

Promoting Receptive Vocabulary Growth among Undergraduates: Focused In-Class Reading with Writing Activity

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a mixed-method study which was conducted to investigate whether Malay ESL learners who were, at the time the study was conducted, first-year Diploma in Computer Science students in a public university in Malaysia could improve their receptive vocabulary knowledge incidentally while reading silently in the classroom. A quasi experiment and a focus group interview were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The following were the two main research questions of the study: a) What is the effect of focused in-class reading with writing activity on the students' receptive vocabulary knowledge at the 2,000 word-family level? b) What are the students' perceptions of these activities in improving their vocabulary knowledge? The study concluded that a short period of focused in-class reading and writing activity conducted consistently can improve L2 learners' receptive vocabulary knowledge. Although both the experimental and control groups showed significant improvement in their receptive vocabulary knowledge at the 2000-word level, the vocabulary growth for the experimental group was higher than for the control group. In addition, the participants perceived focused in-class reading with writing activity as beneficial in improving their general vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Focused in-class reading, receptive vocabulary, vocabulary growth, word family

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 8 December 2011

Accepted: 3 March 2014

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INTRODUCTION

It has been proven through research in the field of second-language acquisition (SLA) that the success of learning a second language (L2) is highly correlated to the

learners' vocabulary knowledge (Waring & Nation, 2004). Krashen (1993), a proponent of the notion 'simply reading', believes that reading is the only way to improve vocabulary knowledge. However, recent research in vocabulary acquisition has come to the conclusion that reading alone is not as effective as originally believed in promoting incidental vocabulary learning. According to Schmitt (2008), incidental word learning from exposure to reading alone requires a large amount of textual exposure, results in learning a small number of new words and facilitates the development of partial rather than complete word knowledge. Thus, researchers such as Laufer (2003), Schmitt (2008), Peters, Hulstijn, Sercu and Lutjeharms, (2009) have taken the 'input plus' position, a term used in Peters *et al.* to describe reading (input) plus other productive activity such as writing, to increase learners' exposure to and involvement with unfamiliar words.

Reading for pleasure has been known to provide quantitatively and qualitatively rich context and resource for lifelong vocabulary development (Eckerth & Tavakoli, 2012) since extensive exposure to textual input is vital to achieve the breadth (Nation, 2006) and depth (Nation, 2001) of vocabulary knowledge. However, one of the biggest challenges faced by ESL teachers in Malaysia is to encourage Malaysian students to read in English. The fact that reading is still not the general favourite past time of Malaysians has been highlighted in many surveys on reading habits. Based on the survey conducted in

2010, Malaysians read between eight and 12 books per year (2013). Another survey conducted among undergraduates of a public university found that only 27% of the respondents read daily and 4% almost or never read outside class hours (Rahim, Shazila, & Shareena, 2007). In a related study, although university students were found to spend more time reading compared to the average Malaysian, 72% of the materials they read were directly related to their academic work (Karim & Hasan, 2007). These studies did not investigate their language preference, but it can be hypothesised that the students would most likely use their mother tongue when reading for pleasure as attested by Noor (2011). The respondents in her study stated that English was their language of choice when reading academically but when reading for pleasure, they preferred to read in their mother tongue. Annamalai and Muniandy (2013), who conducted a survey among Malaysian Polytechnic students, found that 83.2% of the respondents preferred to read in Bahasa Malaysia compared to other languages.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Malaysian undergraduates are found to be poor in receptive (Mokhtar, Rawian, & Yahaya *et al.*, 2010) and productive vocabulary knowledge (Jamian, Sidhu, & Muzafar, 2008; Mokhtar, Rawian, & Yahaya *et al.*, 2010). Thus, one of the most frequently-asked questions among ESL educators at tertiary level is: What can be done to ensure that undergraduates read in the target language to improve their receptive as well as productive vocabulary knowledge?

