RESEARCH PAPERS

THE IMPACT OF EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION AND INTENTIONAL LEARNING IN THE RECEPTION OF VOCABULARY - AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the importance of the reception of vocabulary in the language learning process of second language learners of English considering the evident role of vocabulary in the language fluency of the learners. The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of explicit instruction and intentional learning environment in the reception of vocabulary. Thirty students from a Government school in the Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu participated in this study. The vocabulary aspects of the English textbook under the Tamil Nadu Uniform Syllabus were analysed followed by the observation of the teaching methods employed by the teacher and the learning strategies used by the learner in the learning of the vocabulary in the selected classroom setting. Post the qualitative analysis of the observations made based on the conceptual framework of Henriksen's model of vocabulary development, a comparative study was conducted to quantitatively explore the influence of the explicit instruction and intentional learning in the reception of the target vocabulary. The participants' reception of vocabulary was gauged using the VKS (Vocabulary Knowledge Scale) and the results were tabulated. The statistical analysis of the data using the t-test tool confirmed that the explicit instruction of vocabulary and creating an intentional learning environment among the learners did result in a significant improvement in the reception of the target vocabulary of the second language learners of English. One of the key implications of the study is that the theoretical understanding of the available concepts of vocabulary knowledge and the process of vocabulary acquisition is mandatory in designing the textbook materials and in framing methodologies for the teaching of vocabulary, to the learners of English as a second language.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Language Acquisition, Reception, Production, Textbook Designing, Explicit Instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Language primarily is a means of communication of meaning, and vocabulary can hence be termed as the building blocks of any language. It plays an inevitable role in conveying the meaning in both speech and writing. In regard with the acquisition of English as a second language, that the prime focus has to be on teaching the grammar of the language to the learners is undeniable. However, it is to be noted that lack of proficiency in grammar of the language does not interrupt the communication of meaning, whereas, vocabulary solely are the carriers of meaning without which language loses its purpose.

The results of the survey conducted by James (1996) to analyse the attitude of the learners towards vocabulary learning, gave an understanding that the learners were in fact interested in getting introduced to new vocabulary (Barcroft, 2004). Also, L2 learners in the advanced stage felt that the only gap in terms of performance, between them and the native speakers is the lack of a vast size of vocabulary among the second language learners of English (Arnaud and Savignon, 1997; Barcroft, 2004).

The question as to what it is to know a word initiated a huge number of discussions and many researchers have

proposed various criteria to validate the complete knowledge of a word. There is a need to draw a clear cut distinction between the receptive and the productive knowledge of vocabulary. Waring (1999) in his paper Tasks for Assessing Second Language Receptive and Productive Vocabulary, discusses extensively on the notions of reception and production of vocabulary. He traces the origin of the concept of reception and production of vocabulary to the terms 'recognition' and 'recall' of words, which was in turn borrowed from psychology used in the context of mental abilities. These terms were then replaced by familiar terms in the context of vocabulary, namely the 'passive' and the 'active' vocabulary. The passive and the active vocabulary eventually turned out to be called as the receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary (Melka, 1997; Waring, 1999).

Henriksen (1999) asserts that the one opinion which has gained the common consensus of the researchers is that the learners' receptive vocabulary size is larger than that of the size of the productive vocabulary. Melka (1997) attempted to draw the various relationship factors between the receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary, and concluded that they should be viewed on a continuum scale, that is to say there is no possibility for the production of vocabulary without the act of receiving the vocabulary in the first place (Hajiyeva, 2015).

Vocabulary can be taught in three different ways. Implicit instruction of vocabulary is one which facilitates unconscious acquisition of vocabulary. Embedded method of teaching vocabulary focuses in helping the learner to understand the meaning of the word only in the particular context of the text that is dealt with. The third kind of method is that of the explicit vocabulary instruction, where the teacher designs the lesson plan aiming to encourage vocabulary acquisition. Hunt and Beglar (2005) stated that explicit instruction of vocabulary aims to grab the attention of the learners towards the prescribed set of new vocabulary by explicitly and directly explaining the meaning of the words (Khamesipour, 2015). Though there is a high range of intention in the instructor for facilitating acquisition of vocabulary, there is a lack of consciousness of the act of learning new words among the learners. The

researcher believes that creating an intentional vocabulary learning environment, where the learners are also aware of the fact that they are involved in the act of learning new words would give better results along with explicit instruction of vocabulary.

