

PROMOTING BLENDED LEARNING IN VOCABULARY TEACHING THROUGH WHATSAPP

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Abstract

Notwithstanding some non-English speaking countries' curriculum has changed over time, the students' vocabulary acquisition remains pathetic. The evidence of the plight of students' mastery on vocabulary can be easily and obviously found on their daily basis activity of English learning. Teachers are encouraged to employ various approaches, methods, or strategies to meet the goal of the improvement of pupils' vocabulary. This article suggests an idea of how to develop it through blended learning by employing WhatsApp. WhatsApp has now been ubiquitous application attached in students' smartphone which brings through students and teachers to be connected anytime and anywhere. The utilization of WhatsApp in language teaching is believed to prompt learners' motivation which in the end will lead them to learn vocabulary effectively.

Keywords: *blended learning, vocabulary, WhatsApp*

Abstrak

Meskipun beberapa negara yang tidak berbicara bahasa Inggris telah merubah kurikulumnya dari waktu ke waktu, pemerolehan kosakata siswa masih tetap menyedihkan. Bukti keadaan memilukan dari lemahnya penguasaan kosakata siswa tersebut dapat dengan mudah ditemukan dalam kegiatan keseharian pembelajaran bahasa Inggris mereka. Guru didorong untuk menerapkan berbagai macam pendekatan, metode atau strategi untuk memenuhi tujuan meningkatkan kosakata siswa. Artikel ini mengusulkan ide bagaimana mengembangkan kosakata melalui pembelajaran campuran atau blended learning dengan menggunakan WhatsApp. Aplikasi ini sekarang telah merajalela dan tersemat pada ponsel pintar siswa yang mampu menghubungkan siswa dan guru kapanpun dan dimanapun. Penggunaan WhatsApp dalam pembelajaran bahasa dipercaya mampu mendorong motivasi siswa yang mana pada akhirnya akan membuat mereka belajar kosakata secara efektif.

Keywords: *blended learning, kosakata, WhatsApp*

Introduction

Blended learning has become a trend in education, particularly language teaching. It enables teachers and students to learn a lesson both inside and outside of classroom. It is a ‘multimedia technology, CD ROM video streaming, virtual classroom, voicemail, email, conference call, online text animation or video-streaming’ which is ‘combined with traditional forms of classroom training and one-to-one coaching’ (Thorne, 2003: 16-17). Through blended learning, students do not only study when they are at school environment but also at home or somewhere else.

Vocabulary inevitably prescribes the successful key of learning a foreign language. All four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, consist of and involve bundle of words which make up a unity of meaning. Anyone who possesses big storage of vocabularies surely outperforms the one who has less. Unfortunately, students of non-English speaking country are destitute in terms of vocabulary mastery. They get difficulty to understand information as well as to deliver it. Consequently, the majority of them are left in taking up global chance or challenge since they still do struggle on language matter meanwhile others have no problem on it.

WhatsApp (hereafter WA) has come into existence recently as the most used application at user’s smartphone or personal

computer. It connects everyone either in personal or group in the exact and real time. Almost all teachers or students have now operated the application in their every single day with the very high frequency of use. It has been a trend now in society that people do communication through WA. This situation should be deemed as a great chance to propel the implementation of blended learning in classroom.

The ability of WA to connect a teacher and a group of students everywhere and every time opens possibilities for teachers and students to learn English language skills including vocabulary. This article will depict the importance of learning vocabulary, the presence of WA in modern days as well as its use in language teaching. In the last section, this article will provide some steps of how to use WA in vocabulary teaching.

Vocabulary: Its Importance and How to Teach It

“If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh” (Harmer, 1991:153). This is to show how essential the existence of vocabulary in building a language. Besides, it can also be said that vocabulary is the most important part of a language. In line with Harmer, Sadenova et al. (2017) asserted that vocabulary is one of language foundations. The stronger the foundation, the better the language someone has. It is no wonder that a student who masters

thousands of word could communicate in spoken or written form very well.

