

# Empowering Students' Vocabulary through Cuisenaire Rods

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**Abstract.** This paper is attempt to present Cuisenaire Rods in empowering students' vocabulary at SMPN 1 Kauman as one of interactive media in teaching and learning process. In creating an interactive and innovative media in teaching vocabulary, teacher is charged add more knowledge and know kinds of media and methods for teaching learning. Cuisenaire rod is an instructional media in the silent way method by Caleb Gattegno, in teaching English as the foreign language. It is helpful not only in teaching grammar and pronunciation but also in teaching vocabulary. Classroom action research was applied in this research. The result of this research showed that Cuisenaire Rods can improve students' vocabulary, 75% students succeed in using Cuisenaire rod, empowered their vocabulary and almost 72% of the students improved their activeness in teaching learning process.

**Keywords:** *vocabulary, teaching English, Cuisenaire Rods*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a medium for communication that is needed for using words to form sentences. Vocabulary plays a vital role in teaching languages and is a crucial part of four basic language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Wilkins wrote that, "...while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." [1]

According to Konferensi Pers UN 2017 jenjang SMP from Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, in the 2017, the English trend score for national exam from UNBK is 49.08 and for UNKP are 50.71. 11,407 schools with 1,339,469 participants took part in the UNBK final exam, while 43,724 schools with 2,817,566 participants took part in the UNKP. [2] However, many students in Indonesia and particularly in East Java, are far below this standard. English scores were lower than other subjects. Students' low vocabulary levels contributed to these results, as did a failure to implement the aims of the national curriculum. According to Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, the curriculum demand for English is ability in functional language, and use of the language based on context. [3] The difficulties that many students have with vocabulary show that this has not been achieved. It is reasonable to assume that the average vocabulary size of a high school student in Ponorogo is less than elsewhere. Teaching and learning EFL vocabulary involves more struggles and difficulty. Teachers must work harder to help their students, and students must put more effort into learning in order to increase their achievements.

Teachers and learners alike face many difficulties, especially when it comes to teaching vocabulary, which is crucial in order to help students become effective users of English. In

line, Fahime Narjami and Nader Assad A argued that language learners look for effective ways to increase opportunities for retaining new words in long-term memory, but forgetting is a common problem. Language learners often complain that they forget new words soon. The importance of vocabulary learning also poses some challenges for teachers. They like to know in what ways instructional programs might foster the acquisition of so many words. Students face some barriers when they try to assign the vocabularies to their long term memories. The same problem is faced by the language learners in Ponorogo, and especially by high school student.[4]

Through short interviews with some English teachers and junior high school students in Ponorogo, the researcher found that they face many of the same difficulties.[5] Through discussions and interviews with English teachers and students at SMPN 1 Kauman Ponorogo during both the 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 academic years, the researcher learned that the students at this school do not feel confident enough to speak or write in English. They are anxious and afraid of making mistakes.[6] The students do not have high enough levels of vocabulary and struggle with grammatical rules. Increasing their vocabulary is difficult because the students have not found methods which work for them in the classroom and when studying at home.[7]

Some students feel that they have problems memorizing, pronouncing, and using new English vocabulary. The interviewed teacher had already tried different approaches to teach English and increase their English vocabulary, including games to introduce fun ways to learn words. The teacher believed that the students had insufficient vocabularies because they did not practice often enough with new words. The students learn words, write them, and never use them again. The students do not use the new words in conversation, so they often do not know how to use them in context. If students forget how a word was used or pronounced, they are often too afraid of being wrong to try and use it themselves.[8]

In line with these facts, the researcher believes that students can benefit from engaging vocabulary activities that can help them overcome their passiveness in the classroom. These activities should help them memorize, maintain, and understand the vocabulary that they have learned. To solve the problem, the teacher should use good methods and techniques to increase students' achievements, especially in learning vocabulary. There are many methods that can be used for teaching vocabulary related to various subjects.

The Silent Way is a language teaching method created by Caleb Gattegno that makes extensive use of silence as a teaching method.[9] The Silent Way is a methodology of teaching language based in the idea that teachers should be as silent as possible during a class, but learners should be encouraged to practice or be active as much as possible.