University undergraduates normally have a busy schedule and it is difficult for ESL teachers to persuade them to read English materials outside class hours. Therefore, this study was carried out to determine whether it is possible for ESL learners to improve their vocabulary knowledge by participating in focused in-class reading for a period of 30 minutes per session, with out-of-class writing activity three times per week. The activity was called ‘focused in-class reading’ because it was done in class during ESL lessons under close supervision of the class teacher. The materials that the students read were general in nature and not directly related to their academic work. The writing activity was conducted outside class hours as a follow-up to the in-class reading activity. This paper reports the results of the study that was conducted to investigate whether Malay ESL learners who are first-year Diploma in Computer Science students in a public university in Malaysia could improve their receptive vocabulary knowledge incidentally while reading silently in the classroom. A quasi experiment and a focus group interview were used to collect the quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The following were the two main research questions of the study:

- RQ1: What is the effect of focused in-class reading with writing activity on the students’ receptive vocabulary knowledge at the 2,000 word-family level?
- RQ2: What are the students’ perceptions of these activities in improving their vocabulary knowledge?

RECEPTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

Vocabulary knowledge has been classified into two different categories: receptive and productive vocabulary. Nation (1990, p.5) has defined receptive or passive vocabulary as “the ability to recognize a word and recall its meaning when it is encountered.” According to Nation (1990), receptive or passive vocabulary are words which are initially encountered, learned, comprehended and accumulated in one’s memory accordingly via reading and listening. Receptive or passive vocabulary can also be defined as the way the meaning of a word is retrieved and understood by the learner when he or she is exposed to written or oral input (Nation, 2001). On the other hand, productive vocabulary, which is also known as active vocabulary, refers to the ability to retrieve the needed vocabulary from memory by using it at the appropriate time and in appropriate situations (Nation, 1990; Fan, 2000). Nation (2001) further explains that productive or active vocabulary is the process of retrieving (receptive/passive knowledge) and producing the appropriate written or spoken language form to get access to its meaning. It involves knowing how to pronounce the word, how to write and spell it and how to use it in correct grammatical patterns along with the words with which it is usually in collocation. This process will occur when one is engaged in writing or speaking.

As illustrated in Fig.1, Waring (2002) describes the development of vocabulary knowledge as moving from receptive knowledge on the left, along a continuum towards productive knowledge on the right. From this perspective, the receptive knowledge of a word is a requirement of productive knowledge. In addition, word knowledge is said to be incremental (Nagy & Scott, 2000), and learners' are found to increase their receptive vocabulary size incrementally and constantly over time (Gallego & Llanach, 2009).

Research conducted by Goulden, Nation and Read (1990), Nation and Waring (1997) estimate that the average receptive vocabulary size of a university-educated native English speaker is around 17,200 base words or word families. A 'word family' as defined by Nation (2001) consists of a headword, its inflected forms and its closely-related derived forms. Based on these estimates university-educated non-native English speakers should aim to learn about 17,000 word families. According to Nation (1990) advanced level ESL learners are generally expected to have acquired a minimum productive English vocabulary of 2000 to 3000 word families and a slightly larger receptive vocabulary of 3000 to 5000 word families. Read (2000) and Nation (1990) have also pointed out that ESL

learners pursuing tertiary level education should aim at acquiring the university word level with a vocabulary of about 5,000 to 10,000 word families. Adolphs and Schmitt (2004) have come out with a more recent estimate. In order to understand around 90% of written and 94% of spoken discourse, a learner needs to master 2000 word forms, while Nation (2006) estimates that for 98% coverage, 8000 to 9000 word families are required to understand a written text and 6000 to 7000 word families are needed for comprehension of spoken discourse. Based on all these estimates, it is felt that ESL learners at tertiary level should have mastered the 2000-word level upon entering their respective academic programmes. As undergraduates, they should aim to reach at least the university word level of the 5000-word family in order to participate effectively in academic discourse, as a vocabulary of below the university word level would hamper their learning process.

READING TO PROMOTE VOCABULARY LEARNING

There have been numerous investigations to support that reading is beneficial for indirect vocabulary learning (Jenkins, Stein, & Wyoski, 1984; Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987) and that some vocabulary growth occurs through incidental learning

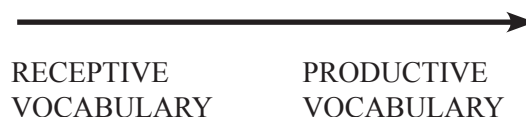


Fig.1: A continuum of receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge

(Horst, Cobb, & Meara, 1998; Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989). Nagy et al. claim that the results of their study show beyond reasonable doubt that incidental vocabulary learning takes place during normal reading. Although these studies were conducted among L1 learners, Krashen (1989) has extended this claim to include secondlanguage learning as well. This claim has been supported empirically by Day, Omura and Hiramatsu (1991), whose study provides evidence that ESL learners can learn vocabulary of the target language through reading.

