Improving young learners' vocabulary through Educaplay

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is the key to mastering certain languages, including English. Thus, teaching vocabulary with appropriate learning media is crucial for teachers, especially for teaching English to young learners. This research aims to determine the improvement of young learners' vocabulary through playing Educaplay. This research belongs to Classroom Action Research (CAR). The data were from young learners in grades 3 to 5 at Pendampingan Belajar Lantips. The data was collected by observation, pre-test, and post-test. The findings of this research show that young learners improved their vocabulary. It can be seen from the improvement of young learners' scores on each test. They achieved a score of 50 on the pre-test, which indicates that none of the young learners hit the targeted score. After implementing Educaplay during the treatment session, young learners achieved scores of 95 on Post-test 1 and 98.33 on Post-test 2. It proves that Educaplay helps young learners improve their vocabulary.

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1. Introduction

Four English skills are taught in EFL class, such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Before applying those skills, the students must master vocabulary first. According to Khafidhoh (2019), vocabulary is the key to mastering certain languages. On the other hand, Ur (2012) stated that vocabulary is the list of words taught to learners of foreign languages. As English is taking place as a foreign language in Indonesia it means that mastering vocabulary is important since without it, people are not able to say or write what they want (Khafidhoh, 2019). Thus, learning vocabulary is crucial for learners, especially young learners.

English is officially put into the primary school learning process. They start with basic materials such as verbs. In these materials, there are numerous vocabulary that must be known and will be applied to the four English skills. The students in elementary school are still building concepts and vocabulary in their first language (Brewster et al., 2004). Unfortunately, many young learners are low in mastering vocabulary. They have some difficulties in finding and identifying the meaning of certain vocabulary. It can be caused by their own difficulties. Many of them are poor in memorizing. Besides, it can also be caused by external factors, such as the lack of technology used by the teacher. So, there is no doubt that nowadays we still find that young learners are low in mastering vocabulary, possibly caused by several factors.

To come up with those problems, teachers need learning media that might help them in teaching vocabulary to young learners. One of the most popular learning media applied in a class is a game.

Numerous digital games can be used by the teacher, such as Kahoot!, Quizziz, and Word Wall. In this research, the researchers used Educaplay, one of the digital games on the internet that can be used freely.

The majority of earlier research conclusions about employing video games to teach vocabulary were encouraging. Based on Bakhsh (2016) and Hazar (2020), digital games are an effective tool to enhance young learners' vocabulary. The research used various games, such as Pictionary, Hot Potatoes, Memory Challenge, Last One Standing, and Bingo. Meanwhile, this research used Educaplay as the media to improve young learners' vocabulary. To add, this research was a Classroom Research Action (CAR), conducted in a tutoring institution. It makes this research different from the previous one since they used literature review and experimental research, conducted in a school.

1.1. Vocabulary

Hornby (1995) in Alqahtani (2015) defines vocabulary as the total number of words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings. On the other hand, Burns (1972) in Alqahtani (2015) defines vocabulary as the stock of words which is used by a person, class or profession.

Vocabulary is crucial to be mastered by the learner in order to understand the language. Vocabulary mastery is needed to express our ideas and to be able to understand other people's sayings (Susanto, 2017).

1.2. Teaching Vocabulary

A language's vocabulary is essential, particularly when teaching English. Thus, in order for pupils to communicate their own ideas or comprehend those of others, they must possess a strong vocabulary. However, because English is a foreign language in Indonesia, many teachers would have difficulties when teaching vocabulary (Mahadyan, 2023). Some experts have suggested a number of vocabulary-teaching strategies to address this issue: (1) Teaching vocabulary using objects, (2) Teaching vocabulary by drilling, spelling, and active involvement, (3) Teaching vocabulary using drawing and picture, (4) Teaching vocabulary using mime, expression and gestures, (5) Teaching vocabulary using enumeration and contrast, and (6) Teaching vocabulary through guessing from context.

