IMPLEMENTING “SPELLING BEE” GAME TO IMPROVE SEVENTH GRADERS’ SPELLING ABILITY

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ABSTRACT: Students often made spelling mistakes in their writing. This research aimed at investigating how the “Spelling Bee” game could be used to improve the seventh graders’ spelling ability. The instruments used to collect the data were an observation checklist, field notes, a questionnaire, a scoring rubric, an interview guide and the students’ written works. The result of the research showed that “Spelling Bee” could improve the seventh graders’ spelling ability, to increase their motivation and awareness of the use of correct spelling in writing, and to learn new vocabulary items. Some important steps should be followed and certain requirements should be met.

Keywords: “spelling bee”, writing

Regarding the important role of English, Indonesia has included English in the content standard of Indonesian curriculum that focuses the teaching of English on the four language skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan, 2006: 124). Among the four language skills, writing is regarded as the most difficult skill which not even all native speakers of English truly master it (Olshtain, 2001: 206).

The difficulty in mastering writing skill is due to many aspects that students should learn in order to gain an intelligible writing; one of the aspects is mechanic of writing, such as handwriting, punctuation, and spelling (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2007: 7). Spelling being a small aspect of writing is often disregarded by both the students and also the teachers, whereas Fergus (1964: 4) states that there is a definite need for good spelling in the written communication.

In order to overcome the difficulties with the spelling of the students’ written works, it is necessary to improve the students’ spelling ability as well as their vocabulary mastery. Fachrrurrazy (2011: 90) states that spelling is one of the elements of vocabulary. Also, Ur (1991: 60) states “The learner has to know what a word sounds like (its pronunciation) and what it looks like (its spelling) …. In teaching we need to make sure that both these aspects are accurately presented and learned.” Thus, once the students learn vocabulary, the spelling aspect is needed to be concerned or vice versa.
Besides, the teaching of vocabulary accompanied by spelling helps the students to master the four language skills. Huyen and Nga (2003:2), states that in learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role because it is one element that links the four skills. The target of teaching and learning English in the classroom is student’s ability to produce spoken and written texts. Therefore, the product of spoken and written texts is inseparable from the knowledge that has been gained through listening and reading comprehension.

Nevertheless, in SMPN 13 Malang the teaching and learning of English vocabulary involves only giving lists of vocabulary items and asking the students to memorize them. The students are bored of the method of jotting down and memorizing the new words applied all the time. As a result, the students were not motivated to learn English vocabulary and the spelling. Therefore, the students need a more interesting way to learn the meaning and how to spell English words.

One of the ways to improve the students’ spelling ability is through games. Kavaliauskiene (2000, cited in Rahayu, 2009:3) states that using games gives a special chance to students to self-assess their progress in learning vocabulary and to a teacher to assess students’ progress.

One of the games that are appropriate in teaching spelling is Spelling Bee game since the purpose of this game is in line with two of language components of English, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Rahayu (2009: 65), as the previous researcher who conducted the research on Spelling Bee game, states that Spelling Bee game was a complete package that can train students’ spelling and vocabulary. The importance of Spelling Bee game is also suitable with the content standard of Indonesian curriculum (Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan, 2006:124) that states the component of language such as vocabulary; structure, pronunciation, and spelling have to be taught cohesively with the language skill. According to Merriam-Webster (2011:2), the purpose of Spelling Bee game is to help the students improve their spelling, increase their vocabulary, learn concepts, and develop correct English usage.

Therefore, the research problem of the present study is “How can Spelling Bee game be used to improve the spelling ability of the seventh graders of SMPN 13 Malang?”
METHOD

The research design that was implemented was Classroom Action Research (CAR) due to the fact that this study aimed at improving the students’ spelling ability in writing skill. The subjects were the seventh graders of VII-B class of SMPN 13 Malang. This class consisted of 39 students, most of whom were not aware of the spelling in their written works. The instruments used to collect the data were a questionnaire for the students to know their responses to Spelling Bee game, a writing assignment to know the students’ improvement in the spelling ability, field notes to write notes and some comments about the activities during the implementation of Spelling Bee game inside the classroom, an observation checklist to be filled out by the English teacher about the students’ participation in the class, and an interview guide to gain information concerning the technique used by the English teacher.