Krashen (1993), a proponent of the notion 'simply reading' to promote language competence believes that reading is the only way to improve vocabulary knowledge and claims that other methods of vocabulary learning are less effective. However, Schmitt (2008) in his study of L2 vocabulary acquisition has opined that incidental word learning from exposure to reading alone is inadequate in learning new words. This view is supported by Laufer (2003), who concludes that vocabulary learnt through productive word-focused tasks was retained longer than from reading alone. According to Peters et al. (2009) and Yamamoto (2011) learning vocabulary through reading, together with various types of productive word-enhancement tasks, is more effective than learning from reading alone because the vocabulary learnt would be retained longer. Eckerth and Tavakoli (2012) compared 'word exposure frequency' and 'elaboration of word processing' on the initial word learning and subsequent word retention of advanced learners of L2 English

and concluded that processing words again after reading (input-output cycles) is superior to reading-only tasks.

VOCABULARY LEVEL OF UNDERGRADUATES IN MALAYSIA

Many local researchers have conducted studies among Malaysian undergraduates to determine their level of vocabulary knowledge. One of the studies was conducted by Jamian et al. (2008) among 90 teacher trainees who were pursuing a Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) degree at a public university in Malaysia. It was found that the students' mastery of vocabulary knowledge at the 2000-word level was 80% on average while their mastery at the 3000-word level was 66%. Their mastery at the 5000- and 10000-word levels were 44% and 33% respectively. The study revealed that they had failed to achieve even 50% at the university word level (5000-word families) despite being highly engaged with listening, reading, speaking and writing activities in English. It can be concluded from this study that active involvement in the language does not necessarily contribute to students' mastery of vocabulary knowledge.

Another related study was conducted by Mokhtar et al. (2010) among 360 undergraduates from a Malaysian public university. It was found that the majority of the subjects failed to achieve the passing level of the Passive and Controlled Active Vocabulary Test, which means that they had poor passive and active vocabulary knowledge. The findings reveal that the

average size of the students' passive vocabulary was 1528 word families for semester one, 1653 word families for semester two and 1968 word families for semester three. These averages show a growth rate of 440 word families per year. On the other hand, the average size of the students' controlled active vocabulary were shown to be 1691, 2116 and 2154 for semester one, two and three respectively with a growth rate of 459 word families per year. The results show that without intervention it is quite impossible for these undergraduates to achieve the vocabulary of at least 5000 word families as expected of tertiary-level learners.

METHODOLOGY

The Study

The study was a mixed-method utilising a quasi experiment and a focus group interview. It was carried out for a duration of 12 weeks during the subjects' normal ESL class hours. The subjects attended three two-hour classes per week during a 14-week semester. The first and the last weeks of the semester were used for conducting the pre- and post-VLT (Vocabulary Level Test), respectively. The main objective of this study was to determine whether reading for pleasure can increase ESL learners' general vocabulary size. Since recent literature in vocabulary development has proposed that reading plus other productive word-processing activity such as writing is better than reading alone in promoting vocabulary acquisition, this study incorporated writing in its experiment.

The Participants

The participants of this case study were first-year Diploma in Computer Science students from the Perak state campus of University Teknologi MARA. Forty-four students from two intact groups who were enrolled in a proficiency level English course were assigned as participants for the experimental and the control groups. Each group consisted of 22 participants. The participants were homogeneous in the sense that all of them were between 18 and 20 years old at the time of data collection and all of them were *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) certificate holders. In addition, they shared the same mother tongue, which was Malay, and all of them had been exposed to English for at least 11 years in primary and secondary school before entering university. General background information on the participants is presented in Table 1.

