topic 9 to topic 12.

Observation: The data were collected from February to May 2014. The pretest and posttest were administered before and after the cycles. The tests were in the form of multiple choices consisting of 100 vocabulary items. The tests were adopted from the students' workbook and developed based on the curriculum of English for Elementary School. The test items were administered to know the average of the students' initial scores. To complete the tests, the students were asked to choose the correct meaning of a certain word in each item. During the lessons, the students' responses on how they learned vocabulary in the classroom were observed and noted by the observer with the aid of field notes provided in the observation sheets. At the end of each lesson, a short journal serving as a reflection and description of the lesson was written, and the observer was interviewed for his opinion of it. Besides, the vocabulary tests were also administered and the students' home and field assignments were also examined and scored. All the data were analyzed in a summarized

manner in order to find out any points that can contribute to the next cycle. The schedule of the data collection phase for the entire cycle is tabulated in the following table.

Table 1
Data Collection Schedule

No	Data	Instrument	Time			
			Feb 2014	Mar 2014	Apr 2014	May 2014
1	Students' vocabulary scores	Vocabulary tests	√	√	√	√
2	Students' responses on materials	Interviews		√	√	√
3	Observer's opinion	Observations and Interviews		√	√	√
4	Students' written work	Document Analysis		√	√	√
5	Researchers' journal	Journal Keeping		√	√	√

In the final phase, all data were reflected to figure out the aspects that could give contribution to the next cycle and/or to the research as a whole. The comparison of the data before and after the cycles was conducted to find out if any improvement has resulted including the causes of success or failure.

The Teaching and Learning Activities

In this study, the vocabulary learning process included inside and outside classroom vocabulary learning activities. The inside classroom activities were firstly started by introducing the topic and vocabulary to students using videos, pictures, or role plays. The students were encouraged to give comments on the videos or pictures. Thereafter, they were allowed to share their own personal experiences related to the topic based on the instruction in the brainstorming. At the same time, the class discussed the students' share of personal experiences. Next, the students were invited to see the use of the words in topical reading passages. Some students were encouraged to read the passages in turns and the other students were asked to listen. After that, the teachers read the passages loudly. The meaning of each

vocabulary was explained using pictures. At last, students were assigned to do written classroom exercises.

To review the taught words, home and field tasks were assigned. The home assignment was in the form of printed papers containing questions in various types of exercises. An example of the home assignment can be seen in Appendix 1. The field assignment was designed for the students to practice the vocabulary in real life. An example of field assignment was visiting a market. Students were assigned to make a visit to a market near their homes and took notes of the things sold in the market. The field assignment can also be seen in Appendix 2.

These following extracts are the examples of the teacher (T) and students' (S) classroom interaction:

<when the students watched the videos for certain topics >

T: "Apa aja tadi yang kamu lihat di dalam videonya?" (What did you see in the video just now?)

S: "Market", "Sayur (Vegetable)", "Food", "Perlombaan (Competition)", "Dancer"

T: "OK. Trus, kegiatan apa yang kamu lihat?" (OK. What activities did you see in the video?)

S: "Buying", "Menjual (Selling)", "Dancing", "Playing", "Eating"

T: "Okay, yeah, do you know *dance*"?

S: "Nari"

T: "Hmmm...Okay!"

<when the students watched the video of Batu Malang tourist object>

- S: “Oh, aku uda pernah ke situ..., Hari itu aku sama orangtua ku ke sana...” (Oh yeah, I have been there..., I went there with my parents...)
- S: “Iya, aku juga bulan lalu baru ke sana..., Tempatnya bagus lho, soalnya aku pernah main ke situ, seru...” (I have also been there last month..., It is a wonderful place. I have ever played there! So exiting...!).

