

Impact of Authentic Material on ESL Learners' Receptive Vocabulary Size

Muhammad Akbar Khan^{1*}, Ambreen Fatima², Nazir Ahmed Malik³

¹Department of English Language & Literature, The University of Lahore, Gujrat Campus, Pakistan; ²National University of Modern Languages, Lahore Campus, Pakistan;

³The University of Lahore, Gujrat Campus

*Email: akbarkhannuml@gmail.com

Received for publication: 13 September 2019.

Accepted for publication: 30 January 2020.

Abstract

In Pakistani pedagogical process, English is taught as foreign or second language and as a compulsory subject from class 1 to bachelor level. But the results are unsatisfactory in the whole process. Various studies (Heflin, & Alaimo, 2007) have been conducted to find out the reasons and remedies but vocabulary being the most important part of a language is not given due concern in pedagogical process. This research study is undertaken to observe the impacts of authentic material i.e. newspaper on ESL learners' receptive vocabulary size at intermediate level. This is basically a quantitative research which borrowed the framework of an experimental research. The population was the ESL learners at bachelor level in Lahore. Through convenience sampling technique, the researchers have selected 50 students and formed them into control and experimental groups. The data were collected with pre-test and post-test tools. Later, data were analyzed statistically and shown in charts. In this research study, the researchers have found that good results can be obtained by teaching ESL learners with the help of authentic material i.e. newspaper as compared to the traditional methods of text book teaching. The EFL process can be enhanced with living and practical settings.

Keywords: Authentic material, English as second language, experimental research, receptive vocabulary

Introduction

Background of the Study

Besides manifesting many other functions, language is also considered as a basic tool of human communication. Language has various components i.e. sounds, words, sentences etc. We can also define language as a collection of words in a simple way. In a way, we communicate with the help of words or lexis. This collection of words is called vocabulary which is divided into two groups i.e. productive and receptive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary is linked with a person's receptive linguistic skills i.e. reading and listening. Words that are generally known or understood when heard, read or seen constitute a person's receptive vocabulary. These words may comprise a list from well-known to less known. A person's receptive vocabulary is larger than her or his productive vocabulary (Allen, 1983). A young child may not yet be able to speak or write, but he or she may be able to follow simple commands and appear to understand a good portion of the language to which she or he is exposed. This is so because the child's receptive vocabulary is likely tens or few words but his or her active vocabulary is zero. When that child learns to speak or write, however, the child's active vocabulary begins to increase. But still the receptive vocabulary remains larger than the productive vocabulary (St. John & Vance, 2014). Receptive vocabulary also supports productive

vocabulary. So in this way, to be a good speaker or writer, one needs to be a good reader or listener (Nation, 1980).

If we look at our education system in Pakistan, we find so many faults in it. After spending many years in learning English language, our students are unable to use it in proper way. They cannot communicate in a desirable way. Many course books are devised to overcome this problem but the results are not satisfactory (Kim, & Gilman, 2008). Thus it is necessary to find out the reasons to overcome the problem. The reason that seems obvious is that English as a language is taught in a mechanical way with the help of prescribed books and syllabus while language can be learnt in appropriate way in some natural setting. The students also try to learn it in a mechanical way. They try to learn language specially its vocabulary side by rot. This memorization process does not stay long with them so after some time they forget most of the words which they learnt because of not knowing their proper contexts. Though text books also provide contexts of the usage of the words but it is not sufficient. But language is a dynamic and fluid type of activity. It always remains in changing process (Keller, 1994).

The text books remain constant for a long time. So teaching vocabulary needs something that is from the usage of daily life. In this way, authentic material such as newspapers can be helpful in teaching vocabulary especially receptive one. It can also be fruitful comparatively to the boredom element found in the text books. Thus the researchers have undertaken this aspect in the current study. They are of the view that authentic material is more productive and fruitful in teaching receptive vocabulary to the students of English as second language as compared to the traditional methods and techniques given in the prescribed text books.

Statement of the Problem

In our country, the state of affairs of English language has been worsened. Our students, despite spending so many years in learning language cannot communicate properly in written as well as spoken ways. There can be various reasons to it but having low vocabulary is at forefront. They are taught vocabulary but with the help of such prescribed books which do not seem to serve the purpose. They learn vocabulary by rot which they forget after some time. So this issue needs to be tackled properly if English has to be taught properly.