The Instruments

The instrument used to collect quantitative data in the study was Vocabulary Level Test (VLT) Version 1 and 2 while qualitative data was collected using a mini focus group interview. The validity evidence and the equivalence study for both versions of the VLT can be found in Schmitt, Schmitt and Clapham (2001). The test uses word-definition matching format which requires test-takers to match the words to the definitions. It measures knowledge of words at five levels: 2000, 3000, 5000, 10000 and academic English words. The cut-off point for acquiring each level was 24 over 30 (80%) as suggested by Schmitt et al. In this

TABLE 1
General Background Information on the Participants

Experimental group			Control group		
Female			Female		
16			16		
Male			Male		
6			6		
Total			Total		
22			22		
SPM Grade For English	Frequency	%	SPM Grade For English	Frequency	%
B+	4	18.2	B+	8	36.4
B	3	13.5	B	1	4.5
B-	1	4.5	B-	0	0
C+	6	27.3	C+	5	22.7
C	4	18.2	C	5	22.7
D	4	18.2	D	3	13.5
Total	22	100	Total	22	100

study, the students only sat a 2000-word-level test. At each level, 30 definitions needed to be matched to 30 out of 60 words. Table 2 shows an example of the test items.

TABLE 2
Sample of VLT items

1 business	
2 clock	___ part of a house
3 horse	___ animal with four legs
4 pencil	___ something used for writing
5 shoe	
6 wall	

Research Procedure

Determining the equivalence of experimental and control groups

At the beginning of the study period all the participants sat Version 2 of the VLT, which was considered the pre-test. The scores were analysed using SPSS for Windows Version 16.0 to determine whether the experimental and the control groups were selected from the population with equal variances and means. Table 3 shows the

Independent Sample Test results. The 'Independent Sample Test' (Levene's Test for Equality of Variances) table reported a p value of 0.258, which was more than the predetermined $\alpha = 0.5$. This means that the null hypothesis, ($H_0: \sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2$), failed to be rejected. In other words, there was no significant difference in the variances of test scores between the experimental and the control groups. Hence, the 'Independent Samples Test' for equality of means (equal variances assumed) was reported. The 'Independent Samples Test' (t-test for the equality of means) table showed that the p (2-tailed) value was 0.865, which is larger than the predetermined alpha value ($\alpha/2 = 0.025$). Thus, the null hypothesis, ($H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$), failed to be rejected. This means that there was no significant difference between the means of the experimental and the control group at the 2000-word level. This conclusion was made at a confidence level of 95%.

TABLE 3
Independent Samples Test for 2000-word Level

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
								Lower Upper	
PRE2K	Equal variances assumed	1.312	.258	-.171	42	.865	-.273	1.594	-3.490 2.944
	Equal variances not assumed			-.171	41.264	.865	-.273	1.594	-3.491 2.946

The treatment

The main objective of this study was to determine whether reading for pleasure on general topics outside their field of studies can increase the size of ESL learners' general vocabulary. In order to ensure that the subjects actually carried out reading activities in the target language, the class teacher had provided the experimental group learners with a collection of reading materials in L2. These reading materials were made available to the experimental group learners throughout the study period.

Focused-reading

Table 4 details the types of reading material made available to the subjects. The subjects would choose the reading material they preferred and keep it for a week, or if they finished reading the material earlier, they could choose a different book even before the week was up. The class teacher would keep a record of their borrowing and returning transactions. The first 30 minutes of class time was allocated for reading these L2 materials. Since 30 minutes was

too short for the subjects to finish reading some of the books, the reading activity was carried out after class at the students' leisure. The subjects were encouraged to use the dictionary and were taught to record the new words that they encountered in the reading activities. At least three new words would be highlighted by a selected subject in every class. This means that at the end of the study period, each subject would have been exposed to at least nine new words per week and a total of 108 new words throughout the study period. Table 5 shows the activities carried out by the experimental group.

TABLE 4
Reading Materials for the Study

Types	Quantity
Old Edition Reader's Digest	30 copies
Story Books (Classics)	10 copies
Story Books (Contemporary)	10 Copies

Writing task

The subjects were asked to write a summary of between 200 and 250 words of the books or articles that they had read during the

focused in-class reading activity. The writing task was an out-of-class assignment and due to time constraint, the class teacher did not mark the summaries. Only the number of summaries submitted by the subjects at the end of every week was recorded.

