The effect of contextualized vocabulary presentation on 10th form students' English vocabulary acquisition. An action research at To Hieu High school, Hai Phong / Ảnh hưởng của việc dạy từ vựng trong ngữ cảnh tới việc tiếp thu từ vựng của học sinh lớp 10. Nghiên cứu hành động tại trường THPT Tô Hiệu, Hải Phòng. M.A Thesis Linguistics: / Đặng Thị Hương

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ABSTRACT

The study, which is an action research study in nature, sets out to examine the effectiveness of contextualized vocabulary presentation to a group of high school students of grade 10 in a particular school. The study started with a simple, informal survey to find out the students' difficulties in acquiring English vocabulary. On the basis of the outcome of this 'survey', I decided to design activities that help to present vocabulary in contexts. The intervention lasted six weeks. During this period, the students had to take three progress tests of vocabulary. The tests were designed to measure the students' ability to use the taught words in different contexts as well as their retention of the taught words. By the end of the intervention, a focus group interview was carried out to find out the students' attitudes towards this vocabulary strategy. Data from the interview showed that the students really enjoyed contextualized vocabulary activities and they also showed a positive attitude to this instructional strategy.

Findings of the study did not show great improvement on the part of the students' vocabulary acquisition. This might be because the time of the intervention was not long enough (6 weeks) for the students to familiarize themselves with the new instructional strategy and for the intervention to bring about significant difference.

Drawing on the findings of the study I came to the conclusion that vocabulary teaching is complex and it seems that the application of one particular technique can hardly bring about the desired results. Instead, a variety of vocabulary techniques should be used. The change in teacher's teaching methods can help motivate the students. This is evidenced by the students' attitudes toward vocabulary learning despite their insignificant change in the test scores.

PART A: INTRODUCTION

1. RATIONALE

Considering the crucial role attributed to vocabulary learning in second or foreign language learning, one can implicitly understand the importance of vocabulary teaching as well. In the past, vocabulary teaching and learning were often given little priority in second language programs, but recently there has been a renewed interest in the nature of vocabulary and its role in learning and teaching (Richards & Renandya, 2002: 255).A number of research studies have dealt with lexical problems, namely, problems which language learners face in vocabulary learning. The research findings have revealed that lexical problems frequently interfere with communication. As a matter of fact, communication breaks down when people do not use the right words (Allen, 1983:5).

It is also generally accepted that second or foreign language learners who possess good word power or knowledge of vocabulary are usually more successful language learners. Simply put, people with large vocabularies are more proficient users of the target language than those with limited vocabularies. In fact, there is usually a positive correlation between one's knowledge of vocabulary and his/her level of language proficiency (Luppescu & Day: 1993).

When teaching vocabulary to the 10th form students at To Hieu High school the author found out that word retention is a big problem to the students. Students tend to forget words quickly. Another problem is that they may remember words but they do not know how to use them appropriately. It has often been suggested that learning vocabulary by using it in contexts should be employed as the main approach to improve vocabulary knowledge. A number of researchers such as Gairns and Redman (1986) and Oxford and Crookall (1988) have suggested that to learn words in context is an effective vocabulary learning strategy.

This has urged the researcher to carry out this action research, which is aimed at finding out how contextualized vocabulary presentation affects students' vocabulary acquisition.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Specifically, the aims of the study are:

1) To examine the feasibility of presenting vocabulary in contexts to 10th graders in a particular high school.

2) To measure the effectiveness of this vocabulary teaching technique on students' vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary retention.

Therefore, the study is to achieve the following objectives:

1) To experiment presenting vocabulary in contexts in order to measure its effectiveness on students' vocabulary acquisition.

2) To examine the impact of presenting vocabulary in contexts on students' vocabulary retention.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

To achieve the aims and objectives of the thesis, the following research question was proposed: "To what extent does contextualized vocabulary presentation affect students' vocabulary acquisition?"

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since the study is aimed at improving students' vocabulary acquisition through the application of a new vocabulary teaching technique, an action research designed is chosen for the study. In this action research, a series of progress tests was used in order to measure the impact or effectiveness of this vocabulary technique on students' vocabulary acquisition and retention. Moreover, a focus group interview was conducted to obtain more in-depth data about how students assessed their progress when applying guessing strategies and whether contextualized vocabulary presentation affected students' vocabulary retention and learning.

5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to the examination of how presenting vocabulary in contexts affect one group of grade 10 students' vocabulary acquisition and retention. No intention is made to generalize the findings.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this action research will help the author to improve her approaches to vocabulary teaching. Those results can also be helpful to other teachers in the school or in other schools which are similar to the school where this research was conducted.

7. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The research consists of three main parts: Part A, Part B and Part C.

Part A: Introduction presents the rationale, the research question, the method of study, the research procedure, the scope of the study, the significance of the study and the design of the study.

