

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DISCOVERY-DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE IN VOCABULARY TEACHING. AN EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH IN INTERMEDIATE-TWO LEVEL CONVERSATION PROGRAM

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## Abstract

The objective of this research is to find out whether or not the combination of discussion and discovery technique gives better effect to the students' vocabulary mastery than that of vocabulary-drill discussion technique. Based on review of related theories, the proposed hypothesis of this research is as follows: The use of discovery-discussion technique gives a positive and significant effect in improving intermediate-two level students' vocabulary mastery better than that of vocabulary-drill discussion one. The population of this research is all intermediate-two level students of Conversation Program at *Global Lingua English* course Tegal. For the purpose of this research, I randomly took eighteen out of fifty-five students as the research sample which were then grouped into two groups (with equal number of students in each group), the experimental group and the control group. I used vocabulary tests in the form of multiple choice with four options as the research instrument. The analysis of the data is done using t-test. And from the computation using SPSS, it shows that the result of t-test is 2.645 while t-table with degree of freedom (d.f) is 16 in the level of significance of 5% is 1.745. Thus,  $H_a$  is accepted and  $H_o$  is rejected because  $t_{\text{ratio}}$  is higher than  $t_{\text{table}}$  ( $2.645 > 1.745$ ). Based on the result of the above analysis, it can be inferred that the discovery-discussion technique does give better and more significant effect than the vocabulary-drill discussion one in improving intermediate – two students' vocabulary mastery in a conversation class.

**Key Words:** Intermediate-two level, vocabulary mastery, Discovery-Discussion combination technique, conversation class

## INTRODUCTION

Of four language skills –listening, speaking, reading, and writing, speaking is seemingly the one that many English learners in Indonesia find it the most difficult. Most of them say that their problems in English speaking lie in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary as well as teacher's bad competence (Untoro:1995). Teachers' incompetence problem refers to unprofessional teachers who have no good linguistic knowledge and teaching competence, whereas the first three problems – poor grammar, pronunciation, and lack of vocabulary- occur because of the very different nature of English compared to the students'

mother tongue. In fact, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary altogether are the language components which are really needed to make someone have good language skills. However, vocabulary should likely be given the first priority because, as Dardiri (1993) states, "it is possible to communicate without the knowledge of grammar but it becomes unthinkable to do it without the recognized vocabulary".

Referring to the above paragraph, I would like to highlight two of the learners' problems in speaking; 1) students' lack of vocabulary and, 2) teachers' teaching competence. These two points interest me to conduct a research on how

to improve students' vocabulary so that their speaking ability is also improved. The first thing comes in my mind is what teaching techniques are theoretically appropriate to be applied in teaching vocabulary and speaking, from which it leads me to the various kinds of teaching technique as proposed by Harmer (1991:122), they are discussion, simulation, communicative games, problem solving activities, role play, as the techniques in teaching speaking, presentation techniques,-which include Realia, Pictures, Contrast, Enumeration, Explanation, Translation-, and discovery techniques, -which include Matching words with picture and Completing vocabulary network-, as the techniques in teaching vocabulary.

Among the above discussed techniques, I am interested in doing an experiment of applying a combination of discovery and discussion techniques, which is later called "discovery-discussion technique" (Harmer. 1991: 123) to improve students'vocabulary mastery in a speaking class. The term discovery-discussion technique means a teaching technique in which the students are given activity of discovery as the way to introduce new language before the discussion phase, and after the discussion (to recall the words they have used during the discussion). My reasons for choosing this technique are because: (1) it stimulates the students to speak English, (2) Students really practice the language for communication, (3) it makes it possible for students to help each other to correct their own mistakes (Helgesen.2001).

The discovery-discussion technique is also said to be best applied to students who have relatively adequate knowledge of English (Tarigan.1988) and conducted in a small class. Hence, I choose an informal education/English course as my research place, where speaking classes or it is usually called 'conversation program / class are available and the

number of students in one class is usually less than 15 (small class). The research subjects I choose are students sitting in intermediate-two level because they are supposed to have adequate knowledge of English (National Education Dept:1988) from which this will meet the conditions of applying discovery-discussion technique.