<when the students brainstormed about Traditional Market>

- S: “Aku pernah ke pasar Krukah. Tempatnya *rame*, banyak *yang belanja*. *Barang-barangnya* lengkap, mulai dari *sayur, ikan, beras, buah, daging*, dan lain-lain.” (I ever visited Krukah Market. It is *crowded* and many *buyers*. The *goods* are complete, *vegetables, fish, rice, fruit, meat*, and many others).
- T: “Oh, Krukah Market is *rame*? It is *crowded*. <pause> Okay, terus kamu *beli* apa di sana? (OK. What did you *buy* there?)
- S: “*Daging*” (*Meat*)
- T: “Oh..you buy meat. Kalo beli daging, pergi ke mana?” <if you want to buy meat, you go to?>
- S: “*Tukang daging*”
- T: “Alright, to the *butcher*. <pause> Tempatnya bersih apa gimana?” (Is the market clean or...?)
- S: “Gak juga, soalnya banyak sampah” <Not really, because it is dirty>
- T: “Oh, so it is *dirty*?”

The other parts of the brainstorming process are as follows.

“Oh, so you *play* Makan Krupuk *game*? <pause> Oh, kamu *menang*? (You *win*?) So you are the *winner*. Got *prize*? <pause> Trus, gimana perasaannya (So, how did you feel?) Oh, *excited*.”

“So, you like *eating* Rawon? What else? Rujak Cingur? It *tastes delicious*? Hmm..the color is black?”

“tadi ada yang bilang uda pernah ke Batu, ya? <pause> Oh, jadi kamu uda pernah *liburan* ke sana? Gimana rasanya? <pause> *Senang*? Hmm... Kalian *tinggal* di villa? Wah, tempat nya pasti *luar biasa* dong? (someone said that s/he’s ever gone to Batu? Oh, you had a *holiday* there? How did you feel? *Excited*?... Oh, you *stay* at a villa? Wow, it must be a *wonderful* place?)

Findings and Discussions

Findings

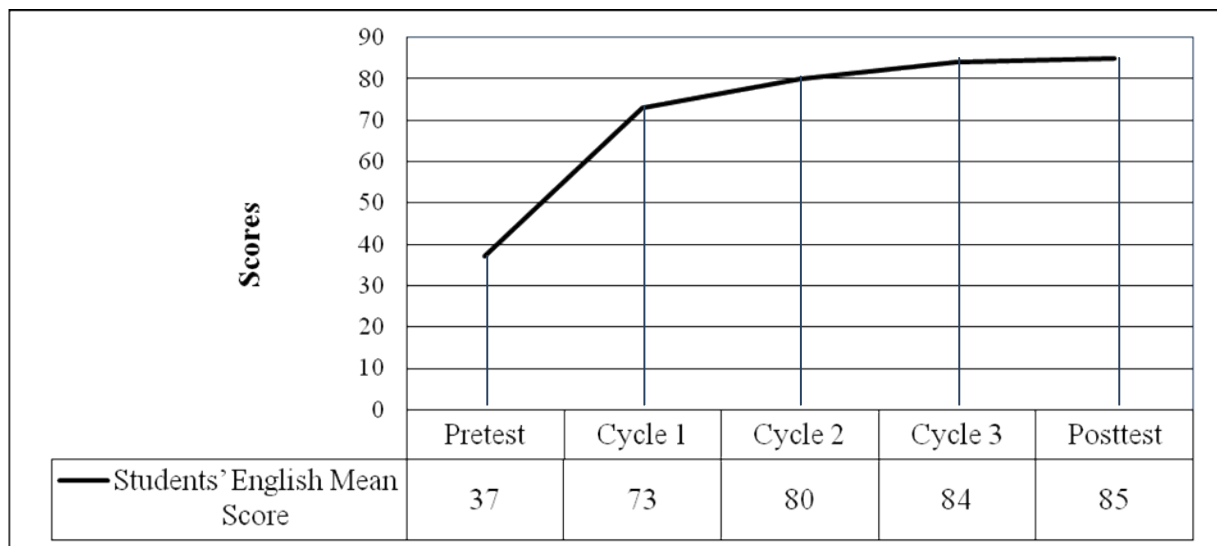
As a whole, the students’ English vocabulary mastery tended to improve along the cycles. Chart 1 shows the English vocabulary scores across the cycles. The scores of each cycle were different and influenced by the schematic knowledge of the topics learned during the cycles (The lowest English score, 73 was obtained in cycle 1). The local cultural content topics in this cycle could not necessarily benefit the students in their English vocabulary learning. Most of the words learned from the topic Traditional Music and Dance could not be answered correctly by the students through the test. The observation showed that the students did not have much interest and were not motivated. They found themselves difficult in learning the new words. According to them, they were more familiar with modern music and dance than the traditional music and dance. The students were more exposed to performance of modern music outside school. They asserted:

“Iya, Mr...kita taunya lebih banyak tentang musik zaman sekarang” (You know, Mr.. we know more about the today’s music than the traditional one).

