

GAUGING THE COMPETENCE OF ESL LEARNERS: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

A. Aravinth Raja, Reg. No: 19114014011010, Research Scholar, Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University. Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu 627012, India
Dr. S. Prabahar, Professor, Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University. Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu 627012, India

Abstract:

The present study attempts to measure the competence of ESL learners when it comes to learning the vocabulary in English. The study is conducted among the postgraduate learners of English, who are supposed to have a better competence than any other streams. The study also identifies that the said population is not competent enough in the required amount of vocabulary to be known in the language to communicate effectively in the language. Hence, treatment was given using short stories.

Key Words: *Communicate, competency, Language learners, ESL.*

1. Introduction:

David Wilkins, in his book *Linguistics in Language Teaching*, ascertains that "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (111). Learning the basic, intermediate and advanced vocabulary of any second language is seemingly a conscious process. ESL classrooms in India have adapted to the practice of conscious learning of the vocabulary rather than finding a way for the learners to effortlessly acquire the vocabulary of the language like how they acquired their First language. Learners of Second Language have two choices in hand, firstly, whether to use a dictionary to learn the new words or secondly, to understand the words from the context of where it is used. The first approach, the explicit or conscious learning, might be suitable for the beginners who do not know anything about the target language. The second approach, implicit or incidental learning, is suitable for any second language learner who knows the fundamentals of the second language. It is easier for the intermediate or the advanced learner who learns a target language to understand a word's meaning from its context. Learning a second language is primarily vested with learning the vocabulary and grammar of the language. Secondly, the knowledge of using the above two in context is required for effective communication. So, it is inevitable to learn a language by knowing its vocabulary. Narrowing it down to Learners of English as Second Language and considering the wordlists of English language such as GSL, which consists of 850 essential words, C. K. Ogden's 2000 frequently used words in English, LDOCE's 3000 most frequent words, it is not easy to learn all the vocabulary of English in a short period. However, it is required that the ESL materials used in classrooms must cover all the words in the above wordlists to communicate flawlessly and fluently in English. This present study probes into this problem and addresses the problem of covering a large number of vocabularies in a target language within a short period. Further, it inquires whether vocabulary learning should be explicit or implicit. In order to find an appropriate solution for the research questions, the researcher conducts experimental research among the postgraduate learners to come out with better solutions in Teaching vocabulary in ESL classrooms.

2. Literature Review:

Teaching vocabulary in ESL classrooms is generally, a congenital practice. It has been in practice even when the Grammar-Translation method, which is attributed as the first of the Teaching methods in

Second Language Teaching. A confusion is still prevalent among the teachers at the early stages of Second Language Teaching in the selection of the words to be taught in an ESL classroom and the methods of teaching. Considering the first issue, researchers started identifying the required and frequently used words in English, which are sufficient enough for a second language learner. As a result, Michael West in 1953, published the General Service List (GSL) which contains around two thousand most frequently used words in the English language. It was published to aid language teachers in the selection of vocabulary to be taught in ESL classrooms. Similarly, C. K. Ogden, in his project, surveyed a few essential words in English and published them as a book titled *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar* in 1930. This book contains rudimentary rules regarding the grammar of English. Apart from that, few words have also been listed as the most frequent words in the English language. After the establishment of COBUILD in the University of Birmingham, a Corpus has been created where 4.5 billion words are recorded. Coming to the second issue that teachers faced in Vocabulary teaching, researchers started looking for solutions to teach vocabulary whether vocabulary should be taught in isolation or context. The debate is interminable that it is inadvertently mooted in present teaching methods too. Stephen Krashen, a notable teacher and researcher in the realm of Second Language Teaching, has proposed Six hypotheses regarding Second Language Acquisition. The last of the six is called The Reading Hypothesis, where he says "the more we read in an SL, the greater our vocabulary will be" (Bio). A study was conducted among the Iranian learners of English as target language where the findings suggest "Results of the present study have shown that explicit instruction of vocabulary better influenced vocabulary learning among Iranian pre-intermediate learners" (Marzban&Kamalian 2013).

3. Methods:

The study is focused upon teaching vocabulary for the postgraduate learners of English, who have studied English literature in their Bachelor's degree. Hence, the population of the research may be stated generally as postgraduate learners of English. Non-probability sampling method was used to filter the samples for research from the actual population. Ten students who are currently pursuing their postgraduation in English in the Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University were taken for the research. The researcher also conducts his research in the above-stipulated institution, and so, the sampling method followed is convenience sampling. Two short stories are used as materials in the research which are taken from 'Linguapress', a web resource, especially for EFL/ESL teachers. The experiment did not follow the traditional design for conventional pretest-posttest research. The researcher has deliberately deviated by not making any distinction between treatment and control group in the samples for a specific reason. Thus, the research becomes a quasi-experimental research. The samples were first given a proctored pretest, which contained fifteen vocabulary of that of C1 and C2 level in the CEFR for second language. The marks obtained by the samples were carefully recorded, and the treatment was carried out using the materials and a unique teaching methodology adopted by the researcher specifically for Teaching vocabulary. A posttest was conducted after the end of the treatment, and the marks were also recorded carefully.