1.3. Young Learners

Phillips (1993) mentioned that young learners are kids who start formal schooling at age five or six and continue until they are eleven or twelve years old. On the other hand, Nunan (2016) defined young learners as kids in preschool or the first few years of formal education. According to Bakhsh (2016), young learners have characteristics that make them different from older learners, such as: (1) They are inventive, playful, and interested learners, (2) They quickly become unique personalities and take pleasure in repeats and routines, (3) They pick up knowledge through watching, mimicking, listening, and acting, (4) Their limited attention to focus demands a variety of activities, and (4) They are communicating in their native tongue about what they accomplished and understood, assisting in their learning.

1.4. Game-based Learning (GBL)

According to Gibbs (1981) cited in Bakhsh (2016), a game is an activity in which players compete or collaborate to accomplish goals while adhering to a set of rules. Qian & Clark (2016) defined game-based learning as an environment where learning activities involve problem-solving areas and challenges that provide players or learners a sense of accomplishment, and where game material and gameplay enhance the acquisition of knowledge and skills. According to Al-Azawi et al (2016), game-based learning (GBL) is a technique used to motivate students to engage in learning while having fun and to make learning more engaging.

2. Method

The purpose of this research is to determine the improvement of young learners' vocabulary by using Educaplay. This research was a Classroom Action Research (CAR), a social scenario review intended to raise the caliber of an action (Elliott, 1993). Moreover, CAR is a type of reflective research in which specific activities are taken to enhance professional learning practices in the classroom. It is crucial to scientific research as it influences the caliber of research findings (Gasperz & Uktolseja,

2020). Therefore, the researchers used CAR to help young learners improve their vocabulary by applying Educaplay as the learning medium.

The action research model cycle utilized in this research was based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), as cited in Burns (2009). According to this model, CAR was carried out in four steps: Planning, Acting, Observing, and Reflecting are the first four processes. Planning is the initial stage in preparing the instruction that the researchers have created, such as preparing a lesson plan, material, media, and test. During the action stage, the researchers implemented the plan they had created earlier. In this research, the researchers also acted as the English tutor and delivered the material about vocabulary related to verbs using Educaplay Observations include the events that took place in the classroom, as well as the interactions that occurred between the teachers and students. The researchers were a teacher who taught vocabulary related to verbs using Educaplay, observed by another English tutor. In addition, reflection is an activity to analyze young learners' vocabulary improvement by looking at their scores on each test. If issues needed to be resolved, the outcomes of this reflection served as a foundation for thinking through how to change the approach that would be employed in the following cycle.

This research was conducted in Pendampingan Belajar Lantips, a tutoring institution in Yogyakarta. It involved young learners in the 3rd to 5th grades. The subjects were chosen based on the researchers' pre-observations in that place. It was found that some young learners begin learning English when they enter 3rd grade. In addition, the material taught in these grades is complex as preparation for the next grades.

Observation sheets, pre-tests, and post-tests were used for collecting the data. The pre-test is the first step to gather the data. It was conducted before the treatment session. The second step is the post-test which is conducted after the treatment session. Meanwhile, the observation sheet was used during the treatment session.

3. Findings and Discussion

As this, the research was conducted in 2 cycles. Cycle 1 was done for three meetings. At the first meeting, the researchers gave a pre-test consisting of 10 vocabularies related to verbs. This test was given to young learners to measure their ability to find the meanings of those 10 vocabulary words. It was a written test then the tutor gave the score at the end of the test.

Figure 1 shows young learners' pre-test scores. The lowest score obtained by 1 respondent, was 45 points, while the highest score obtained by 1 respondent, was 55 points. The results indicated that none of young learners fit into the target score that had been determined by the researchers, 75 points.
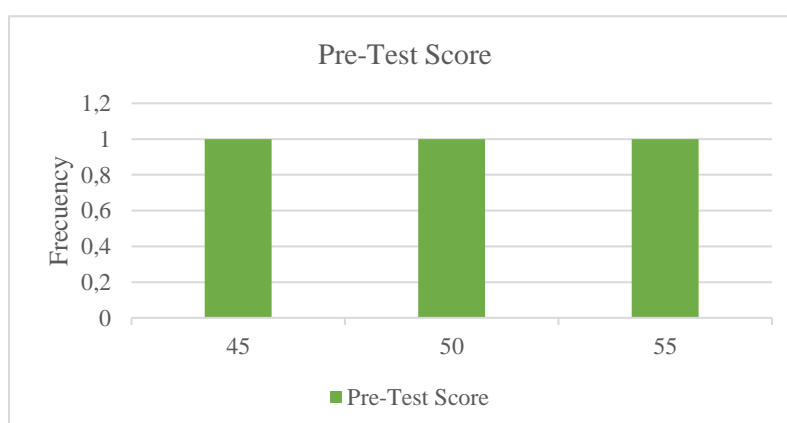

