THE USE OF SPELLING BEE GAME IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Vocabulary is among the difficult component for EFL students to master in learning English language. Based on a preliminary observation at a junior high school in Banda Aceh, it was found that the teachers seldom used specific strategy in teaching vocabulary. Thus, this research was aimed at finding out whether the use of Spelling Bee game can improve students’ vocabulary at the school under study, with a focus on vocabulary related to nouns. The sample of this research was the seventh grade students for the one group pre-test and post-test design. To obtain data, vocabulary test items were used for the pre-test and post-test before and after the treatment was implemented. The results showed that the average post-test score is higher (88.76) than the pre-test score (62.52), so the difference between the scores of both tests is 26.24. Moreover, t-test also showed that t-score > t-table or 10.826 > 1.71 at the level of significance 0.05 with the degree of freedom (df) 24. Consequently, it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypotheses is rejected, which suggests that Spelling Bee game can improve students’ vocabulary. And so, Spelling Bee game is recommended as...
among the effective strategies in teaching English vocabulary for EFL students.

**Keywords:** Spelling Bee Game, vocabulary, EFL students, experimental study.

**INTRODUCTION**

Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 255) suggest that “vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read and write.” Based on the statement, vocabulary is a particular skill which should be mastered by the students to understand other English skills, such as receptive skill (listening and reading) and productive skill (speaking and writing). Accordingly, Indonesia’s School Based Curriculum (or SBC) 2004 demands that the 7th grade students should master about 500-1000 words in the English subject (Depdiknas, 2004). So students who are not able to do so are likely to face difficulties in learning English in the next school levels. To achieve this mandate, both teachers and students need efforts.

Based on a preliminary study in one of the junior high school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, it was found that the 7th students of the school still had difficulties in developing their vocabulary. During writing tasks, students could not focus on what they had to write because they lack of vocabulary, so the students could not express their ideas effectively. A similar condition happened during speaking activities, where they could not articulate their ideas clearly because they do not have enough English words to convey them. Hence, this problem needs to be resolved and among the ways that teachers can use to improve and develop students’ vocabulary is by using games (Kim, 1995; Mei & Yu-Jung, 2000; Huyen & Nga, 2003). Games have been found to be easy to play and flexible in terms of subject matter and design. Ersöz (2000) mentioned that games are motivating because they are entertaining and stimulating at the same time, and they can be practiced in all language skill tasks. Games can also give
chances for both teachers and students to assess the progress of the teaching and learning process.

According to Ur et al. (2014), there are a lot of activities that can be used to teach vocabulary, one of which is a game such as the Spelling Bee game (hereafter, SBG). This game comes from the Spelling Bee Competition, a kind of competition where participants are required to spell words and it can be held at any levels of each school to the national (Sebba, 2009). Spelling itself is a system in using symbols of the alphabet to pronounce a word in speaking and writing (McPhearson, 1984). Henceforth, the spelling bee today is not just for the contestants at the competitions but it is also for the English language itself (William, 2008). To teach the English spelling system by implementing a variety of learning styles in the classroom is necessary to help students understand spelling in English (O’Sullivan & Thomas, 2007).

On the subject of SBG, the *Spelling Bee Handbook*, published by Macmillan (2012), explains that it is a way to help children to overcome their difficulties in spelling words being learnt in the classroom. There are three main points in playing SBG: (1) there must be participants, (2) judges are needed to take control of the competition, and finally (3) teachers are pronouncers; who are important characters of the spelling bee activity. Moreover, SBG is an educational strategy for teaching the English language because it can help build a strong foundation in learning spelling and vocabulary (Payra & Cardona, 2016).

A number of researches have been conducted on the use of SBG to help students increase their English vocabulary in Indonesia. Among them are by Sekarini (2013), Rahayu (2009), Inayatullah (2012) and Ovaningtyas (2016). Their studies have found SBG to be effective in improving the students’ English vocabulary in the English classrooms. Considering the benefits of SBG and to help the 7th grade students in the school under this study, thus, this game is proposed. Based on that case, the research question is as follow: Can Spelling Bee game improves the students’ vocabulary?
Based on the research problem, the following hypotheses are formulated:
1. Alternate hypothesis (H_a): Spelling Bee game can improve students’ vocabulary.
2. Null hypothesis (H_0): Spelling Bee game cannot improve students’ vocabulary.

The result of this research is hoped to add more knowledge and information to English teachers specifically on the use of SBG in teaching English vocabulary. This study can also become among the literature for other researchers who intend to conduct research on a similar topic.

METHODS
This research was a quantitative research of pre-experimental design with one group pre-test and post-test design because it was not intended to make any comparison, but to see whether there was an improvement in students’ scores after a treatment on SBG was given. Moreover, the population of this research was the 7th grade students of SMPN 4, Banda Aceh. A simple random sampling was deployed and class VII-2 was chosen. The class consisted of 25 students.

