

The Correlation between Internal & External Factors that Influence Elementary School Students in Learning English Vocabulary: A Study on the Third Graders of Marsudirini 77 Elementary School Salatiga, Indonesia

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Abstract: Communication is very important in this globalization era. To communicate well, proper diction in uttering language expressions is highly desirable. In this case, we cannot get rid of the language because it is inseparable part and the most dominant factor in communication in addition to gestures, facial expressions, and so forth. English is needed as a medium to converse with people around the world. Unfortunately, many people especially those at the young age still find difficulties in learning English vocabulary. This research pays particular attention to the Third Grade of Marsudirini 77 Elementary School Salatiga to identify their difficulties in learning English Vocabulary and their relation to their grade in vocabulary tests. The questionnaire was distributed to students in class and the findings revealed that both internal and external factors included in the questionnaire positively correlated to the students' grade. That is, the more difficulties they found the lower the grade. By contrast, fewer reported difficulties were associated with higher grades. It is recommended that similar studies need to be conducted to further ascertain the difficulties that hinder students in learning English vocabulary.

Keywords: internal factors, external factors, difficulty, child vocabulary learning.

Four basic skills need to be learned in English: speaking, reading, listening and writing. All four of those skills involve vocabulary. When speaking to others, we need to choose proper diction to convey messages. When reading a passage, we need to know the vocabulary in order to get the main idea easily. When listening to somebody talking, we need to utilize our vocabulary in order to understand and to avoid misunderstanding. Finally, when writing a composition, we need to know exact terms used in the particular style of writing.

"Learning of a language is an emotional experience, and the feelings that the learning process evokes will have a crucial bearing on the success or failure of the learning" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 47). From this statement, it is clear that emotional factors are important for learners to determine their success or failure in learning a language. To gain these emotional factors, students should be encouraged to learn a language; in this case, English, to achieve success instead of failure. Emotional factors are internal factors that determine difficulties in learning English Vocabulary. Tschirner (2004) also proclaims that learning English for eight years or more does not

necessarily enable students to meet a vocabulary threshold for academic purposes. The conclusion that could be drawn from this statement is that emotional experience might not be incorporated in the students' learning so that vocabulary learning cannot be done effectively. In addition, Chondrogianni and Marinis (2011) also claim that internal factors influencing children's vocabulary learning are age of onset, length of exposure and age at the time of testing. In the present study, the aim is to determine whether those factors occur in the research population in Indonesia, or whether there are other internal factors that influence vocabulary learning in high school students.

To master the language, students cannot avoid learning the vocabulary of that particular language. Unfortunately, we see that students in Indonesia find difficulties in learning English, especially getting across the meaning of certain vocabulary. Some say that it is difficult to memorize certain words; others say that the teachers cannot translate the proper interpretation of the words (Hustchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 50). These phenomena show that external factors also have a large influence on vocabulary learning in English. Chondrogianni and Marinis (2011) further report that external factors influencing students' vocabulary learning are environmental factors, parents' level of education, use of English at home, amount of language input, and L2 proficiency of the parents. Bae Son (2001) provides another way to teach vocabulary by involving CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning). CALL can also be used as an effective way of teaching vocabulary for the sake of implicit and explicit learning of vocabulary and comprehension.

To sum up, learning English is crucial for getting information and socializing with others, especially those that speak other languages. It is for this reason that administering English vocabulary is demanded. The emotional feelings of the students should be noted since they will determine the success or failure of learning itself. In fact, many students still find it difficult to learn vocabulary. This is the reason why the researcher is interested in investigating the factors that influence difficulties faced by elementary students in learning English vocabulary. These factors involve both internal and external ones.

Vocabulary Learning

In the 1950s, many people began to notice that vocabulary learning is not a simple matter. It is not simply a matter of learning that a certain word in one language means the same as a word in another language. Much more needs to be learned, and there are so many materials that could not be covered in the classroom (Allen, 1983, p. 2). According to Allen (1983) "There are some words that are familiar to people, young people especially, that are being learned without any teaching, explanation, or even drill from the teacher" (p. 7). The examples of the words are 'cowboy' and 'rock star' since children often see movies on television. In this way, it can make it easier for them to memorize. On the other hand, there are words that have been explained or taught by teachers, but students still cannot comprehend them as well as words like 'cowboy' and 'rock star'. Thus, the question of how to make vocabulary seem as familiar to children as words like 'cowboy' and 'rock star' is an important one (Allen, 1983, p. 8). Chung and Nation

(2003) also proposes the idea that we should be knowledgeable in helping learners to notice and learn technical vocabulary items. As stated by Thornbury (2002), "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing could be conveyed."

