

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

According to the 2013 curriculum, English is no longer an obligated subject for elementary schools in Indonesia; therefore, many elementary schools still apply the KTSP as a reference of English teaching. Based on the KTSP 2006, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four central skills that need to be developed in the English learning process. To achieve the goal, the young learners should be encouraged to increase their vocabulary because vocabulary is the essential language component to develop the four language skills.

There are several arguments why vocabulary, the building blocks of language, is regarded as an important component of language skills. Dubin and Olshtain (1986) stated that a good stock of vocabulary is the key to using language effectively. Krashen and Terrell (1983) argue that vocabulary is basic to communication. Without a rich vocabulary no meaningful communication can take place; therefore, communication competence relies heavily on vocabulary (McCarthy, 1990). In line with McCarthy, David Wilkins as quoted by Thornbury (2003:p.13) says that “without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. In other words, learning vocabulary is almost more important rather than learning grammar. In reading comprehension, Laufer (2003) and Nation (2001) found that vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors; therefore, full comprehension of text cannot take place without understanding its vocabulary.

One of the features that make learning a word difficult is the way in which the word is learned or taught (Nation, 1990). The elementary school students seem to have problems in learning vocabulary because they are prone to quickly forget. For foreign language learners, this situation might become a more serious issue since English is a foreign language for them, which is in fact only learned and used in the English teaching classroom. Another critical obstacle encountered by students in English vocabulary learning process is the difficulty in the process of mastery. Some students are not easy to recall the vocabulary because of the absence of factors stimulating students' memory. The vocabularies are not stored longer in their long memories. Therefore, teachers, as the educators should be responsible to create an English teaching and learning process that is conducive, comfortable, beneficial, and effective for students to learn.

English vocabulary mastery was still problematic for the fifth grade students of Baratajaya Elementary School Surabaya, where the researcher is presently teaching. The school is one of the

public schools in Surabaya, Indonesia where mostly the students are from local people. The medium of instruction used in the classroom was Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese Language. The students also used the same languages to communicate to their classmates. As observed, the students were in difficulties mastering a number of vocabularies and storing them in their long memories. The researcher noticed that the previous vocabulary was usually forgotten even before the students started learning the new ones. When the tests were administered, none of the students passed the minimum passing grade, 75.

In order to have a more systematic picture of the situation and the potential cause of the problems, the researcher conducted interviews with some students and teachers. As revealed in the interviews, the students did not have longer time to learn English because they had two hours a week to study English, that was, at school. Accordingly, teachers gave more attention to teach the other subjects that were considered more important than English. The teaching was focused on the subjects that would be tested in the national examination for the graduation of elementary level, for example, Math, Bahasa Indonesia, Civic, Science, and Social. Above all, students were not provided with written material which was properly designed for the purpose of vocabulary learning whereas written material was crucial to vocabulary development during the school years (Nagy and Herman, 1987). Based on the two causes of the problems, a potential solution would be to provide the proper English vocabulary learning materials for the students.

Interesting material results in very significant increases in vocabulary growth (Elley, 1991). To provide interesting materials, Xiaowen (2008) opines that the teacher must involve students' daily and life object in the learning process. When there is an awareness of an interest in words or a connection with their everyday lives, the students will enjoy learning the words, always remember the words and the 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 others they have already known. Students' familiarity is active when the students can explore more their prior knowledge: situations, objects, events, or actions of which they already know by associating the prior knowledge with the new information provided in the text to understand the meaning of the words. Students' local culture is a new consideration proposed as the trend of English as foreign language (EFL) teaching (Juan, 2010). It is said that the target language culture is not the only one objective involved in English language teaching but also the local culture of the learners. The local cultural content, therefore, has become crucial for the EFL teacher to design interesting English materials to improve students' vocabulary.

Hudson (1980:p. 77) said that culture, which is defined as a 'socially acquired knowledge', plays a central role in cognition. Widdowson (1990) perceives the socially acquired knowledge as schematic knowledge. In native language learning, the child's schematic and systemic knowledge develop at the same time, and support each other. However, as Widdowson states, the foreign

language learning experience is quite different. Language learners have already been socialized into the schematic knowledge associated with their mother tongue. They are initiated into their culture in the very process of language learning. It follows that when learners confront uses of the foreign language they are acquiring, they are prone to interpret them in reference to the established association (Widdowson, 1990). As a case in point, a learner of English who has never resided in the target-language culture will most likely experience problems in processing English systemic data if these are presented through such unfamiliar contexts, for example, Halloween or English pubs. Even if these have been explained, the learner may still fail to perceive Halloween or the pub in the same way in which they are normally evoked in the mind of the native speaker of English. As such, it is possible that the learner in question will react to Halloween or the pub context with less than full comprehension, regardless of how much explanation is provided. Eventually, the learner may find it hard to discern a certain vocabulary in the content of the material.