In the Silent Way Method, the media supports students in learning English by using sound-color charts, teacher's silence, peer correction, word charts, and Cuisenaire rods. One of the hallmarks of the Silent Way is the use of Cuisenaire rods, which can be used for anything from introducing simple commands to representing objects. These rods are a form of language learning media that have meaningful advantages. The advantage is Cuisenaire rods encourage learners to use their visual senses to interact with them. Rods of different colors and lengths appeal to these visual senses and obtain learners' interest almost automatically, because they required them to learn by doing. In addition to appeal students' visual senses, the rods can make the students become quieter and more focused because they required them to concentrate and focus their attention.[10]

This has been applied to resolve the problem of learning language or teaching vocabulary. It is used, for example, to teach American Peace Corps volunteers being trained to teach in Thailand. Syifa' Khuriyatuz Zahro conducted research on improving the speaking abilities of

Indonesian high school students by retelling stories using Cuisenaire rods. Research on Cuisenaire rods has also been conducted by Akarcay. He concludes that Cuisenaire rods are potential learning tools that may help students to develop their skills through activities such as “Playing with Time” and “Thirty-Four Linking Phrases.”[11]

In this case, the researchers implement the Silent Way Method to teach English, focus particularly on vocabulary mastery. This method serves as an effective and engage activity that cultivate and enhance students’ speaking proficiencies. Using the Silent Way Method with Cuisenaire rods can be the right stimulus to both increase student interest in vocabulary and improve speaking skill.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### **a. Research Design**

The research method in this study is classroom action research because using this method is able to find out a solution to the teaching problem. Classroom action research encourages the researchers to be reflective in the practice in order to develop the quality of the education for the teacher as well as for the pupils.

### **b. Subject**

The subjects of this research were students in class 8A at SMPN 1 KaumanPonorogo. The 8A students were chosen because they show interest in English but have had problems mastering vocabulary. The class consisted of 28 students, 8 of whom are male and 20 of whom are female.

### **c. Instrument**

This research employed data of observation and documentation. In collecting data, classroom observation was conducted to know the learning process how the students mastering vocabulary by using Cuisenaire Rods in the English Teaching Learning. The observation focused on observing the learning process, the students’ activities, the class situation, the students’ activeness and the students’ achievement. The documentation was in terms of field notes, photos and videos during teaching and learning process in speaking class.

### **d. Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed by using Vocabulary Knowledge Scale which based on the students’ vocabulary achievement.

## **.3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **a. Cycle 1**

The first phase was conducted on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018. In this cycle the teacher did one day meeting done 2x40 minutes.

#### **1) Planning**

In this stage, the researcher planned the needed of the research. The researchers used Cuisenaire rods with theme Narrative text and the story of Golden Cucumber. The cycle hold on the classroom action research procedure that already planned, such as the following:

a) Curriculum Development.

The researcher made lesson plan based on K13. In the lesson plans included the goals of teaching, materials, the tasks, and the guide lines of the scoring.

b) Instructional strategies

The strategy in the teaching and learning process was using the Silent Way method and the Cuisenaire Rods as the media. The size and the color had different function in the teaching and learning process. The yellow rod showed adjective use, the green rod showed noun and the blue rod showed verb.

c) Assessment strategies

The vocabulary assessment was using technique Vocabulary Knowledge Scale which a self-report assessment that is consistent with Dale's incremental stages of word learning. The VKS format and scoring guide fall into the following five categories[13]:

- 1.) I do not remember having seen this word before. (1 point)
- 2.) I have seen this word before, but I do not think I know what it means. (2 points)
- 3.) I have seen this word before, and I think it means \_\_\_\_\_. (Synonym or translation; 3 points)
- 4.) I know this word. It means \_\_\_\_\_. (Synonym or translation; 4 points)
- 5.) I can use this word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_. (if you do this section, please also category 4;5 points)

d) Classroom Management Strategies / Plans.

The teacher followed the lesson plan which is planned by the researcher. There were three steps in the teaching and learning process, those are pre activity, whilst activity, and post activity. All the steps and the plans were suitable with the daily activity of the students and the teacher.