Based on the background, the identification and the limitation of the problem, the problems can be formulated into this following question. Does the discussion-discovery technique in conversation classes of a private English course have better effect than vocabulary-drill discussion technique in improving intermediate-two students' vocabulary mastery?

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **Nature of 'Intermediate-level' Vocabulary**

In *Petunjuk Teknis Pelaksanaan Kursus* (Curriculum) of the English Course by the Central Java Regional Office of the Department of Education, it is said that students in Intermediate level should possess 3,500 English words. This number of English words is relevant to what Waring (2001) says that English learners need about 3,000 "word families" to be good at English.(A word family is a group of words that share the same meaning such as *help, helping, helped, helpless*, etc).

Waring (2001) further says that in terms of Speaking, an English learner who acquires 3,000 word families can do "daily conversation with some ease, unpredictable conversation is difficult especially abstract topics, may feel lost especially when listening to a natives' conversation, constant need to ask for clarifications or to check one's understanding, collocation and idiomatic expression is a problem."

### **Techniques in Teaching Speaking and Vocabulary**

### ***Techniques in Teaching Speaking***

Basically, the techniques in teaching speaking are those which support the students to experience with the spoken language. Referring to this, Harmer (1991) suggests some techniques in teaching speaking such as discussion, simulation, communicative games, problem solving activities, simulation, and role play. "These activities are designed to provoke spoken communication between students and or between the teacher and the students" (Harmer, 1991:122).

Considering the nature of intermediate-level students in a conversation class of a private English course as my research subject and place (for example: students already have sufficient English words, and the conversation class is usually a small class), I prefer to choose discussion activity as a technique in teaching speaking.

### ***Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary***

Teaching vocabulary is clearly more than just presenting new words in a list and asking students to memorize them. Even, such a teaching means to make the words in isolation, whereas words are never found in isolation. They can not stand by themselves, but nearly always have partners that together form meanings in certain ways.

It is believed that learners will learn vocabulary well when they are actively involved in words learning and at different level of mental activity. If a learner just repeats a word over and over, the processing is quite shallow because it is just maintaining knowledge. Thus, writing the words again and again will result in little learning. Waring says that:

Learners should be trained to work with words deeply, by working with the collocates, looking at how the word is similar but different

from other words, by forming 'networks' of word relationships in their minds and not just keeping words in isolation (Waring:2001).

Extending the above explanation, Harmer (1991:161-163) says that a language learners must be given opportunities to notice new words for themselves, and made to correctly guess the meaning of these new words. They should also be given a chance to experiment with these new words in speaking; for only by experimenting they will know whether or not their learning is successful. Harmer further states that a teacher should try not just present the meaning of a word to a learner, but let him or her work it out for himself, with guidance only if necessary.

In order that the teaching of vocabulary doesn't end with the boring list memorization, let us take a look at some various vocabulary teaching techniques as suggested by Harmer (1991: 161-163):

- (1) Presentation and Explanation Techniques, the examples of them are: Realia, Pictures, Mime, Action, Gestures, Contrast, Enumeration., Explanation, and Translation.
- a. Discovery technique: Harmer states that discovery technique is a teaching technique in which "students are encouraged to work out rules and meanings for themselves rather than being given everything by the teacher" (Harmer: 1991:160). Some kinds of discovery technique: (a) **Matching the words with picture**. Students are asked to match the word (noun, adjective, preposition, etc) with the correct picture. This is usually given at elementary level; (b) **Completing vocabulary network**. Within this

technique, a teacher usually gives some general words and the students are asked to find the specific ones or other words related to the general ones. Various activities can be used here, among other written individual completion and discussion.