Data collection

The quantitative data for this study come from a pre- and post-VLT which was conducted on the first and the last week of the semester, respectively. The qualitative data were collected using a mini focus group interview conducted at the end of the study period. Four students of mixed-ability were chosen for this interview. The 30-minute interview was semi-structured and was carried out by the researcher herself. The subjects were allowed to use Malay to answer the questions but during the interview all of them tried to answer in English. The objective of the interview was to investigate the students' perception of the focused in-class reading and writing activities. The interview was tape-recorded and the data were then analysed. Four major questions were posed to the subjects during the interview. The four major questions were: 1) Do you think focused in-class reading and writing activities are beneficial

in improving your general vocabulary knowledge? 2) Do you have any problems in completing the writing assignments? 3) Do you think you will be able to use the new words you learnt during the focused in-class reading? 4) Are you more confident in dealing with unknown words now compared to before the experiment? The design of the study is summarised diagrammatically in Table 6.

RESULTS


At the end of the study period, the number of books and articles read as well as the number of summaries written by each subject were calculated. The data are shown in Table 7. The total number of books or articles read throughout the study period was 262 while the number of summaries written was only 232. The discrepancy may be due to the following reason. Focused in-class reading was an in-class activity under close supervision by the class teacher, thus the subjects were more motivated to participate in this activity compared to summary writing, which was done as an out-of-class assignment. Since the summaries submitted by the subjects were not marked by the class teacher, some subjects did not write or submit them. The highest number of books

TABLE 5
Reading and Writing Activities

In-Class Activities	Out-of-class Activities
1. Reading (30 minutes)	1. Write a 250-word essay based on what they read to be submitted in the following week during ESL class.
2. Discuss new words as part of <i>Reading Comprehension</i> lesson (15 minutes).	2. Choose 3 new words that they encountered; to be discussed in class.

TABLE 6
Design of the Study

Research Groups	Before the Experiment	Independent Variable	After the Experiment	Dependent Variables
Experimental Group	01	Y1 X	02 03	VLT for receptive vocabulary scores Students' perception
Control Group	01	Y2	02	VLT for receptive vocabulary scores



 12 weeks (36 two-hour sessions) of instructions
 (Experimental Period)

01= VLT (Version 2) pre test	Y1= Normal class instruction following the syllabus
02= VLT (Version 1) post test	(1 hour 30 minutes x 3 times per week)
03= Focused group interview	Y2= Normal class instruction following the syllabus
X = Treatment (Focused-reading activities-30 minutes x 3 times per week)	(2 hours x 3 times per week)

TABLE 7
Average Number of Books Read and Summary Written by the Experimental Group

Number of Students N=22	No. of Books and Articles Read	No. of Summary Written
Total	262	232
Average	11.9	10.5
Maximum	15	15
Minimum	10	5

and articles read and summaries written by a subject was 15. The lowest number of books and articles read by a subject was 10 and the lowest number of summaries written by a subject was five.

VLT Results

Table 8 shows VLT score distributions while Fig.2 shows the average scores for both the experimental and the control groups. It can be observed that the total scores for the post-test at the 2000-word level for both the experimental and the control groups improved from 475 to 601 and from 481 to 554, respectively. The result represents a growth of receptive vocabulary knowledge

from 1439 to 1821 known words for the experimental group and a growth from 1458 to 1679 known words for the control group. This means that the experimental group experienced a growth rate of 382 word families per semester while the control group experienced a growth rate of 221 word families per semester.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted for pre- and post-test scores to determine whether the differences in the means for the pre- and post-tests were significant. Table 9 shows the results of the Paired Sample Test. A significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ for both level tests. Based on the statistical analysis results, it can be

TABLE 8
VLT Scores for Pre- and Post-Tests

	CONTROL		EXPERIMENTAL	
	PRE 2K	POS 2K	PRE 2K	POS 2K
Total Score	481	554	475	601
Mean	21.86	25.18	21.56	27.32
% of known words	72.96	83.93	71.96	91.06
% of unknown words	27.13	16.06	28.13	8.93
Word Known	1458	1679	1439	1821
Word Growth	221		382	

