The Effectiveness of Using a Young Adult Novel to Improve Students' Vocabulary Size

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Introduction

The importance of vocabulary in acquiring a new language has been stated by several experts. Folse (2004) said that without vocabulary, second language learners cannot perform the language. The learners will be passive and not responsive in communication. In line with it, Harmon, Wood, and Kiser (2009) stated that vocabulary development is directly proportional with language development. It means that the more vocabulary the students acquire, the better language skill they can perform. It is supported by Nation (2001) who said that having rich vocabulary eases the students to perform skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In short, he highlighted that good vocabulary mastery helps students to absorb knowledge more from receptive skills such as listening and reading, and perform better in productive skills such as speaking and writing.

Providing sufficient and comprehensible inputs through reading is a good way to improve students' vocabulary. That is in line with Comprehensible Input generated by Krashen (1982). He stated that one way for human to acquire a language is by receiving comprehensible input. After getting the input, finally they can perform the language. Reading is one of receptive skills that can provide students with sufficient inputs. By reading books, students are able to absorb

language inputs especially vocabulary aspects such as spelling, word meanings, part of speech, and word forms. Through reading, they are also able to learn how to use words or expressions in a right context. After getting that knowledge, the students will get easy to practice it in both written and oral communication.

In Indonesia, reading is usually taught by giving the students a long text which the vocabulary is much beyond students' ability. Besides that, the topic of text is quite far from their daily life. The teacher is not giving enough assistance by giving some tasks to help students to understand their readings. In effect, students feel difficult in comprehending the content. Then, they are going to stop reading the text and their vocabulary will not be improved.

In this study, applying Comprehensible Input by Krashen (1982), the researchers designed a syllabus to improve students' vocabulary size through reading. An authentic material such as a young adult novel in an English language with several illustrations to ease students in understanding the story was chosen. To assist the students in improving their vocabulary through reading the novel, a set of classroom activities are also provided.

This research is actually on belief that reading a young adult novel provides them with an authentic material and enables them to gain various types of words through reading. Constant exposure to the language is beneficial to provide them greater opportunity to meet, learn, and acquire new words continuously. From that elaboration, it can be known that this experimental study aims to test whether using a young adult novel is able to improve students' vocabulary size.

Literature Review

Vocabulary

The definitions of vocabulary are variously stated by some experts. According to Hornby (2009), vocabulary is the total number of words which (with rules for combining them) make up a language. Also, Richards (2002) defines that vocabulary is the core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write. It could be inferred that mastering vocabulary for a student is a fundamental necessity in learning a language. It gives the students basic knowledge to understand the target language.

In addition, Nation (2001) defines vocabulary as a number of words which have low or high frequency in the utilization that are adapted bearing on situation or condition. High frequency words are the most frequently used words in written or oral form. There is a general consensus that high-frequency words must be mastered in order to achieve minimum levels of reading proficiency in both L1 and L2. Grabe (1991), however, states that infrequent words may be the most important for L2 readers knows, especially in specialized academic setting. Therefore, both high and low frequency words are important in vocabulary learning.

In relation to English as the target language learned, it is known that English language contains around 54,000 word families when these are counted in a large dictionary (Nation and Waring in Cameron, 2001). The Webster's Third New Dictionary, the largest non-historical dictionary of English, even has around 114,000 words families excluding proper names. Nation (2001) states that 14,000 word families are sufficient for written receptive use (number of words required for reading). However, Nation (1990) argues that learners of English as a foreign language only need at least 3000 high-frequency English words in order to be able to cope with university reading tasks. In the case of Indonesian students, the number of words that the

students should acquire is specified in the English curricula. Based on the curriculum documents, the senior high school students should master 4000 words, which includes the 1500 learned in junior high school. It means that the official learning objectives would seem to bring high school graduate within range the 4000-5000 English words that they minimally require at the tertiary level.