Vocabulary to a very large extent influences an individual's language proficiency. When new words are not taught or learnt properly, it becomes a major hindrance in the higher studies of an individual, no matter which profession he/she chooses to be specialized. Language clearly is a tool for communication and hence it is the foundation for knowledge acquisition and production of any kind. The productive vocabulary is as important as the receptive vocabulary because when the learner passes the knowledge gaining phase and enters the knowledge producing phase, he has to pen down his accumulated knowledge in words, to communicate his contribution to his readers in a comprehensive manner. At that point of time, one's major concern should be that of the theoretical knowledge and not that of the search for a right word at the required context. Hence, vocabulary should be made as natural as possible to enable uninterrupted efficient language flow, which can be achieved only by best pedagogical practices in the initial stages of the language learning.

1. Statement of the Problem

Second language learners of English are introduced to a wide range of vocabulary in their early language learning phase. However, only a few words become a part of the learner's vocabulary, whereas many words do not and they are learnt over the years, provided that the learner is exposed to favourable conditions for incidental learning. The previous studies on the reception and production of vocabulary provide an understanding that the two aspects of vocabulary are on a continuum and that production of a newly learnt word is impossible without the reception of the word. There is need to revisit the understanding of the concept of reception knowledge of vocabulary and the teaching and the learning of the receptive aspects of vocabulary in a classroom setting.

2. Research Questions

Research question 1: What is the method employed in

teaching and learning of vocabulary at a Government school in Coimbatore and what are the factors that might influence the participants' receptive knowledge of vocabulary?

Research question 2: Can explicit teaching and intentional learning of the vocabulary in a language learning classroom setup result in better reception of the target words?

3. Hypothesis

The second language learners of English receive vocabulary partially in the selected context and this problem of partial reception of the words can be solved by implementing the use of suggested way of explicit teaching vocabulary and creating an intentional environment for the learning of the vocabulary.

4. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to focus on the reception part of vocabulary. This research aims to study the approach adopted by the Tamil Nadu Government school teachers, under the equitable education system, in teaching English language vocabulary in Coimbatore and thereby drawing the receptive aspect of vocabulary in both teaching and learning. The degree of reception of vocabulary is measured and then the concept of acquisition and knowledge of the reception of vocabulary by studying the related literature. The goal of this study is to investigate whether explicit teaching and intentional learning of words can help in the better reception of vocabulary.

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

This research study constituted of 30 participants and all the participants were 5th grade-second language learners of English at a Coimbatore District Government Higher Secondary School in Tamil Nadu, which lies in the southernmost part of India. The research was designed over two sessions. In the first session, all 30 participants attended a class where their class teacher taught them the prose lesson from Unit 1 of their Term III English textbook. The participants were then divided into two groups of 15 each, by random sampling. The participants were informed

about their liberty to deny participation in the study and the participation of all 30 students was completely voluntary.

5.2 Materials

To investigate the role of explicit teaching and intentional learning in the reception of vocabulary in the second language learners of English, the researcher used learning materials, teaching aids for explicit instruction of vocabulary, and a vocabulary test to gauge the reception of the target vocabulary. The learning material used for this study was 5th grade's English language Term III textbook. The target words were the prescribed set of words given in the two units. The units that were taught under this study were "A Friend Indeed" and "Listen to the Spiderman".

The researcher used word lists while teaching the lesson and used a computer after the lesson was taught, to project texts and pictures for explicit instruction of vocabulary. At the end of the experiment, the participants were asked to fill in a self- report of the reception knowledge of vocabulary. The researcher has used Wesche and Paribakht's (1996) Vocabulary Knowledge Scale. Bruton (2009) has critically analysed the VKS and has said that VKS model is one of the instruments in L2 quantitative research that is at present best known for measuring both receptive and productive vocabulary development of the specific targeted words. The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) is a self-report assessment that is in line with Dale's (1965) incremental stages of word learning (Wesche and Paribakht, 1996). The VKS format and marking of the knowledge of the target words fall into five categories as shown in Figure 1. Since this study focused solely on the receptive knowledge of vocabulary, the fifth category of the knowledge scale is excluded from the study.

5.3 Procedure

5.3.1 Session One

The experiment was conducted in two separate sessions

1. I don't remember having seen this word before.
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't think I know what it means.
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means_____ (Synonym or L1 equivalent)
4. I know this word. It means_____
5. I can use this word in a sentence:_____

Figure 1. VKS Test Model (Wesche and Paribakht,1996)

which happened over two days. The researcher did not disclose the purpose of the research neither to the students nor to the class teacher. The researcher was allowed to observe the class. The researcher observed the teaching method employed by the teacher, especially in the aspects of vocabulary teaching. The researcher also observed how the students responded when the prescribed vocabulary of the unit was taught. At the end of the session, the researcher briefed the class teacher about the purpose of the research and was asked to look into the consent form. The researcher guided the students through the four sections of the test paper and assisted them in self-analyzing their knowledge on the reception of the words by reading out the words listed and by translating the choices in the third section of the test. The test was completed in fifteen minutes. The students were kept uninformed about the sessions planned for the next day.

