

DEVELOPING A MNEMONIC POCKET DICTIONARY FOR IMPROVING VOCABULARY MASTERY OF YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract: Without suitable instructional media, young learners often find it hard to memorize and retain foreign language vocabulary in their long-term memory. This study aimed to develop a mnemonic pocket dictionary for improving the vocabulary mastery of young learners. This study employed the Research and Development design, which steps – needs analysis, planning, product development, expert validation, and revision, tryout, and product publishing – are adopted from Latief (2017). The tryout subjects of this study were six young learners at Selok Awar-Awar, Lumajang, East Java. The tryout results show that the developed mnemonic pocket dictionary is suitable, helpful, and motivating young learners in memorizing vocabulary. Moreover, the product is appropriate for young learners because it matches their characteristics, and the topics are relevant to their needs and interests.

Keywords: mnemonic, pocket dictionary, mnemonic dictionary, vocabulary, vocabulary learning, young learners

INTRODUCTION

Recent research indicates that teaching vocabulary is problematic due to teachers' lack of knowledge of the subject matter and their learners' needs. For example, Berne and Blackhowicz's (2008) study on the practice in vocabulary teaching shows that teachers do not know where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning. In addition, teaching English to young learners requires that teachers understand young learners' development, needs, and characteristics (Suyanto, 2007). Without a comprehensive understanding of how they learn, it is not easy to design efficient language teaching and learning activities.

Pinter (2006) confirms that young learners have a great curiosity to try new things and explore concrete to abstract things. They get their understanding from explanation and what they see, hear, and learn when they have a chance to touch and interact with it (Harmer, 2001). Besides, young learners also have a pretty short attention span and can quickly get bored (Slattery & Willis, 2001). To deal with this, foreign language teachers need to design meaningful learning experiences by creating engaging instructional media and sound techniques that suit young learners' characteristics and maintain their interest in learning vocabulary.

Three kinds of instructional media that can be used with young learners are visual, audio, and audiovisual media (Suyanto, 2007). Visual media involves eye sensory, and audio media involves ear sensory. Audiovisual involves seeing and hearing sensory. Audiovisual and visual media need the support of technology to function. Visual media, on the other hand, can operate with no technology. This makes visual media versatile and flexible to use in any teaching and learning condition.

In foreign language teaching and learning, the most common visual instructional media used with young learners are picture flashcards, picture dictionaries, puppets, and real objects. Instructional media have to make communication and learning (Smaldino, 2007). There are many kinds of instructional media, but the visual ones are the most appropriate in teaching vocabulary to young learners (Wright, 1976). Moreover, visual media of colored paper positively impact young learners in the specific skill of language learning (Khoury, 2010). Thus, language teachers are better to focus on making

an effective vocabulary learning strategy than directly giving the meaning of unfamiliar words for helping their students (Nation, 1990), especially young learners. Thus, they have to seek the simplest and most straightforward strategy and technique supported with any resources provided in their school. Besides, the strategy and technique should also raise the students' motivation and build a fun learning atmosphere so that the students are full of spirit and interest in learning English.

Several studies have investigated that the mnemonic method can benefit learners, especially in memorizing vocabulary. According to Azmi (2006), most students agree that they enjoy the mnemonic technique more than the typical teaching technique of vocabulary learning. Besides, the technique also helps learners develop a strong link between a new vocabulary item and its meaning, expands learners' vocabulary, increases language performance, and many more. From the cognitive perspective, mnemonic strategies are effective because they form an effective acoustic imaginary link between stimulus and response (Scruggs & Levin, 1885).

To develop a mnemonic pocket dictionary that suits young learners in Indonesia, the researcher visited a classroom in an elementary school in Lumajang to conduct an observation and interview as well as distribute a questionnaire. During the observation, the young learners showed that they were interested in joining the English class. However, they were inactive because they did not have sufficient vocabulary for communicating with their classmates. In the questionnaire, the students mentioned that they did not use any workbook in class. Moreover, only one of them brought a dictionary to the English class. Therefore, the students were in desperate need of any low-tech instructional media and learning technique to improve their vocabulary mastery so that they can be more active in class. According to Nation (1990), selecting a proper technique and instructional media is very important for young learners to support their vocabulary learning. Hence, the researchers developed a simple instructional media in the form of a mnemonic pocket dictionary that easily and efficiently help young learners learn vocabulary. The mnemonic pocket dictionary has some advantages that are different from conventional dictionaries. It is small and colorful; it is illustrated, and it uses mnemonic devices to make it easier for young language learners to memorize vocabulary.

METHOD

This study employed the Research and Development (R&D) design to develop a mnemonic pocket dictionary used as an educational product. The process involved problem identification that needed to be solved using the educational product (Latief, 2017). The mnemonic pocket dictionary developed in this study is used to improve young learners' vocabulary mastery. It has passed several steps before it is published: 1) needs analysis, 2) planning, 3) product development, 4) expert validation and revision, 5) product tryout and revision, and 6) publishing.

