Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery on Synonyms through the Application of Think Pair Share (TPS) Technique

Anna Stasya Prima Sari[1], Novalina Sembiring[2], Kwalitas Wau[3]
[1,2,3]*Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan,Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas*
annastasya3105@gmail.com

Abstract

This Classroom Action Research (henceforth, CAR) is mainly carried out to prove that the application of Think Pair Share (henceforth, TPS) technique is able to improve the students' vocabulary mastery on synonyms and to describe the students' responses towards the learning teaching processes of vocabulary mastery on synonyms through the application of TPS technique. This CAR was performed in two cycles in which each cycle consisted of three meetings excluded the pre-test and the post-test. The subjects of this research are the fifth semester students of English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas in the Academic Year of 2021/2022. There are 21 students as the research subjects. The quantitative data analysis shows that the mean of the students' score in the pre-test, formative test, and post-test increases continually after TPS technique was implemented in the learning teaching processes of English synonyms. The students' total score in the pre-test is 1.252 and the pre-test mean is 59.62. The students' total score in the formative test is 1.572 and the formative test mean is 74.86. The students' total score in the post-test is 1.756 and the post-test mean is 83.61 There are five students (23.8%) who attained score >75 in the pre-test, ten students (47.6%) who attained score >75 in the formative test, and 17 students (81%) who attained score >75 in the post-test. The qualitative data analysis shows that the students are more active and enthusiastic in learning and mastering English synonyms after TPS technique was applied. The students gave positive responses towards the application of TPS technique in the learning teaching processes of vocabulary mastery on English synonyms. The researchers recommend that English lecturers/teachers implement TPS technique in order to improve their students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms.

I. Introduction

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in the language learning. Richards (2001:4) states that one of the most obvious components of language which linguists turned their attention to is vocabulary. Vocabulary is the core of the language itself. This makes vocabulary as one of the most essential aspects in English language teaching because if students have excellent vocabulary mastery, they will find it easier to master the four English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Wilkins (in Thornbury, 2002:13) says, Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". In addition, Sari and Pandiangan (2021:24) state, "Even though someone surpasses in sentence structure but if he/she does not excel in vocabulary mastery, he/she keeps being unable to say or write anything and the grammar

knowledge will be futile". Since English language is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, it is understandable why most Indonesian learners find it difficult to master the word meaning.

It is stated that vocabulary mastery is the most fundamental aspect in mastering four English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). We can comprehend an English text, say or write something in the English language if we have excellent vocabulary mastery. Teachers are able to apply some certain ways to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Lewis and Hill (in Sembiring and Ginting, 2019:17-18) state that there are eight vocabulary teaching techniques, namely contrast, synonyms, enumeration, explanation, the dictionary, translation, in context, and word games. In this research, the researchers focused on teaching English synonyms to the fifth semester students of English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas in the Academic Year of 2021/2022.

At this present, there is a strong educational movement to mitigate the effects of competitions in schools by using cooperative learning methods, in which mutability activities and academic tasks can be interacted so that the poor learners can increase their involvement in the classroom activities and improve their skills, while the more successful learners do not suffer any loss in academic progress. Based on the educational movement, the researchers taught English synonyms to the students by implementing Think Pair Share (henceforth, TPS) technique. TPS technique is a technique which was developed by Frank Lyman (Millis, 1990). It is a technique that encourages and allows for individual thinking, collaboration, and presentation in the same activity. Students must first think about a prompt on their own, then come together in pairs or small groups, then share their discussion and decision with the class. Discussing an answer first with a partner before sharing maximizes participation and helps to focus attention on the prompt given. According to Millis (1990), in TPS technique, students take approximately a minute to think through a response to a question (Think) proposed by the instructor-often one demand analysis, evaluation, or synthesis-before turning to partners for discussion (Pair) and subsequently sharing with a learning team, with a larger group, or with an entire class during a follow-up discussion (Share).

Teaching vocabulary through synonyms is also a classical technique. Erten and Tekin (in Yu, 2020:12) claim that this technique can cause confusion and take more time and effort than expected. But according to Webb's (2007) empirical study, learning words with known synonyms may be easier than learning words without known synonyms, because learners may be able to transfer their knowledge of syntax and collocation from known synonyms to less frequent synonyms, thus lightening the learning burden. This research is focused on teaching synonyms through TPS technique. For instance: The first researcher taught the students other ways to say kind, namely thoughtful, caring, considerate, benevolent, warmhearted, and sympathetic. Another aspect that needs to be fully paid attention to in order to attain the learners' maximum learning achievement is the learners' language attitudes. Fakeye (in Sari, 2016:38) states that the matter of learner's attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors that impacts on learning a language.