Many realize that second language acquisition is closely related to vocabulary acquisition. Acquiring vocabulary determines the success of second language use and plays vital role of forming spoken or written text (Maximo, 2000; Nation, 2001; Schmit, 2000). Many ways are available to increase the amount of memorized words. Second language acquirers commonly do not bring grammar books but dictionary to master a language (Krashen, 1981). They simply tend to improve their bulk of vocabularies through memorizing by using it. Some people speak or read as much as they can with the purpose of raising their vocabulary.

Rationally, the four language elements are made up of words which people call as vocabulary. In listening, the skill of catching any words spoken by someone or played by an audible media is the successful key. However, someone must have enough vocabulary to do so. In speaking, a student can communicate with others when he has all vocabularies he needs in the communication. It will be hard for anyone to speak with others when he or she has very little vocabulary. In reading, it is obvious that vocabulary appoints one's comprehension. He may get misunderstanding or misconception when he cannot translate the text accurately. Lastly, people may write easily when they have many vocabularies.

For those reasons, teaching or learning vocabulary becomes essential as to get perfection in foreign language mastery.

Teacher and learner are facing real significance and complexity of vocabulary learning (Elekaei et al., 2015). Thus, teaching vocabulary should be best done through a certain method or strategy. A foreign language teacher should have innovative way in doing so (Hadi, 2017). The method or strategy a teacher uses finally determines the success of a learner. Pupils are so motivated when they are led in various ways of learning something so that they could receive materials in comfortable way.

Research on vocabulary teaching recently provide a reference that teacher may consider before being implemented in classroom setting. Damhuis et al. (2016) investigated the the effect of adaptive word retrieval intervention children's vocabulary acquisition in kindergarten level. The result showed that the activity could encourage higher learning gains of the target words. Hassinger-Das et al. (2016) examined the impact of combination of shared book reading and gameplay on preschooler's vocabulary knowledge. The finding revealed that the treatment could improve learner's vocabulary. Similar research has been conducted by Wahyuni & Safei (2016) on the use of Action Bingo game to elementary students. The result denoted that the game could increase students' motivation and eased them to understand the meaning of each verb in English. Lin & Hsu (2013) examined the effects of hierarchy vocabulary exercises on elementary students' vocabulary acquisition. The finding of the research revealed that the activity could

increase vocabulary gains. Another finding denoted that it could also improve reading comprehension.

There are quite lot of evidences that teaching vocabulary should be practiced through a certain design involving particular method or strategy. The research done by some scholars above bring positive result into the practice. Teachers or educators are strongly encouraged to widen their knowledge on how to teach vocabulary prior to the practice.

WhatsApp in Education, ELT, and Vocabulary Teaching

WhatsApp is “a cross-platform instant messaging application for smartphones. It enables users to send and receive location information, images, video, audio and text messages in real-time to individuals and groups of friends at no cost” (Church & de Oliveira, 2013:352). People just need internet connection to operate it. The user of WA gains increasing from time to time. The advent of WA outperforms Short Message Service (SMS) as the king of messaging service. This is due to the extraordinary features that WA has particularly for its real-time speed.

As indicated before, WA has capability to send message, picture, audio, and video from one person to another or group. This feature enables some users to be in one group where they may share everything. Through this feature as well a teacher and a group of students which is usually consisted of

one class can join in an activity. It opens a chance that a classroom activity or language study through WA out of school time may take place. A teacher can easily control the activity for he just needs to open his WA anytime and anywhere. In addition, dealing with education matter, WA has provided a service of sending documents in the form of word, excel, or pdf. Thus, a teacher or student may send some documents required in a teaching learning activity.

