



Improving The Mastery Of English Vocabulary of Grade X Students Through The Application Of Word Chain Games At Ma Muhammadiyah Unggulan Gorontalo

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to use Word Chain game in MA Muhammadiyah Unggulan Kota Gorontalo to improve vocabulary mastery of grade X students in English. The background of this study is the low ability of students in mastering vocabulary, which has an impact on other language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This study conducted descriptive qualitative research using observation, interview, and documentation as data collection methods. Word Chain game is an interactive learning approach designed to encourage students to be more actively involved in the learning process. The results show that the use of Word Chain can increase students' interest and desire to learn and strengthen their vocabulary mastery in a fun and meaningful situation. This strategy also makes the classroom a healthy place to cooperate and compete. Therefore, the Word Chain game can be used as an effective alternative learning strategy in teaching English at the secondary school level.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition, English language learning, Word Chain, learning strategy, educational game

A. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary development is very important for English language teaching. Students often face problems in understanding the four skills, viz: reading, writing, speaking, and listening if they do not have a strong vocabulary. Initial observations conducted on grade X students at MAS Muhammadiyah Unggulan Kota Gorontalo showed that most students have difficulty in mastering vocabulary. This is shown by their inability to understand the texts they read, to make sentences, and to participate actively in classroom learning activities.

One of the main factors causing this problem is students' low intrinsic motivation and lack of interest in learning new vocabulary and phrases. In addition, the use of monotonous and teacher-centered educational approaches also hinders students' participation. Therefore, to

encourage active learning and increase students' participation in vocabulary, innovative and interactive teaching strategies should be implemented.

The use of educational games, interactive digital technology and collaborative activities that allow students to learn contextually and meaningfully is one example of this approach. Vocabulary-based game activities such as Word Chain can make learning more fun and encouraging. This method increases students' confidence in using English actively and improves their vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, changing the learning approach to be more innovative and engaging is an important step to overcome the challenges in vocabulary learning in the classroom.

The use of educational games such as Word Chain is an alternative solution. This game encourages students to name or explain new vocabulary that starts with the last letter of the previous word in the game. This activity not only improves language skills but also makes learning more fun and competitive. Students can learn vocabulary in a more useful, collaborative and engaging context through the Word Chain game.

Based on these findings, the researcher intends to apply the Word Chain game in the English learning process to improve vocabulary acquisition and grammatical understanding of grade X students at MAS Muhammadiyah Unggulan Kota Gorontalo.

Through the implementation of this strategy, the researcher hopes to create a more dynamic, participatory and fun learning atmosphere. The Word Chain game can help facilitate context-based learning and collaboration, which in turn can increase students' cognitive engagement in the active and appropriate use of vocabulary. Besides that, the competitive and interactive elements of the game are also expected to trigger students' intrinsic motivation to be more enthusiastic in learning English.

This study looks at how the Word Chain game works to improve students' vocabulary and understanding of grammatical structures. Using this method, data will be collected through pre-test and post-test, classroom observation, and questionnaire to measure students' perception of learning. The results of this study are expected to provide empirical contributions to the development of more innovative English teaching approaches. They can also be an alternative solution to the problem of students' low engagement and motivation in vocabulary learning.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary acquisition is essential for English language learning as it shapes reading, writing, listening and speaking skills (Nation, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002). However, student engagement and lack of motivation are often the main obstacles in the process (Dörnyei, 2001). Teachers are crucial in making the learning environment interesting by using interactive and fun methods (Brown, 2007). Educational games, which have been shown to increase students' participation, motivation and language skills, are one effective approach (Wright et al., 2006; Hadfield, 1999). One type of linguistic game called "Chain of Words" requires students to express a word based on the last letter of the previous word. This helps students expand their vocabulary and improve their ability for creative thinking and quick response (Pinter, 2006; Sari & Rahmawati, 2020). This method follows a learning model.

Previous research shows that games significantly improve vocabulary acquisition, especially when combined with a collaborative approach and a positive competitive atmosphere in the classroom (Astuti, 2019; Sari & Rahmawati, 2020). Students learn to use contextualized vocabulary through the Word Chain game. In addition, meaningful repetition improves long-term memory. Learning with this activity can reduce boredom arising from conventional learning approaches and make learning more lively and fun. Therefore, this study is important to empirically test whether Word Chain game is effective to improve students' vocabulary acquisition and grammatical comprehension, especially at the senior high school level in Indonesian education. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to building innovative and practical English learning strategies.

C. METHODS

1. Research Approach and Type

This research method is a descriptive qualitative approach. The purpose of this study is to thoroughly explain how the Word Chain game helps students learn English, specifically how the game improves their vocabulary and grammatical understanding. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to interact directly with the research subject and understand the phenomenon contextually and thoroughly.

2. Subjects and Research Location

The subjects in this study were grade X students at MAS Muhammadiyah Unggulan Gorontalo City in the academic year 2024/2025. The selection of subjects was done by purposive sampling, by choosing one class that has characteristics relevant to the research focus. In addition to the students, the English teacher in the class was also involved as a supporting informant to obtain a pedagogical point of view.

3. Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

The following are some of the methods used to collect data:

- a. Participatory observation: The researcher directly observed the learning process in the classroom when the Word Chain game was applied. The focus of observation includes student engagement, interaction between students, and response to vocabulary and grammar materials.
- b. Semi-structured interviews: Conducted with the teacher and some selected students to explore their perceptions on the effectiveness of using the game in English language learning.
- c. Documentation: The researcher collected supporting documents such as lesson plans, students' assignments, and teachers' notes during the learning process.