The vocabulary mastery requires the students to be able to know the word. Knowing the word here involves knowing its form and its meaning. This covers the grammatical function, collocations, and connotation which includes register and cultural assertion (Thornbury, 2002). Added to this, Cameron (2001) states that knowing a word comprises three components. First, is its form which includes how the word sounds, how it is spelt, and the grammatical changes that can be made to it. Second is its meaning which embraces the word's conceptual content and how it relates to other concepts and words. The last is its use which covers its pattern of occurrence with other words, and particular types of language use.

Furthermore, Nation (2001) suggests that knowing a words involves several abilities: (1) being familiar to recognize the word when it is heard, (2) being familiar with its written form so that it is recognized when it is met in reading, (3) recognizing word structure and being able to relate the parts to its meaning, (4) knowing what the word means in the particular context in which it has just occurred, (5) knowing the concept behind the word which will allow the understanding in variety of context, (6) knowing the related words, (7) being able to recognize whether the word has been used correctly in the sentence in which it occurs, and (8) being able to recognize the word's collocates. Based on the above explanation, teaching vocabulary mastery for the EFL students is a challenging task. Therefore, the teacher should implement the appropriate strategy in order to achieve the desired objective of learning.

Reading

Reading is one of the language competences or skills a person needs to have for language acquisition. Alderson (2000) defines reading as an interaction between the reader and the text. The text as a written language product is aimed to be the means of communication by the author or writer to the reader. Moreover, Johnson in Mikulecky (1990) defines reading as a complex behavior that involves conscious and unconscious use of various strategies including problem solving strategies to build the meaning which the writer intends. He defines reading as a way to generate the idea through particular strategies to get the intended meaning of the text.

There are two common ways on how reading is performed. They are intensive reading and extensive reading. The emphasis of the intensive reading is to get deeper comprehension of the text by examining the language features. It greatly considers the grammar of the text. The reader needs to get full attention of the text since intensive reading requires the reader to examine the detailed information of the text including the grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary, spelling, etc. In contrast, extensive reading involves reading with the focus on the meaning of the text. It does not involve much additional language use. Extensive reading enables the reader to read the text at ease. The reader doesn't need to get the whole details of the text. One of the benefits of extensive reading is that extensive reading presents vocabulary in breadth and depth and it allows students to get an access to advanced vocabulary that students will likely encounter in academic texts (Cummins, 2008)

The principal objective of extensive reading approach is to get students reading in English and liking it. An increase in reading fluency should be another objective. Hence, reading should be a pleasurable activity for the student, and teacher should promote it as much as possible. Another benefit of extensive reading is that constant exposure of the target language

will make the learner develop and enrich vocabulary. However, vocabulary learning from extensive reading is very fragile. If the small amount of learning of a word is not soon reinforced by another meeting, then that learning will be lost. It is critically important in extensive reading program that learners have the opportunity to keep meeting words they have met before (Nation, 1997: 15). Thus, a good reading habit needs to be regularly done by the language learner to maintain the language input through extensive reading.

One of the considerations to do extensive reading is about the selection of the reading material. Tsou (2007) stated careful selection of novels as text books is a crucial factor to teach to students of all levels of proficiency. It is very important since extensive reading needs minimum amount of difficult vocabulary provided in the text. Thornbury (2002) suggests that a reading material should contain 95-98 % of vocabulary coverage which consists of high frequency words to maintain the reading fluency. However, it will still provide the reader new words to learn of 5-2% of the total words in the text.

Reading Material for Extensive Reading

There are some reading materials commonly used for extensive reading. Books, magazine, newspapers, and novels are some of the extensive reading materials. They are useful as they provide text variety and themes. The selection of extensive reading material is crucial because it requires minimum unfamiliar words in the text (2-5% of unfamiliar words). There should be careful selection of the material to maintain reading fluency.