One way to do so is by presenting a vocabulary lesson in a textbook; for example, explaining persons and things in the classroom like the words *boy, girl, book, pencil, window, and door*. It is so important for the first stage learners to know this basic vocabulary since the meanings can easily be made clear. *Windows, walls, desks, and doors* are the things that students can see and touch. A research study, conducted by some of the vocabulary experts, proclaims that involving the senses in the learning process will be successful (Allen, 1983, p. 9). From this statement, the question that arises is *how can we create a similar type of same atmosphere for teaching vocabulary outside the classroom?* Vocabulary lesson for the first stage or beginner uses three ways to show the meaning of words:

1. Pictures
2. Explanations in the students' own language
3. Definitions in simple English, using vocabulary that students already know

The real object is important but if it cannot be acquired, the Audio Visual Aids of pictures, explanation in the students own language, and the defined simple English will have fulfilled the needs of children in learning vocabulary for the first stage. It is supported by Decarrico (2001), who believes that vocabulary learning strategies help students in finding out the meaning of new words and consolidating them once they have been understood.

Factors Influencing Difficulties in Vocabulary Learning

Nyikos & Fan (2007) argue that vocabulary learning is influenced by learner's level of proficiency, individual variation and gender, strategy development and proficiency, and the learning environment. The next section provides an in-depth discussion of the internal and external factors that influence students' vocabulary learning.

Internal Factors

Internal factors concern the intrinsic characteristics of students that can play an important role in learning an English vocabulary. According to Felix (1977, as cited in Leontiev & James, 1981), "Students are the most important factor in learning an English vocabulary" (p. 133). Some of these characteristics are age, motivation, behavior, and so forth. Regarding age, the way of learning for teenage students will be different from adults, so the teachers must be aware of this difference. Young children tend to have limited attention spans, whereas adults tend to pay attention longer to the lesson. Another factor is students' motivation. Strongly motivated students will likely achieve better grades than non-motivated students. It is the job of the teachers to give appropriate

stimulus input so that the non-motivated students will develop the spirit to learn. Considering the students' behaviour, teachers must also know whether the students are diligent enough in reviewing the material, since memorizing vocabulary is essential for them to develop their ability in mastering English. In this study, the researcher aims to identify whether these phenomena occur in elementary school students in Salatiga, Indonesia.

External Factors

External factors are factors outside students that influence them in learning English vocabulary. Those are:

a. Time

Felix (1977, as cited in Leontiev & James, 1981, p. 150) stated that, "Time is the key word in determining what level students can achieve." How many hours there are in a day and using the proper learning materials can determine the measurement of the students' progress. If there is limited time, it is the job of the teachers to make a summary and teach students the most important material within the time allocated. It might happen that due to examinations, teachers only give exercises which are actually beyond the material being prepared. Because of the emphasis on grades, students tend to be lacking in theoretical material. Accordingly, teachers only focus on achievement and neglect the process of language learning.

b. Frequency of Learners' Contact with the Language

A more significant factor in addition to time, according to Felix (1977, as cited in Leontiev & James, 1981, p. 175), is the frequency of the learners' contact with the language. This means that regardless of the time available, the teaching and learning process should be effective as it is exposure or contact with the language that is the more important factor. If it is a short period of time, but with the right objectives, the result will be likely better than learning over a long period of time with the wrong objectives set.

c. The Number of Students in the Classroom

Felix (1977, as cited in Leontiev & James, 1981, p. 190) also add that, "The number of students in the classroom will play a significant role." Research has shown that classes with fewer students are more beneficial to learning than classes with larger numbers of students. The teachers can recognize the students easily and the material will likely be taught more effectively when the class size is relatively small.

This research aims to establish the internal and external factors that influence difficulties in learning English vocabulary and their significance toward the students' English vocabulary learning. This research focuses on factors influencing difficulties in learning English vocabulary faced by third grade elementary students at Marsudirini 77

Salatiga school. Chujo (2005) emphasizes how vocabulary size, text lengths, and sample size affect the stability of text coverage and define relevant parameters. In this case, a teacher should not place sole attention on internal and external factors; they should also focus on the forms and face validity of the vocabulary lesson itself.

Children are taught English vocabulary at school. However, they still find it hard to learn. There are so many factors influencing these difficulties that they need to be analyzed deeper. The causes of the difficulties can be from the students themselves or from the external factors, such as the teacher or the educational environment. This study aims to find out the difficult factors that hinder elementary students in learning English vocabulary. Children, especially elementary students, need to be introduced to basic vocabulary with the right guidance from educators. It is so important since vocabulary is a vital part of communicating well in English. By knowing the different factors that impede elementary students in learning English vocabulary, it is anticipated that educators can address the difficult factors and help students more effectively learn English vocabulary.

