

“There are three words I still can't understand, I am sure they are the key words”; Learning vocabulary through extensive reading

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Abstract

A number of studies have shown that second language learners acquire vocabulary through reading; however it is only small amounts. Most of these studies used only short texts, measured only the acquisition of meaning, and did not pay attention to other aspects of words. This study of two learners of English language investigated whether EFL extensive reading is successful in increasing word knowledge. The study tests a small number of words (18), and questioned is six weeks of extensive reading enhanced knowledge of these target words in terms of meaning, spelling, and pronunciation. The participants read a 1200-word story over two weeks. The data was gathered through vocabulary pre-test and post-tests to measure their vocabulary gain. The findings revealed that knowledge of meaning was enhanced by 70%. Phonology and orthography were also enhanced, but not to the same extent. Overall, the study proved that vocabulary acquisition is possible from extensive reading as previous studies have suggested.

Keywords; Extensive reading - Pre-test- Post-test – New Vocabulary –

Introduction

It is widely believed that learners gain their vocabulary knowledge through reading Krashen also claimed that reading is good for people (learners) and that the one and the only way to be good readers, develop our writing style, learn vocabulary, to be advanced grammar user and to become good spellers is to read (1993: 23). According to Coady (1997) extensive reading provides the chance for learners to expose to the vocabulary they learnt repeatedly to increase sight vocabulary.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate on how reading is effective to learn vocabulary and how much vocabulary items are gained from reading, for example Krashen (1993); Monson and Krashen (1997); Pitts, White and Krashen (1989). The findings of these experimental studies showed that vocabulary can be gained from reading but only a small amount. The results of the scores of the tests are only just significant and only

guessing on the tests. In Pitts, White and Krashen, 35 ESL learners were tested on a 6700-word text. The test a multiple choice test and the gain was only 6.4%. In an experimental study conducted by Hulstijn, 65 EFL learners were tested on a 907-word advertisement in Dutch. They were asked to provide the meaning for 12 words. The results were only 7.6% of the target words. In all cases, reading is a beneficial strategy that can be followed to enhance vocabulary learning for any learner of a language.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982, 1993) supports the extensive reading in learning a foreign language, which states that comprehensible input is the necessary and sufficient condition for L2 acquisition and extensive reading can provide learners with substantial comprehensible language input for acquiring new vocabulary.

Research questions

From the above, we can see that there is a need to discover how much vocabulary is learned from reading in a foreign language to answer the following research questions:

1. Is extensive reading effective in learning new vocabulary?
2. How many new words do learners learn from an abridged story?
3. What kind of words do learners learn?

Literature Review

Krashen (1989) was the first to mention the concept of learning vocabulary through extensive reading through his Input Hypothesis. There has always been a debate between researchers about how effective is extensive reading in learning vocabulary. Pigada and Schmitt (2006) argue that in spite of the widely accepted belief that reading can enhance vocabulary learning, it is still very limited knowledge about how does the whole procedure works (Paribakht and Wesche, 1997).

The findings of a research study conducted by Pellicer-Sanchez and Schmitt (2010) revealed that learners gained vocabulary from some reading practices. However these results evaluate reading to be a poor tool for acquiring vocabulary. In contrast, Nagy et al, (1987) showed that even a small amount of improvement made from reading can enhance over the time. Day et al. (1991) conducted an experimental study in which he investigated 600 high school and university students from Japan on how much vocabulary can be acquired from reading an EFL context. 300 of these students were given a short story to read, the rest of the students did nothing. After completing the story the 600 students did a post-test on a number of target words. The

results showed that the group how did the reading scored more points than the other group who did not read the story.

In spite of all the studies conducted on this issue, a great number of those studies did not give permit the participants to select the type of materials they will read, instead they were given a material chosen by the research which may led to create an artificial reading environment.

Methodology

The whole study lasted about 6 weeks, started in middle February and ended late March.