5.3.2 Session Two

5.3.2.1 Part I

The participants were put into two groups of 15 each by random sampling. An English language teacher who was unaware of the purpose of the research was requested to teach Unit 2 of the Term III English Textbook to the control group in this study. Fifteen students were randomly selected among the total 30 students for the control group. The researcher at the end of the lesson conducted the vocabulary test for the control group.

5.3.2.2 Part II

The experimental group which included the rest 15 from the total number of participants was taught the same lesson using an explicit method and by creating an intentional learning environment for the teaching and learning of vocabulary among the students. At the beginning of the class, the researcher conducted a quick activity to break the ice. The researcher then spoke to the students about the importance of learning vocabulary and its influence on one's language comprehension and fluency. The students were asked to pay close attention to the bolded words in the lesson. As the lesson was taught, at the first encounter of a bolded word, the words were read aloud and the students were asked to repeat and spell the word out. The students were asked to guess the meaning of

a specific word from the context and later the researcher gave the right meaning of the word in English with respect to the context. After every bolded word from the unit was explained, it was added to a word list on the board. When all the target words were added to the word list the researcher encouraged the students to know the meanings of all the words that were listed by the end of the session. However, the vocabulary test to be conducted at the end of the session was not informed to the students.

After the completion of the lesson, the researcher projected a presentation, prepared based on the prescribed set of words of that particular unit, on the screen. On the first slide, the first target word was projected in big fonts and in the next slide the meaning of the word as given in their textbooks was given. The researcher then created various situations to explain various other contextual meanings of the word and projected sentences with the target word. Then, the translated L1 (Tamil) equivalent of the word was shown. This was followed by a pictorial representation of the word in the next slide. It was made sure that all the four slides had the target word on it, so that it helped the students in the constant association of the word with its meanings and the pictures. All the remaining target words were also projected in the same pattern. The students then took up the vocabulary test after all the target words were taught explicitly.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Research Question 1: Qualitative Data Analysis

6.1.1 Analysis of the Vocabulary aspects in the Textbook

The textbook taken here in the study, claims that each unit in the textbook is divided into these six aspects to facilitate easy learning, in the notes both to the teacher and the learner in the preface of the book. This study focused only on the vocabulary aspects of the textbook. Under the vocabulary aspect, which is given the fourth priority after reading and before writing among the seven aspects, it states that good amount of vocabulary empowers learners and keeps them self-confident and self-reliant. It goes on to claim that the learner of this textbook would be able to recognise it during communication, use it in appropriate situations, pronounce and spell it correctly, and understand their relationship with other words.

Moving into the Unit 1 of the textbook, the number of prescribed set of words in the prose lesson "A Friend Indeed" is 15. The prescribed words in the particular unit are portable, demonstration, transmitter, faint, destination, resembles, invention, communicate, microwaves, tumour, comfortable, disaster, emergency, boon, and bane. Unit 1 prose lesson extended over three pages and all the 15 words were boldfaced in the lesson. These boldfaced words were given meaning in English in a pink coloured box in the respective pages. In the exercise part of the unit, there is a section called 'Let us build vocabulary', where the first subsection asks the learner to circle the right meaning of five words from the given three options, from a total of the prescribed set of fifteen words in the text. The next subsection asks the learner to match the given four words with the right meanings.

6.1.2 Analysis of the Vocabulary aspects in the Teaching and Learning of Vocabulary

The teacher at the very beginning of the lesson, asked the students to close their textbooks and place it on their tables. The teacher discussed in depth about all the aspects mentioned in the lesson and gave a wide range of real life everyday examples for explaining the content of the lesson. The topic interested the students to that extent that almost every student in the class had something to say except a very few who did not share opinions with the teacher. The discussions extended over one hour and forty five minutes. The teacher then instructed the learners to open their textbooks. The teacher started to read the lesson and explained it line by line to the students. As the lesson was taught, the teacher instructed the learners to read a few sentences. When the teacher came across the boldfaced words in the lesson, she gave the meaning of the words in English. However, not every prescribed word was paused at and given meaning for. Six words among the fifteen words were written on board and the learners were asked to repeat those words after the teacher.