Objectives of the Study

The researchers have the following objectives in this study:

1. to use authentic material in teaching receptive vocabulary to ESL learners
2. to see whether the authentic material such as newspaper is helpful in teaching receptive vocabulary to EFL learners
3. to test the impact of authentic material on ESL learners' receptive vocabulary size
4. to explore whether authentic material is better tool for teaching receptive vocabulary to the ESL learners as compared to the traditional methods i.e. the use of the prescribed text books

Research Questions

Following are the research questions on which the current study has been focused:

1. Does the use of authentic material enhance ESL learners' receptive vocabulary?
2. What are the pedagogical implications of the research findings?

Delimitation of the Study

There can be various types of authentic material like videos and audios, songs and movies, advertisements and TV commercials, novels and poetry but the study is delimited to the use of newspapers only. The sample also consists of only 50 students of intermediate level whereas various other learners of different levels could also be included.

Significance of the Study

This study is important so far as the vocabulary enhancement of ESL learners is concerned. In the state where our educational system is unable to serve its purposes fully so far as linguistic skills of learners are concerned, the researchers are going to present and suggest some different ways to teach vocabulary to the ESL learners. As we know, for being a good speaker and writer, one needs to be a good listener and reader (Mercuri, 2010), so the researchers are making their concern with vocabulary that is related with reading and listening i.e. receptive vocabulary. This study can be helpful in enhancing receptive vocabulary of ESL learners who are taught vocabulary with the help of text books which they consider as dry and boring. In these state of affairs, such study about the enhancement of receptive vocabulary through authentic material can be a good step in the said process.

Literature Review

According to Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, Vocabulary is “all the words known and used by a particular person”. If we look at this definition carefully, two elements of vocabulary are quite clear i.e. knowing words and using words. So on the basis of these two elements – knowing and using – we can make the distinction of receptive and productive vocabulary. Productive vocabulary is basically related with writing and speaking skills so it is used in form and depends on the receptive vocabulary (Shahov, 2012). So the teachers need to work on receptive vocabulary of English learners if they are to be made good writers and speakers. For the development of receptive vocabulary of the learners, various techniques are employed. The syllabus is one of them (Phillips, 2016). But in the countries like Pakistan, the condition of language learners is pathetic. So they need to be taught from some other way. And that other way can be through some living material (Jamil, 2009).

Vocabulary is the basic element of a language and the students with a good size of vocabulary can learn well and communicate their ideas in more proper way in both writing and speaking than the students with low vocabulary size (Joshi, 2005). Thus the importance of vocabulary in learning a foreign or second language cannot be ignored.

English has become a lingua franca for the whole world. In the fields of science, technology, arts and humanities, English language has become a prominent language throughout the whole world. In the developing countries like Pakistan, English language has more importance. Here it is being taught with the help of traditional methods and techniques. The students are taught English from class one to bachelor level. But at the end of more than fourteen years of their educational career, they are unable to communicate in writing or speaking properly. In the whole process of second language learning, vocabulary is of crucial nature (Faravani et al., 2016).

Here in our country, language is being taught with the help of various text books at different levels. The vocabulary items that are picked from these text books are memorized by the students who only know them in so far as they interact with them. After some time, they forget most of the vocabulary items. On the other side they also remain unsuccessful most of the time in their proper usage because most of the items which are taught to them are from some foreign context. For example, various short stories like “The Killers” by Ernest Hemingway along with many others are taught to the students at bachelor’s level. These stories happen in the context which is quite foreign to our students in Pakistan. They come across many vocabulary items and try to learn them but because of not using them in their own context, they forget these after a period of time. On the other side they also find them dry and boring. And spend quite a time on their memorization unwillingly.

For such situations described above, various researches have been conducted which emphasize the importance of authentic material in foreign language teaching. One such study was con-

ducted by Shu-Chin Su (2007). In his PhD dissertation, he stressed and concluded that authentic material can be more helpful in teaching receptive vocabulary because it is “more interesting and mostly comes from students’ own context in lively way” (p.40).

Edge & Garton (2013) are of the view that the authentic material that comes from the daily lives around us like advertisements, dramas, news, speeches, interviews, movies etc. can prove more fruitful in teaching a foreign language. This method of selecting authentic material reinforces the memory of the students who are already in contact with the issues of their own lives and their own contexts. Keeping in view, such studies, the current research has been conducted to bring to light the state of affairs and importance of vocabulary teaching in Pakistan to eradicate the problems that hinder language learning.