4. Research Procedure

The research was conducted in several stages:

- a. Preparation: Including the preparation of observation instruments and interview guidelines, as well as coordination with schools and teachers.
- b. Implementation: The researcher was involved in learning activities in the classroom for several meetings when the Word Chain game was used.
- c. Data collection: Conducted simultaneously during learning, including recording of observations, documentation, and interviews.
- d. Data analysis: Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques based on the Miles and Huberman (1994) model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.
- e. Preparation of research report: Compiling a narrative based on the main findings in the learning process.

5. Data Validity

The researcher compared data from observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure data validity. In addition, member checking with teachers and students to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in accordance with what they experienced.

To obtain feedback and improve the objectivity of the analysis, the researcher also used peer debriefing, which is discussing preliminary findings with colleagues to obtain feedback and strengthen the objectivity of the analysis. With this step, the researcher sought to reduce the potential for personal bias and ensure that the data generated was completely accurate. Validity was further strengthened through an audit trail, where the entire process of data collection and analysis was systematically documented so that it could be traced and evaluated by other parties.

D. DISCUSSION

The results showed that grade X students at MA Muhammadiyah Unggulan Kota Gorontalo could improve their vocabulary mastery by using Word Chain game when learning English. This is in accordance with learning theory which states that interactive and fun learning approaches can increase students' desire to learn, which has a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

The Word Chain game is an active and challenging way to learn. Students have to find related words in chains. Students are directly involved in the process of remembering and understanding new vocabulary that has been taught previously through this activity. Therefore, students not only learn new vocabulary independently, but they also learn to use it in a dynamic context.

Besides that, using this game can help students overcome the problem of boredom and saturation that they often experience when learning monotonous English. The success of using this method is highly dependent on students' activeness and enthusiasm in playing Word Chain. Students seem more courageous in using new vocabulary without worrying about being wrong, which is one of the common obstacles in foreign language learning.

However, the role of the teacher as a facilitator, who must be able to organize the game to focus on the learning objectives, also affects the success of using this game. In addition, the teacher must ensure that the

vocabulary used in the game is appropriate for the students' abilities and the learning materials they are studying.

Despite the fact that the results of this study showed that students' vocabulary acquisition improved, there are some issues that need to be considered. These include differences in students' abilities, which may hinder students' active participation or prevent them from finding the right word for the game. To ensure that all students follow the game well, additional strategies are needed, such as providing word examples gradually and dividing the groups equally.

Overall, this study confirms that innovative and fun learning techniques, such as the Word Chain game, can be an effective solution in improving students' vocabulary acquisition, as well as increasing their interest and motivation in learning English. It also indicates the need to develop creative learning methods that accommodate students' needs in the language learning process.

Furthermore, the findings support the importance of participatory and contextualized learning approaches, where students are actively involved in the learning process and not just passively receiving information. Activities such as Word Chain enhance a more dynamic and collaborative classroom atmosphere by allowing students to learn through play. Therefore, teachers are expected to continue to explore and implement adaptive learning strategies, in accordance with student characteristics and 21st century learning challenges.

Thus, the use of game-based learning strategies not only contributes to the achievement of cognitive aspects, but also forms a learning environment that supports students' affective and social aspects. Approaches such as Word Chain allow for meaningful learning through interaction, collaboration and active engagement, which directly drives improved learning outcomes. Therefore, it is important for language education educators and practitioners to continue to explore and apply creative and contextualized methods in teaching, in order to create learning experiences that are adaptive to students' learning styles and 21st century learning challenges.



Picture when giving Word Chain game

E. CONCLUSION

Overall, this discussion confirms that innovative and fun learning methods, such as the Word Chain game, can be an effective solution in improving students' vocabulary acquisition, as well as increasing their interest and motivation to learn English. It also indicates the need to develop creative learning methods that accommodate students' needs in the language learning process. Thus, the use of game-based learning strategies not only contributes to the achievement of cognitive aspects, but also forms a learning environment that supports students' affective and social aspects. An approach such as Word Chain allows for meaningful learning through interaction, collaboration and active engagement, which directly promotes improved learning outcomes.

Therefore, it is imperative for language educators and teachers to continuously explore and implement creative and contextualized teaching approaches. The aim is to make students have learning experiences that suit their learning styles and the challenges of 21st century learning.

This kind of method is not only useful in English learning; it can also be applied to various subjects that demand students' active participation. Teachers should be facilitators who are able to design student-centered learning and oriented towards authentic learning experiences along with technological advances and changes in student characteristics. Activity-based, collaborative and communicative methods such as educational games can build an inclusive, engaging and sustainable learning environment. Therefore, to improve the quality of education, especially in the acquisition of language skills, which is crucial to face global competition, research and innovation in teaching strategies should be continuously encouraged.

Such an approach is not only relevant in the context of English language learning, but can also be applied to a variety of subjects that demand active student participation. Teachers must be facilitators who are able to design student-centered learning and oriented towards authentic learning experiences along with technological advances and changes in student characteristics. Activity-based, collaborative and communicative methods such as educational games can build an inclusive, engaging and sustainable learning environment. Therefore, to improve the quality of education, especially in the mastery of language skills, which is very important to face global competition.

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