The application of TPS technique is expected to be able to build up the students' positive language attitudes in learning English synonyms and give the students chances to share ideas, encourage them to do their personal responsibilities, and work together with their classmates in order to improve their vocabulary mastery on synonyms. There are two problems which were formulated by the researchers in this research, namely: 1) Can the application of TPS technique improve the students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms?, and 2) What are the students' responses after learning English synonyms

through the application of TPS technique?. Finding the answers to the research problems is the main research objectives. Therefore, the research objectives are: 1) to prove that the application of TPS technique is able to improve the students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms, and 2) to describe the students' responses after learning English synonyms through the application of TPS technique. Based on the research background elaborated above, the researchers were interested in carrying out a research entitled Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery on Synonyms through the Application of Think Pair Share (TPS) Technique.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Vocabulary

Vocabulary can be defined as (1) the total number of words in a language, (2) all the words known to a person or used in a particular book, subject, etc, and (3) a list of words with their own meanings, especially one that accompanies a textbook in a foreign language. Nauth (1995:414) depicts that vocabulary is a collection of words by a speaker, a listener, a writer or a reader in the language competence which has a meaning or meanings. It means that a speaker constructs some words to make sentences for their communication with other people.

Vocabulary is not a syllabus but a list of words that teachers prepare for their learners to memorize and learn by heart. Memorizing may be good and useful as a temporary technique for tests, but not for learning a foreign language. What students need to know regarding vocabulary is the word meaning and the word use. Therefore, vocabulary has an important role to help the students understand the meaning of words, and how they are used in sentences.

2.2 Vocabulary Mastery

Knowledge or skill which makes one master of a subject is called mastery (Allen, 2000:856). Subject in this case is vocabulary in a foreign language which is learnt by students. Referring to the concept of mastery, vocabulary mastery is one's proficiency in using words and their meanings correctly in language. Excellent vocabulary mastery helps the learners express their ideas precisely. By having many stocks of words, learners will be able to comprehend the reading materials, to catch up someone's talk, to give a response, to speak glibly, and to write some kinds of topics.

Vocabulary has to be mastered by students in order to develop the four language skills, particularly in speaking and writing since without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Therefore, success in learning English requires vocabulary acquisition. A large vocabulary cannot guarantee the learner's competence in learning English but inadequacy of vocabulary will intrude their chances to make success in learning English. Resnick (1989:67) argues that the students should be involved intensively in acquiring vocabularies. Thus, vocabularies will be realized and internalized in their own cognitive systems that may be utilized in their social language interaction and academic activities. To sum up, vocabulary mastery is essential in language learning because no language exists without vocabulary.

a. The Importance of Vocabulary Mastery

One language element which ought to be taught before teaching other aspects of the language is vocabulary. It will be hard to master a language without mastering a certain number of vocabularies. It should be realized that the students' competence to listen, speak, read and write is determined by their vocabulary mastery. It makes vocabulary becomes the basic element to master the four language skills, that is listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In listening, learners are able to comprehend what people talk about if they have excellent vocabulary mastery. In speaking, vocabulary helps learners deliver their ideas orally. In addition, Sari and Br Sembiring (2019:508) state, "To be able to speak, a large amount of vocabulary is also important, because without adequate vocabulary, there is nothing to say".

In reading, vocabulary mastery helps learners to comprehend texts and get knowledge and information from them. In writing, vocabulary mastery really helps learners expand their fresh ideas based on the topics given. McCharty (in Sari and Pandiangan, 2021:29) states, "No matter how successfully sounds of a second language are mastered, without words to express a wider range of meanings, communication in a second language just cannot happen in any meaningful way". In brief, nothing can be conveyed without vocabulary. Vocabulary must not be neglected by anyone who learns a language.

2.3 Types of Vocabulary

Harmer (1991:56) distinguishes vocabulary into two types. They are receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. The two types of vocabulary are explained as follows:

a. Receptive Vocabulary

Receptive vocabulary is words that learners recognize and understand when they are used in context, but which cannot produced by the learners. Stuart (2005-2008:78) states that receptive vocabulary is vocabulary that learners recognize when they see or meet in a reading text but do not use it in speaking and writing.

b. Productive Vocabulary

Productive vocabulary is words that learners understand and can pronounce correctly and use appropriately in speaking and writing. Stuart (2005-2008:81) says that productive vocabulary can be addressed as an active process because the learners are capable of producing the words to express their thoughts to others.