The needs analysis was conducted to know young learners' problems in learning vocabulary related to instructional media used in the learning process. In this research, needs analysis information was collected from classroom observation, interviews, and a questionnaire. During the observation, the researcher asked the students one by one and then gave them a questionnaire in the form of a checklist sheet. In this step, the researcher explained, read, and guided them on filling the questionnaire checklist sheet to avoid mistakes. In addition, the questionnaire asked for the students' opinions in learning English, their vocabulary problems, and their preferences in learning vocabulary. The observation and questionnaires were used to inform the development of the product that can be used to aid those who have problems developing vocabulary mastery. The product was designed based on the needs analysis, relevant syllabus, and learners' problematic areas in the planning process.

In this present study, a mnemonic pocket dictionary was developed based on the needs analysis results, which were difficulties in learning and memorizing vocabulary and the limited instructional media for learning vocabulary. In addition, the researcher used a general syllabus for young learners for the topic itself, covering things around us, kinds of animals and fruits, and transportation tools (Brown, 2001).

The process was done carefully to design the most appropriate product for learning and memorizing vocabulary for young learners. The steps of the product development were as follow:

1. Choosing the appropriate topic, things around us would fit the students' interest in learning;
2. Determining the sub-topics;
3. Choosing the suitable vocabulary with the sub-topics;
4. Finding some pictures to be inserted into each word;
5. Finding the keyword in each vocabulary;
6. Arranging the vocabulary, and putting pictures, and explaining the definitions of the keywords.

An expert then evaluated the developed product. The validator evaluated whether or not the mnemonic pocket dictionary fits the students' needs and is ready to be tested or needs more aspects to be added. The validator was a lecturer who taught Instructional Media and Activities Language Teaching in the Department of English, Universitas Negeri Malang. The researcher provided a validation sheet to be filled by the validator. The validation focused on three evaluation criteria, i.e., design and layout, program operation, and content. The product was then revised based on the feedback given by the validator.

To evaluate its appropriateness, applicability, and usability based on the target students' needs and interests, the revised product was then tried out to six elementary school students at Selok Awar-Awar, Lumajang. Most of them were third graders from several schools in the area. However, they had a similar background and faced similar problems in learning foreign language vocabulary, i.e., unable to communicate because of limited vocabulary knowledge and unavailability of supporting instructional media for learning vocabulary. The tryout was also used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the product. Finally, the students tried the product and filled in a response checklist. The checklist, which measures the students' affects and opinions about the product, used Likert scale items.

The product was revised based on the feedback given by the tryout participants and published. The final product is in the form of a mnemonic pocket dictionary ready to aid young learners' in memorizing English vocabulary.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The mnemonic pocket dictionary is an illustrated dictionary. It contains pictures and words in English and Bahasa Indonesia. Besides, a mnemonic strategy is used in presenting the target words in the dictionary. Moreover, an acronym, the most common type of mnemonic, helps learners memorize words faster and easier. The mnemonic pocket dictionary contains the following properties:

1. Covers

The covers are in two parts, i.e., front and back. The front cover includes the name of the product and the target users. The back cover contains the author and the co-authors' names. The size of the covers is 8 x 12 cm. It is printed on an art paper type 210.

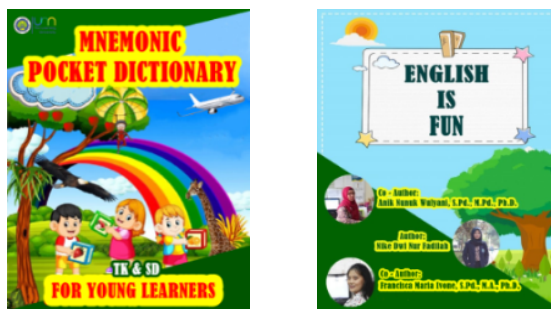


Figure 1. Front and back covers of the mnemonic pocket dictionary

2. User Manual

The user manual contains information for target users on how to use the dictionary. The manual is printed on an art paper type 150.

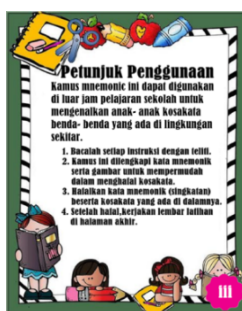


Figure 2. A page of the user manual

3. Mnemonic Keywords

The mnemonic keyword pages provide acronyms and sentence examples. The acronyms are relevant to the list of words; for instance, SMALL MANGO stands for Strawberry, Mango, Apple, Lemon, Lychee, Melon, Avocado, Nut, Grapes, and Orange. Relevant acronyms will help the target users memorize the vocabulary items faster and easier. The keyword pages are printed on art paper type 150.