Participants

Two participants were selected for this research study;

- A 33-year old Libyan learner of English, whom I will refer to as M. His English proficiency is pre-intermediate. His mother tongue is Arabic. He has been living in England for a year accompanying his wife, who is engaged in doing Master degree in the UK. He has never been exposed to any English speaking country; however he had studied basic English in his country. When he first arrived to England, he hardly knew any vocabulary. He started learning English at A2Z school of English. He started from beginner. He could understand some English but could hardly speak any, due to lack of vocabulary. After one year he is now in pre-intermediate level. M had the opportunity to mingle with native speakers where he picked some useful vocabulary for everyday use.
- The second participant will be referred to as S. She is also Libyan and first language is Arabic. When she arrived in Manchester her English was very low. She joined

beginner class but now she is a pre-intermediate student. Her English grades were very low in her country. Her major is Chemistry and now she is on a scholarship to do MA in Chemistry in the UK. She needs to improve her English in order to take the IELTS exam so she can receive an academic offer from Manchester Metropolitan University. S is a fast learner and a good speller

The plan of the research study was as following;

Time	Procedures
Week 1	Finding a story. Reading the story and selecting the target words. Creating the Checklist for the pre-test
Week 2 and 3	Applying the pre-test. Giving the participants the story to read. Designing the post-tests (VKS and Multiple Choice test).
Week 4	Applying the immediate post-tests (VKS and Multiple Choice test respectively).
Week 5	- Nothing has been conducted-
Week 6	Reapplying the delayed post-test (only Multiple choice tests).

The story

The researcher has adapted the story ‘AMISTAD. ’It is a level 3 (Pre-intermediate) story with 1200 headwords. The story has a large number of interesting vocabularies that are appealing to be tested on. The participants were given two weeks to read

the story. They were asked not to use dictionary, just read for pleasure.

The words

After reading the story the target words were selected which consisted of 10 nouns, 3 verbs one adverb and 4 adjectives (18 words in total). The primary intention was to include all parts of speech in the study. “Nouns and verbs are considered to be the most common parts of speech found in a natural text” (Webb, 2005:36). The criteria by which the target words were selected were to choose vocabulary from the story that is believed to be new and unknown to the participants.

Instruments

Pre-test

Subjects were given a pre-test which consisted of a check list of the target words along with 7 distractor words selected previously from the same story. The reason of including these distracters is to hide the target words among them so the participants do not pay attention to them while reading. Participants were asked to tick the box in front of every familiar word and provide an explanation in L1 in order to reassure that they knew the correct meaning (see appendix). The familiar words were taken off the list. Participants were given one mark for every correct answer.

Reading the story

The participants were given two weeks to read the story. They were continuously asking for a definition for some of the vocabulary including the target words. They also made every effort to retell the story in Arabic to check if they understand correctly. The researcher tried to ignore their questions and telling them to understand from the context and just to have fun!

Post-test

After participants had finished, the story was removed and the subjects were given the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) which is a 5-point self-report scale developed by Wesche and Paribakht (1996) and it is a tool used to assess students' knowledge of already known vocabulary. After answering (VKS) participants were given a vocabulary test which was a word recognition test. None of the subjects were told in advance that there would be any kind of a test on the reading afterwards. A multiple-choice vocabulary test was designed with five choices per item; 1 key, 3 distracters and 1 choice "I don't know" (see appendix). Subjects were asked not to guess, but to choose the option 'I don't know' when they did not know the meaning of a word. Subjects received one mark for each correct answer. A dictation test and interviews were also conducted as final instruments in this study. Dictionary was not allowed at any stage of the investigation.

Procedures

Both participants did the pre-test; they were worried and struggled in many words. Then, the full text of *Amistad*, with the substitute words, was printed for both subjects. The subjects were asked to "read this story as usual and enjoy it." During the reading, there were some comments from both subjects, such as "there are a lot of new words," but they were only told "please enjoy it." As soon as they finished reading, they first were asked to answer VKS questions, in which they had to answer five questions assessing their knowledge of the target words. They then did the first word recognition test immediately after the reading. Two weeks after the first post-test; the subjects took the tests again. The aim of this was to determine the rate of

forgetting that had occurred from the learning from context. After the post-test, the participants had a dictation test, testing their knowledge of the spelling of all target words; they were excited and eager to test themselves. Interviews with both participants had also taken place in this study in which they narrated their experience with extensive reading.