2.4 Think Pair Share (TPS) Technique

Think Pair Share (TPS) is a very simple but an effective technique to improve the quality of discussion participation. It is a technique designed to allow students to think about a given prompt, formulate individual ideas, and share the ideas with other students (Usman, 2015:39). It is a technique in which students think individually for a few minutes, and then discuss and compare their responses with a partner before sharing with the entire class. TPS is a learning technique that gives students the opportunity to work independently and cooperate with others. In this case, teachers play a crucial role in order to guide the students to the discussion, and to create an alive learning atmosphere. The following are the processes of implementing TPS by Lyman (in Raba, 2017:14):
1) The teacher asks a question or introduces a problem.

2) Students are given enough time to think individually in order to answer the question or suggest solutions to the problem. The time that is given to students depends on the complexity of the question or the problem.
3) Students are asked to work in pairs in order to discuss their answers with their peers. They are given enough time to listen to each other ideas and to discuss them.
4) Students are asked to share their ideas with the whole class. They are given the opportunity to share what they have discussed in pairs and to express themselves through speaking.

Sugiarto and Sumarsono (in Hudri and Irwandi, 2018:2) note some important benefits of using TPS in their study. First, it improves students' communication skill. Sharing ideas to classmates helps students learn how to deliver their ideas or opinions appropriately. Second, it makes them participate more actively in the classroom activities. Third, working with a partner and sharing their work to other classmates make improve solidarity and tolerance among students. They learn how to respect each other if they have different opinions. Fourth, it helps teachers to teach big classes so that teachers can facilitate and monitor the discussion and give assistance whenever their students need them. To sum up, TPS technique is a learning technique that provides a structured opportunity to students to think about a case or a certain topic, work in pairs to discuss their individual ideas, and share those ideas with their classmates in order to improve their communication skill.

III. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This is Classroom Action Research (henceforth, CAR). Burns (2010:2) says, "CAR is a part of a broad movement that has been going on in education generally for some time. It is related to the ideas of reflective practice and the teacher as researcher". It means that CAR is a process of research conducted by the teacher for repairing and improving the quality of learning in the classroom.

Action research is different from other more conventional or traditional types research in which it is much focused on individual or small-group professional practice and is not so concerned with making general statement (Wallace, 1998:18). Furthermore, McKay (2006:29) says that action research has three major characteristics: it is carried out by practitioners (i.e., classroom teachers), it is collaborative, and it is aimed at changing things. To sum up, CAR can be conducted by a teacher in a classroom with the help of other teachers to discuss what and how to improve the classroom activities so that the students' learning achievement will be better. This CAR is mainly focused on improving students' vocabulary mastery on synonyms by applying TPS technique. The process of this CAR is described by the following design.
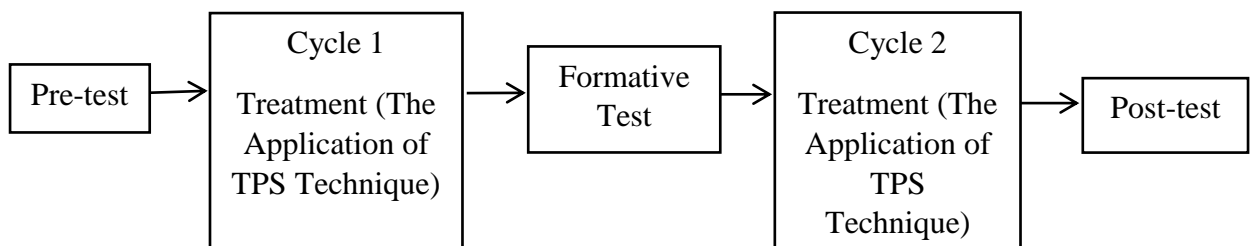

Figure 1. Research Design

In this CAR, the first researcher acted as a teacher who taught English synonyms to the fifth semester students of English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas by applying TPS technique. She was helped by the second and the third researchers who acted as observers during the learning teaching processes of English synonyms through the application of TPS technique.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1 The Procedures of Classroom Action Research