The above observations showed that vocabulary was taught by partial embedded teaching method and minimum importance for vocabulary was given. The researcher called it a 'partial' embedded teaching methods because not all words were taught except for the

six words out of the prescribed fifteen words. Also the teacher neither created an intentional learning environment nor gave any kind of motivation for the learning of vocabulary. Hence the vocabulary learning in this particular group of learners is observed to be implicit.

The students were exposed to the new words only once and the content and the vocabulary of the unit was not given equal importance. There was no awareness among the students that they were exposed to new words and that there were in the act of learning new words. The discussion part of the session took the major time. The wide range of discussions on the content and the underlying theme of the lesson were given much importance.

6.1.3 The Examination of the Lack of the Factors to help in the better Reception of Vocabulary

All thirty participants in the study were asked to respond to the VKS test prepared on the prescribed set of words from Unit 1. The responses of all the participants were evaluated and tabulated. The total average performance of the entire class was found to be 14.23 with 21 and 1 as the highest and the lowest scores observed from the test which was on a total of 40.

The researcher has studied the case with Henriksen's theory of vocabulary acquisition (Henriksen, 1999). Vocabulary as a knowledge is defined as a multi dimensional construct. Henriksen (1999) defined vocabulary knowledge as a multi-dimensional construct. Henriksen claims that language develops along a continuum, or in some kind of hierarchical order. Henriksen has created a model of vocabulary acquisition based on development along three continua. Henriksen's continua of vocabulary acquisition can be looked at as three dimensions of vocabulary knowledge.

- A partial-to-precise knowledge dimension where levels of knowledge are operationalized as degrees of understanding

- A depth-of-knowledge dimension which reveals the multi-aspect nature of word knowledge, and extends to a word's syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations with other words

- A receptive-productive dimension which refers to the

mastery levels of vocabulary knowledge reflected in the learners' comprehension and production abilities

The first two dimensions are related to comprehension of word knowledge while the third dimension is associated with the ability to access and use a word. In order to understand the development of vocabulary knowledge from receptive to productive use, the partial-to-precise and depth dimensions should be included. Henriksen's proposal thus demonstrates the fact that learning a word is a gradual process. Henriksen's conceptualization of vocabulary acquisition is presented in Figure 2.

Henriksen says that word meaning is learned along the partial-precise continuum (I), thus this is a knowledge continuum. Knowledge moves from initial word recognition through rough characterization or vagueness to mastery of finer shades of meaning. That is, the better the word meaning is known, the further along the continuum one moves. Henriksen says that vocabulary knowledge is understood as precise comprehension, which is viewed as the ability to translate the lexical items into the L1, the ability to find the right definition in a multiple-choice task, or the ability to give a target language paraphrase. Similarly, the more paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships that are known, the further along the depth-of-knowledge continuum (III) one moves. This is because the knowledge of a given word grows in relationship to other words and their relationships with others. The receptive-productive continuum (II) is a control continuum that involves the control or accessibility aspect of lexical competence, or whether the learner is able to use a lexical item receptively or productively.

Thus the continuum of progression approach considers that vocabulary knowledge is not an 'all-or nothing' phenomenon (Laufer, 1998), but starts from unknown to knowing, and develops to fully mastered level. Each of the word a learner knows can be located at a certain point in the continuum of word knowledge.

6.2 Research Question 2: Quantitative Analysis

An analysis of the receptive vocabulary knowledge of the target words was done by assessing the VKS tests of both the experimental group and the control group, which was conducted at session 2. There were 15 participants in both the groups and the target vocabulary items used in each of the two groups were the same. The number of prescribed set of words in the Unit 2 prose lesson "Listen to the Spiderman" was twelve. The prescribed words were reside, remote, receive, excited, scaling, vacation, preferred, ambition, splendid, inspiration, goals, and delightful. Post the teaching session of Unit 2, the learners from both the groups responded to the VKS receptive knowledge test. The scores of the VKS tests of the control and the experimental groups are tabulated respectively in Table 1.

The data of the VKS test scores was used to investigate whether the assumed improvement in the receptive vocabulary knowledge was true according to the standard statistical tools for testing the significant differences between sample groups. According to the number of participants and the objective of the research, the
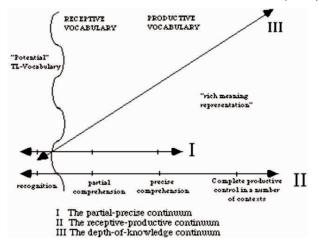

Figure 2. Henriksen's Model of Vocabulary Acquisition (Henriksen, 1996)

Control	Experimental
17	21
16	37
12	33
19	36
15	38
24	34
6	31
23	19
4	33
7	31
9	35
7	18
23	20
21	15
9	25

Table 1. VKS Test Scores of the Control and the Experimental Group

statistical tool, t-test, was used to analyse the data from Table 1. The results provided by the Microsoft Office Excel sheet when hypothesized mean value was aligned at 0 and the alpha value was set at 0.05 is provided in Table 2.