Method

The participants were third grade elementary school students of Marsudirini 77 Salatiga, who are still learning English vocabulary at the basic level. One class took part, consisting of 43 students. To address the research objectives of the study the following instruments were used:

1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to get detailed information about each student regarding their difficulties in learning English vocabulary.

2. Interview

This was designed to gather information regarding the difficulties in teaching English vocabulary from the teachers' perspectives. Only one teacher was interviewed since most elementary schools in Indonesia have only one teacher per class.

Afterwards, the writer correlated external and internal factors to the students' grade using Pearson Correlation.

Findings and Discussion

After being calculated, the writer copied them in SPSS program and processed it with Pearson Correlation with the following results:

1. Item A is for the internal factors that influence the difficulties in vocabulary learning. There is a significant positive correlation between the internal factors and the students' vocabulary grade [$r = .388$, $p = .028$]. In short, the more
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students have problems in the internal factors, the more they have problems in their vocabulary test.

2. The second item, B, consists of external factors (vocabulary difficulties), which is positively correlated to the students' grade. The result was significant, $p=0.048$ ($0.048<0.05$). In this case, this suggests that the less difficulty students face, the better grade they will get.
3. Item C is the second external factor that is the concrete and abstract vocabularies. It is also correlated to the students' grade and the result is positively significant, $P=0.027$ ($0.027<0.05$). If the students learn concrete vocabularies, they will get better marks in vocabulary tests, whereas if they learn abstract ones, students will get lower marks.
4. The next item is the third external factor that is the number of students in the classroom. It is exactly the same as the standard of p (probability), that is 0.05 ($0.05=0.05$), but it is still considered significant. To sum up, the fewer students in the classroom, the better grade they are likely to get. On the other hand, the bigger number of students in the classroom, the lower grade they tend to get.
5. The last external factor is the Educational Environment. It is also positively correlated to students' grade and the $p=0.048$. It is still considered significant since $0.048<0.050$. If the educational environment, like the teacher, is supportive enough, the better grade students will get.
6. The writer also correlates both the external and the internal factors to students' grade. As a result, the writer combines both of the factors and get the result of $p=0.00$. This is positively significant indeed because both of the factors really influence the difficulties of vocabulary learning of the third grade of Marsudirini 77 Elementary School. The conclusion is that the fewer students find difficulties in terms of external and internal factors, the better grade they will get.

In addition, based on the questionnaire distributed to the students, the writer found the following:

- A.** Internal factors relate to the intrinsic motivation of the students. This consists of:
- Students' desire to learn English
Some students like to learn English; others do not
 - Students' limited attention span/concentration
Many students could not concentrate fully on the lesson. It is understandable since they are still 9 years old; as a result, the teacher needs to be more creative in the teaching and learning process.
 - Students' willingness to get a good grade
Some students admit that they are trying hard to get good grade since their parents will give them rewards.

Furthermore, based on the interview with the teacher, the writer found the following:

- B.** External factors that influence students' learning vocabulary are:
- Concrete/abstract vocabulary

The teacher identified that the students found it hard when they had to understand abstract vocabulary. That is why the teacher needs to explain it in simple words, or by demonstrating with a miniature. For things that the students could touch and see (concrete vocabulary), they understood the concepts much more easily.

- The number of students in the classroom

The teacher admitted that having a large number of students in the classroom made him frustrated since students were noisy, difficult to handle, and had limited attention spans.

Conclusions

The conclusions from the results above is that there are both internal and external factors that influence difficulties in vocabulary learning; both correlate to the students' grade. If their difficulties in learning English is not significant, automatically their grade will be high. On the other hand, if students find difficulties more often, their grade will be lower. Both have positive correlations to the students' grade on English vocabulary testing.

Getting involved in education is very demanding. Every person needs education and educators need to provide proper guidance in the teaching and learning process. The world of education needs teachers who are aware of the difficulties faced by their students in learning something; in this case, English vocabulary. We need to know what factors hamper students in learning English vocabulary and hope that the teachers can minimize these difficulties. That is why paying attention to the students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary is worth doing. It is recommended that similar studies are conducted to determine whether there are other factors apart from motivation and the educational environment that influence students' vocabulary learning. Similar studies need to be conducted to know all factors that influence difficulties in learning English vocabulary and their influence on the students' grade of vocabulary English testing for the sake of knowledge contributions in applied linguistics.

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