Research on the use of WA in educational setting has gained popularity recently. Güler (2017) investigated the use of WA as assessment tool in higher education. The application was used as anonymous and non-anonymous peer assessment tool. Two groups were created; anonymous and non-anonymous group. The anonymous group used the personal messaging of WA for assessment, while in doing so the non-anonymous group used the group chat of WA. It was confirmed that WA was a valid peer assessment tool for such assessment required the anonymity of a method. Aljaad (2017) investigated the use of WA for educational usage particularly female students in Saudi Arabia. As many 122 female students of a certain university were given questionnaire. The result denoted that the most useful values of WA for female students were curriculum development, students' club activation, and scientific research use. Nitza & Roman (2016:255) examined the use of WA messaging in academia. The study found that WA served “for communicating with students, nurturing a social atmosphere in the

classroom, forming dialogue and collaborations between students and as a means of learning". The research further investigated whether the use of WA could improve students' writing of seminar paper. The finding revealed that WA has strong effect on students' achievements in writing paper of seminar.

In English language teaching (ELT), research on the use of WA has also been conducted by some scholars lately. Zayed (2016) designed some activities that possible to use in ELT such as writing the names of given emoticons and smileys, reading a given topic or situation then discussing it in a group, giving equivalent proverbs in students' native language from a given proverbs in English, and still many more. Fattah (2015) examined the effectiveness of WA in improving students' writing skill. Experimental and control group were created. The experimental group used WA to develop their skill of writing while the control group used prescribed book. The result showed that the experimental group outperformed the control one after a post-test.

In the teaching of vocabulary, some scholars used WA as a tool to conduct the activity. Shahbaz & Khan (2017) examined the effectiveness of the use of mobile application, particularly WA, to teach 40 phrases of English. They divided students into experimental and control group. The result revealed that students who received treatment using WA got significant higher score than those who learned through conventional

method. Similar studies have been conducted by Hassan Taj et al. (2017), Jafari & Chalak (2016), and Ashiyan & Salehi (2016). All of them found that WA is effective to use in vocabulary teaching.

WhatsApp in the Teaching of Vocabulary

The background of theories and research based evidence of WA as well as its use in the teaching of vocabulary open a possibility of employing it in the venture of teaching vocabulary. As indicated before, this article is going to provide an idea of how to use WA in the teaching of English vocabulary.

Prior to the implementation, a teacher should create a WA chat group consisting of him or her and students from the same class. The teacher then may follow the following steps:

- Make a list of words in which latter students will learn three words each day. The words created are better in the form of various parts of speech, i.e. verb, adjective, noun, etc.
- When students are not at school environment anymore, upload the three words to the WA group.
- Ask the students to make three sentences based on the words.
- Get the students to discuss peers' sentences if any mistakes are made.

The role of the teacher in this activity is mainly to do supervision and assessment.

Supervision is absolutely required in this activity since the program might not run well when there is no supervision from the teacher. Assessment is also needed since students would be so motivated when they know that what they are doing is assessed. Both teachers' roles are believed to keep the program run effectively.

Giving time limitation to make the words into some sentences in WA chat group is strongly encouraged so that when there is a student who does not upload yet till the given time, the teacher can remind him or her directly. The teacher may also remind anyone who uploads anything out of the track. While the assessment can be done through observing students' liveliness in uploading the words and also how well they make the words into sentences. The teacher had better give comment when students' comments are misleading.

Conclusion

This article is an effort to explore the possibility of the use of WA in the teaching of vocabulary. The concept of WA as well as their evidence in research have been presented as foundation before heading to the proposed activity. Teaching vocabulary should be done through a certain strategy for a maximum output. This article has provided the way how to teach vocabulary through the employment of WA. Teacher or educator may take advantage of this article and implement it into their real classroom activity.

Prior to the implementation of the activity, teacher should prepare all required stuffs well. During the treatment, supervision and assessment should be done for it determines the success of the activity. The activity should not run only for one or two months, but as long as the teacher teaches in the classroom where the certain students are there.

This article opens a possibility for any researcher to do further investigation particularly on the effectiveness of the utilization of WA in vocabulary teaching. The future research is suggested to examine the advantages and disadvantages of the activity. This article also suggests an investigation of the use of WA and in the teaching of grammar or writing.

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