Methodology

The following section describes the nature of the current research study besides introducing research design, population and sampling method, techniques of data collection, procedure of data collection and analysis.

Research Design

This study is basically a quantitative research because it is based on the confirmation of an idea i.e. the impact or enhancement of receptive vocabulary of EFL learners with the help of authentic material. The researcher has exploited the methodology of experimental research which is used to find out cause and effect relationships or causal relationships. Experimental research is used to observe the effects of systematically changing one or more variables. It is also helpful to “control confounding extraneous variables” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.292).

Population and Sample

The ESL learners at bachelor level belonging to public sector colleges of Lahore are taken as population of this study. For practical constraints and according to the feasibility in this study, the researchers have used convenience sampling technique which is also “used by experimental researchers on high scale” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.238). The sample size consisted of 50 female students of bachelor level from two female public sector colleges found in Township and lower Mall, Lahore. These students were formed into two groups i.e. control and experimental groups by dividing 25 students into each group.

Data Collection Techniques

As described earlier, the researchers have selected two government colleges for women, from the vicinities of Township and lower Mall, Lahore. In these colleges there are found four sections of bachelor (BA) students. The researchers have divided them into two groups i.e. control group and experimental group. The control group has been taught with the same traditional method of prescribed text books while the experimental group has been taught with the help of authentic material i.e. newspaper e.g. daily Dawn News.

For the collecting of data for analysis, two instruments of data collection i.e. pre-test and post-test have been applied. Pre-test for data collection helped to see the conditions before the research study began and post-test has helped to know the effects of the study to arrive at some findings.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data has been described and analyzed statistically. The researchers have described the collected data in the form of charts and then they have observed the ratio of results by comparing the pre-test and post-test results.

Results

In this section, the researchers have analyzed the data that were collected during this study from the sample of the students from two female public sector colleges which have also described in detail in the last section.

List of Vocabulary Items Used as Pre-test

Before teaching the target population of the English learners, a test is given to both control and experimental groups. The objective of giving them a pre-test was to know the students' background knowledge of the vocabulary items. The pre-test consisted of the following vocabulary items (mostly nouns) which were to be used in proper sentences. All these vocabulary items (40 in number) were from the things and objects related to the daily life.

Table 1. Vocabulary Items used as Pre-test

Status-quo	Anarchy	Masses
Turnip	Mince	Broth
Figurative expression	Ironic	Saw
Scissors	Spade	Match
Calf	Fork	Intestine
Pore	Rib	Okra
Ginger	Broker	Bile
Brinjal	Yam	Wrestler
Boil	Lunacy	
Potter	Druggist	Cowherd
Wound	Sore	Sprain
Hare	Ass	Puppy
Mare	Horse-trading	Hound
Damned	Energy-crisis	

As described earlier, the students from both control and experimental groups were asked to make sentences out of these 40 vocabulary items. Later, these sentences were analyzed to see the concepts of the students. The results of both the groups are shown in the following chart.