3.1 Hypothesis:

The researcher tentatively assumes that short stories might help postgraduate learners in acquiring the vocabulary of the target language in a brief period. The researcher also hypothesizes that vocabulary learnt in context, that is incorporating the selected vocabulary in short stories, may help the learners to master those vocabulary comparing to learning in isolation. In ESL classrooms and ESP classrooms, short stories can be used to teach the vocabulary of the target language to improve the learner's growth of vocabulary rate.

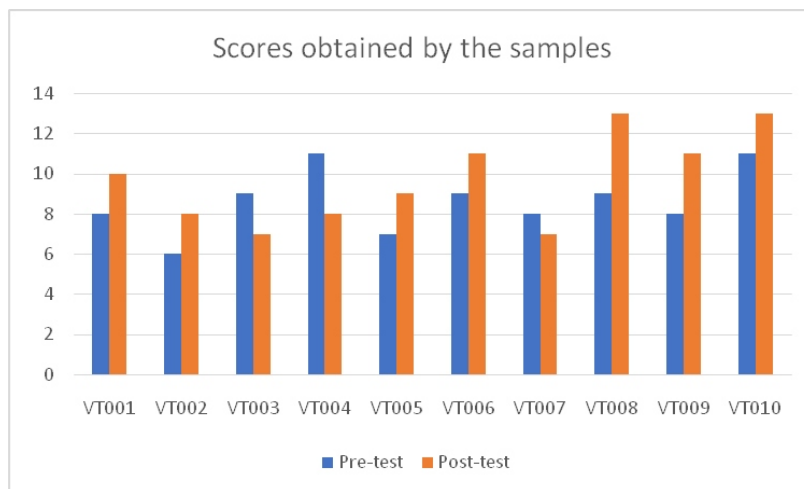
3.3 Assumptions:

The researcher assumes that these postgraduate learners taken for research might be able to comprehend C1 and C2 level of words stated in the CEFR framework. The materials used in the research

are texts prescribed for C1 and C2 level learners and learners, who can score an IELTS score of 7.

4. Results:

The ten samples were assigned a unique ID which starts with VT001 and ends with VT010. The collected data obtained from both the pretest and posttest are tabulated in a graph below.



4.1 Marks scored by the samples

5. Discussion:

Of the ten samples taken for treatment, the posttest scores of 7 respondents have significantly increased from the pretest score. The posttest scores of the remaining three samples have slightly decreased compared to the pretest scores. If the collected data is taken for analysis, the mean of all the pretest scores is 8.6, and the mean of all the posttest scores is 9.7. The average difference between the pretest and posttest scores is 1.1, which is a significant increase. So, the hypotheses may be proven right, considering the significant rise in the posttest scores of the respondents after the treatment. Seven samples have shown improvement after the treatment, and three of the ten samples have not shown any improvement after the treatment. The improved samples number supersedes the number of declined samples. So, it can be said that the hypothesis framed during the early stages of this research can be proven right.

6. Conclusion:

From the experiment as well as the interpretation of data, it is found that Teaching vocabulary through short stories will help the learners in mastering the vocabulary of the target language quicker. Though the list of words in the wordlists are more significant in number, short stories might help in teaching and using the words in context in a short period. In ESL classrooms, short stories can be used more effectively when it comes to teaching vocabulary. The results of the research clearly show that teaching vocabulary in context improves the learner's vocabulary growth rate than teaching in isolation.

References:

- Bio, Olenka Bilash. "Krashen's 6 Hypotheses." *Krashen's Hypotheses*, [https://sites.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/Best of Bilash/dr.b bio.html](https://sites.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/Best%20of%20Bilash/dr.b%20bio.html).
- Marzban, Amir, and Kimia Kamalian. "Effects of Implicit Versus Explicit Vocabulary Instruction on Intermediate EFL Learners' Vocabulary Knowledge." *ELT Voices - India*, vol. 3, no. 6, Dec. 2013, pp. 8495.
- Rossiter, Andrew. "The Car." *Linguapress*, Linguapress.com, <https://linguapress.com/advanced/story-the-car.htm>.
- Wilkins, D. A. *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. Edward Arnold, 1972.