

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of this study. The discussion will begin by discussing the background that underlay this study. Research questions, which will be the guideline of this study and the purposes of the study will be presented next. The discussion will go on to the scope and significance of this study. Next, brief discussion on research method covering research design, data resource, data collection techniques, and data analysis will also be presented (further discussion on methodology will be presented in chapter 3). Finally, this chapter will be ended by presenting the clarification of terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Some students sometimes find it difficult to express their ideas in written or spoken, even in the form of a single sentence. When they are asked to perform written or spoken tasks, they tend to write the Indonesian version first before the English one. One of the reasons that bring this problem is that the students possess limited vocabulary mastery. It is particularly serious when students come in situations like spoken interaction, because in this situation vocabulary is sometimes poor and difficult to recall, even after it has been learnt (Suberviola and Mendez, 2002). In addition, this condition is supported by **the fact that many times teachers have less concern of teaching their students how to learn or how to master vocabulary.** Teachers usually miss to create class activities that lead the students to build their vocabulary mastery or teach them the strategies in covering unknown words.

As Aisha (2008) said in her thesis that some English teachers believe that the most important elements to be mastered in learning language are rules and structures, otherwise vocabulary does not need more attention to study since it is assumed that vocabulary can be obtained from the other class activities like reading or it can be learned by learners themselves without specific guidance.

In learning a new language, the first thing language learners usually do is to understand the meaning of new words. Vocabulary mastery is an important element to understand a new language – although grammatical rule is also important – because with no vocabulary mastery, comprehension of grammar becomes no use. Richards (2000) claims that vocabulary is at the heart of learning and communication, no amount of grammatical or other type of linguistic knowledge can be employed in communication or discourse without the mediation of vocabulary. In all language skills, vocabulary may become an important element. It is supported by Harmer's (2002) statement that the four language skills become meaningless if learners do not possess a number of words required. In other words, without an extensive vocabulary, students will be unable to use the structures and functions they may have learned for comprehension and production in communication.

Furthermore, the idea of having certain strategies is thought to be beneficial to the language learning, it is because learning strategies can make students become more independent in their learning. This idea is like-minded as one of the national education goals that is to make the students become independent (see Regulation No. 20 year 2003 about national education system: chapter II, verses 3).

As an old proverb says “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime”. Applied to the language teaching and learning field, this proverb might be interpreted to mean that if students are provided with answers, the immediate problem is solved. Thus if they are taught the strategies to work out the answers for themselves, they are empowered to manage their own learning. In accordance with this proverb, Oxford (1990) claims that language learning strategies are among the main factors that help determine how well the learners learn a second or foreign language.

Researches indicate that learning strategies enable learners to take more control of their own learning so that students can take more responsibility for their studies (Nation, 2001; Takac, 2008). Subsequently, Oxford (1990; 1) claims, “strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence”. In relation to the effective foreign language learners, Brown (1994) argues that:

Successful mastery of second language will be due to a large extent to a learners own personal “investment” of time, effort, and attention to second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language (20).

Under the umbrella of Language Learning Strategies, there are certain strategies used in learning vocabulary – Vocabulary Learning Strategies. The strategies are considered to be useful for students in learning a new language. A major function of those strategies is to help the learners continue to learn new words and increase their vocabulary size (Nation, 1990). In addition, Cameron (2001; 92) proposes Vocabulary learning

strategies as “Actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary”.

Accordingly, for taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, some experts have designed their own taxonomies. Nation (2001), for instance, proposes this taxonomy: Planning (choosing what to focus on and when to focus on it), Sources (finding information about words), Process (establishing knowledge). The other one, which is considered the complete one, is the strategies proposed by Schmitt (1997) covering 58 strategies. He classifies those strategies into two areas: strategies used when a learner encounters a new word and when a learner intends to retain the word in her/his memory.

In line with the importance of vocabulary in learning a new language, it is beneficial for teacher to be aware of variety of strategies in learning new words. Not only become aware of the strategies, but teacher also, hopefully, be able to introduce some of them through teaching and to encourage learners in effective strategies (Cohen, 1998). Brown (1994) argues that the methods that the learner employs to internalize and to perform in the language are as important as the teacher’s methods.

However, the research on the vocabulary learning strategies is still few, therefore, the present study is set out, (1) to investigate the strategies used by the eighth grade students at one of Madrasah Tsanawiyah (in the same level as junior high school) in Indramayu in learning vocabulary. (2) to explore the most helpful strategies based on the students’ personal opinion. (3) to seek out the students’ rationales for choosing those

strategies as the most helpful strategies. (4) to discover the strategies that higher, average and lower achievers tend to do in learning vocabulary.

