Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery through Word Chain Game (WCG)

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Abstract. This research aims to determine the extent of students' abilities in learning English, especially in terms of how much their vocabulary mastery increases. The subjects in this research were the first semester students of STIKES Al-Fatah Bengkulu for the 2023-2024 which consist of 20 students. This research was carried out as classroom action research which is implemented in 2 cycles using the Word Chain Games activities during the learning process. The research results show that the Word Chain Games method increases students' vocabulary mastery. Students also become become more active during the implementation of Word Chain Games activities which indicates that the activities are suitable in engaging students' participation in English learning process, especially in vocabulary activities.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language has many constraints, especially because the students need to master many components such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation. Usually students find English difficult to be learned. So, to improve students' learning, teachers must be more creative and prevent students from feeling bored. Teachers must be able to organize their students in the teaching and learning process. If teachers cannot teach students well, then students will not enjoy their learning. As a result, the teaching and learning process will fail.

Teachers must be able to use strategies and techniques in the teaching and learning process. Improving speaking skills can be done in various ways, such as pictures, guessing, games, etc. To make techniques for improving speaking skills effective, teachers must create various teaching techniques to increase student motivation. Games have been proven to have many benefits for improving speaking skills. Skills. First, the game makes students interested in teaching English learning. Second, games usually involve friendly solutions and keep students enjoying themselves.

Using Word Chain Games (WCG) to improve students' vocabulary skills is an appropriate technique to apply in the classroom because WCG are a medium that can help teachers attract student interest and arouse student motivation in the teaching and learning process effectively. The WCG is a game that requires a lot of concentration to think and compose words. Here students have to focus on the last letter of a word and continue the last letter to another word. It is also easy to use WCG to help students enrich their vocabulary and they can improve their speaking skills easily. Interesting

things can make students more active and interested in the teaching and learning process. Apart from that, the word chain game is a funny game that helps students remember the new words they get and students have a great advantage because it can make them enjoy learning.

In playing the word chain game, participants can use the last letter of the previous word to create a new word. Players must write words that start with the last letter of the previous word, as in the following example: Blue, Egg, Gold, Dream, Money, and so on. Agus et al. (2021) arrange the WCG steps as follows:

1. Determine the category of words to be played, for example: Fruit.
2. Invite one player to say one word about fruit, for example: Banana.
3. The next player must say the name of another fruit starting with the last letter of the previous word, for example: Avocado.
4. Then, the third player says Orange, and so on.
5. Players who cannot answer must leave the game.

Siswanto (2021) also explains several other steps such as choosing a word category, for example: Animals, and the first player can use the word Elephant. Then, he asks one of the other players to say the name of another animal that starts with the last letter of the previous word. Players who cannot give the correct answer will exit the game, and the game will continue with new categories, such as fruit, food, profession, etc. Based on the theory above, it can be concluded that chain word games are games played by using the last letter of the previous word to create a new word, for example: book, king, gold, doll, lamp, picture, and so on.

The basic concept of the WCG technique involves developing a series of words that are related to each other. The main idea is to create semantic or phonetic relationships between words, forming a flow of words that trigger each other. For example, if the first word is "sunset," the next word could be "horizon," and so on. It is important to note that Word Chain is not just an entertainment word game, but is also an effective learning tool. Through this activity, students not only expand their vocabulary but also engage in creative thinking and hone their idea association skills (Ifianti & Fitriani, 2022). Therefore, this concept instills the idea that learning does not have to feel monotonous, but can be a dynamic and interesting experience.

WCG activities can be integrated into various aspects of the English curriculum. For example, in vocabulary teaching, this technique provides an opportunity for students to actively engage in constructing new words and designing meaning relationships between them. In developing listening skills, teachers can use Word Chain to train students to listen carefully to determine what words can be added to the series. Kokomaking & Ratminingsih (2021) stated that the importance of integrating WCG in English language learning lies not only in increasing vocabulary, but also in developing students' ability to associate words with situations and meaning. Using this technique in a variety of learning contexts ensures that students not only have an extensive list of words but can also use those words contextually.