Different from the topic in cycle 1, the topics in cycle 2 and 3 were much more interesting for students. All topics in cycle 2 and 3 exposed the students' daily life such as, the geographic and public places, friends, and school library; therefore, the students' English mean score in cycle 2 and 3 were higher than that in cycle 1.

Chart 1

English Vocabulary Scores across the Cycles



As can be seen in chart 2, the teaching of local cultural content materials has contributed to the findings of students' English vocabulary mastery with an average gain score 48. The highest gain score, 76, was obtained by Aura. Her pretest score was 23 and her posttest score was 99. The second highest gain score, 74, was obtained by Yuliana. Her pretest was 21 and her posttest was 95. The third highest gain score, 66, was obtained by Patria. Her pretest was 29 and her posttest was 95. The fourth highest gain score, 63, was obtained by Enjelly. Her pretest was 20 and her posttest was 83. The same gain score was obtained by Faith. Her pretest was 36 and her posttest was 99. All these students as well as Dimas, Ananda, Fikky, and Hanif who obtained the best posttest score, 100, were the ones who participated in classroom and outside vocabulary learning activities. They were

passionate to learn English vocabulary in the classrooms and completed and submitted their worksheets. In other words, activities in and outside the classroom reinforced the students to acquire vocabulary.

Chart 2

Pretest and Posttest Scores

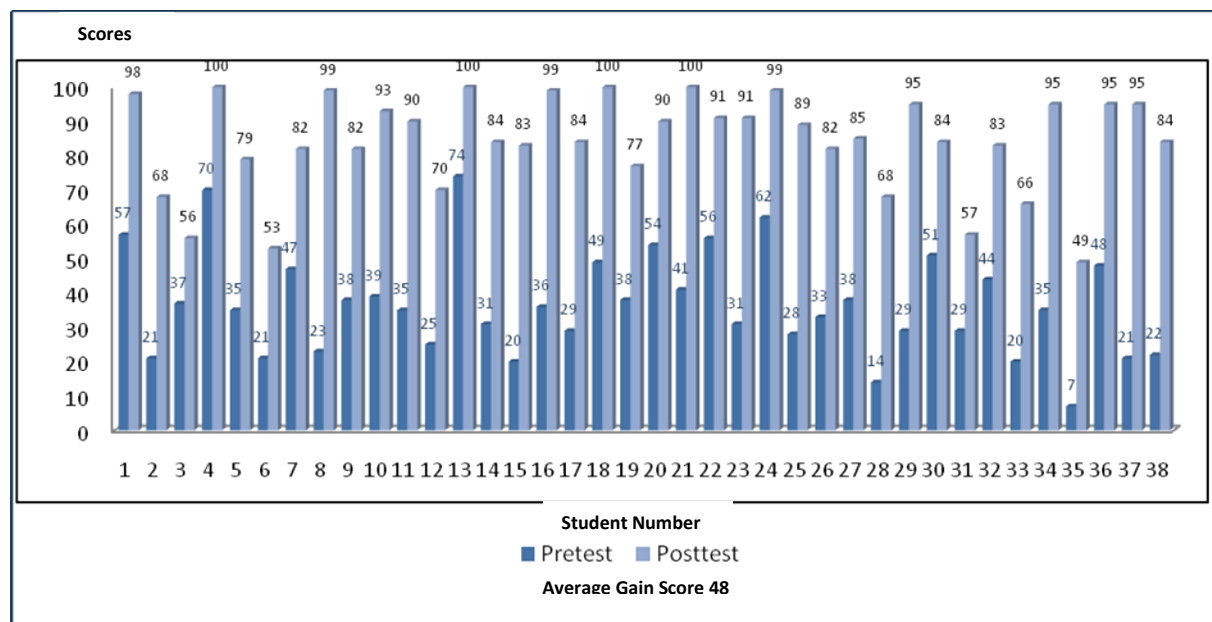


Table 2 and 3 show the difference between the pretest and posttest result analyzed by using paired sample t-test. As seen in the table 3, the significance value, 0.000, was lower than 0.05 shows that the students' vocabulary mastery improved significantly.