The researchers used CAR model which was developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998). This CAR was performed into two cycles, namely cycle one and cycle two. CAR typically involves four broad phases in a cycle of research, namely: (1) planning, (2) action, (3) observation, and (4) reflection. It can be seen in the figure 3.2.
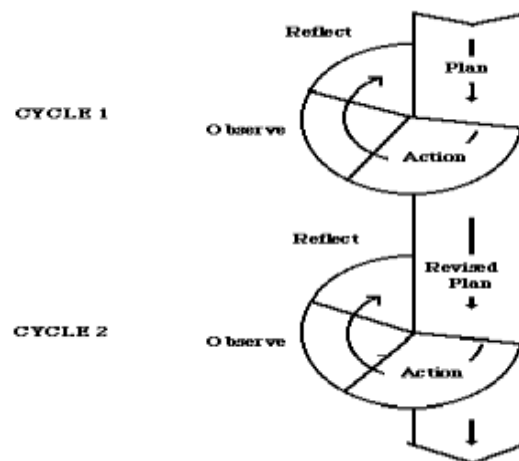

Figure 2. The Classroom Action Research (CAR) Model Developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998)

The following are the activities that were done by the researchers in cycles one and two.

a. Cycle One

Cycle one consists of four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Each step is deciphered as follows:

1. Planning

Planning refers to the proposed instructional techniques to be developed in the CAR in order to solve the problems faced by the students in mastering synonyms. In this phase, the researchers prepared everything which was needed during carrying out the CAR. They arranged the lesson plans related to the syllabus, observation checklists for the teacher and the students, pre-test, formative test, and post-test. Some planning done by the first researcher who acted as the teacher are depicted as follows:
a. preparing learning materials about English synonyms,
b. designing learning teaching activities through the application of TPS technique, and
c. preparing the instruments of collecting data, both quantitative data and qualitative ones.

2.Acting

Acting refers to the implementation of TPS technique in order to improve the students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms in the classroom activities. Before the first meeting of this cycle took place, the first researcher gave the pre-test to the students in order to measure their prior knowledge about English synonyms. The major steps to teach English synonyms through the application of TPS technique are depicted as follows:

a. In the first meeting of the cycle one, the first researcher taught English synonyms to the students. The students were brainstormed to activate their knowledge and understanding about English synonyms.

b. In the second meeting, the processes of applying TPS technique in the learning teaching processes of English synonyms were explained to the students.

c. In the third meeting, the first researcher started to implement TPS technique to teach synonyms to the students. She gave directions how to use TPS technique to answer a vocabulary test on synonyms. After the students knew the implementation of TPS technique to master synonyms, she provided a vocabulary test on synonyms to the students. They had to practice applying TPS technique in order to answer all of the questions.

d. At the end meeting of the cycle one, the first researcher administered formative test in order to see the students' progress and the results of teaching synonyms through the application of TPS technique.

3.Observing

In this phase, the collaborators (the second and the third researchers) helped the first researcher to observe the teacher's and students' activities during the processes of learning and teaching English synonyms through the implementation of TPS technique. The collaborators also noted problems which arose during the learning teaching processes. The first researcher wrote down the field notes by herself. The field notes covered all the meetings in the first and the second cycles. All the notes were used as consideration for conducting the next cycle.

4. Reflecting

Reflecting is the process of analyzing data in order to reflect whether the technique which is applied is effective to improve the students' learning achievement. In this CAR, the researchers reflected the effectiveness of implementing TPS technique to improve the students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms by checking the students' answer sheets and their participation in the classroom activities. The researchers evaluated the results of cycle one in order to determine whether cycle two needed to be conducted or not.

b. Cycle Two

After completing all phases in cycle one, the researchers conducted cycle two in order to make some improvement. This cycle was primarily focused on answering problems found in cycle one. It also consisted of four steps, namely: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. It is the revision of the first cycle. In the last meeting of cycle two, the first researcher administered the post-test in order to find out whether the results of teaching English synonyms through the application of TPS technique in cycle two is much better than in cycle one.

4.2 The Place and Time of the Research

This CAR was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas which is located at Jalan Setiabudi No. 479F Tanjungsari, Medan. It was conducted in November 2021. The main reason why the researchers chose the university as the location of the research is because the first researcher is a permanent lecturer at the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas. She truly realizes that mastering English vocabulary as well as possible really helps learners to master four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

4.3 The Subjects of the Research

The research subjects are the fifth semester students of the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas in the Academic Year of 2021/2022. There is only one class consisting of 21 students. All of the students were taken as the research subjects.

4.4 Discussion

In this CAR, TPS technique was applied to improve the students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms. The analysis of quantitative data shows that the mean of the students' score in the pre-test, formative test, and post-test increases continually after TPS technique was applied in teaching English synonyms. The students' total score in the pre-test is 1.252 and the pre-test mean is 59.62. The students' total score in the formative test is 1.572 and the formative test mean is 74.86. The students' total score in the post-test is 1.756 and the post-test mean is 83.61.