## 2) Acting

The researcher and the teacher did the session on Friday, 20 April 2018. The usage of Cuisenaire rod in increasing vocabulary mastery stated the lesson plan. The steps of the lesson plan were:

a) Pre Activity

The teacher greeted to the students then checked the attendant list. The teacher gave motivation to the student with played a game and then gave them understanding about the benefit from learning the narrative text. The teacher asked the students' readiness for learning the narrative text by gave them the questions related to the material on that day.

b) Whilst Activity

The teacher read the story about Golden Cucumber while using the different colors of the Cuisenaire rod when she read the noun, verb and adjective. The students paid attention while finding the meaning of the different colors of the rod those were showed the teacher. The students responded the usage of the Cuisenaire rods in the text and analyzed the generic structure of the text, after found the meaning from the colors of the rods, students applied the color in the text, they tried to signed the part of speech based on the categories, by guiding from the teacher the students checked the result of their work. The presented the text and used the rod for told their friends the kind of the part of speech.

c) Post activity

The teacher and students did reflection and discussed the benefits of the teaching learning process. The teacher and the student made feedback of the lesson.

## 3) Observing

In this phase the researcher observed all the aspect in the teaching learning process using observation sheet to observe students' activeness by seeing their attitude while the teaching

and learning process happening. The students' activeness measured from how they involved the learning process and how they followed the instructions. Students' achievement also tested, especially in increasing vocabulary mastery. The teacher had already taught material Golden Cucumber, the observer needed to know the result of their understanding the material using Cuisenaire rods by completing VKS sheet and the result will be showed in the end of this part.

#### **4) Reflecting**

From the observation above, it can be concluded that:

- 1) The students' activeness have not spread widely yet.
- 2) A lot of student did not know the usage of the words in the sentences. The Vocabulary Knowledge scale (VKS) results showed that a lot of students did not know yet the meaning and the usage of the words in the sentences, but they had known the words before.
- 3) A lot of student did not pass the standard of mastery minimum criteria score (KKM) which was 75.
- 4) Because that was the first time the students studied with Cuisenaire Rods, they felt difficult to comprehend the information of the instructions.

The researcher concluded that cycle 1 has not successful yet, the researcher decided to continue the research to cycle 2 to improve the goals of this research.

#### **b. Cycle 2**

The cycle 2 was conducted on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2018. The steps of Classroom Action Research in cycle 2 were:

##### **1) Planning**

The researcher used different text for the narrative text entitled The Lion and The Mouse and used the same strategy of teaching from the previous cycle. The activities were as follows:

- a) Curriculum Development.

The researcher made lesson plan with the same procedure in cycle 1.

- b) Instructional strategies

The strategy in the teaching and learning process was still using the Silent Way method and the Cuisenaire rods as the tools.

- c) Assessment strategies

In this researcher the vocabulary assessment was still using technique Vocabulary Knowledge Scale.

- d) Classroom Management/Strategies

The teacher followed the lesson plan.

##### **2) Acting**

The researcher did the session on Friday, 30 April 2018.

##### **3) Observing**

The aspects those were observing still the same, the activeness and the achievement of the students.

##### **4) Reflecting**

In this cycle, the students were more serious in doing the assignment and more active in following the instructions. They enjoyed the strategy and had fun in using the media in the learning vocabulary. Moreover the students could use the words by the context in the sentence; it means the cycle 2 was successful. It was proven from 28 students; the 20 students have fulfilled the comprehension standard already. There was significance improvement in

achievement of students' vocabulary mastery by using Cuisenaire rods. It can be summed up that vocabulary mastery was increasing by using Cuisenaire Rods.

The results of this research showed that the students' activeness using Cuisenaire rods in the process of learning vocabulary mastery led to improvements in student achievement. The researcher found a strategy that can solve the problem at SMPN 1 KaumanPonorogo, as the teacher expected. The comparison of the cycles can be analyzed in the tables below:

#### 1) Students' activeness

The table above shows the improvement in students' activeness when empowering vocabulary through Cuisenaire rods. This result shows that there were specific differences between cycle 1 and cycle 2. The students' activeness influenced the students' understanding of the materials. The Silent Way method is designed to make students more active and involved in the learning process instead of only being listeners who listen to a teacher's explanation. It was not easy to find a strategy that could increase students' activeness in the teaching and learning process. Teachers should find interesting media to use in their classes. In addition to being tools, media are a kind of teaching supporter or learning motivator. As Murcia said, media can be an important motivator in the language teaching processes.[15] Cuisenaire rods are new tools in English learning and teaching and are the tools of the Silent Way approach.

In the second cycle, the students were more active, which influenced the results of the study. In the first cycle, the teaching and learning process had only 7.14% of students who were very active, 25% of students who were active, and 67.86% of students were less active. Even though there were improvements in the students' activeness after using Cuisenaire rods, the researcher continued to the second cycle to see better improvement. The results showed that there was a decrease. The students who were less active and students who were less active were only 10.71 %, while the percentage of active students was 71.45%, and the students who showed the highest level of activeness (very active) in the class were 17.86%.