1.2 Research Question

By taking the facts that study on vocabulary learning strategies is still few into consideration. This study sought to probe some problems, which were formulated in the following questions:

1. What strategies do the eighth graders use in learning vocabulary?
2. What strategies are considered the most helpful by the students?
3. What are the students' rationales for nominating those strategies as the most helpful strategies?
4. What strategies do higher, average, and lower achievers tend to apply in learning vocabulary?

1.3 Aims of the Study

In line with the research questions above, the study was conducted to: (1) examine strategies used by the students in learning vocabulary, (2) explore strategies considered the most helpful by students, (3) seek out the students' rationales for choosing those strategies as the most helpful strategies, (4) and discover the strategies which tend to be used by higher, average and lower achievers.

1.4 Scope of the Study

Concerning the aim of the study, that was to investigate students' vocabulary learning strategies, this study involved the Eighth Grade students at one of Junior High School in Indramayu. There were four classes (162 students) involved and each class was represented by nine students who were categorized as high achievers (three students), average achievers (three students), and low achievers (three students). Therefore, 36 students of eighth grade were chosen as representatives.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Considering the importance and the influence of Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Teaching and Learning field, this study hopefully gives a quite significant contribution to Teaching and Learning Field, and enriches the literature about Vocabulary Learning Strategies research – in this case, about Junior High School language learners. Moreover, this study also improves teachers' knowledge about Vocabulary Learning Strategies and gives teachers valuable information on how their students process and learn new words, select and apply the most suitable vocabulary learning strategies to understand and solve the problems they face in learning vocabulary.

1.6 Research Method

1.6.1 Research Design

This study was set out to explore the students' vocabulary learning strategies, the most helpful strategies according to the students, including their

reasons toward the most helpful strategies, and the strategies which tend to be used by higher, average and lower achievers.

To answer the research questions, this study employed Descriptive Method, Gall *et al* (2003) states that descriptive method is a research which has intent to study phenomena as they exist at one point in time. It does not focus on answering a hypothesis, but it is more emphasized on the researched elements in order to understand the problem that the study will examine. The vocabulary learning strategies are described and investigated as they are in natural situation, as Arikunto (2005: 310) asserts that descriptive research is intended to describe a variable, a symptom, and a situation as they are. This means that neither the respondents nor the vocabulary learning strategies were studied with interference of the researcher in the form of treatment or control.

1.6.2 Data resource

There were four classes of eighth grade in the school; each class was represented by three high achievers, three average achievers, and three low achievers. The participants involved in this study were selected based on their English ability in the class. The total students involved from the four classes were 12 students categorized as high achievers, 12 as average achievers, and 12 as low achievers. The use of purposive sampling in this study is, basically, to achieve the varied data. This is in accordance with maxwell's (1996: 71) suggestion, "this is a

strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events, are selected in order to provide important information that cannot be gotten as well from other choices.”

1.6.3 Data Collection

This research used theory of triangulation, in which three different instruments were used – questionnaire, interview and document analysis – to collect the intended data. This theory was employed to make the gathering data more reliable and more valid and to reduce bias that possibly occurs during the research (Alwasilah, 2000).

The first instrument was questionnaire, in the form of closed-ended items, which was adapted from taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategy developed by Schmitt (1997) to investigate the students’ vocabulary learning strategies and open-ended item to explore the most helpful strategies. The second instrument was interview, to get further information on the vocabulary learning strategies the students apply and to crosscheck the information obtained from questionnaire. The last instrument was document analysis, which was used to get data of students’ English ability – this data were used to make classification of higher, average and lower achievers.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis performed in this study consisted of several processes. The first one was analyzing the data obtained from questionnaire, which were about

students' vocabulary learning strategies and the most helpful strategies based on students' perception by displaying the data in the form of table. Secondly was transcribing and analyzing the data obtained from interview, in order to get additional information about students' vocabulary learning strategies, the most helpful strategies and students' English ability. The third step was analyzing and classifying the data obtained from document analysis. Finally, the last step was synthesizing and interpreting the research findings.

1.7 Clarification of the Terms

1. Vocabulary is all the words that someone knows, learns, or uses (Longman Dictionary, 2009).
2. Learning strategy is steps taken by students to enhance their own learning (oxford, 1990).
3. Vocabulary learning strategy is actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary (Cameron, 2001).