There are 5 (five) students (23.8%) who attained score >75 in the pre-test, 10 (ten) students (47.6%) who attained score >75 in the formative test, and 17 (seventeen) students (81%) who attained score >75 in the post-test. From the results of pre-test, formative test, and post-test, it is concluded that the application of TPS technique has improved the students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms successfully.

The analysis of qualitative data shows that the students are more active and enthusiastic in learning and mastering English synonyms after TPS technique was applied. Their responses towards the application of TPS technique in the learning teaching processes of English synonyms are very positive. All of them agree that learning English synonyms through the application of TPS technique can trigger their curiosity and collaboration and improve their knowledge and vocabulary mastery on English synonyms.

V. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the researchers drew two conclusions as follows:
1) The application of TPS technique is able to improve the students' vocabulary mastery on English synonyms successfully. It can be seen from the analysis of quantitative data. The analysis of quantitative data shows that the mean of the students' score in the pre-test, formative test, and post-test increases continually after TPS technique was applied in teaching English synonyms. The students' total score in the pre-test is 1.252 and the pre-test mean is 59.62. The students' total score in the formative test is 1.572 and the formative test mean is 74.86. The students' total score in the post-test is 1.756 and the post-test mean is 83.61.

2) The analysis of qualitative data shows that the students gave positive responses towards the learning teaching processes of English synonyms through the application of TPS technique. They are more active and enthusiastic in learning and mastering English synonyms after TPS technique was applied. They all agree that learning English synonyms through the application of TPS technique can trigger their curiosity and collaboration and improve their knowledge and vocabulary mastery on English synonyms.

References

Allen, D. (2000). Microteaching. Massachussetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Arikunto, S. (2010). Prosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik (Edisi Revisi V). Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.

Burns, A. (2010). Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners. New York: Routledge.

Harmer, J. (1991). The Practice of English Language Teaching. New York: Longman.

Hudri, M., and Irwandi. (2018). Improving Students' Reading Skill through Think-Pair-Share (TPS) Technique. Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics (JELTL), 11(2), 1-7.

Kemmis, S., and McTaggart, R. (1998). The Action Research Planner (3rd Edition). Geelong: Deakin University Press.

McKay, S.L. (2006). Researching Second Language Classrooms. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Millis, B.J. (1990). Helping Faculty Build Learning Communities through Cooperative Groups to Improve the Academy. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/podimproveacad/202 on 17 June 2021.

Nauth, W.H. (1995). The World Book Encyclopedia. Chicago: World Book.

Raba, A.A.A. (2017). The Influence of Think-Pair-Share (TPS) on Improving Students' Oral Communication Skills in EFL Classrooms. Creative Education, 8, 12-23. http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2017.81002.

Resnick, L.B. (1989). Knowing Learning and Instruction. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Richards, J.C. (2001). Curriculum Development in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sari, A.S.P. (2016). Tionghoa Students' Language Attitudes toward the English Language Learning. Jurnal Ilmiah (Juril) AMIK MBP, IV(2), 37-50.

Sari, A.S.P., and Br Sembiring, R.K. (2019). Improving Students' English Speaking Skill through the Implementation of Talking Stick Method to the Fifth Grade Students of State Primary School 028226 Binjai. Budapest International Research and Critics in Linguistics and Education (BirLE) Journal, 2(4), 507-513.

Sari, A.S.P., and Pandiangan, S.R. (2021). The Application of Guessing Strategy to Improve Students' Vocabulary Mastery on English Phrasal Verbs. Jurnal Suluh Pendidikan (JSP), 9(1), 24-38.

Sembiring, N., and Ginting, F.Y.A. (2019). Improving Students' Vocabulary Achievement by Using Storytelling. Jurnal Liner, 2(3), 15-29.

Stuart, W. (2005-2008). Receptive and Productive Vocabulary. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 3(1), 7-95.

Thornbury, S. (2002). How to Teach Vocabulary. London: Pearson Education.

Usman, A.H. (2015). Using the Think-Pair-Share Strategy to Improve Students' Speaking Ability at STAIN Ternate. Journal of Education and Practice, 6(10), 37-45.

Wallace, M.J. (1998). Action Research for Language Teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Webb, S. (2007). The Effects of Synonym on Second Language Vocabulary Learning. Reading in A Foreign Language, 19(2), 120-136.

Yu, X. (2020). English Vocabulary Teaching Techniques at Junior Middle Schools. English Language Teaching Journal, 13(11), 12-14.