Novel is one of the reading materials commonly used for extensive reading. According to Garies (2004) novels are suitable for extensive reading due to four reasons. First, novels are ideal to develop skills and integrate of some skills because of their length and varied content. Second,

novels develop critical thinking skill as they are engaged in the literary texts and learners apply their own feelings and ideas regarding them. Third, novels make readers more enjoyable and help them to diversify their reading habits. Four, novels enable readers to discover the way the characters behave, feel and think to develop cultural awareness.

Conceptual Framework

Vocabulary is the key element of language learning. One of the strategies to improve the vocabulary is by using extensive reading. Novel is a reading material that can be used for extensive reading useful for vocabulary development. Novel provides rich sources of vocabulary and enables the reader to use the material for authentic use of the language.

Methodology

To answer the aforementioned research question, a quantitative research method was applied here because the data collected are numeric not descriptive (Borg & Gall, 2003). This quantitative research is categorized into experimental research because the focus of the research was to compare the difference before and after the implementation of a treatment (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Instead of using intensive reading activities and non-authentic materials, the new curriculum made an attempt to promote extensive reading and use authentic materials. To introduce the extensive reading activity, two novels were used in this course: Laskar Pelangi (an Indonesian novel used to change students' attitude toward reading and introduce them with the concept of the course activities) and the Diary of the Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules (a young adult novel used throughout the course).

While the first novel was selected primarily due to its popularity in Indonesia and used for a different purpose in an English class, the second book was selected because, in our point of view, the vocabulary used in the second novel was within students' English proficiency. In addition to being an authentic material in English learning (Tomlinson, 2003), the novel contained a high level of high frequency words and a considerably low level of low frequency words. The high portion of high frequency words would help students to understand the story (Nation, 2001). The novel also displays a number of illustrations that can help students understand the stories, although students may have been familiar with the stories because they are closely related to students' daily lives (Tomlinson, 2003).

The lessons were planned in which the students were required to finish the novels by reading it page by page. The novels were to be read in 16 weeks - the total number of meetings of the course. So, students were to read approximately15-30 pages per week. In each meeting, students were given questions related to the reading and asked to write their answers on a piece of paper. The questions were mainly about the story of the reading assignments and required students to retell the story in their own words. Students were allowed to use the words they learned from their reading. Their answers were turned in, given feedback, marked and returned in the following meeting.

The research question of the study is formulated as "Is Using a Young Adult Novel Effective to Improve Students' Vocabulary Size?" To answer the research question, the study employed an experimental research design by conducting a pre-test and post-test. In conducting pre-test and post-test, we designed an instrument by adopting Nation's vocabulary size instrument, which can be found in http://www.fltr.ucl.ac.be/fltr/germ/etan/bibs/vocab/cup.html. All the vocabulary used in the pre-test and post-test instruments was taken from both Nation's

website and the novel. The vocabulary was the first 200 words of Nation's word list and was in the novel used in the course. Students were asked to answer the vocabulary questions stated in the pre-test instrument, and the teacher collected their answers. The pre-test was conducted on 23rd, 24th, and 25th September 2015 to a total of 95 freshmen from 105 freshmen enrolled.

As for the intervention, similar activities were conducted every meeting. Besides retelling-the-story-in-writing activity, a vocab quiz in a form of dictation activity was performed. In the dictation activity, a list of words taken from the assigned pages was verbally read and students were instructed to write the words down on a piece of paper. The students were encouraged to use the words in the following activity, which was the retelling-the-story-in-writing activity. The next activities were group discussions in which students were instructed to relate the story with their personal lives. Again, they were encouraged to use the words they had been using during meeting and wrote what they discussed.

At the end of the semester, students were given the post-test, which was conducted on January 6, 2016. The words used in the post-test were the ones used in the pre-test. The 200 words were randomized so that students would have unlikely remembered the order of the words used in the pre-test. The results of pre-test and post-test were then analyzed using the dependent *t-test* of SPSS.