### ***Discovery-Discussion Technique***

As the name implied, it is a combination of a discussion technique used in teaching speaking and a discovery technique used in vocabulary teaching. The principle of using this combination technique is the students are given activity of discovery technique as the way to introduce a new language before the discussion phase, and after the discussion (to recall the words they have used during the discussion). In other words, the discovery activity is to put in pre-teaching and post teaching phases which refers to the vocabulary teaching, whereas discussion activity is the whilst teaching dealing with the teaching of speaking.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

An experiment research under descriptive-quantitative approach is the research method I use in this study because the purpose of this study is to find out the effect of a certain treatment given to an experiment group and compare it to a control group. It means that the empirical data is obtained by giving treatment to the experiment group, observing the teaching-learning process in both experiment and control groups, and from which the data is then measured and analyzed in the form of statistical and descriptive analysis.

The sample of my research is 18 students of intermediate-two level in conversation program at Global Lingua Tegal English Course that I took randomly from from 6 classes consisting of 55 students.

I use test, observation, and documentation to collect the data. The test that is used here is to test students' mastery on vocabulary, whereas observation is done to see the process of students' using English in the discussion, and documentation is used to seek for the topics of discussion which the students have discussed during time of their study. The result of this observation and documentation is explained descriptively. On the other hand, the result of vocabulary test is explained and analyzed in a statistical analysis as to meet the main objective of this research that is to find out whether there is significant and positive effect of the discovery-discussion technique on the students' vocabulary mastery

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### ***Application of Discovery-Discussion Combination Technique***

There are three times of treatments done in this experiment using this technique. Each treatment needs one and a half hour to complete. Here is the example of the treatment observation:

Treatment I (time allotment: 90 minutes)

Topic of discussion : " Dating"

*Phase 1. Discovery activity (15 minutes), aimed at introducing 'new language'.*

In this phase, the teacher grouped students in three groups of three (:buzz group). The grouping was based on the teacher's consideration that all members in a group were relatively close to each other. Then, students were introduced to new language by being given

a short-reader (which was made by the writer) to read. Here was the short reader:

*"I have a boyfriend. His name is Asep. I've been going out with him for about three months. My friends say that he is a sympathetic, awesome, and cool guy. Yesterday, he asked me out for dinner. It was a romantic dinner. He held my hands and caressed my hair gently while talking about engagement and marriage. Wow... don't you think it's too early?? After all, I love him very much. I want my love story ends up in a happy ending. I can't imagine if he breaks me up like what he did to Jamilah, my best friend."*

After the students read that short reader, the teacher wrote the *underlined words* and *word-group columns* on the whiteboard and asked the groups to match them. The results of this activity were: (1) words like *gorgeous*, *cool*, *sympathetic*, *awesome*, *handsome*, and the like, were put in the adjective column; (2) the words *to kiss*, *caress*, *hold*, *embrace*, *smile*, *go out with*, *break up with*, *shake hand*, were put in the verb column; (3) words like *tenderly*, *gently*, *nicely*, go into adverb column; (4) the words *engagement*, *marriage*, *happy ending* were in the noun column.

Then, students were asked to work together to find the meanings of these words by *guessing from the context* and confirmed them to the teacher (: *no dictionary allowed in this phase*). When all groups were done, the teacher told students that they would have a discussion with the topic of Dating.

*Phase 2. Discussion activity (60 minutes) aimed at encouraging students to practice speaking and develop their vocabulary*

The teacher explained what the students would do in the discussion. He asked all groups to choose the moderator whose main duty was to

lead the discussion (: but the moderator was also a member who was to give opinion as other members did). The guided questions (see chapter three: Material for treatment) to be discussed was given to each moderator. When all were ready, the teacher asked them to start the discussion. The teacher walked around the class to monitor the students' practicing their English. Students sometimes asked or confirmed to the teacher about the words they didn't know or were in doubt (such as the English words for: *pacaran jarak jauh*, *terlalu pilih-pilih*, *berdosa*, *kawin lari*, *dijodohkan*, *kawin paksa*, *terlalu menuntut*).

During the process of discussion, students seemed very enthusiastic, they practiced speaking in English without being afraid of making mistakes in grammar. Other members of the group also seemed not to find it necessary to correct mistakes like: "he *visit* me last Sunday". However, they often corrected the mistakes which they thought were bothering like those in pronoun (: should be *she* but *he*, *they* but *it*, *her* but *his*).