Fig. 1. Chart of Pre-Test Score

The second meeting was focused on improving young learners' vocabularies by using Educaplay. Before playing the game, the researchers gave a brief explanation related to the material that would be used in Educaplay. After delivering the material, the researchers asked young learners to keep their notes and explained the game's rules. They were given enough time to play the game.

The third meeting was focused on the post-test session to find out young learners' vocabulary improvement after the pre-test and treatment session. The post-test consisted of 10 vocabulary words that they had already encountered in the pre-test session and had been explained during the treatment session.

Figure 2 shows young learners' Post-Test 1 scores. The lowest score obtained by 1 respondent, was 85 points, meanwhile, the highest score obtained by 2 respondents, was 100 points. The results showed that all young learners hit the targeted score.
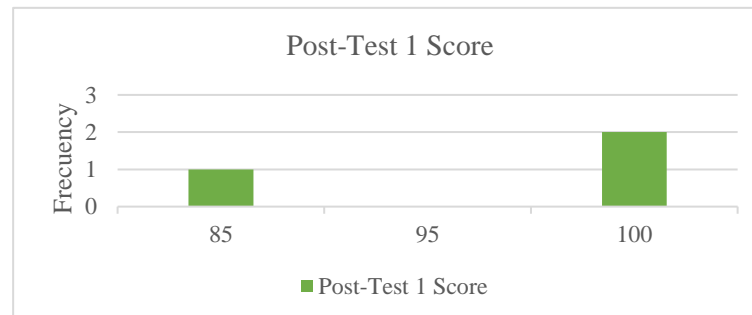

Fig. 2. Chart of Post-Test 1 Score

Based on the results of Cycle 1, the researchers concluded that the learning process already entered the standard criteria of the researchers since all young learners gained their score, from the pre-test to the post-test. Nevertheless, based on the observation during Cycle 1, young learners still found difficulties in identifying the meaning of certain vocabularies. It can be seen at the treatment session. Many young learners played Educaplay more than once since they were still confused in identifying the meanings of certain vocabulary words. They also still looked hesitant to answer the questions.

Therefore, the researchers decided to conduct Cycle 2 in order to improve their vocabulary and decrease their anxiety. The implementation of the second cycle was different from the previous one. In this cycle, the researchers added some new vocabulary. This cycle was done for two meetings. After the re-planning session, the researchers conducted the treatment session the same as the first cycle. The post-test 2 was done at the second meeting.

Figure 3 shows young learners' Post-Test 2 scores. The lowest score obtained by 1 respondent, was 95 points, meanwhile, the highest score obtained by 2 respondents, was 100 points.
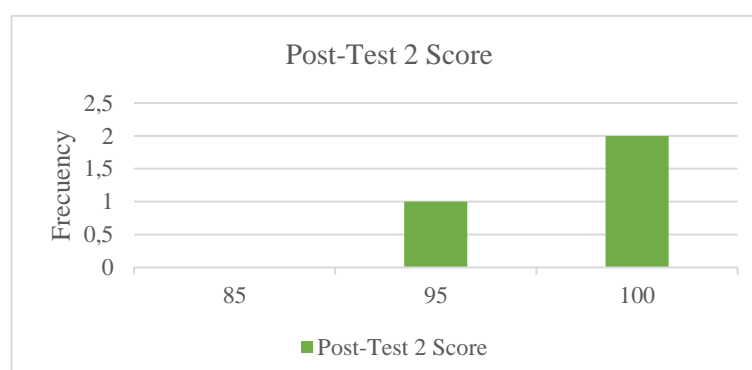