Findings and Discussions

This study aims at examining the difference of students' vocabulary size before and after the given treatment. The difference is figured out to reveal how significant the use of young adult novel influences the first year college students' vocabulary size. Regarding to it, hypothesis was

made as the following; "there is a significant improvement on the first year college students' vocabulary size by the use of young adult novel".

After the treatment implementation, the scores of students' vocabulary size tests were revealed. The result of this experimental design is the pre-test and the post-test scores. The *dependent t-test* (paired-sample t-test) was used in data analysis as it is used to determine whether there is significant difference between the means of the group before and after the treatment. The analysis of the scores aims at testing the hypothesis, and was conducted using SPSS v. 17.0 statistic software.

Since this study involves assumptions in the hypothesis, therefore, the parametric statistics is considered as the valuable method for analyzing the data. However, before approaching the analysis of parametric method and the hypothesis testing, two requirements should be met, namely test of normal distribution and test of homogeneity (Bluman, 2008).

Test of Normal Distribution

Before analysing the statistical result, the normality test was conducted to confirm whether or not the data of the dependent variable are normally distributed to be tested. The normality test can be done through two approaches, namely graphic analysis and statistical analysis. Firstly, the normality test with graphic analysis was done by analyzing the distribution of data plots on the curve test for normality. If the data are normally distributed, the result would be a straight diagonal line (Field, 2009). In other words, the data are normal if the data plots are distributed close to or following the diagonal line. On the other hand, if the data plots are distributed far away from the diagonal line, the data are considered not normally distributed. The result of the normality test through graphic analysis is presented in figure 1.1.

Secondly, the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test can be used to test a variable to see if it is normally distributed (Bluman, 2008, p. 517). The test compares the scores in the sample to a normally distributed set of scores with the same mean and standard deviation. The null hypothesis is that "sample distribution is normal." If P value is less than 0.05 (P<0.05), reject the H_0 because the distribution is significant or the distribution is not normal. Otherwise, accept the H_0 if the result is not significant (P>0.05) which means that the data have normal distribution. The result of the normality test is presented in table 1.1.