Numerous examples exist in the literature, in fact, on how familiar schemata facilitate foreign language acquisition and, in particular, comprehension. Their findings suggested that texts which contain culturally familiar content schema are easier to process. As mentioned earlier, research in the area of schema theory and comprehension concluded that the closer the match between the reader's schema and the text, the more comprehension occurs. Lee (1986) has studied the effects of background knowledge in reading, understanding and recalling of text in second language learners and finds that the learners' ability to recall is enhanced when they are presented with one of the components of background knowledge, context, transparency, and familiarity. Johnson (1982), for instance, shows that, in reading comprehension in the foreign language, syntactic and lexical simplification can be far less important than familiar content schemata. Similarly, Nunan (1985) suggests that more than the provision of systemic knowledge, what makes a foreign language text easier to process is the learner's degree of familiarity with its content schemata. Based on the findings of her own extensive research on the subject, Carrell (1987) concludes that good reading comprehension in a foreign language entails familiarity with both content and formal schemata. Winfield and Barnes-Felfeli (1982) stress the cognitive processing difficulties encountered by foreign language learners not only in reading but also in writing activities involving unfamiliar content schemata. In the same vein, Friedlander (1990) indicates that foreign language learners' planning and writing are enhanced when they are asked to write on topics related to their native language background. Hinds (1984) points to another interesting aspect of the positive role of familiar schematic knowledge in foreign language learning through his discovery of a relationship between the degree of the learners' familiarity with formal schemata in essays and the degree of their ability to retain information from such essays.

Given that local cultural content plays a major role in cognition, which in turns significantly affects comprehension and interpretation, one of the salient issues in foreign language pedagogy is

the determination of the type of schematic input to be presented to the learners. In other words, it is very crucial to consider the appropriate selection of content as the materials to be taught to foreign language students. Local cultural content might be an effective option to give strong impact on improving the vocabulary mastery to the foreign language learners.

The researcher considered that Classroom Action Research (CAR) seems to be a suitable design for the purpose of this study. As the research was aimed principally at making improvement in the current classroom situation, the solution of which could naturally be very specific to that particular set of students at that particular time. It is also inherent in a CAR to contain several cycles, each of which consists of planning, action, observation, and reflection, which then lead to the next cycle if necessary. Applying the certain cycles in this study was based on the students' English vocabulary mastery improvement. It was expected that during the cycles, the students could learn and master English vocabulary with ease through the predetermined learning materials. After the cycles, their average English vocabulary score might improve and was expected to be more than the minimum passing grade, 75.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, this study aimed at discussing the teaching of local cultural content materials to improve the Elementary students' vocabulary mastery. And according to the previous studies, it was considered that the use of local cultural content in English materials was effective to help the students master the vocabulary. Hence, the researcher conducted a classroom action research (CAR) with the following research questions:

1. To what extent can the teaching of local cultural content materials be used to improve the fifth grade students' English vocabulary mastery of Baratajaya Elementary School?
2. How can the teaching of local cultural content materials be used to improve the fifth grade students' English vocabulary of Baratajaya Elementary School?

The Objectives

This study aimed at:

1. Knowing whether the teaching of local cultural content materials can improve the fifth grade students' vocabulary mastery of Baratajaya Elementary School.
2. Knowing how the teaching of local cultural content materials can be used to improve the fifth grade students' vocabulary mastery of Baratajaya Elementary School.

Theoretical Framework

The first theory used in this study is the theory of schemata developed by Anderson (1977). A strong view of schemata states that the materials can create something influencing the reader's opinion even before the texts are read. According to Anderson, schemata can guide the readers to see the clear picture in a certain way determined by a person's personal lives. And the second theory is the theory of language learning and acquisition developed by Krashen (1982) focusing on the input hypothesis ($i+1$). According to him,

"The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production."

Assumption of the Study

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. Teacher and students have sufficient information of knowing the local culture in Surabaya.
2. Teacher and students have the same concepts of the local cultural background knowledge.

Scope and Limitation

The study was a classroom action research within a delimited scope of sample using the students of Baratajaya elementary school in Surabaya from the fifth grade in the academic year 2013-2014. The study itself was delimited to studying the teaching of local cultural content materials on the improvement of elementary students' vocabulary mastery. The vocabulary was limited to 240 in the form of word. Due to the limited time, the research took three cycles.

Significance of the study

The findings are expected to provide information about using local cultural content materials to teach English vocabulary to elementary EFL learners. Theoretically, the findings are also expected to provide the current information related to the prior studies arguing that the schemata were one of the learning components that need to be considered in providing English materials especially for the EFL learners. Finally, the findings are expected to be a reference for the book writers to develop English vocabulary materials which fit to the target learners providing the students' realistic cultural information.

Definition of Key Terms**English Vocabulary Mastery**

Vocabulary mastery is the scores of English vocabulary obtained by students based on the test results. The scores refer to the students' correct answers out of the number of questions tested in vocabulary test. A minimal passing grade is 75 (based on Baratajaya Elementary school English passing grade standard).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an English word which is related to the predetermined topic: Market, Food and Drink, Games and Sport, Music and Dance, and Students' experience and surroundings (Birthday, Spare Time, Family, Friends, Holiday, School Library, and Public Places).

Improvement

Improvement is the gain score obtained by comparing the students' posttest and pretest results. Improvement refers to the students' posttest results which are higher than pretest results.

Local Cultural Content Materials

Local cultural content materials are short English reading passages containing topics, objects, events, ideas, or behaviors in which every setting is situated in the students' local environment that the students are familiar with. Short reading passages contain 150-200 words. **Local Cultural Content Materials** are different from the term of local content which is an optional subject or additional teaching at a certain school.

Local Culture

Local culture is the objects, events, ideas, values, or behaviors which are familiar to the students.

Students' Familiarity

Students' familiarity is the degree of student's ability to recognize the content of reading passages and to identify information in the reading passages. The degree is based on the ideas that the students already know.

Students' Interest

Students' interest is the degree of students' attentions towards English vocabulary materials. Students' attentions are attracted by the existence of ideas in the passages which can arouse the students' curiosity to read and learn the passages more.