Fig. 3. Chart of Post-Test 2 Score

Figure 4 shows the young learners' average score. The average score of the pre-test session is 50 points with 3 respondents in the class. The average score of the Post-Test 1 is 95 points. The average score of the Post-Test 2 is 98.33 points. To conclude, young learners improved their score significantly, especially from the Pre-test to Post-test 2.
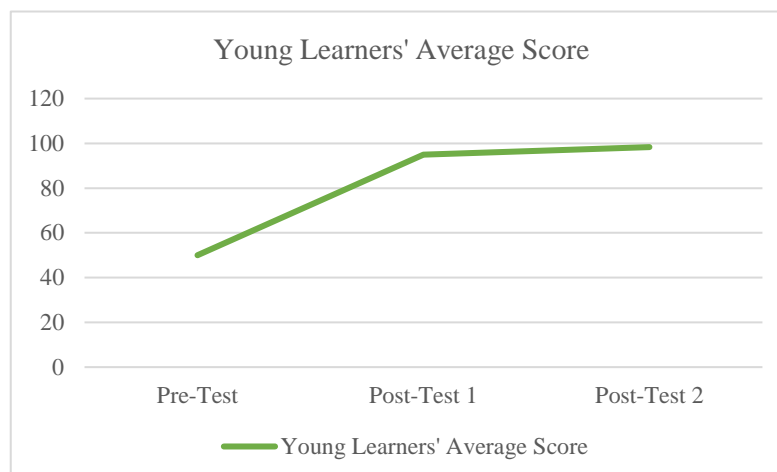
Fig. 4. Chart of Young Learners' Average Score

The results of the research shows that Educaplay can improved young learners' vocabulary. It is in line with the statement of Hazar (2020), that digital games are an effective tool for enhancing young learners' vocabulary. Moreover, Educaplay offers various games that can be applied by teachers. In this research, the researchers applied one of their games, Froggy Jump. In this game, teachers could set the game based on their preference, such as setting the time limit and the amount of player's life. The researchers set a time limit of 20 seconds for each question with 3 hearts for once played. Those made young learners thrilled to finish the game. Most of them were enthusiastic in playing the game since they have to beat the time and hit the perfect score.

Related to the use of Educaplay as a medium to improve young learners' vocabulary, based on the observations and the test scores, Educaplay could engage their learning motivation. Most of them stated that they became more motivated to learn English, especially in learning vocabulary words. Playing games can make learning more entertaining and interesting, which will enhance students' motivation and participation (Eltahir et al., 2021). Thus, young learners with good learning motivation led them to improve their vocabulary. As mentioned by Al-Zhawi (2014), vocabulary acquisition is more likely to be successful for motivated learners. The score increasement of each test showed an improvement. In the pre-test session, none of them achieved the target score, of 75 points. Meanwhile, in the post-test 1 session, young learners increased their scores significantly.

Nevertheless, they needed time to finish post-test 1 as they were hesitant to answer the question because they had to memorize the material that had already been delivered during the treatment session. Hence, Cycle 2 was conducted with the same treatment and the same material with the additional vocabulary words. They improved their score. They looked more enjoyed and needed plenty of time to finish the question since they memorized the vocabulary well and reduced their anxiety.

4. Conclusion

The research results indicate that Educaplay can be applied in a class as a learning medium to improve young learners' vocabulary. This is demonstrated by the increasing score of the Pre-test, Post-test 1, and Post-test 2. The results of the pre-test were 50 points. It means that none of the young learners hit the targeted score. Then the researchers applied Educaplay. In this regard, the researchers gave a Post-test 1 with a result of 95 points. It means that young learners increased their scores significantly, but the researchers still found that they were confused and hesitant in identifying the meanings of certain vocabulary words. Thus, the researchers conducted Cycle 2 and gave a Post-test 2 after the treatment. The results show that young learners increased their scores, reaching an average score of 98.33.

According to the explanation above, Educaplay could be applied as a learning medium to teach vocabulary to young learners since it helps them to enhance their learning motivation and improve their vocabulary. Moreover, as one of the online game platforms, Educaplay could help young learners

to memorize words as Al-Shawi (2014) found in his research that playing games while practicing vocabulary improves students' memorization skills, fosters student engagement, and boosts motivation. The teacher can choose the kind of games from Educaplay since it offers various games that can be played in a class. The teacher can also modify and set it based on their preferences. When applying Educaplay, the teacher must manage time effectively since it may cause addiction in young learners.

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