The meeting sequences in this experimental study are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting 1 (pre-test)</th>
<th>Meeting 2 (treatment)</th>
<th>Meeting 3 (treatment)</th>
<th>Meeting 4 (post-test)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 1: The meeting sequences in this study**

Data were collected by giving a test as a research instrument. In this research, two types of the test are provided, namely pre-test, and post-test. It is a vocabulary test based on the first 1000 frequency words (noun) for 7th graders as stated in the curriculum. The pre-test was conducted to determine the initial scores of the students’ vocabulary knowledge before the treatments were performed. Meanwhile, the post-test was done after the treatments were given. Concerning to the content validity of the test, the learning materials and the sample of the
test in this research were taken from the English textbook used by the school under study, which was “When English Rings a Bell” (Khatimah, Gunawan & Wachi, 2013) for 7th grade students. The form of the test was to label the name of the picture using the words available in the box. A number of 25 multiple choice questions were employed in each test. It contained 16 items of noun translations from English to Indonesian, and 9 items of noun translations from Indonesian to English.

The treatment was given in two meetings. The procedure of playing SBG in the classroom for this research is was modified from the Spelling Bee Handbook, published by Macmillan (2012). For each treatment meeting, the procedures are as below:

1. A day before the treatment started, the teacher prepared the words and wrote each down on a piece of card. Each card was numbered.

2. On the treatment day, she introduced the topic of the lesson to the students. The English textbook was used. This took about the first half an hour of the class time.

3. She then divided the class into 5 groups, in which each group consisted of 5 students to start playing SBG. Before the game starts, the students were given about 10 minutes to study together the lesson that they had just learnt from the teacher: read the text in the textbook and discuss the meaning of the vocabulary together.

4. The teacher acted as both the pronouncer and judge in this treatment. Spelling bee was conducted orally. The students were expected to spell the words correctly and precisely. They were allowed to ask the word given to them to be said repeatedly by the teacher to help them compare it with other words that may have the same pronunciation but different spelling.

4. A student representative from each group was called up to the front of the class. Each student selected a number from the word cards. Each student was given turns to spell out the words from their chosen cards. The teacher (as the pronouncer) reads the word out loud as much as two times.
5. The word must be pronounced by the student once before it is spelled and once more afterwards, for example: “elbow…e-l-b-o-w…elbow”.

6. If the student requests for the definition of the word to be provided, the teacher had to respond to it, e.g. “the word is “elbow” and its definition is the part of body; the joint between the forearm and the upper arm”.

7. The students were not allowed to play again if they misspelled a given word or caught getting hints (i.e. whispers) from their groups on the spelling of the word. If they were found to do so then the group was expelled the game.

8. The group which had the highest score from the game was the winner.

After the pre-test and post-test were scored, they were calculated for the mean scores, standard deviation, t-test and t-score by using SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of pre-test is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the pretest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Interval</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-80</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-90</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that the students’ competency in vocabulary knowledge was less satisfactory in the pre-test. This indicates that the students still had less knowledge about the vocabulary being learnt in class.
The result of post-test is presented in Table 2.

### Table 2: Frequency distribution of the post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Interval</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76-80</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-84</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-88</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-92</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-96</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For comparison, the scores of pre-test and post-test were combined. Based on Figure 2, the pre-test score starts from the lowest score, ranging between 31 and 40, obtained by one student, and to highest range, i.e. 81-90, by two students. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the score started from the lowest range of 71-80, which was achieved by six students, to the highest one (91-100) and achieved by 11 students. In other words, the improvement of students’ vocabulary from the pre-test to the post-test was obvious after they were taught by using SBG.

![Figure 2: Pre-test and post-test comparison](image)

To test the hypotheses of this study, the data were further calculated by using SPSS. The result of t-score was 10.826 and the significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) was .000. It means that the value of significance is less than 0.05 or 0.000 < 0.05. Thus, the t-
score to the critical value of t-table at the level of significance $\alpha=0.05$ with the degree of freedom (df)=24 which is 1.7. The detail is presented in the following table.

**Table 3: T-test result**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 pretest-posttest</td>
<td>-26,240</td>
<td>12,118</td>
<td>2,424</td>
<td>-31,242</td>
<td>-21,238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Referring to the statistical calculation of the t-test, the result is clear that $H_a$ is accepted and $H_o$ is rejected ($t$-score=10.826 > $t$-table=1.71). Thus, it can be interpreted that SBG could improve the students’ vocabulary.

The finding of this research was quite similar to the results of studies conducted by Rahayu (2009) and Inayatullah (2012) who found that SBG gave a significant effect in improving students’ vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary by using SBG could help students construct their vocabulary, enhance their spelling ability, and make students enjoy the learning process. SBG could increase the students’ vocabulary because the game made the students remember, repeat, spell and understand the meaning of the words all at the same time.

**CONCLUSION**

The main conclusion of this research is that the use of SBG in the classroom had improved the students’ English vocabulary. The improvement is evidenced by results of the pre-test and post-test, in which their scores increased significantly after SBG was used in the classroom. This game has helped the students enhance their vocabulary mastery in English by learning in a fun and interesting way. Yet, this research was conducted with a number of limitations. SBG was only implemented to one class in a school and the treatment was done for only two meetings. Future related studies are recommended to extend the use of
SBG to more classes with different educational levels and to more schools to further corroborate the findings drawn from this study.

REFERENCES
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