Table 2

Mean Scores

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre	36.5263	38	15.13138	2.45463
	Post	84.0789	38	14.21340	2.30572

Table 3**Paired Sample Test Score**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre - Post	-47.55263	17.75006	2.87944	-53.38693	-41.71833	-16.515	37	.000

Interviews with students and observer revealed that familiar topics encouraged the students to learn English vocabulary in a meaningful way. They were motivated in learning vocabulary through brainstorming. Some students commented.

“Topik nya itu dekat sama kehidupan kita sehari-hari, jadi kita langsung konek”. (The topics are very familiar to our daily lives; so, we are engaged with them directly).

“Topik-topiknya itu semuanya berkaitan dengan hal-hal yang pernah kita alami, misalnya liburan, keluarga, kegiatan waktu luang, dan ulang tahun. Jadi, kita bisa ngomong lebih banyak”. (“All topics reflected the experiences that we ever had, such as, going for holiday, talking about family, doing spare time activities, and celebrating birthday. Thus, we can talk much and generate more words”).

As told by the students, the observer commented.

“Topiknya mengangkat kehidupan siswa itu sendiri. Jadi, mereka jauh lebih tertarik dan antusias untuk belajar kosa kata”. (The topics reflect the students’ lives. So, they are much more interested and enthusiastic in learning vocabulary).

The content of reading passages has also aroused the students’ interest and motivation to learn vocabulary. In his own words, the observer commented.

“Siswa bisa mengerti teks karena terdapat istilah-istilah lokal yang memudahkan siswa”. (Students could understand the passages because of the familiar local terms).

One of the students, a Remo dancer at school named Yuliana, commented on the passage of Remo Dance,

“Aku ngerasa teks nya gampang dimengerti. Soalnya aku uda pernah punya pengalaman seperti yang ada di teks itu”. (I think the passage is easy to understand because I have the same experience told in the passage).

The observer and the other students, Dinda and Hanif, commented on the passage of Games and Sport,

“Teks nya menarik untuk dibaca soalnya cerita yang ada dalam teks itu udah pernah kita alami juga kan, jadi gampang ngerti”. (The passages are interesting to read because we have experienced playing the game)”.

Some students commented on the passage of Food and Drink,

“Bacaannya gampang dimengerti soalnya membahas tentang makanan Surabaya”
(The passage is easy to understand because it is about Surabayan food).

For the passage Krukah Market, a student named Faith commented,

“Waktu saya pergi ke Krukah, langsung keingat kalau kita uda pernah belajar kosa kata ini sebelumnya, gitu....”. (When I go to Krukah Market and see the things around, I remember that I have ever learned the vocabulary from the passage).

The teaching of local cultural content materials has also benefitted a low achiever, Dinda. Her pretest score was 28 and her posttest score was 89. She has showed her eagerness in learning English because she had lots of experiences about the topics discussed in the passages. Her background knowledge helped her acquire new vocabulary.

Unlike Dinda, Aldo, another low achiever was not much benefitted by the teaching of the local cultural content materials. He obtained the lowest gain score because he had few experiences about the topics. His family problem was the cause of it. Aldo was shy and did not socialize. Along the treatment, he used to be silent and rarely participate in the learning

process. He had difficulties in giving responses when the teacher asked him. In his own words, he used to say “I don’t know” as the reason. It seemed that, this issue has given effect on to the failure of his English vocabulary learning process.

