INCIDENTAL LEARNING OF VOCABULARY VIA READERS' THEATER

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5.1 Executive Summary

Although explicit teaching of vocabulary is often practiced in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, it has been proven to be rather ineffective since words are not taught in context. This leads to the increasing use of incidental vocabulary learning approach, which emphasizes on repeated readings as a source for vocabulary learning. By adopting this approach, this study aims to investigate students' ability in learning vocabulary incidentally via verbal dramatization of written texts. In this case, Readers' Theatre (RT) is used as a way to allow learners to engage in active reading so as to promote vocabulary learning. Since the key step to language mastery would simply start from vocabulary learning, there is a need to investigate the potential of using RT as a form of incidental vocabulary learning activity in ESL setting.

This study assessed how RT can lubricate the process of vocabulary learning incidentally as compared to vocabulary learning via conventional reading lesson in classrooms. The objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To measure the effect of classroom reading in ESL incidental vocabulary learning.
2. To measure the effects of Readers' Theater in ESL incidental vocabulary learning.

A total of 160 Diploma students participated in this case study and they were divided into two groups, namely, Classroom Reading (CR) and RT groups. A proficiency test was first conducted to determine their vocabulary levels. Based on the results, a story was selected as the reading material in the two groups. The CR group read the story through a normal reading lesson while the RT group was required to verbally dramatize the text through RT activity. Then a post-test based on vocabulary levels was carried out and the results were compared.

The findings revealed that incidental learning was more apparent in the RT group and their ability to learn words from the higher levels was noticeable through higher accuracy scores.

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5.2 Introduction

5.2.1 Background of Study

In second language learning, research indicates that there is a strong bond between language learning and vocabulary learning. Learners' vocabulary learning starts from 'noticing' the vocabulary (Elis, 1995; Schmidt 1993, 1995, 2001) and repetitive reading would enhance their word recognition skills thus encourage the incidental learning of vocabulary (Dowhower, 1989; Samuels, 1979). Incidentally learning is best achieved when learners read aloud (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Hickman, Pollard-Durodola,& Vaughn, 2004; Santoro, Chard, Howar & Baker, 2008) the story based text (Mason, 2004; McMaster, 1998; Rashidi & Ganbari Adivi, 2010). Literature shows that incidental vocabulary learning is fundamental in tertiary education (refer to Literature Review) as the core reason is to gain the world knowledge. In short, repeated oral reading is highly favourable in driving learners to learn the language via incidental vocabulary learning. Therefore, RT would be the best way to achieve this as it certainly fulfil all the criteria needed for language learning, particularly in incidental vocabulary learning (refer to Literature Review).

5.2.2 Problem Statement

From the past researches, RT has shown to give impacts towards the improvement of learners' fluency, reading motivation, reading attitude and reading comprehension. However, the impact of RT towards vocabulary learning in the language classroom has yet to be explored, albeit the pivotal role of vocabulary in oral reading has been recognized as lexical knowledge (Nataporn Srichamnong, 2009) and critical in language mastery (Schmidt, 2008).

Despite, literature also pointed the significant impact of RT in terms of language learning, which mainly focused on the impact of RT towards young children, elementary students and students with learning disabilities. Not many studies have been dwelled into the possible students' educational level differences in explaining vocabulary learning via RT in the light of the second language classrooms among the university learners.

In addition, without a satisfactory account of the vocabulary learning in the higher learning institution, the impacts of incidental vocabulary learning among the university students is "bound to end up stranded in an explanatory void" (Cameron, 1997, p. 59). Studying the vocabulary learning of the university students offers empirically-driven explanations that would inform the status of syllabus planning and would assist in the syllabus planning in the future, apart from enhancing the teaching and learning experience in the classrooms. Eventually, incidental vocabulary acquisition via RT may also be applied across discipline which is not merely confined in language learning.

Studies found that students who have poor academic performances particularly in English language learning is largely resulted by the fact that they are lacked in the interest in reading, poor reading habit and negative attitudes towards reading (Akabuike & Asika, 2012). The key for students not to read is perhaps they are demotivated by the challenges of decoding the meaning of vocabulary while reading. Researches shown that oral reading and story based reading may assist vocabulary learning and comprehension, nevertheless, few studies explore the impact of RT in offering rooms for them to achieve better learning of vocabulary and comprehension orally, especially for students who are lacked of confidence and are weak in English.

Moreover, literatures in the field also inform that read-aloud narrative or story based text and repeat reading would be fundamental for incidental vocabulary learning and comprehension. Nevertheless, Jenkins, Stein and Wysocki (1984) found that vocabulary is not usually taught in the classroom nowadays even though learning vocabulary helps in comprehending the reading texts. They also found that more frequent presentation in context increased the learning of vocabulary.

5.2.3 Hypothesis

RT can really help in vocabulary learning as compared to classroom reading as the exposure to the vocabulary in context is repeated; and students in the RT group should learn better from the students in the classroom reading group who are only exposed to the text once, regardless of whether they have any prior knowledge of the vocabulary.

5.2.4 Expected Results/Benefit

So far, vocabulary learning has been explored using different methods. However, little research has been done on using RT for vocabulary learning in the ESL context. The findings of this research will address the potential or need of RT to be included as part of the vocabulary learning in order to enhance incidental vocabulary learning for beginning level students, comprehension for intermediate students and promoting language mastery for intermediate and advance level students.

5.2.5 Significance of Study

This is an action research that further enhances the findings in the area of incidental vocabulary learning, vocabulary learning and reading via Readers' Theater. This method of language learning might be absorbed as one of the teaching methodology for the English language teaching courses in the syllabus.