Part B: Development consists of 3 chapters. *Chapter one* reviews the literature relevant to the study including the definition of context and a number of researches in which contextualized vocabulary presentation has been used to helps students make improvement in their language study. This chapter also presents some types of contextual clues used to guess the meaning of unknown word and students' vocabulary learning strategies. *Chapter two* discusses the method used in the study. It presents a thorough justification for the use of action research and the research's components and program. *Chapter three* presents the findings and discussion of the study. This part is apparently important because it justifies the effectiveness of the research.

Part C: Conclusion provides summary of the findings, implication, refection as well as presents limitations and suggestions for further study

PART B: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Definition of contextualized vocabulary presentation:

1.2. A contextualized presentation to vocabulary acquisition

1.3. Previous studies on contextualized vocabulary presentation

1.4.Guessing or inferencing strategy

1.5. Types of contextual clues:

1.5.1. Structural clues:

1.5.2. Inference clues

1.6. Advantages and disadvantages of contextualized vocabulary presentation to vocabulary acquisition

1.7. Activities and exercises for presenting and practicing words in context

1.8. The roles of vocabulary knowledge in guessing meaning of the unknown words

1.9. Vocabulary in English textbook for 10th form non- English major students

1.10. Summary

In this chapter, an overview of approaches to contextualized vocabulary presentation, a summary of previous studies on guessing strategy, advantages and disadvantages of contextualized vocabulary presentation to vocabulary acquisition, activities and exercises for presenting and practicing words in context, the roles of vocabulary knowledge in guessing meaning of the unknown words and vocabulary in English textbook for 10th form non- English major students have been presented. To infer the meaning of an unknown word, the reader has to collect a number of clues from the text. A theoretical framework has been prepared for investigation in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLODY

In this chapter, the writer provides some information about research approach, the basic settings for the study. The following section describes in details how the data for the research were collected and analyzed to answer the three questions set for this research, namely:

2.1. Rationale for the use of an action research

2.2. Action Research Procedure

2.3. Background of the study

2.3.1. Participants

2.3.2. Data collection instruments

2.3.2.1. Tests

2.3.2.2. Focus group interview

2.4. Data collection procedures

Step 1: Initiation (Identify the problem)

Before carrying out this action research, I had informal chats with the students to gain understandings of their problems in vocabulary learning. Students tell me that they tend to forget words quickly after class. Some other students say they may remember words but they do not know how to use them appropriately.

Step 2: Preliminary Investigation (Collect data through a variety of means)

From the informal chats with the students, I found out that both students and their teachers tended to present and learn words in isolation.

Step 3: Hypothesis (Develop research question)

Taking into account the result of the preliminary investigation, I developed the following hypothesis for my action research:

Contextualized vocabulary presentation helps students to learn and retain vocabulary better.

Step 4: Intervention (Devise strategies and innovation to be implemented)

Regarding contextualized vocabulary presentation as an important factor to helps students to learn vocabulary better, I would like to make it extensively. I read books on how to contextualize my vocabulary presentation and selected the activities and exercises that I believed could help me present and get students practice vocabulary in contexts. The criterion for selection was the activities and exercises that were appropriate to the students' proficiency. Then I used those activities and exercises in the classroom with my students.

Step 5: Evaluation (Collect data again and analyze it to work out the findings)

The instrumentation used in this study included a general test of language proficiency; a post test- only model was used to measure whether students change over time due to a treatment. The posttest was a vocabulary test prepared carefully by the researcher. In which, it requires students to use the contextual guess work to determine their option. The aim of the posttest was to reveal the efficacy of the treatments provided to the experimental group during the research. The test results of different period of time were compared to

identify the improvement in students' proficiency of vocabulary. Moreover, an interview was conducted to obtain more in-depth data about how students assessed their progress when applying guessing strategies and whether contextualized vocabulary presentation affected students' vocabulary retention and learning.

Step 6: Dissemination

The results of the action research, i.e. presenting vocabulary in contexts, are reported in this thesis.

Step 7: Follow- up (Find alternative methods to solve the same problem)

Having completed the first cycle of this action research, I understand better the advantages and the limitations of contextualized vocabulary presentation. This understanding will be the foundation for my next cycle of the action research, which will be presented in Section 2 of Part C in this thesis.

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the analysis of data collected is presented. As being said in Chapter 1, the aim of the study is to examine the feasibility of presenting vocabulary in contexts to 10th graders in a particular high school and to measure the effectiveness of this vocabulary teaching technique on students' vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary retention. The results of this study, therefore, are reported on each purpose of the study.

3.1. The results of the post-test

3.2. The results of focus group interview

3.2.1. Students' opinions of the usefulness of contextualized vocabulary presentation

3.2.2. Enhancing motivation for vocabulary learning

3.2.3. Memorizing words better

3.2.4. Preference of contextualized vocabulary activities and exercises:
3.2.5. The help of contextualized vocabulary presentation to word retention and using

3.3. Discussion

First, the students' vocabulary was quite limited, which made it hard for them to acquire new vocabulary as Nation (1993b) concludes "Vocabulary knowledge enables language use, language use enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of the world enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge and language use and so on".

