

## **The Use of Song Worksheet to Enhance EFL Elementary School Students' Vocabulary Mastery**

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This study aimed to enhance students' vocabulary mastery through the use of song worksheet. Twenty-two fourth graders of an elementary school in Indonesia were selected as participants. Action research was adopted in this study consisting of three cycles. To find out students' achievement, vocabulary test was given. To investigate students' responses, observation and interview were implemented. Findings showed that song worksheet could enhance students' vocabulary mastery. They also gave positive responses to the use of song worksheet. However, students complained that the songs were too fast. This study supports the use of songs in the EFL context which could make teaching-learning processes more fun.

*Keywords:* vocabulary mastery, song worksheet, action research

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan perbendaharaan kata (vocabulary) melalui penggunaan worksheet lagu. Dua puluh dua siswa kelas empat di sekolah dasar di Indonesia berpartisipasi dalam penelitian tindakan ini yang terdiri dari tiga siklus. Untuk mengetahui kemajuan siswa, tes penguasaan kata diberikan. Dan untuk mengetahui respon siswa, observasi dan wawancara dilakukan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa worksheet lagu dapat mendorong penguasaan perbendaharaan kata. Tetapi, siswa mengeluhkan tentang lagu yang terlalu cepat. Penelitian ini mendukung penggunaan lagu untuk pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing yang berpotensi membuat proses pembelajaran menjadi lebih menyenangkan.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Vocabulary is a language component which should not be neglected, including in the teaching of English for elementary school students which can be considered as EYL (English for Young Learner). Regarding vocabulary, Rivers (as cited in Nunan, 1991) contends that "... adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because. Without an extensive vocabulary, we will be unable to use the structures and functions we may have learned for

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comprehensible communication” (p. 117). Almost similarly, Richards and Renandya (2002) argue that it is “a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write” (p. 255). Teaching vocabulary to Indonesian elementary school students is not always easy. Based on my own experience as an English teacher at an elementary school, it shows that fourth graders of elementary school still found difficulty in learning vocabulary. However, they were very active, so they always asked me when dealing with unfamiliar words they did not understand.

Apart from the difficulty in teaching vocabulary, learning it is also difficult, especially when the vocabulary is not used, be it in speaking or writing. Harmer (2012) suggests repetition and states that “repetition has always played a part in language learning...” (p. 56). Besides this, exposing students to the use of vocabulary in context and in a fun way seems helpful. Using songs may be a good idea in this regard.

Considering the use of songs in classroom activities, Saricoban and Metin (2000) argue that “songs offer a change from routine classroom activities... They can also be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives, and adverbs” (p. 1). In addition, songs can be an effective material for EYL. Şevik (2014) finds that “in fact, songs are regarded as among one of the most appropriate and effective materials for young EFL learners” (p. 51). It could be inferred that songs can stimulate young learners to study English attractively and possibly effectively as songs could be easily memorable. Another author such as Medina (as cited in Diakou, 2013) states that songs can enhance memorization since the information conveyed is accompanied with music. With regard to the teaching-learning process, Saricoban and Metin (2000) propose some techniques to deliver songs, among others, close texts, true-false statements, dictation, and antonyms/synonyms.

The delivering technique in using songs can be combined with worksheet. Worksheet can be defined as a printed material “to help students to gain knowledge, skills and values by providing helpful comments about the course objectives” (Kaymacki, 2012, p. 57). With its flexibility to be used in the educational setting, worksheet is possible to engage students and make them active in the learning processes. Teachers can use worksheets for many tasks in order to make students get benefits (Harmer, 2012). In addition, Lee (2014) says that worksheet can be used to support study and promote active learning. It could be inferred that worksheet is beneficial for not only making students become active in the study but also stimulating students’ interest to study.

There have been some studies on the use of songs in EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Shaffer (2004), for example, conducted an experimental study to find out the effect of songs in learning. Songs were given to the experimental group, while the control group was not given songs at all. Results show that the group given songs was better than the group without songs. A classroom action research which was conducted by Arévalo (2010) to investigate the English performance of students after being exposed with some English songs also show that songs were effective enough to improve the performance of the first academic semester students at the university. A study by Tse (2015) in Malaysia that investigated the use of songs to young learners also show that songs provided lots of repetition, reduced students’ anxiety when studying English, and made learning more interesting. However, the study suggests the appropriate songs for young learners.

The studies confirm that songs can be used in the EFL context with its various benefits. However, the use of songs combined with worksheet has not been popular. This study, therefore, is interested in integrating songs with worksheets. As regards, two research questions are posed in the study: (1) Can the use of song worksheet enhance the students' vocabulary mastery? (2) What are the students' responses concerning the use of song worksheet?