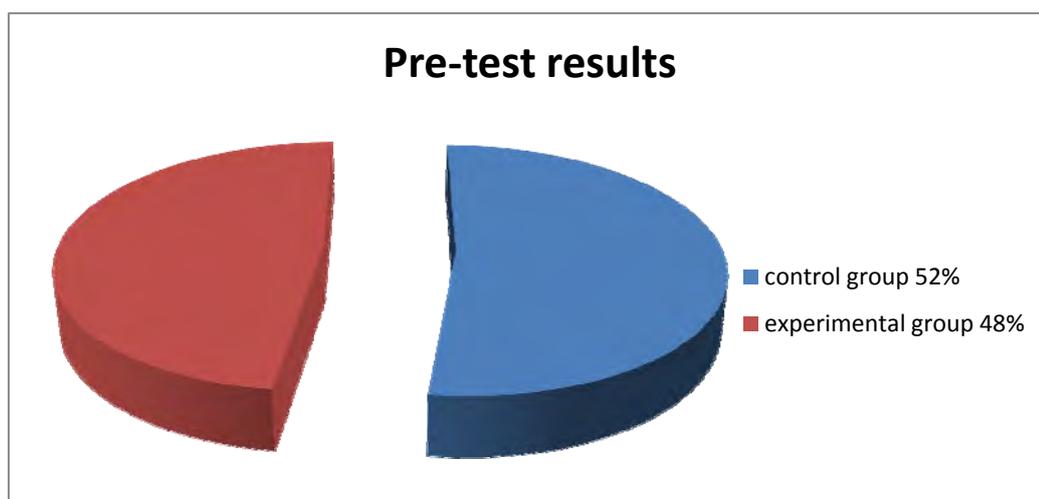


Figure 1. Pre-test results

In the above chart, the reddish part shows the results of experimental group which is 48 % while the bluish part that is 48% shows control group.

The researchers worked on both the groups for about one and half months in teaching them vocabulary. The control group was taught with the same traditional method of teaching vocabulary from the prescribed text book while the experimental group was taught vocabulary with the help of authentic material i.e. newspaper. After the said time limit, following post-test to judge their vocabulary enhancement was taken. In this post-test, the students were asked to form sentences to judge their ability of knowing the given forty lexical items.

List of Vocabulary Items used as Post-test

Table 2. Vocabulary Items used as Post-test

Political upheaval	Totalitarian	Assassination
Garlic	Ginger	Bell-paper
Connotation	Metaphoric	Lethargic
Spoil	Shovel	Bout
Hyper-reality	Bowl	Basin
Pan	Ankle	Yellow journalism
Unrest	Rebellion	Apricot
Appreciate	Apathy	Empathy
Riot	Captivating	
Ample	Posologist	Herd
Lesion	Eruption	Strain
Porpoise	Rogue	Check in
Take off	Launch	Acquire
Condemned	Power shortage	

These were checked and analyzed carefully by the researchers and the results from the above mentioned post-test are shown in the following diagram.

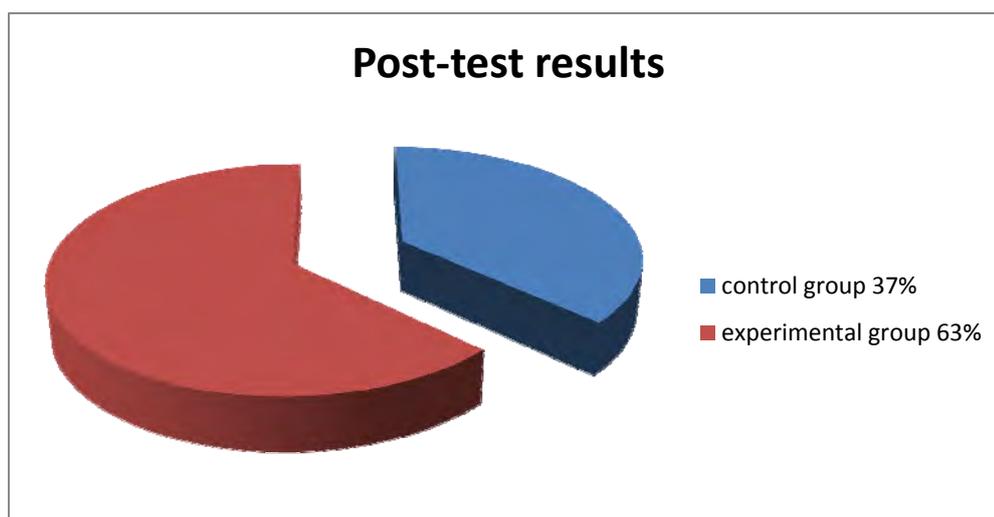


Figure 2. Post-test results

After the application of authentic material in teaching receptive vocabulary to the experimental group and traditional text book teaching to the control group for a one and half months, the post-test was applied and the results are visible in the chart above. Here a remarkable change can be seen in the results. The experimental group showed a growth from 48% to 63%. While a visible decline can be seen in the ratio of the control group that declined from 52% to 37%. These results were quite interesting and expected in the hypothesis.

Conclusions

The research study started from the question “Does the use of authentic material enhance ESL learners’ receptive vocabulary?” and has undergone an experimental research design. It has been found that the use of authentic material e.g. newspaper in the enhancement of ESL learners’ receptive vocabulary has very positive results. The group that scored lesser in the first place when it was taught with the help of authentic material i.e. newspaper, it showed remarkable growth in its score. While the group which was taught with the help of traditional text book method could not increase its score rather it decreased its score. Thus it is quite obvious that just the use of text books in the pedagogical process is not sufficient rather something more will have to be introduced in it if good and positive results in the process of teaching English as second language or foreign language are required.