Normal Q-Q Plot of Gainscore

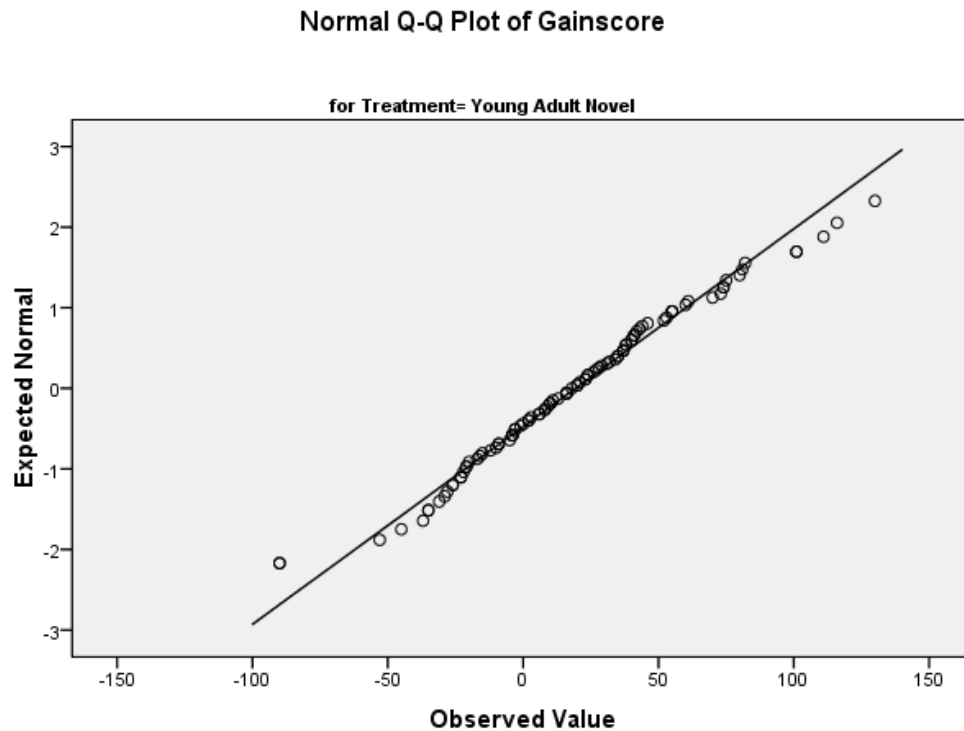**for Treatment= Young Adult Novel**

Figure 1.1. The Graphic Analysis of Normality Test

Based on the graphic analysis of the normality test, the data plots are distributed not following the diagonal line. From the result, it can be concluded that the data of the dependent variable were normally distributed. However, visual inspection of the distribution is not

representative enough for assessing normality. Therefore, normality test is also conducted in SPSS as the supplementary to the graphical assessment of normality. The main test for the assessment of normality is Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test.

Table 1.1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Treatment	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Gainscore	Young Adult Novel	.061	99	.200[*]	.987	99	.465

The result of the normality test presented in table 1.1 shows that the *sig.* value is 0.200 which is higher than 0.05 at the 95% degree of confidence. Therefore, the decision is to accept the H_0 as the result is not significant (0.200 > 0.05). It indicates that the test distribution is considered approximately ***normal***.

Test of Homogeneity

The test of homogeneity was used to determine whether the proportions for a variable are equal when several samples are selected from different population. The analysis used was ANOVA (F test). In ANOVA, we assume that treatment variances are equal. If *Sig* is lower than or the same as 0.05 (*p*-value ≤ 0.05), reject H_0 and conclude the variances are not all equal. However, if *Sig* is greater than 0.05 (*p*-value > 0.05), reject H_0 and conclude the variances are equal.

Table 1.2. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Gainscore	Based on Mean	13.320	1	196	.407
	Based on Median	12.734	1	196	.418
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	12.734	1	186.501	.418
	Based on trimmed mean	13.227	1	196	.409

Since the result shows that *Sig* is greater than 0.05 (0.407 > 0.05), the decision is to reject the H_0 in which the conclusion is that the variances are equal. Thus, the population from which the groups were sampled is homogeneous.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis of this experimental study is "there is a significant improvement on the first year college students' vocabulary size by the use of young adult novel". After the required analysis tests had been fulfilled, the hypothesis testing could be done using inferential statistics. *The dependent t-test* (called the paired-sample t-test in SPSS Statistics) was used in data analysis. The test compares the means between two related groups on the same continous, dependent variables. That formula was selected to understand whether there was a difference in the first year college students' vocabulary size before and after a 16-week-programme using the young adult novel. Therefore, the independent variable was the treatment (young adult novel), the dependent variable was the students' vocabulary size, and the two related groups were the vocabulary size *before* and *after* the programme. In order to take this effect into account, this study utilized the differences between the pre-test and the post-test score.

Table 1.3. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	126.70	99	32.425	3.259
	Posttest	146.071	99	22.6442	2.2758

The **Paired Samples Statistics** table (table 1.3) shows the generated descriptive statistics for the variables. The table 1.3 could be used to examine whether the means of the test scores are different from the pre and the post one. From the result, the difference between the mean scores were analyzed. The mean score of the pre-test of 99 students is 126, 70 (sd = 32, 43), while for the post test of 99 students, the mean score is 146, 07 (sd = 22,64). Thus, the mean difference is 19, 37. From the mean scores, it is revealed that the mean scores of the pre-test is higher than the mean score of post-test after the use of young adult novel.