Data analysis

Data was analysed according to the results of the post-test. Participants were given one point for every correct answer and zero for any wrong or 'I don't know' answer. The results were then transcribed. The participants were also interviewed to discuss what obstacles they faced and why they learnt those words they remembered in the tests

Results

The overall results show that the subjects succeeded to learn more than half of the target words from different word knowledge perspectives. The table below briefly illustrates the overall results of this research study;

The Target words	Participants	Semantic [Meaning]	Orthography [Spelling]	Phonology [Pronunciation]	Using the word
W1 Kidnap	M	X	X	X	X
	S	X	X	X	X
W2 Journey	M	✓	X	✓	X
	S	✓	X	✓	
W3 Slave	M	✓	✓	✓	X
	S	✓	✓	✓	X
W4	M	✓	X	✓	X

The Target words	Participants	Semantic [Meaning]	Orthography [Spelling]	Phonology [Pronunciation]	Using the word
Sailor	S	✓	✓	✓	
W5 Brave	M	✓	✓	✓	X
	S	✓	X	✓	
W6 Scream	M	✓	✓	✓	X
	S	✓	✓	✓	X
W7 Disappear	M	X	X	x	X
	S	X	X		X
W8 Murder	M	✓	✓	x	X
	S	✓	✓	✓	
W9 President	M	✓	✓	✓	X
	S	✓	✓	✓	
W10 Property	M	X	✓	X	X
	S	X	X	X	X
W11 Immediately	M	✓	X	✓	X
	S	✓	✓	✓	X
W12 Trouble	M	✓	X	✓	X
	S	✓	X	X	X
W13 Ceiling	M	X	✓	X	X
	S	X	X	X	X
W14 Gun	M	✓	✓	✓	
	S	✓	✓	✓	
W15 Independent	M	✓	X	✓	X
	S	✓	✓	✓	X
W16 Leather	M	X	✓	✓	X
	S	✓	✓	✓	X
W17 Proud	M	X	X	X	X
	S	X	✓	✓	X
W18 Honest	M	X	✓	X	X
	S	✓	X	✓	

Discussion

The first participant (M) did not recognize any of the target words in the pre-test; however he knew 7 out of 10 distractors, which anyway were later taken off the list. After reading the story, he did VAK test in which he could only identify two words (Sailor and Gun) he chose 4 and 5 and he confidently used them in a sentence, however some grammatical mistakes were spotted in his sentences. M did not recognize any of the remained vocabulary, but preferred to select the first answer 'I don't remember having seen this word before' for seven of the target words, and the second option 'I have seen this world before, but I don't remember what it means' for eight words. The word 'Ceiling' had been removed from the list, because M stored the word in his mind when he did the pre-test, and while he was reading he could identify the word and understand its meaning from the story. He then had the second post-test (Recognition Test) in which he scored 13 out of 18; he had 3 answers with 'I don't know' option and two wrong answers. After doing the delayed post-test, which was exactly the same as the immediate post-test, in two weeks' time, a spelling test on all the target words had also taken a place in this study, the primary reason behind that was to reassure that the participants had learnt the spelling of the target words they acquired and they can use them correctly in the future. The final results of the participant M showed that M has in total learnt 11 words semantically, 6 of them orthographically correct and other 3 orthographically accepted such as (Screame, immedeltely and ceileng) and 8 wrong spelt words (see the table above). It is worth mentioning that when I retested M on the word 'ceiling' I discovered that he had totally forgotten its meaning, therefore I had to re-include it in the delayed post-test.

When interviewing M he stated what he had benefited from reading the story. He pointed that he had learnt new words from the story and revised a great number of words he already knew in terms of meaning (semantic) and spelling (orthography). He also mentioned an interesting new thing he had never learnt before which was 'direct speech', he stated that he exposed to the using of quotation marks and understood how they are used, however he did not have a complete knowledge of it. M found reading is interesting and a fruitful tool to learn new vocabulary and improve his English in general.