The basic principle of the Word Chain technique is word association. Gusriani & Yanti (2022) say that in the context of Word Chain, students are invited to make associations between words, which leads to the activation of the link between concepts in their memory. This principle is supported by cognitive theory which states that linked information has a greater chance of being remembered. By making connections between words, students can strengthen their memory of the words they use in the Word Chain. Thus, this technique is not only a tool to expand vocabulary but also to deepen students' understanding of the relationship between these words.

The Word Chain technique creates an active and engaged learning environment. Students not only act as recipients of information but also as creators, directly

contributing to the learning process. Students' activeness in creating a series of words creates an activity that is not only fun but also stimulates their creative thinking. The application of Word Chain in English language learning creates opportunities for students to collaborate and communicate (Pastika, 2022). In group activities, students can build on each other's word chains, share ideas, and expand the meaning of the words they choose. This not only improves vocabulary, but also students' speaking and listening skills, as they have to describe the relationship and meaning of words in context. Student activity in Word Chain also creates space for formative assessment. Teachers can monitor student participation, observe how they make word associations, and provide immediate feedback. This allows teachers to adapt their teaching approaches according to students' individual needs, increasing learning effectiveness.

The use of the Word Chain technique can also have a positive impact on students' motivation and interest in learning English (Pastika, 2022). Interactive and fun activities such as Word Chain can increase students' intrinsic motivation because they feel involved in learning that is meaningful and relevant to them. In addition, Word Chain activities can stimulate students' interest in English by presenting challenges and excitement in vocabulary development. They can feel a sense of success when they see progress in remembering and using new words. Therefore, Word Chain is not only a learning method, but also an encouragement and booster of students' interest in English.

With advances in technology, Word Chain can also be integrated in digital learning environments. Special applications or platforms can be created to facilitate online Word Chains, allowing students to participate collaboratively without time and space constraints. The use of technology in Word Chain can also increase student engagement through engaging interactive elements. By delving into these aspects, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Word Chain is not only a vocabulary learning technique, but also a tool that actively engages students, increases creativity, and stimulates their interest in English. Through careful and strategic application, Word Chain can be an effective means of achieving English language learning goals at various levels of education.

Learning English can be a challenge, especially for students where English is a foreign language in their region. It also need to be emphasize that each student has her/his own language learning style that is different to each other (Hidayat & Ariani, 2021; Hidayat, 2014). Besides, an English instructor also needs to adapt the teaching methods so that it can fit what students need. Based on observations, students at STIKES Al-Fatah Bengkulu has very low vocabulary mastery which can be caused by any of the reasons above. Therefore, it is important to ensure the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery which in this case by using Word Chain Game technique in the learning process.

METHODS

This research was designed as classroom action research and was carried out at STIKES Al-Fatah Bengkulu. The subjects of this research were first semester students consisting of 20 students. As a classroom action research, this research is structured into four main stages in each cycle, namely planning, implementation, observation and reflection.

Furthermore, WCG was played in two stages to allow for flexibility according to goals and situations. It starts with words and develops to produce sentences. Students will firstly find words and then make sentences out of the words in the second stage as describe below:

Stage 1.

The first participant writes an English word (any word) and the next participant writes a word starting with the last letter of the word written by the first participant and so on, the third participant writes a word starting with the last letter of the

word written by the second participant, and so on. Example 1: (one player, one word) Doll – lunch – hand – drink – king – girl – love – end – day – you – understand – dog – green– north – house – egg – good – drive – error – room – make – elementary – year – round – dream – mad – day – your – rainbow – wing.

Stage 2.

Using each word in the word chain in a sentence (grammar). This stage is an expansion of the word chain game where the words are used in sentences. Each students is asked to choose any words that has been written or spoken from the the first stage, then make a sentence out of it. The words can only be used once.