Table 1.4. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	19.3737	40.7372	4.0942	-27.4986	-11.2488	4.732	98	.000

The decision-making rules for the hypothesis are based on two criteria, the observed t-value and the significance value (P-value): Firstly, if the observed t-value is higher than the t-table, H_0 is rejected (observed $t > t$-table = reject the H_0). If the observed t-value is lower than the t-table, H_0 is accepted (observed $t < t$-table = accept the H_0). Secondly, if the level of significance

is lower than 0.05, H_0 is rejected (*P*-value < 0.05 = reject the H_0). If the level of significance is higher than 0.05, H_0 is accepted (*P*-value > 0.05 = accept the H_0).

From the result (table 1.4), the observed *t*-value at (d.f.= 98) is 4,732, while the *t*-table at (d.f.= 98) is 1,990. Here, the observed *t*-value is higher than the *t*-value (4,732>1,990). Moreover, the result presents the 2-tailed significance level (P-value) at .000 which is lower than 0.05 (.000<0.05). The results indicate that there was *a statistically significant difference* between group tests. Therefore, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis (Ho) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1). From the results, the research question of this study is answered that is, the use of young adult novel improves the first year college students' vocabulary size.

One aspect that is important to acquiring a language is the vocabulary size (Cameron, 2001; Harmon, Wood & Keser, 2009). The bigger the size of vocabulary that a student has, the easier the student comprehends a text. Thus, reading and vocabulary work hand in hand. Students would not be able to understand a text without a decent number of vocabulary (Folse, 2004) and reading can improve students' vocabulary mastery. As vocabulary serves as the main elements to master a language, improving students' vocabulary knowledge and size is something worth to be done.

This research proposed an extensive reading with the use of young adult novel as the teaching technique to improve students' vocabulary. The decision of implementing extensive reading to the participants of this research is because it fits this research objective which is to allow students to get an access to advanced vocabulary that students will likely encounter in academic texts (Cummins, 2008). It is also in line with our beliefs about providing exposure for students to improve their English proficiency. As Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) states that by providing comprehensible input as much as possible, students will have greater opportunities

to acquire the language. The results indicate that there was *a statistically significant difference* between group tests. Therefore, the young adult book was effective to significantly improve students' vocabulary. The result is in line with Garies (2004) who states that novels are suitable for extensive reading.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the study shows that a young adult novel is effective to improve students' vocabulary size. Since the concept of extensive reading was still new in our context, the focus of the new curriculum was to promote extensive reading among students and teachers. The original concept of extensive reading is to encourage students to read a variety of texts in their free time without giving them extra works with regards to their reading. This new curriculum introduced the concept of extensive reading in terms of the variety of texts used. Meanwhile, the activities used in the new curriculum required students to pay close attention to the vocabulary, grammar, and story plot used in the book so that they were able to meet the course expectation. While the materials used in the new curriculum did not vary as stated in the concept of extensive reading, the materials were the authentic ones, which might have provided a better exposure to English vocabulary. This implies that authentic materials are strongly recommended to be used in the future curriculum, especially for skill-based curriculum: reading, writing, speaking, and listening courses.

The pilot implementation of this study was one semester long. After the implementation of the new curriculum: lesson plans and materials, several revisions were suggested for the next curriculum of the same course. With regards to the lesson plans, the activities conducted in the piloting were quite monotonous for both students and teachers. The next lesson plans should

have more various activities but are still closely related with the focus of the curriculum, which is vocabulary improvement and the story of the materials. A suggested activity that may be used is to provide students with reading time in which students are provided with a variety of texts or books. This activity can also be used to introduce students with the concept of extensive reading.

In terms of materials, after the piloting, the suggested revision for the next curriculum of the course is to eliminate the Indonesia novel used in the piloting as it had minimal contribution to students' English vocabulary improvement. Although this Indonesian novel was used to introduce the activities during the semester, the novel may be replaced with a variety of English texts. These texts would not only provide students with more exposure to English vocabulary, introduce students with various text types, but also give teachers more options for activities. While the English novel may still be relevant to students' vocabulary improvement and the focus of the course, this material may also be replaced with different books based on students' current English proficiency.

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