

Chapter One

Introduction

This chapter presents a description of the study. Also discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions purpose of the study and the significance of the study.

Background

Vocabulary is a part of language learning aspect that is important for the students. According to Lehr (2004) vocabulary is knowledge of words and meaning of the words in oral or written which is used in listening, writing, reading, and speaking. Vocabulary is also important to support learners in practicing their four skills such as listening, writing, reading and speaking. Wilkins (2004) stated “without grammar, a very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed” (pp. 111-112). By having a rich vocabulary, students can understand every context in those four skills in language learning without guessing or thinking about the meaning of the words.

Students should consider putting vocabulary as one of the top aspects in their language learning process because lack of vocabulary can lead them to difficulties in the language learning process. Asgari and Mustapha (2011) said that vocabulary has been recognized as crucial to language use in which lack of vocabulary knowledge will lead the learners to difficulties. The point shows that vocabulary is important in language learning.

To learn vocabulary, students need strategies in their learning process. These strategies are usually made by themselves. It can make the language

learning process easier, fun, enjoyable and effective. As stated by Weinstein (2000) learning strategies were thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, and emotions that help the acquisition and the transfer process of new knowledge or skills. That is why the students should have their strategy in acquiring the vocabulary. Oxford (1990) stated that strategies are important for language learning because they are tools for students to be active in every language activity. A strategy can be a tool for students to help them in learning vocabulary. By having a proper strategy, the students can acquire more vocabulary rather than those who have no strategy.

Vocabulary acquisition is really important for first-year students. The first year of college is the transition time for the students to move from high school to college. It is the starting time for the students to find out new strategies that can be used continuously by them. As time goes by, they will move to the difficult levels which demand them to have a lot more vocabulary. By then, they will be able to engage with the language learning process in the next coming year.

Students with less experience in English will find difficulties to follow the learning process; it is because of the lack of vocabulary. Research by Abdullah (2006) found that most of the Indonesian high school students only acquire less than 1000 vocabulary when they were graduated. Moreover, first-year students' awareness in the strategies for learning vocabulary also gives a significant effect on the process of acquiring vocabulary because they only remembered a few vocabularies since high school. Some of the first year students do not know about the strategies in learning vocabulary. According to Priyono (2004), the main problem of Indonesian EFL students is their limited vocabulary. It becomes a

problem because the lack of vocabulary will make students cannot engage in the learning process.

Meanwhile, there are some first-year students who have an outstanding performance in using vocabulary during the language learning process. Those students who can use the strategies effectively can acquire more vocabulary than the other first-year students who have no strategy to learn vocabulary. The difference condition between the first-year students who have not outstanding performance and first-year students who have outstanding performance is in line with the aims of the research which is to find out strategies used by first-year students in learning vocabulary.

This research is important because the results of this research will determine the common and effective strategies in learning vocabulary. Based on the researcher experience, some of the first-year students in one of the private universities who have less experience in learning English are confused in mastering the vocabulary. Hence, the researcher hopes that the results of this research can help first-year students to choose the proper strategies in learning vocabulary.

The study was conducted in an English Language Education Department in one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. The first-year of university students are the participants of this study. First-year students are the new students that have just finished High School. Based on the researcher's observation and experience, most of the first-year students cannot engage with the learning activity

because of lack vocabulary. Some of them only learn the basic of English before they enroll in college.

Statement of the Problem

Strategies in learning vocabulary are the action from students to make the learning process easier. In the university level, students of the English Department will use English in every learning context. Students will read English textbooks as the modal to write and speak in English. It can be compared with English in high school which most of EFL in Indonesia learn English in general and mixed with Bahasa Indonesia. The university level is harder than high school because the use of Bahasa Indonesia is less than in high school. The researcher has seen that some of the first year students in one of the private universities did not have a rich vocabulary. Based on the researcher observation, some first-year students cannot even introduce themselves in front of the class because they did not know the vocabulary of introducing self. It becomes the problem because they are going to learn and gain knowledge using English as the medium of the instruction. It demands them to understand every context in the learning process. First-year students need to learn and master vocabulary to make the vocabulary learning process easier by then they have to employ the proper strategies to help them in reaching their goals to master vocabulary. Thus, the researcher intends to investigate and find out which strategies they believe that it is the most effective one.

Research Questions

Related to the aim of the study, this research is expected to answer two main questions:

1. What are the strategies that first-year students use for learning vocabulary?
2. Which strategies does first-year English as Foreign Language students believe to be the most effective?

The purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to find out the strategies used by first-year students of English Language Education Department in learning vocabulary. The study will also investigate the effective strategies that first-year students believe which can help them in mastering vocabulary.

The Significance of the Study

After this research is conducted, there will be possible benefits for the first year students, pre-service English teachers, and English teachers.

For first-year students. This study would help first-year students to choose the effective strategies in learning vocabulary and they might use it if they feel it is beneficial for them. When students can choose effective strategies in learning vocabulary, they will be able to improve their learning process. Thus, they will get a lot of vocabulary which can help them in learning a language.

For pre-service English teachers and English teachers. This study will help pre-service English teachers and English teachers to introduce some strategies in learning vocabulary to the language learners during the teaching and

learning process. Therefore, pre-service English teachers and English teachers can help students to be familiar with the strategies in learning vocabulary.

For the department. The study will help the department in improving their facilities to provide more stuff which can facilitate students in learning vocabulary. The results of the research will also determine the detail about what stuff that students need to learn vocabulary.