TABLE 9
Results for Paired Sample Test at 2000-word Level

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PRE2K_E - POS2K_E	-5.72727	4.63097	.98733	-7.78053	-3.67402	-5.801	21	.000
Pair 2	PRE2K_C - POS2K_C	-3.31818	4.22449	.90066	-5.19122	-1.44515	-3.684	21	.001

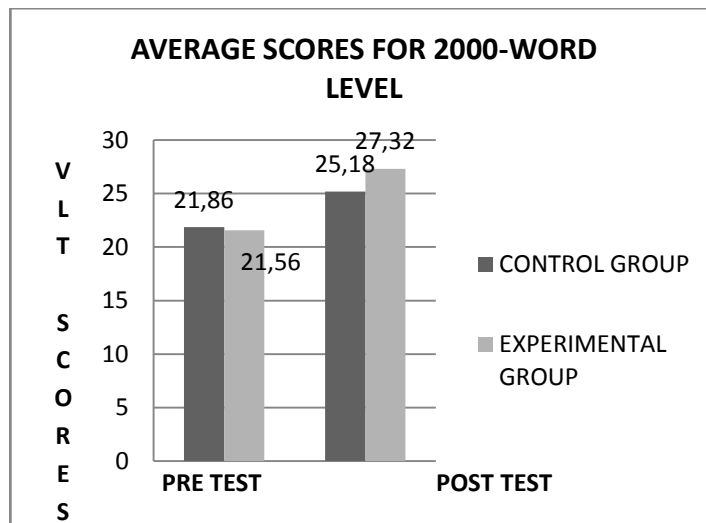


Fig.2: Means for 2000-word level

seen that the experimental and the control groups show p values of 0.00 and 0.001 respectively. Since both values were less than the predetermined alpha value ($\alpha/2 = 0.025$), the null hypotheses for both the experimental and the control groups were rejected. This means that there exists adequate evidence to show that there are significant differences between the means of pre- and post-tests for both the experimental and the control groups at the 2000-word level. Both the experimental and the control groups performed better in the post-test compared to the pre-test.

Focus Group Interview Result

Based on the interview data, it can be concluded that the subjects perceived the experiment positively. Although they admitted that they lacked confidence in using the new words they had learnt from the reading activity, they were motivated to use them in their writing. Table 10 to 13 show excerpts of the interview dealing with the four major questions. Only responses

that are related to the major questions are included in the excerpts. The students' perception is summarised as follows:

1. The subjects believed that the focused in-class reading and writing activity that they had undertaken had been beneficial in improving their receptive vocabulary knowledge.
2. They felt that the writing activity provided them with the opportunity to use the new words they had learnt during the focused in-class reading.
3. They felt that summary writing should be carried out as an in-class activity.

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

To address the first research question, the scores for both the experimental and the control groups were compared. The histogram in Fig.2 clearly shows the difference between the means for the experimental and the control groups. The post-test results show that the experimental

TABLE 10

Excerpt from Focus Group Interview: Question 1

QUESTION 1: Do you think focused-reading and writing activities are beneficial in improving your general vocabulary knowledge?

Subject 1 : "I think it is very useful. Writing activity is good because I can practise to use new words that I found in the story book...I don't feel stress because teacher don't mark the summary."

Subject 3 : "I agree ...it useful. I learn many new words. I like to read after class but no time... sometimes not finish reading, just write Summary."

Subject 2 : "My English is not good. I know reading can improve my vocab...so I think the activity is good to learn new word and practise writing."

Subject 4 : "I like the activity because I like reading. I think thirty minutes is too short...not enough time to discuss meaning of new word."

TABLE 11

Excerpt from Focus Group Interview: Question 2

<p>QUESTION 2: Do you have any problems in completing the writing assignments?</p> <p><i>Subject 2 : "I also learn new words but sometime I cannot finish writing assignment ...I think if writing in class better."</i></p> <p><i>Subject 1 : "True, I agree...teacher should explain new words until we understand. Sometimes I cannot finish writing summary, maybe should write in class. Got many assignment".</i></p> <p><i>Subject 3 : "I think it useful...but too short... time not enough to finish writing... My English is not good. I learn many new words... but slow to check meaning in dictionary..."</i></p> <p><i>Subject 4 : "Yes, I agree with subject 3, writing is good practice but if teacher give time to write in class better. Sometimes I use new words in my essay but not sure right or wrong.. if write in class I can ask teacher."</i></p>