The conclusion is the Silent Way is an effective method for improving both students' achievements and students' activeness and the media was Cuisenaire rods. The Cuisenaire rods are interesting for students, allowing them to learn while playing and become more active in the learning process.

#### 2) Students' Achievement

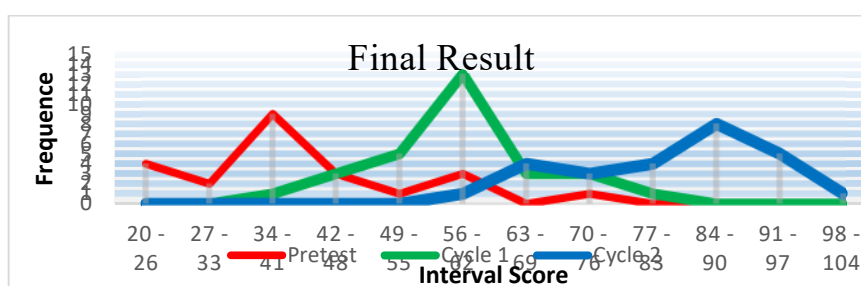
The classroom action research in the cycle 1 in increasing vocabulary mastery was not maximal because some students did not pay attention while teaching process. They did not pay attention to the teacher's explanation, some of them got confusing in the media usage, some students played by themselves, some of them lazy to be active in teaching learning process.

The betterment in the cycle 2 was teacher in the classroom management when implemented the Cuisenaire rod as the media in teaching was good, so the goals of the teaching learning could be reached better and students had good understanding on the material. The appropriate method and media in teaching learning process and the material also the characteristic of the object in teaching could increase students' activeness and achievement.

The post test was purposed for knowing the students' abilities in mastering vocabulary. The test was related to the materials in the teaching learning. This classroom action research had written test in each cycle. The written test was using vocabulary knowledge scale (VKS) to know the students' vocabulary mastery and the students' worksheet

to know students' achievement in English subject. Here is the diagram of result students; achievement from cycle 1 and cycle 2.

The result from the classroom action research had upgrading in every cycle. Therefore, can be concluded that increasing vocabulary by using Cuisenaire rod; students at SMPN 1 KaumanPonorogo in academic year 2017/2018 has been successful. The whole results of the students' improvement start from pretest, post test in cycle 1 and post test in the cycle 2 can be seen at the chart as follow:



**Chart 3.3**  
The final result students' achievement

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research conducted in class 8A at SMPN 1 Kauman Ponorogo, using Cuisenaire Rods can increase students' activeness in the English teaching and learning process, especially as it relates to increasing vocabulary mastery. This statement can be explained using the result data from each cycle.

In every cycle, this research followed the procedure of how to use Cuisenaire rods for learning a foreign language. In the first cycle, the teacher and students were confused about how to use the rods. In the first activity, the teacher followed the procedure in the lesson plan, but students got confused because they were experiencing something new. In the second activity, the students started enjoying the process. They played and learned the material using the media. Then, in the last activity, which was the test, the students passed well enough but didn't meet the standard criteria (KKM). The research continued to cycle 2. The teacher and the students enjoyed the process and using the media very much. The students got the point, understood the purposes and saw how Cuisenaire rods could help increasing their vocabulary mastery.

The results of the test from each cycle will be shown. In cycle 1, of 28 students, 7.14% were very active, 25% were active, and 67.86% were less active. In the cycle 2, of the same 28 students, there was a decreasing percentage of students who were less active in the teaching and learning process of increasing vocabulary by using Cuisenaire rods. Only about 10.71% were less active, while the percentage of active students was 71.45% and the students who had highest level of activeness were 17.86%.

Cuisenaire rods can also improve students' achievement in increasing vocabulary at SMPN 1 KaumanPonorogo. This statement can be proven from the results of the research in every cycle. In cycle 1, of 28 students, only 7.14% passed the standard of Mastery Minimum Criteria Score for the English subject at SMPN 1 Kauman Ponorogo, which is 75. The rest of the students, about 92.85%, failed. In cycle 2, of the same 28 students, 75% passed the standard of Mastery Minimum Criteria Score for the English subject at SMPN 1 KaumanPonorogo, and only 25% failed.

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