Discussions

As revealed in the findings, the familiar topics and the content of reading passages could help students acquire vocabulary. As argued by Anderson (1977) the findings showed the topics and activities were about the students’ life: when and what the students eat, the students’ attitudes towards their friends, the students’ family lives, the daily time, work values, and the other things. According to Brooks (1983) the reading passages in such materials could also help students understand the meaning of vocabulary. Such ideas were included in their English vocabulary learning materials, for example, Family Gathering, My Holiday – My Experience, My Birthday, and My Spare Time. On the other hand, the cultures which were not familiar to students were excluded from their English vocabulary learning materials (Kachru & Nelson, 1996; Canagarajah, 1999). Thus, schematic knowledge in the passages made the words more accessible and the passages more meaningful through the word or concept association (Oxford & Crookall, 1990). And, the inclusion of such realistic students’ daily life in the learning materials has aroused the students’ interest in their English vocabulary learning process (Xiaowen, 2008).

This study has also found that background knowledge had a big impact on the students’ vocabulary learning process (Nassaji, 2002; Steffensen et al., 1979). Since the words were mostly learned through brainstorming, students were required to have background knowledge of the topic in order to give responses to the teaching; otherwise, the students could not understand the topic and the learning was not successful. In the same way, this study has also corroborated Krashen’ Input Hypothesis (1982) regarding that humans acquire language in only one way – understanding the message – that is, by receiving

comprehensible input. As found in this study, the students failed to learn the new words about Music and Dance because most of them were not exposed to traditional music and dance. Another example, Aldo was not able to learn the materials well and obtained the lowest gain score because of limited knowledge of the topics.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Based on the results of this research, this study revealed that the teaching of local cultural content materials for foreign language learners has contributed to the improvement of their English vocabulary mastery. The schematic knowledge found in the familiar topics has aroused the students' interest and motivation in learning English vocabulary. Both classroom and outside vocabulary learning included in the materials appeared to make positive contribution to the students' English vocabulary learning. However, the brainstorming activity was considered to be the most influential in the students' English vocabulary learning. Therefore, an English teacher was required to be creative in delivering the lessons and energetic in addressing some questions or responses to students during the brainstorming. And, to make the vocabulary learning more successful, the students were required to learn the new vocabulary in and outside the classroom.

Currently, most of Indonesian schools adopted English learning materials from other countries which were not necessarily compatible with the students' experiences; the content was mostly unrealistic for them. Thus, it is hoped that headmasters or English teachers would be selective in providing the expected English vocabulary books for their students. Finally, the researcher would like to encourage other researchers to conduct experimental studies by involving two different classrooms by giving different treatments to each in order to give a quantitative support to this study by comparing the two groups in order to figure out whether the materials are the most influential in improving the students' vocabulary mastery or the teaching process.

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Appendix 1

Home Assignment

Topic 12 - Public Places

Name	:	_____	Teacher	:	_____
Date	:	_____	Score	:	_____

WORKSHEET

Draw the trail to make correct answer. Match the words to the clues. Number 1 is the example.

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Clues:

- Delta ... is near Monkasel.
- We want to go by bus. We go to Bungurasih ...
- I go to Reny ... to buy some food.
- We want to go by ship. We got to Tanjung Perak ...
- We want to go by plane. We go to Juanda ... *airport*
- Hospital, Airport, and Railway Station are kinds of ...
- You can eat your favorite food at a ...
- Mpu Tantular ... is not far from Surabaya Zoo.
- We want to go by train. We go to Pasar Turi ...
- Surabaya is a big ...
- Suramadu ... is very long.
- The ... is called Tugu Pahlawan.
- We go to Surabaya ... to see fountain (air mancur).
- I can ride a boat on Kenjeran ...
- Pasar Atom and ITC Surabaya are the names of ...
- Batu is a beautiful ...
- Ample ... is near Tanjung Perak.
- We go to play skateboard at Bungkul ...
- My family and I go to Batu Secret ... to see animals.
- You can go to ... to watch movie.

Appendix 2

Field Assignment**Topic 1 - Traditional Market**

Name : _____ Teacher : _____
 Date : _____ Score : _____

PRACTICE

Please go to a market and write the names of goods sold in the market as many as possible. The numbers are not limited. The table below is provided to help you to write the goods. You may multiply this paper. Bring your notes in the next meeting. Number 1 is the example.

Name of Market : _____
 Address : _____
 Date of Visit : _____

NO	ITEM	TYPE	CHARACTERISTICS				
			Color	Size	Shape	Taste	Others
1	Orange	Fruits	orange	small	round	sweet	--
2							
3							
4							
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