The students’ writing assignment was measured using a writing rubric. The criterion of success which were designed to determine whether the researcher should continue to another cycle was: the students’ spelling ability was considered to have improved when 75% of students used correct spelling in their writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Spelling Bee game was found to be able to help the students to improve their spelling ability. Besides, the game could be used as an alternative activity to strengthen the students’ memory to remember the vocabulary items that they learned and the spelling of those vocabulary items. The Spelling Bee game that was played in group motivated the students to learn the meaning and the spelling of vocabulary items in their Spelling Bee notebook because the students did not want to be defeated by others group. Besides, the students did not know in advance the vocabulary items that were used in the game. Hence, they should learn all the words and the spelling. Indirectly, the students learned and memorized all the vocabulary items in the Spelling Bee notebook although the vocabulary items did not appear in the game. Therefore, the Spelling Bee game could be used to improve the students’ spelling ability in their written works even though the Spelling Bee game was an oral game.

In the teaching and learning inside the classroom, listening, speaking, and reading were also included. In the listening activity, the questions were designed in the form of cloze texts. According to Brown (2004: 225) dictation was described as an assessment of the integration of listening and writing. Dictation was classified as an imitative type of
writing, since it is centered on correct spelling. Besides, through listening activity, the researcher expected that the students can spell the words correctly based on what they have heard. The speaking activity was aimed to help the students to pronounce and also spell the words. Thus, the students would be accustomed to the spelling of the words even though the words have different pronunciation. The reading activity helped the students to increase their vocabulary mastery because in writing, vocabulary contributes to the success in writing compositions up to 20% of the achievement level (Hartfield, et al., 1985 cited in Cahyono & Widiati, 2008). Without listening, speaking, and also reading activity, the students would not get enough knowledge and vocabulary to compose their writing.

The teaching and learning activity used three games: The Hangman, Jeopardy, and Scrambled Words. Those games are under the umbrella of Spelling Bee game according to the official site of Spelling Bee game (E.W. Scripps Company). The Hangman game was carried out on its own, while Jeopardy and Scrambled Words were carried out as a collective game. In this study, The Hangman game was not effective to be implemented considering the big number of students in the class—39 students. Most of the students did not participate in the game.

There were three stages in the teaching and learning process: pre-activity, main-activity, and post-activity. In the first stage of each meeting, the students were given a worksheet and explanation of the instruction of how to do the task in the worksheet. The students were also asked to read the texts in the worksheet and write the unfamiliar words that they found from the text in the Spelling Bee notebook. In the second stage, there were some activities which consisted of listening, speaking, and reading. In this stage, the students were asked to do the tasks. In the third stage, the students were asked to play Spelling Bee games The Hangman, Jeopardy, and Scrambled words. The vocabulary items that were used in the game were chosen from the students’ unfamiliar words in the Spelling Bee notebook.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the research findings from the action research conducted in two cycles with the seventh graders of SMPN 13 Malang in academic year of 2012/2013, the following conclusion can be drawn.
Firstly, the Spelling Bee game can be used as an alternative in teaching and learning activity since this game effectively improved the students’ spelling ability. Spelling Bee game is considered as an appropriate game to increase the students’ spelling ability.

Secondly, the games that are used in Spelling Bee game are: an individual game The Hangman and a group game: Jeopardy and Scrambled Words. The procedures of those games included the teacher pronouncing the word and then the students spelling the word correctly.

Thirdly, the students had positive responses towards the use of the Spelling Bee game in the teaching and learning activity. Most of the students liked to have Spelling Bee game in their English class. Furthermore, they were more concerned about the spelling of the words and more motivated because the Spelling Bee game was not only interesting but also beneficial to the students. Indirectly, the students also were taught vocabulary by implementing Spelling Bee game.

In brief, the implementation of Spelling Bee game through the three phase technique in the pre-activity and post-activity could help the students to improve their ability in spelling. Besides, Spelling Bee is a complete package that can train students spelling and vocabulary skills.

**Suggestions**

The classroom English teachers are recommended to apply the Spelling Bee game since it is proven to be effective and give advantages for the improvement of the students’ writing ability in the aspect of spelling. However, the English teacher should set the rules in detail and manage the class. The English teacher also should give more attention toward the students spelling in their writing to anticipate their misspelled words. If the teacher does not pay attention to the misspelled words, the students will think that they have written the correct words. However, the Spelling Bee game need to be developed to be more enjoyable and easier to fit the students’ ability level.

Future researchers are suggested to conduct a further research concerning the implementation of Spelling Bee game. They are also suggested to conduct other research on other skills such as speaking since writing and speaking are both productive skills and also in the receptive skill that are listening and reading.
REFERENCES


