

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

One of the essential for success in comprehending the language well, good speaking, and composing a good writing is vocabulary. Vocabulary has an important role in teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

At the present day, everybody approves the value of vocabulary in learning a language. Vocabulary as the basic element of language, is accepted as even the backbone of the language system. But unfortunately, vocabulary knowledge is not attached importance according to its deserts in language study area in the beginning. Vocabulary teaching was a matter of secondary importance in foreign language programs. Today, almost all second language theorists and practitioners admit vocabulary is crucial for language teaching.

Vocabulary knowledge also plays a significant role in overall academic success (Lehr et al, 2004). Students' lack of academic vocabulary ultimately translates into shallow interaction with print and spoken word, fewer job opportunities, and less income.

Vocabulary is the basic element of four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students who are rich in vocabulary will be better in listening, speaking, reading and writing a foreign language (Ekawati:2014). Therefore, vocabulary affects the student's ability in learning foreign language. According to Marzano (2004), vocabulary knowledge impacts reading and academic success, and it is

significant in our daily life and can have practical as well as social and emotional consequences. It is supported by Beck (2002) who estimates that better readers may learn as many as seven new words a day, while struggling readers and low achievers learn one or two new words per a day. Not surprisingly, students with rich vocabularies find more enjoyment in reading and more willing to spend time reading. It supported by Pikulski (2004:4) that the learners have to increase their vocabulary by around 3.000 words a year. The number of vocabulary will influence how well someone masters the language.

In this study, the writer chooses vocabulary as her topic because when she observed to the VII grade students at 2013/2014 academic year and interviewed the English teacher in SMP Swasta Masehi Medan she found that the students cannot comprehend a text and do the exercises from the textbook because their vocabulary were still low. The students' achievement in learning English is very low especially in vocabulary. Most of them have many problems in understanding, memorizing, and pronouncing the words and it makes them lazy to study English because most of the students get the score below Minimal Completeness Criteria (KKM) of English lesson for Junior High School. The score of vocabulary test from the students can be seen in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 The Seventh Grade (VII) Students' Score of Vocabulary Test

Semesters	Score	Students	Percentage	Mean
1 st Semester 2012/2013	<70	10	34,48	66,68
	≥70	19	65,51	
2 nd Semester 2013/2014	< 70	9	31,03	68,49
	≥70	20	68,96	

The Minimal Completeness Criteria (KKM) applied for the seventh grade (VII) by school is 70. From the data above, it can be fulfilled that the students' ability in vocabulary in that class is still low. It can be seen from the mean of the students' score where the mean is still under the Minimal Completeness Criteria.

The problems are most of the students still have limited vocabulary in English. The students felt bored with the teachers' way of teaching vocabulary, in which they were asked to find out the meaning of difficult words in the dictionary and then memorize the words. The teaching method is not effective and students need something different. Harmer (2001) said that the role of teacher is crucial. The teacher should find out a different method of teaching considered to solve the problem.

From the reason which has been explained above, creative and engaged technique should be used. Thus, in this study it is determined to conduct a research by applying Semantic Clustering Technique to improve the students' vocabulary.

Lizda and Zainuddin (2012:3) states that semantic clustering is a teaching technique which can provide the best exercises for learning the meaning of words and increase the number of students' vocabulary. By semantic clustering technique, it is expected that the students will get many new words. Another benefit of using clustering technique is to stimulate and encourage the students to search for new words to enlarge their vocabulary and also motivate them to learn seriously. It is expected that students' achievement in vocabulary will be improved if the students are taught by using semantic clustering technique.

B. The Problem of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the research problem of this study is formulated as the following: “Is there any significant effect of applying Semantic Clustering Technique on Students’ Vocabulary Mastery?”

C. The Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to analyze the effect of applying semantic clustering technique on students’ vocabulary mastery.

D. The Scope of the Study

Based on the background above, this study is limited to the effectiveness applying Semantic Clustering Technique in teaching vocabulary in grade VII at SMP Swasta Masehi Medan.

E. The Significance of the Study

As this study concerns with the use of semantic clustering technique to affect the students vocabulary mastery, the findings of this study are expected that:

1. Theoretically : It is useful for the teachers to improve the quality of students’ vocabulary and for the researchers to use this study as reference for next researches
2. Practically: It is useful to improve the students’ vocabulary and widen their horizon about the function of semantic clustering technique in affect their vocabulary mastery