When there was a word or phrases they didn't know, they asked other members or asked the teacher, and right away used this 'new' word or phrase (: *some of the words were even 'new' for the teacher. In such a situation, he asked students to look up in the dictionary*). The writer also noticed that there were much 'laughs' and 'smiles' when they were involved in discussion, indicating that they were interested in the topic.

After around 35 minutes discussing in a group, the teacher asked each group to write the concluding remark of their discussion (the time given to do this was 5 minutes) which then was reported orally by group representatives within 5

minutes each (:didn't have to be the moderator, but could be any other members). The teacher gave his comment on students' report and performance.

*Phase 3. Discovery activity (20 minutes). Aimed at remembering the 'new words' they find and used in the discussion*

In this phase, students were told to keep working in a group of their own and asked each member of the groups to mention the new words he / she found and used in the previous discussion activity. These new words were grouped as noun, adjective, verb, and miscellaneous then written with its translation on a large *manila-paper* provided by the teacher. What were 'new' to one student might not be 'new' to some others; however, these words had to be written and considered as **new words**. After that, all groups were asked to put their new-words-written manila paper on the white board. The teacher mentioned all the words and asked students to repeat after him to make sure that they made proper pronunciation. The teacher then closed the class.

### ***Suitable Discussion-Topics for Intermediate-two Level***

Based on my observation and documentation, here are the topics that were successfully discussed in intermediate level and the categories:

Category 1. Topic the students are familiar with.

The topics included here are those that the students have known. And they might often discuss such topics in their mother tongue. Using this kind of topics, they seem to have more than sufficient ideas or opinion to express. For examples: ideal teacher, smoking is dangerous, What do you want to be?

Category 2. Topics about actual news

As adolescent, they are usually interested in keeping up with actual news. Then, it is good for a teacher to give the students such topics since they will stimulate students to discuss. Here are the examples:

Students demonstration

General Election

The mushrooming of political parties

Category 3. Controversial Topics

These topics are good to provoke students to come into discussion. Students in the intermediate-two level of English courses are usually adult learners who are assumed to have relatively high analytical and critical senses. They already have their views and opinions toward something and tend to defend what they think is right. They also want to comment on as well as criticize something. It is good for them to have topics or statements which are controversial. Here are the examples of them:

Man is stronger than woman

Woman should not be a president

State universities are better in quality than private ones.

### ***The Result of T-test***

From the computation using SPSS in Appendix 7, I find that the result of T-test is 2.645 while t-table with degree of freedom (d.f) = 16 in the level of significance 5 % is 1.745, thus  $H_a$  is accepted and  $H_o$  is rejected because  $t_{ratio}$  is higher than  $t_{table}$  (  $2.645 > 1.745$  ). It means that discovery-discussion technique in a conversation class gives better and significant effect than vocabulary-drill discussion one in improving intermediate – two students' vocabulary.

## CONCLUSION

Having known the result of the experiment, I have no doubt to say that discovery-discussion technique is one of the teaching techniques worth to be applied in the effort of improving the vocabulary mastery of intermediate-two students' of a conversation class in an English course. The reasons why it is so are based on the reasons concerning the students' characteristics and course objective, and also the advantages that this technique has.

The intermediate-two students of an English course are assumed to have good language competence, and they are in the level of functional practice level, and so they will not have difficulties in doing such an activity. Discovery-discussion technique is also a good medium for students to accomplish the purpose stated in English Curriculum for Intermediate-Two students of an English course. Within this technique, students will learn and develop new vocabulary through short-reader and discussion activity. In addition, this technique can make students really practice the language, stimulate them to speak, make them feel motivated to correct their own mistakes, make them feel comfortable to speak, and increase their self-confidence.

In conducting the discovery-discussion activity, the teacher should learn that suitable topics of discussion could determine the success of the activity. The topics suitable for students in intermediate-two level are those which are interesting and familiar to students, actual, and controversial.

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