CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Language is a means of communication. Although it is not only coming from communication among human being, it is certainly important for us (Wilkin, 1974: 1). Dealing with the definition of language, an American anthropological linguist E. Sapir as cited by Alwasilah (1993) says that language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Meanwhile, language is a system for the expression of meaning reflected in the structure of the language as an instrument to express meaning.

Based on the definitions above, it seems that there is an emphasis on the components of language, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and phonology. Thus, the language would be very useful if it is communicated with others to get the meaning of language itself.

To understand the language, we have to invent the meaning of words as many as possible either in a sentence at least. Therefore, it can be assumed that language is a systematic communication tool that may transfer one's ideas or feeling through meaningful, body language, signs, sounds, and gestures

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These ideas, are not covered also in the 1994 English curriculum for SMU. Even though it contains all the four-language skills reading, speaking, listening, and writing – with a special emphasis on reading. Actually this is the source of the problem by stressing on reading comprehension, where the students are expected to be able to understand the meaning of words in a text. It is the obligation of teachers to teach student how to acquire vocabulary. In fact, many students often have some difficulties to comprehend a text because they are lack of the English vocabulary mastery. In other words, they are lack of capability of comprehending the meaning of words in the text provided precisely.

Considering the above facts, Allen (1983:3) reveals that many teachers assume that vocabulary can be developed in the teaching-learning process. However, the students, in reality, encounter the problems to find out the meaning of words. If these problems still exist, there are two factors that will affect the failure of students in understanding the meaning of words. Those are: (1) they do not have any skills in comprehending the meaning of words and (2) they do not have enough basic competencies to translate both words and sentences in a text.

In a very real sense, the students cannot master the meaning of words in a sentence and neither can communicate in English appropriately because the teaching-learning activity, as mentioned in the previous, still focuses on grammatical rules rather than on vocabulary in context Consequently, they only have competent in structure, but they cannot communicate accurately. Since the requirement of fluently

in communicating ideas mostly based on the number of words or vocabulary a person has.

It is in line with Wilkin (1974: 111) who said that "without grammar, very little can be conveyed but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." it is possible to have a good knowledge of how the system of language works and yet not able to communicate in it; whereas if we know the vocabulary we need, it is usually possible to communicate well". In short, it can be stated that it is quite sensible to provide students with much attention in teaching vocabulary

To solve these problem, the English teachers, of course, have to provide practical techniques on teaching vocabulary that English students are able to develop their learning of new words independently (Nation, 1982). Hence, Nattinger (1988) identifies that "guessing vocabulary from context is the most frequent way of discovering the meaning of new words" (p.63). Similar to this idea, Oxford and Scarcella (1994) also reveal, "guessing the meaning of word from context is the most useful vocabulary learning technique" (p.236)

In line with the linguists' ideas quoted above, the English teachers should ensure that the students should not only understand the meaning of words in context, but also can communicate the words with other people. So, the English students should be provided with some opportunities to acquire the vocabulary. In other words, the English teachers, in teaching vocabulary, should also be able to lead the students to produce the language as well as other language components either in spoken or written form.

To produce the language in teaching vocabulary, the English teachers should have the ability to:

(a) Recognize words in its spoken of written form;

(b) Recall it at will;

(c) Relate it to an appropriate object or concept;

(d) Use it in the appropriate grammatical form;

(e) In speech, pronounce words in a recognizable way;

(f) In writing, spell it correctly;

(g) Use it at the appropriate level

(Wallace, 1982:27)

Meanwhile, Angela (1996) clarifies that the teachers can apply generative process to their students in using language. This means that words are used generative if it is used in speaking activities. In other words, the teachers can encourage generative use by: 1) retelling of the written input from a different focus, 2) distributing the information that is based on the target of vocabulary given, and 3) requiring students to reconstruct what is in a text rather than repeat it.

From these points, it is obvious that English teachers should be able to teach the English vocabulary frequently in order the students can actualize some or all of these points with the target vocabulary. In addition, these points enable the English teachers to cover the language skills and the language components, such as speaking, writing, grammar, pronunciation, and spelling.