## **METHOD**

This study adopted action research and took place at a public elementary school in Bogor. Twenty-two students sitting at the fourth grade participated in the study; their ages ranged from 9 to 11 years old. There were three cycles in this action research, with each cycle consisting of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Vocabulary test and interview were done to support the observing and reflecting stages, and observation was implemented to find out students' reaction during the study. The test given was in the form of multiple choice, and it was conducted at the beginning of the study and after each cycle to see the effectiveness of the activities given in each stage. The interview was also conducted to investigate students' responses regarding the use of songs and worksheet. There were 12 students selected for the interview. They were taken from three categories: top, middle, and low scorer. Each category was represented by 4 students.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Cycle One**

In the planning stage, I planned to teach regarding the theme of 'numbers.' This theme was decided based on materials in the syllabus. Furthermore, I prepared a book of songs with its audio files created by Carolyn Graham, who is a teacher trainer, writer, and musician. The songs about numbers titled 'Books, Books,' 'Make a Circle,' 'The Student,' and 'The Purple Sneaker Song' were selected since they corresponded to the materials and syllabus in the elementary school. The worksheet, which contained numbers and assigned students to identify incorrect words based on the songs, was made ready for each student. The lesson plan for the first meeting was both studied and rechecked. Besides this, the observation to observe the ongoing process and test to see the students' progress were prepared.

In the acting stage, through the white board and projector, the teacher elicited the learning material in order to know whether some students already knew the material or not. It was important since there was a possibility that students already knew the material. In the lesson, students were encouraged to count some fruits in English. Before the song worksheet was distributed, songs were played without their lyric, so the students were given a chance to focus firstly on their listening skill. After the worksheet was received by students, they were led to indicate incorrect words based on the songs. Then to experience studying the word meaning, the students did additional activities in the worksheet, consisting of numbering pictures, circling answers, and matching numbers. Moreover, to relate the material with the reality and to strengthen the students' vocabulary mastery, the students were asked to count things in their classroom and house.

In the observation, both strengths and weaknesses during the action process were noted and identified. What students did both verbally and non-verbally also became the focus of the observation. Consequently, there were some problems found during the observation. First,

from the exploration of students' understanding regarding numbers as the theme of learning (random numbers were shown), it was found that there were six students who could not be able to count number 1 until 10 in order. Second, some students were reluctant to sing the song altogether, and some others were silent or could not sing clearly. Third, when the song worksheet was given and the task based on the song was instructed, some students still got confused on how to do the task due to their unfamiliarity. They kept asking their friends even after the instruction was explained. Fourth, when dealing with the fourth song in the first cycle, namely 'The Purple Sneaker Song,' the students told that song was too fast to be comprehended and completed in the song worksheet. Finally, the main instruction in the song worksheet, identifying incorrect words based on songs played, seemed too easy to enhance students' vocabulary mastery though the students were completely beginner.

In the reflecting stage, it was found that some songs made the students enjoy to study and to finish tasks given. It could be seen from the students who looked pleasant (for instance, smiling, nodding their head, and clapping hands while listening to the music), enthusiastic, and eager to answer the task. I therefore planned to prepare a song played with introductory music and more songs in order not only to increase the interest of students but also to give more time for the students to focus on the songs since in the beginning. Having dealt with the second song in this cycle, 'The Purple Sneaker Song,' it was realized that the song was too fast or even the fastest among the other songs in the cycle 1. Then I decided to carefully select the songs by paying attention to the lyric and tempo of songs before used.

The main instruction of song worksheet in this cycle, identifying incorrect words based on songs played, seemed too easy to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. I considered planning to use different task to expose students with the song, like more focusing on each letter in the song lyric; so, the task of identifying incorrect words was planned to be replaced with 'asking students to fill in the blanks' and 'indicating whether the statement was true or not' based on the songs played. To anticipate either too fast explanation or ambiguous instruction regarding the task given, I planned to always recheck whether the students already understood the instruction or not, particularly for activities which were still unfamiliar for the students. Based on the post-test in this cycle, there was not much progress for the students' average score; their average score increased from 61.68 to 62.18, while the minimum required standard was 70.

## **Cycle Two**

In the planning stage, 'colors' as a new theme for study was prepared. The song worksheet for this cycle was modified due to reflections in the cycle 1. For instance, identifying the incorrect words was not used. It was replaced with filling-in-the-blank task, and students were directed to indicate whether the statements were true based on the song lyrics. Those tasks were given to make the students become more attentive or careful with vocabulary. The songs having the color theme used were 'What Color is This?' 'This is Blue, This is a Book,' 'The Yellow Chair,' and 'The Black Cat.' Finally, to anticipate fast explanation and/or ambiguous instruction, I rechecked students' understanding.

In the acting stage, students were shown a picture of rainbow and asked to say its colors in order to know students' basic understanding of the lesson. Afterward, I played the song containing numbers before the worksheet was distributed. While students worked with the

worksheet, they were encouraged to do the gap filling activities which was more challenging than identifying incorrect words in the previous cycle. However, stimulating students to tell meaning of words in the songs was still conducted in this cycle. Interestingly, the song titled 'This is blue, this is a book' was suitable to introduce colors to elementary school students because it was easy to study. I continued exploring the songs in this cycle by providing additional activities related to numbers in the daily life, for instance, counting sneakers and uniform.