The mean of the VKS test scores of the participants of the control group was 14.133 and that of the experimental group was 28.4. The mean of the experimental group when compared with the mean of the control group again indicated the improvement in the reception of the target vocabulary. The participants of the experimental group outperformed the control group in the session two VKS test. The first indication for the presence of a difference in the performance of the experimental group when compared to the control group is that the P values of the two tail and the one tail is found to be as low as 0.00001 and 0.000006, respectively. The researcher considered two sets of hypothesis to prove the significant positive difference in the performance of the experimental group. The confidence level considered in both the cases is 95%.

H0 : Null hypothesis: $\mu1=\mu2$: There is no significant difference between the control and the experimental group in the reception of the vocabulary.

H1 : Alternative hypothesis: $\mu1\neq\mu2$: There is a significant difference between the control and the experimental group in the reception of vocabulary.

Since t-stat value 5.279 is greater than t-critical two-tail value, 2.048 the null hypothesis was rejected (P (T<=t) two-tail 0.00001 < 0.05) is provided in Table 3. Hence the author concludes that there exists a significant difference between the two mean scores.

H0 : Null hypothesis: $\mu1=\mu2$: There is no significant difference in the reception of vocabulary between the control and the experimental groups.

H1 : Alternative hypothesis: $\mu1<\mu2$: The reception of vocabulary of the experimental group is greater than that of the control group.

Since t- stat 5.279 is greater than t-critical one-tail 1.701, the null hypothesis is rejected (P (T<=t) two-tail 0.000 < 0.05). Hence the score of the experimental group is greater than that of the control group.

Though the significant difference of the experimental group is proven at the confidence level of 95%, the confidence interval should be determined to claim that the obtained result would hold true within the calculated range in similar situations. The confidence interval range obtained for the difference in the means of the experimental and control group is 8.7323 to 19.8017. This implies that when explicit teaching and intentional learning style is implemented in other similar situations, there is 95% possibility for the difference between the experimental and the control group to fall between the calculated confidence interval range.

The results of the statistical analysis of the VKS test scores primarily shows that the reception of vocabulary can be influenced by the teaching and learning style of vocabulary. Secondly it denotes that explicit method of teaching and intentional way of learning of the target vocabulary, to a very large extent results in better reception of the target vocabulary.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of explicit instruction and intentional learning of vocabulary in the receptive knowledge of the target words in the case selected for study. To achieve this goal, the case was studied using a mixed method approach. The method of teaching vocabulary aspects followed in the Tamil Nadu Uniform Syllabus English Textbook, the teaching methods employed by the teacher and the learning strategies adopted by the learners of English as a second language in the selected context specifically in regard to the reception of the prescribed set of words were observed. The observed data was qualitatively analysed using the conceptual framework of Henriksen's model of vocabulary acquisition.

	Control	Experimental
Mean	14.133	28.4
SD	6.895	7.872
SEM	9.400	10.731
N	15	15

Table 2. Results of the Independent, Unpaired, Two-Sample t-Test, Assuming Equal Variances as Obtained from Microsoft Excel

t	df	p-Two Tail	p-One Tail
5.279	28	0.00001	0.000006

Table 3. Result for the two Mean Scores

Post the qualitative analysis, the impact of the explicit instruction and intentional learning environment in the reception of the vocabulary was examined. The performance of the participants from the control and the experimental groups on the VKS was tested in terms of only the reception of the target words. The data obtained from the test was analysed using the statistical t-tool to find the amount of improvement in the reception of vocabulary found in the experimental group. The results of the quantitative analysis showed that the experimented method brought a significant improvement in the reception of the target words in the second language learners of English. One of the key implications of the study is that the theoretical understanding of the available concepts of vocabulary knowledge and the process of acquisition of vocabulary is mandatory in designing the textbook materials and in framing teaching methodologies for the teaching of vocabulary, to the learners of English as a second language. Another important implication of the study is that apart from employing various teaching methodologies and task activities in the teaching of vocabulary there is a need for the consciousness of vocabulary in both the teacher and the learners.

There were a few limitations involved in the study. The results of the qualitative analysis of the research are strictly limited to the Tamil Nadu Uniform Syllabus textbooks. There is limitation in terms of the number of participants in the study. The study involved only 5th grade learners for examining the impact of explicit instruction and intentional learning on the receptive knowledge of vocabulary. The study was done in a limited time and so only the immediate test results were considered.

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