In terms of the language skills covered above and the language components mentioned, the techniques of teaching vocabulary need to be developed by the English teachers. From the preliminary research at SMU Dwi Warna Medan it can be assumed that most of English teachers tend to make the students find out difficult-word, match words, or find out synonyms and antonyms. Moreover, the English teachers often emphasize the students to translate either the words or the sentences based on their instructions in the text provided.

Owing to some phenomenon in the field, central to this present study was to investigate the techniques of teaching vocabulary used by an English teacher in the teaching-learning activity at SMU Dwi Warna Medan. In addition, this study also attempts to know whether or not the techniques presented by an English teacher could be effective for the students in enriching their English vocabulary.

1.2. The Statement of the Problems

To clarify the problems to be investigated, some research questions are formulated below:

1. What techniques are applied by English teachers in teaching vocabulary at SMU Dwi Warna Medan?

2. What problems are faced by the students and English teachers in teaching-learning vocabulary?

1.3. The Objective of the Study

The objective of these study are to answer the research questions, especially concerning with the techniques applied by an English teacher and the problems encountered by students and English teacher in teaching learning process. To be more specific. The objective of these study are

1. To find out the of techniques applied in teaching vocabulary at SMU Dwi Warna
2. To find out the problems faced by the students and English teacher in teaching-learning English vocabulary.

1.4. The scope of the study

The teacher in the English teaching-learning process at SMU, should be able to cover all the material as it is stated in the curriculum on time, including reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Since there are so many skills taught, most of English teachers seldom focus on the techniques of teaching vocabulary in detail. Of course, there are many factors that can affect the condition of teaching vocabulary. These factors could be the length of time, the teachers' inability to apply certain techniques, and the materials taught.

Hence, this study intends to draw upon the techniques and activities applied by an English teacher in teaching vocabulary. It also discusses ways for applying certain techniques in teaching-learning English vocabulary.

1.5. The Significance of the Study

The result of this study can be used to improve the teaching-learning activity, particularly on the teaching of vocabulary. For the English teachers, the results of this study may be regarded as a practical guide to determine the techniques and activities in harmony with the students' level and need. On other hands, this study may contribute some valuable input to the improvement of teaching vocabulary.

The techniques and activities used by the English teachers from this study are also expected to enrich the students' motivation in learning English vocabulary. Briefly, this investigation may enlarge the teachers' view regarding the current issues, especially on teaching vocabulary.

1.6. Definition of the Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation, then the researcher provides the explanations in respect to some important terms in the study as follows:

1. *Teaching* may be defined as "showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instruction, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge, causing to how or to understand" (Kimble and Garmezy, 1963:133 in Brown 1994). Thus, teaching cannot be defined apart from learning. Nathan Gage (1964:269) in Brown (1994) also noted that "to satisfy the practical demands of education, theories of learning must be 'stood on their head' so as to yield theories of teaching". Teaching is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learners to learn, setting the conditions for learning.

2. *Vocabulary* is the total number of words, which make up a language (Hornby, 1974:959). While Adam (1958) stated that vocabulary is a collection of words arranged alphabetically for reference and defined or explained.

3. *Technique* is specific activities manifested in the classroom that are consistent with a method and therefore in harmony with an approach as well (Anthony, 1963).

4. *Material* is everything, which can help the implementation of teaching-learning process. The material used in this study is taken from buku Bahasa Inggris dengan Pendekatan Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi by Drs. F.A.Soeprapto and his colleagues. It contains a short story that consists of vocabulary items and grammatical structures.

   In relating to the implementation of materials, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) posit that there are several questions to be considered in setting the materials, among others are;

   a. Who develops materials?

   b. Are the materials compatible with the syllabus?

   c. Do most of materials provide alternative for the teachers and the learners?

5. *Students' performance* is the final result that obtained by the learners in the end of teaching-learning process.