There were at least two noticeable problems found during the observation: (a) the more challenging task, the more students asked for repetition. They needed more time to comprehend and write the words, and (b) some students did not stay connected to the lesson for a few times; instead they were joking and playing around with one another that had nothing to do with the lesson. Having seen 'puzzled' looks on some students' faces, there was still a possibility that they were just either confused or bored during their study.

Through reflection, it was revealed that some students needed three times for song repetition, while in the previous stage repetition was not necessary. First and second repetition might be needed to make the students accustomed to the song and its task, and third repetition was for comprehension. Due to the speed of the song which may be too fast for the students, I realized that I needed an additional supportive task for vocabulary activities or practices in the worksheet which was not related to the song, but to the theme of learning material or students' daily life.

I thought that some students' enthusiasm to show their answer of the song worksheet could be stimulated by providing competition. It was also expected to cheer up the class and give students a chance to learn each other. For the students who looked unwilling to stay connected to the lesson due to their confusion or boredom in the second meeting of this cycle, the graded and varied tasks were planned to be conducted in the next cycle. As a result, the main tasks in the cycles 1 and 2 were planned to be combined with another variation of tasks in the cycle 3.

After knowing that the problems in the second cycle were less than the first cycle, I assumed that the students could retain materials and had better progress. Based on quantitative data of the test result, it could be inferred that there was progress in this cycle. More than half of the students achieved the score above 70. A different strategy in using songs and worksheet was conducted in the next cycle.

### **Cycle Three**

In this last cycle, 'foods' as a new theme for study was prepared; it was in accordance with the educational syllabus for elementary school. I decided to use songs about foods, for instance, 'Do You Want Chicken?' and 'What Do You Want for Dinner?' Referring to the reflecting stage conducted in the cycle 2 in which there was a need to cheer up the students and make them learn each other, students could compete to show their answer in front of the class. Varied tasks were also planned to be conducted. However, not all instructions of the tasks were new since I decided to reuse earlier tasks such as identifying incorrect words, indicating whether statements were true or not, and filling in the blanks based on the songs played. It was done to make students become familiar or confident to cope with the tasks, starting from the easiest to the hardest ones. The new task given was asking students to arrange wrong order of simple

sentences into the right sequence while the song was being played. In addition, to introduce the ingredients of foods and their tastes, I also prepared pictures of foods and musical videos of making foods such as meatballs and fried bananas. Those aforementioned tasks were designed to challenge students to be more comprehensive in learning vocabulary through the song worksheet.

In the acting process, I investigated whether the plan facilitated the students' vocabulary mastery. Having considered the low achievers who had 'confused looks' in the previous cycle, the lesson was conducted with the easiest to more complex tasks of the song worksheet, for instance, identifying incorrect words based on the song lyric, deciding whether statements in the song worksheet were right or not based on the song lyric, filling in the blanks, and arranging sentences into the correct sequence based on the song played. Next, to check the students' understanding regarding vocabulary in the first song, they were shown pictures of things related to the previous song, allowed to discuss with their peers, and encouraged to compete in finishing tasks in the song worksheet. As students could be bored when they were explained too much, all students were encouraged to put more effort into their vocabulary practices.

To introduce more knowledge about foods, I showed musical videos of making foods as has been mentioned above, and the students did additional activities in the song worksheet concerning food ingredients and their tastes. Then the students were encouraged to show their answer in front of the class. When nobody wanted to show the answer again, I checked and explained the answers. In this stage, the students were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the material.

There were two problems found during the observation. First, every task in the worksheet required me to explain the instruction or demonstrate how to do the task in detail, otherwise the students were confused. Second, only half of the students could correctly answer the new task, namely, arranging sentences into the correct sequence.

As the reflection in this cycle, teaching process of the third cycle, in general, was successful. Most students participated in the process. There were some students who always showed enjoyment or happy reaction, for example, smiling, nodding their head, and clapping their hands when the songs were played. I also did not rush to finish the lesson. However, to avoid the students' confusion, I consistently provided information dealing with the students' understanding of the task given, particularly for the new task in the song worksheet. Having seen only 36% (in the cycle 1) and 59% (in the cycle 2) of the students who achieved the minimum required score (70), the cycle 3 showed the successful result: 77% of the students achieved the minimum score.

After the three cycles were finished, I interviewed twelve students as has been mentioned in the method section. The findings show the following three points. First, the majority of students already had exposures to children songs in their life. Second, most of them stated that the songs given were too fast. Third, they felt excited when learning through the song worksheet. They said the activities were fun especially identifying incorrect words. The most interesting finding was that students belonging to the low achiever informed that the use of song worksheet was pleasing and guiding; they wanted to have it more.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that the use of song worksheet can enhance elementary school students' vocabulary mastery, and the EFL students at elementary school respond positively to the use of song worksheet even though there are a few flaws such as the speed of songs. Some strategies regarding the activities based on worksheet can be interesting and make them excited. Therefore, EFL teachers need to consider classroom activities which are suitable to children since they may easily get bored. The choice of songs suitable to their language proficiency and age also needs to be taken into account. Finally, the use of song worksheet may also be successful for teenagers or adults learning EFL. The focus can be expanded to not only vocabulary but also pronunciation, for example. Further studies can investigate this aspect.

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