The second participant (S), in spite of the great range of academic and IELTS- related vocabulary she already knew, she was less confident in her ability in recognizing the words listed in the pre-test. She only could recognize 4 words from the whole list, and they were all distractors. She spent 6 days reading the story, immediately after reading the story she was offered the VKS questions which were time-consuming for me to explain what she had to do, she was continuously asking about the meaning of the options. After completing the VKS, most of her answers were the forth option ' I know this word ,it means[]', she was very unconfident of using the words in sentences, because, as she stated, her grammar is very poor and she wouldn't use the correct grammar, she was also uncertain about the words order if she would write a sentence. Therefore, she avoided the fifth option 'I can use this word in a sentence' even though she was 100% sure of its meaning in L1 (Arabic). However, she managed to write 7 sentences with some known words, obvious grammatical mistakes, misuse of the words were spotted), for example, with the word 'President' she wrote [The President my country name's Albagdadi] and with the word ' Brave' she

wrote [My father to brave]. In total, she had seen all the target words before and none of them was completely unknown to her. S then was asked to do the immediate post-test (Multiple Choice test). The results of her first test were also 13 out of 18; she received 4 wrong answers and one 'I don't know' option. Two weeks later she had the second test (mentioned above), the results showed that she learnt 14 out of 18 target words in terms of semantic aspect; however only 9 of these gained vocabulary were orthographically (spelling) learnt. There were two words which were accepted in spelling; they are 'Prave and Honist'. Focusing on the word 'Brave', it is counted to be accepted because of the reason that Arab learners of English language usually find it difficult to distinguish between the two sounds /b/ and /p/ as they only have one sound in Arabic which is/b/, therefore S could not differentiate between the two sounds when I did the dictation test.

Interviewing S, she had mentioned a number of advantages she gained from this study. She stated that she could understand many new vocabulary which she had never met before and was able to obtain the meaning from the context , for example the word 'jury' she had never seen this word before, but she already knew the words 'Judge' and 'Murder' in the same context. She revealed that she could understand that 'Jury' is somebody who works in a court along with the judge. S also stated that she had revised many known words and noticed how they are contextualized. Another benefit S obtained from reading was that she met the polysemy of a couple of new vocabulary, for example she did not know that the word 'Point' could be an adjective such as in the sentence 'A Point tooth', She thought it means somebody is pointing at something with their tooth. The same with the word drop' as

she always thought it is only a verb as it is used in IELTS Writing Task 1, but it can also be a noun such as in the phrase 'a drop of water'. It was very clear that S was intrinsically motivated while she was reading as she aimed to learn any unknown vocabulary she met in the story and led her to be eager to finish the story and discover what would happen at the end. Generally speaking, S has been very convinced that reading is a very effective tool in enhancing vocabulary learning she made a decision that she will carry on pleasurable reading in English and she will buy short stories before she returns back to her country, in order to read them and expand her English vocabulary.

Conclusion

The findings of this simple experimental study revealed that approximately 70% of the target words were successfully acquired, and this is considered to be new evidence added to earlier studies to prove that reading and extensive reading in particular can be an effective tool to enhance vocabulary learning.

Limitations of the study

The study is limited in several ways. Firstly, there were relatively few subjects and a much larger number is more desirable. Secondly, only 1200 words were read and to gather more data on the effectiveness of learning vocabulary from reading in a foreign language it would be best to conduct the same study over a number of texts or with a much longer text. Thirdly, time was another issue that resulted in the limitation of this study. In other words, the time over which the study took place should have been longer in order to conduct the post-test several times to reassure that participants met the repetition of the target words and learnt them effectively.