Figure 3. Examples of the mnemonic keyword pages

4. Picture and vocabulary item

The dictionary also has pages for pictures and vocabulary items. Each vocabulary item is presented in English and Bahasa Indonesia. The use of text and illustration aims to help the target users relate the vocabulary items to the object and their translation in Bahasa Indonesia. The pages in this section are all printed on art paper type 150.



Figure 4. An example of the dictionary page containing pictures and vocabulary items

5. Vocabulary exercise

In the last pages of the dictionary, users can find vocabulary exercises. They are used to help the targets users recall the words they have learned in the dictionary by completing the acronym words. The exercise pages are printed on art paper type 150.



Figure 5. An example of the vocabulary exercise page

6. Readers' review

The readers' review is presented on the last page before the back cover. It is used to display reviews from teachers who have used the mnemonic pocket dictionary. The review page is printed on art paper type 150.



Figure 6. An example of the readers' review page

Young Learner's Opinions of the Mnemonic Pocket Dictionary

Six young learners tried out the mnemonic pocket dictionary and shared their opinions on the instructional media and their learning experience while using the dictionary. Table 1 contains the summary of the student's opinions about the instructional media. The tryout results are positive and promising as all of the students enjoyed learning vocabulary using the mnemonic pocket dictionary. All

of them also found the media easy to use and practical for learning English. All of them were also interested in owning the dictionary and found them fascinating.

Table 1. Summary Result of the Product Try-out (n=6)

No	Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	I really enjoy learning English using the mnemonic pocket dictionary.	6	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.	I am interested in using the mnemonic pocket dictionary to learn English.	2	33	4	67	0	0	0	0
3.	The mnemonic pocket dictionary is easy and practical for learning English.	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0
4.	I do not enjoy using the mnemonic pocket dictionary to learn English.	0	0	0	0	4	67	2	33
5.	I am not interested in using the mnemonic pocket dictionary to learn English.	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	100
6.	I am interested in having a mnemonic pocket dictionary.	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0
7.	Mnemonic pocket dictionary eases me in learning vocabulary.	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0
8.	Even though I use the mnemonic pocket dictionary, I am still not motivated to learn English vocabulary.	0	0	0	0	2	33	4	67
9.	I am highly motivated in vocabulary learning using the mnemonic pocket dictionary.	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0
10.	Mnemonic pocket dictionary really helps me in memorizing vocabulary	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0

The students also shared their opinions on the benefits of using the mnemonic pocket dictionary. It is also shown in Table 1 that all of the students strongly agree and agree that the use of the dictionary facilitates them in learning vocabulary. The results show that the mnemonic pocket dictionary has positive effects on vocabulary learning as it helps and eases students in learning and memorizing vocabulary items. Its use also motivated them to learn the target language vocabulary.

The strengths of the developed product are its ease of use and vocabulary learning technique used in the dictionary. Because learners find it easy to use the instructional media, they enjoy and are interested in using the media. As a visual instructional media, the mnemonic pocket dictionary gives various visual input learners can use when memorizing words in a foreign language. Wright (1976)

suggests that there are various kinds of media, but visual is appropriate for young learners in learning vocabulary.

In addition to ease of use, the developed product also makes vocabulary learning more accessible using mnemonics. Mnemonic devices can help learners quickly memorize target language words by organizing them into elaborative code and visualization to integrate it and connect the new information and the previous familiar information they have already stored in their memory (Carlson, as cited by Rosdiana, 2009). To ease learners' memorizing vocabulary, mnemonic devices can be very effective and make the students motivated and more engaging. The use of acronyms, a type of mnemonic device, in the mnemonic pocket dictionary makes it easier for learners to memorize and retrieve words within one category. Each letter in the acronyms serves as a retrieval cue for the target vocabulary items.

CONCLUSIONS

Lack of appropriate instructional media can inhibit students in learning foreign language vocabulary items easily and efficiently. Many language learners believe that a dictionary can only be used for finding word meanings. In reality, there are many types of dictionaries that learners can benefit from depending on their proficiency level and language learning needs. In this study, a special kind of dictionary is developed for the purpose of assisting young learners in vocabulary memorization and retrieval. Using a mnemonic technique, words are presented in the form of acronyms that can help learners memorize words easily.

Moreover, the dictionary also provides relevant illustrations in the form of pictures and word translation to help young learners understand the meaning of the target language vocabulary items. The students who tried out the dictionary stated that they were interested in owning the mnemonic pocket dictionary for several reasons. First, its practicality and exciting colors are more attractive than other typical dictionaries. Second, this product provides topics relevant to young learners' needs, which are about 'things around us'. Third, this mnemonic pocket dictionary also corresponds to young learners' characteristics in which they have a great curiosity to try new things and explore concrete or abstract things. Fourth, it also helps and eases them in learning vocabulary.

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