There are also pre-test and post-test to see whether WCG successfully improve students vocabulary mastery or not. The tests were held in each cycle with target score for each students is 70. Students who reach score of 70 or above will be categorized as successful, where students wo score below 70 wil be categorized as unsuccessful.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Results of Cycle 1

In cycle 1, it was found that there was an increase in student learning outcomes in vocabulary mastery using the Word Chain Games method, but it was not very significant. Only a few students experienced an increase in vocabulary mastery. The increase in students' vocabulary mastery can be seen in the following figure:
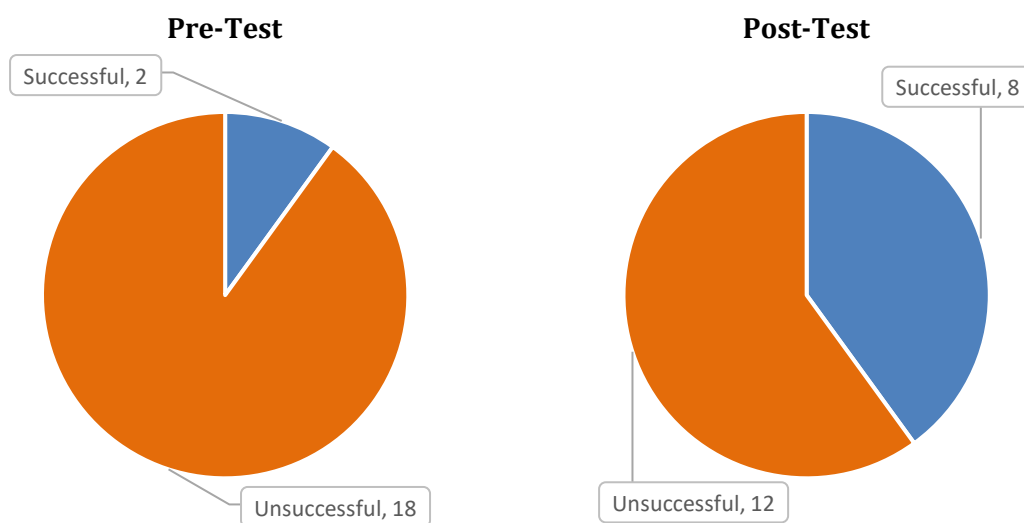

Figure 1. Students' Score in Cycle 1

The pre-test results showed that out of the 20 students, there were only 2 students who passed or achieved score $\geq$ 70, where the other 18 students had not passed or had not. After WCG learning was carried out and a post-test was given, out of the 20 students, there was an increase up to 8 students who achieved score $\geq$ 70 and 12 other students had not passed. This results show that there are improvement in students vocabulary mastery after WCG activities in the learning process. After finishing cycle 1, it should be confirmed and verified if WCG is effectively improve students vocabulary mastery. Therefore, after analyzing and reflecting cycle 1, this research continue in designing cycle 2.