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Appendix

Pre-test

Please check any of these words you know.
Please put a tick mark in the box and write the meaning in your first language;

- Kidnap []
- Journey []
- Slave []
- Sailor []
- Brave []
- Proud []
- Beach []
- Scream []
- Government []
- Freedom []
- Handsome []
- Disappeared []
- Murder []
- Illness []
- President []
- Property []
- Return []
- Ground []
- Immediately []
- Trouble []
- Intelligent []
- Silently []
- Ceiling []
- Leather []
- Independence []
- Natural []
- Against []
- Gun []
- Honest []

Post-test

Part One

VKS Vocabulary Knowledge Scale Choose one of these answers

- ❖ Kidnap
 1. I don't remember having seen this word before

2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means yes
 3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
 4. I know this word, it means []
 5. I can use this word in a sentence. []
- ❖ Journey
1. I don't remember having seen this word before
 2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means yes
 3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
 4. I know this word, it means []
 5. I can use this word in a sentence. []
- ❖ Slave
1. I don't remember having seen this word before
 2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means yes
 3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
 4. I know this word, it means []
 5. I can use this word in a sentence. []
- ❖ Sailor
1. I don't remember having seen this word before
 2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
 3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
 4. I know this word, it means []
 5. I can use this word in a sentence [I saw some sailors on the boat]
- ❖ Brave
1. I don't remember having seen this word before yes
 2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
 3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
 4. I know this word, it means []

5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Scream

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means yes
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Disappear

1. I don't remember having seen this word before yes
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Murder

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ President

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Property

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means

3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []

4. I know this word, it means []

5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Immediately

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Trouble

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence.

❖ Ceiling

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Gun

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence [there are some people use guns in my country]

❖ independent

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Leather

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Proud

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

❖ Honest

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before, and I think it means []
4. I know this word, it means []
5. I can use this word in a sentence

Part Two

Please match the English word with the correct meaning. Put [x] in the box:

❖ Kidnap

- 1) Give someone a present []
- 2) Read someone a story []

3) Give someone food []

4) Take someone by force []

5) I don't know []

❖ Journey

1) Travelling from place to place []

2) Moving house []

3) Changing job []

4) Buying food []

5) I don't know []

❖ Slave

1) Someone who is controlled by a powerful person []

2) Someone who is happy all the time []

3) Someone who works in a bank []

4) Someone who works in a restaurant []

5) I don't know []

❖ Sailor

1) A person who works on a ship []

2) A person who has a lot of money []

3) A person who has no work []

4) A person who can swim []

5) I don't know []

❖ Brave

1) Sad []

2) Strong []

3) Lazy []

4) Friendly []

5) I don't know []

❖ Scream

1) Shout []

2) Study []

3) Walk []

4) Sleep []

5) I don't know []

❖ Disappear

1) Clear []

2) Arrive []

3) Travel []

4) Return []

5) I don't know []

❖ Murder

1) Someone who teaches people []

2) Someone who kills people []

3) Someone who reads a lot []

4) Someone who eats a lot []

5) I don't know []

❖ President

1) The head of the school []

2) The head of the bank []

3) The head of the country []

4) The head of the university []

5) I don't know []

❖ Property

1) Possessions []

2) Freedom []

3) popularity []

4) Sale []

5) I don't know []

❖ Immediately

1) Now [T]

2) Later []

3) After two weeks []

4) After a month []

5) I don't know []

❖ Trouble

1) A Story []

2) A Building []

3) A problem []

4) A ship []

5) I don't know []

❖ Ceiling

1) The floor of the room []

2) The roof of the room []

3) A big door []

4) The light []

5) I don't know []

❖ Gun

1) Something is used for eating []

2) Something is used for killing []

3) Something is used for talking to people []

4) Something is used for writing []

5) I don't know []

❖ Independent

1) Beautiful []

2) Expensive []

3) Fast []

4) Free []

5) I don't know []

❖ Leather

1) Animal legs []

2) Animal food []

3) Animal skin []

4) Animal meat []

5) I don't know []

❖ Proud

1) Happy of yourself

2) Happy to help people []

3) Tired of work []

4) Hungry []

5) I don't know []

❖ Honest

1) Tell a story []

2) Tell the truth []

3) Friendly []

4) Clever []

5) I don't know []