TABLE 12

Excerpt from Focus Group Interview: Question 3

<p>QUESTION 3: Do you think you will be able to use the new words you learnt during the focused in-class reading?</p> <p><i>Subject 4 : "I tried to use some in my summary...but not sure whether right or wrong."</i></p> <p><i>Subject 2 : "New words I learnt... I tried to use but sometimes...meaning not right. If teacher explain better than use dictionary alone".</i></p> <p><i>Subject 1 : "I more confident to use new words...but you know, may be I got it wrong but I don't care, I just use. I try experiment with new words".</i></p> <p><i>Subject 3 : "Writing summary is good for practice...emm ..and I can use new word so I can remember the meaning...but I need more time. Half hour for reading not enough..."</i></p>

TABLE 13

Excerpt from Focus Group Interview: Question 4

<p>QUESTION 4: Are you more confident in dealing with unknown words now compared to before the experiment?</p> <p><i>Subject 1 : "If I find new word I don't know... I just guess the meaning. If cannot guess, I check in dictionary...but like my friend say...sometime meaning not suitable."</i></p> <p><i>Subject 3 : "I not confident ...but I think I improve already compare to when I in secondary school."</i></p> <p><i>Subject 4 : "I know what should I do if I don't know the meaning of new words but I not confident. I need more practice."</i></p> <p><i>Subject 2 : "I more confident to check dictionary...I usually guess first from context like teacher say...I not worried if wrong meaning because it is not a test."</i></p>

group's mastery of vocabulary knowledge on average was 91.06% while the control group's mastery of vocabulary knowledge on average was 83%. According to Schmitt et al. (2001), a student has to score 80% (24 out of 30 correct answers) to pass each level of the VLT. Thus, both groups had passed the 2000-word level test. However, receptive vocabulary growth for the experimental group was higher than for the control group, showing a difference of 161 word families. Based on the result, it can be concluded that focused in-class reading with writing activity can promote larger receptive vocabulary growth compared to normal ESL lessons. Without intervention, the learners' receptive vocabulary growth is estimated to be 442 (221 per semester x 2) word families per year. The estimate is quite similar to the finding by Mokhtar et al. (2010), whose study recorded a growth rate of 440 word families per year. With intervention, a larger growth rate of 764 (382 per semester x 2) per year can be achieved.

Research Question 2

To address the second research question, the focus group interview data were analysed. It was concluded that the subjects perceived focused in-class reading plus writing activity as beneficial in improving their receptive vocabulary knowledge. In addition, the majority of the subjects interviewed proposed that summary writing be carried out as an in-class rather than out-of-class activity. Although most of the subjects admitted that they lacked the confidence to use the new words that they

had learnt productively (in their writing), they unanimously agreed that the writing activity had provided them with an avenue to enhance their knowledge of the newly acquired words.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the results it can be concluded that focused in-class reading with writing activity has the potential of promoting faster vocabulary growth. Although both the experimental and the control groups showed significant growth in their receptive vocabulary knowledge at the 2000-word level, the experimental group recorded a significantly higher growth compared to the control group.

The findings of this study are significant in two ways. Firstly, it provides evidence to support that general reading plus productive language activity such as writing in the target language can promote incidental learning of L2 vocabulary. Secondly, the study has pedagogical implications as it provides ESL teachers with an additional approach to ESL teaching which can be implemented to enhance L2 learners' receptive vocabulary knowledge. Since receptive knowledge of a word is a requirement of productive knowledge (Waring, 2002), improving L2 receptive vocabulary is a step towards developing their productive ability. In the study, the students were asked to write about what they had read every week. The act of writing (productive) is seen as an enhancement of the focused in-class reading activity (receptive). It was carried out to promote productive use of the new

vocabulary learnt during the focused in-class reading exercise. Finally, this study has demonstrated that a little effort on the part of an ESL teacher would go a long way to assist students in developing L2 vocabulary. The study proves that it is not the amount of time spent on reading that matters but how focused the students are during the act of reading that determines their level of success.

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