Results of Cycle 2

In cycle 2, it was found that there was an increase in student learning outcomes in vocabulary mastery using the WCG method. The increase in students' vocabulary mastery can be seen in the following Figure:
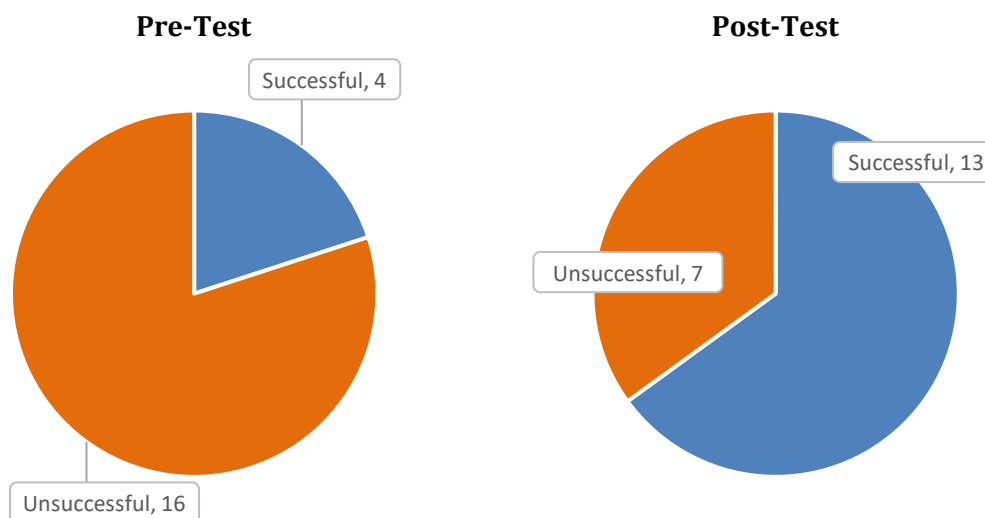

Figure 2. Students' Score in Cycle 2

In cycle 2, the pre-test results showed that out of the 20 students, there were only 4 students who passed or achieved score $\geq$ 70, where the other 16 students had not passed or had not. After WCG learning was carried out and a post-test was given, out of the 20 students, there was an increase up to 13 students who achieved score $\geq$ 70 and 7 other students had not passed. This results again confirm what is found in cycle 1 about the improvement in students vocabulary mastery after WCG activities in the learning process. Therefore, it is quite safe that WCG activities are suitable to be used in vocabulary learning for students in STIKES Al-Fatah Bengkulu.

Discussion

Cycles 1 and 2 were carried out using the same teaching method, namely word chain games, but with different material. In each cycle, there is a pre-test and post-test as a means of measuring the success of a teaching method. The pre-test in cycle 1 and cycle 2 was carried out before entering the teaching material. Students will be given some Indonesian vocabulary and assigned to translate it into English. This is done to see the initial level of students' vocabulary mastery. After doing the pre-test, students then do a post-test at the end of learning in each cycle. The post test was carried out to measure how successful the teaching methods used in teaching English were.

In both cycles, the same case was found at the pre-test stage, namely that students still lacked vocabulary. However, at the post test stage, students' vocabulary mastery increased quite well. Based on the results of these observations, the application of WCG has a good influence in increasing students' vocabulary mastery. This may be because the method in Word Chain Games is fun and enjoyable, thereby helping students to continue to develop and hone their vocabulary.

As previous researchers said, WCG is useful for students in remembering vocabulary or improving vocabulary mastery in their memory, as said by Gusriani & Yanti (2022) in the context of Word Chain, students are invited to make associations between words, which leads to activation of the linkage of concepts in their memory. Apart from that, Pastika (2022) also said that the use of the Word Chain technique can also have a positive impact on students' motivation and interest in learning English.

With the results achieved by students of STIKES Al-Fatah Bengkulu, before implementing WCG and after implementing it, students learned more actively and student test results also improved. This WCG method is very good for increasing students' vocabulary. However, the improvement result is not very significant. This might be caused by students' backgrounds come from rural areas so that their level of vocabulary mastery cannot be met completely. WCG also is not very suitable for some students. There are still 7 students whose score has not passed the target score. This is might be due to the incompatibility of learning methods with student character, the lack of student motivation in learning and the influence of the environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, this research conclude that Word Chain Games can be alternative methods in improving students vocabulary mastery. This method has been proven to train students in easily remembering and understanding English Words. In implementing Word Chain Games, students seem enthusiastic and cheerful, though the games may not be appropriate for some students. There might be some students who do not maximally participate in the activities which might also be influenced by their learning characteristics, learning styles, or even the differences in level for each students. Therefore, instructor need to design WCG activities carefully that can engage every students equally.

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