Students take text books as dry and boring. They need something interesting from their experiences of daily life towards which they can show their interests. Otherwise mere monotonous material which traditionally consisted text books comprised of short stories and other stuff from the contexts about which they don’t have much knowledge and awareness will not prove worthy. And it also leads towards bad results which can be seen in our country where English is being taught as compulsory subject for more than fourteen years but our students cannot communicate in writing or speaking properly and appropriately. Such situation leads them to learn to rote which spoils the true spirit of education i.e. the enhancement of human mind and character.

Receptive and productive linguistic skills are interconnected. If we need good writers and speakers, we will have to work on producing good readers and listeners. Vocabulary is very important element in the whole process. Again we have to come out of mechanical way of teaching. Rather we have to make teaching process interesting and lively to create interest among the learners otherwise boring and dry contents and methods will never lead to positive results in learning English language (Carpenter & Olson, 2012). And the whole process of education will collapse. Such glimpses are quite obvious too.

Limitations of the study

In this research study, the researchers have chosen a sample size only from Lahore while the same ideas could have been tested or confirmed in other parts of the country as well. They have also undergone in this research study for one and half months. The time limit could also be extended to a longer period.

Recommendations for future researches

After undergoing this research study, the researchers have following recommendations for future researches and researchers.

1. The researchers have only conducted the study to see the impacts of authentic material on teaching receptive vocabulary, the other type of vocabulary - productive vocabulary- can also be researched out.

2. The impact of authentic material can also be seen in other elements of language i.e. speaking etc.
3. The researchers have delimited themselves to the bachelor level only; other levels can also be tested.
4. The research study was limited to only one type of authentic material. Other elements like movies, dramas, TV shows etc. can also be tested for the said purpose.

References

- Allen, V. F. (1983). *Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary*. (2010). Cambridge University Press.
- Carpenter, S., & Olson, K. (2012). Are pictures good for learning new vocabulary in a foreign language? Only if you think they are not. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 38(1), 92-101. Retrieved September 20, 2015.
- Edge, J. & Garton, S. (2013). *Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers: From experience to knowledge in ELT*. London: Routledge.
- Faravani, A. Azernosh, M. Ziraatpish, M. (2016). *Issues in Material Development*: Boston: Sense Publishers.
- Jamil, S. (2009). A Study of Vocabulary Building in English Language. *Journal of Elementary Education*, 24(1), 31-45.
- Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2008). *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Approaches*. London: Sage.
- Joshi, R. M. (2005). Vocabulary: A critical component of comprehension. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 21, 209–219.
- Heflin, J., & Alaimo, D. (2007). Creating contexts for instruction. In *Students with autism spectrum disorders: Effective instructional practices* (pp. 127-130). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Keller, R. (1994). *On Language Change: The invisible hand in language*. New York: Routledge.
- Khan, M.A., Khurshid, M. A. & Malik, N.A. (2017). A critique of narrative teaching in Pakistani Universities in the backdrop of critical pedagogy. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 39(1), pp.203-214.
- Kim, D. & Gilman, D. A. (2008). Effects of text, audio, and graphic aids in multimedia instruction for vocabulary learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 11(3), 114-126.
- Lindsey-Glenn, P. F., & Gentry, J. E. (2008). Improving vocabulary skills through assistive technology: Rick's story. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 5(2),
- Mercuri, S. P. (2010). Using graphic organizers as a tool for the development of scientific language. *GIST Education and Learning Research Journal*, 430-49.
- Phillips, M. (2016), The Effects of Visual Vocabulary Strategies on Vocabulary Knowledge. Theses, Dissertations and Capstones. Paper 987.
- St. John, P., & Vance, M. (2014). Evaluation of a principled approach to vocabulary learning in mainstream classes. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 30(3), 255-271.
- Shahov, V.P. (2012). Measuring L2 Receptive and Productive Vocabulary. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 17, 167-185.
- Su, S. (2007). *Attitudes of Students and Instructors toward Textbook-Based Language Skills and Authentic Materials in Selected Adult English as a Second Language Programs*. Ann Arbor: ProQuest and learning company.