Second, the new technique was applied in a relatively short period of time (6 weeks). Given the fact that the students learned English 4 class hours per week, the time for them to familiarize with the new technique is not adequate. Probably, it takes more time for every new teaching technique to show its impact. These students started learning English while they were 6th graders and they had learned vocabulary in isolation and out of context for almost four years. They were quite familiar with the old vocabulary teaching techniques, which were not effective to their retention of the taught words. Now it takes time for them to change their learning habits of learning words in isolation.

However, the interview data revealed that the students enjoyed learning vocabulary with the new technique. They felt that the technique enabled them to memorize the words better and improve their reading proficiency though this was not justified in their test performance. This seems to be contradictory, but I think this may be due the students' investment in learning English. At the high school, English is just one of many subjects the students have to study. With such a heavy curriculum, it is really hard, if not impossible, for them to invest sufficiently in learning English. With four class hours of English being spread out throughout the week, it is very likely that the students had forgotten what they had learned in the previous lesson before starting the new one.

3.4. Summary of major findings

In short, this chapter has presented the major findings of the study based on the data gathered during the program. These include the results of the post-tests, of the focus group

interview and the discussion. On the whole, contextualized vocabulary presentation did not help the students to progress in vocabulary tests. However, the interview data revealed that the students enjoyed learning vocabulary with the contextualized vocabulary activities and exercises. This technique helps them to remember words better and improve their reading proficiency. These findings are valuable to the pedagogical implications display in the last chapter of the study.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the theoretical viewpoint of guessing strategy and previous studies on it in first and second-language context, an action research on guessing strategy was carried out to examine the feasibility of presenting vocabulary in contexts to 10th graders in a particular high school and to measure the effectiveness of this vocabulary teaching technique on students' vocabulary acquisition.

From this action research, some findings were gained as reported in the Chapter Three. The results of this action research prove that contextualized vocabulary presentation did not help the students to progress in vocabulary learning, however, students feel that the technique enables them to memorize the words better and improves their reading proficiency. Therefore, teachers need to vary their vocabulary teaching techniques. Through the action research at this school, I have achieved some ideas on how to handle guessing strategy successfully in the classroom. Hence, in this chapter, some implications drawn out from the action research are given to teachers who want to apply guessing strategy training to their teaching process like this.

1. Summary of the findings

The study presented in this thesis aims at justifying the effect of contextualized vocabulary presentation on students' vocabulary acquisition. This action research was carried out with the participants of 10th form students during six weeks. A post-test and the focus group interview were used as data collection instrument. Results of the research are important in the following ways.

First, they provide addition support to research that gathered reading strategies which involve guessing strategy. It is a fact that most meaning vocabulary is learnt from context; the learner has on occasion read some texts containing unfamiliar words, but he was unable or unwilling to find out from a dictionary or another person what it meant and the teachers might have little time for directly teaching an extensive list of meaning vocabulary items. It is necessary for the learner to be able to guess word meaning using the context clues and his knowledge as well.

Second, the results also provide support for the demand to train students this effective strategy of guessing. When taking part in guessing activities instructed by the teacher the learners become more active and stimulating because they were given a sense of discovery, which appeared to be useful and enjoyable.

Finally, the results have some implications for classroom teaching. The findings suggest that it is possible for the teacher to assist the learners' guessing process through his direct instruction before letting the students guess on their own. When the teacher prepares to deal with a new text, instead of assuming that all important new words must be taught in advance, set aside those which we can use for further practice inference but make sure to check for each item whether there are enough clues to make inference possible. If students are able to use surrounding context to help determine the meaning of unknown words, they become more independently engaged in reading English. If teachers are more enthusiastic in teaching the strategies of inferencing word meaning, the learners will gain more knowledge of vocabulary and of the world through reading and stimulate their interest in reading English.

2. Reflection

Having completed the first cycle of this action research, I understood better the advantages and the limitations of contextualized vocabulary presentation. I am now aware that I need to use different vocabulary techniques in the classroom rather than following just one particular technique no matter how well that technique is suggested or recommended in the literature. Particularly, I become aware of the need to listen to the students' voice to understand their reactions to my teaching practice. I believe that if the students do not

enjoy the technique or activities that the teacher uses they do not benefit much from teacher teaching. The result of this study motivates me to carry on with the second cycle of this action research in which I may use contextualized vocabulary presentation in a longer period. I also need to test out which words can be better taught with this technique. These will be stated more clearly in Section 3.

3. Implications

Findings of this study show that the effectiveness of students' vocabulary acquisition may depend less on the teaching techniques but more on the students' vocabulary proficiency. In other words, the more words the students know, the more effectively they acquire new vocabulary. Therefore, in the classroom teachers should emphasize more the vocabulary teaching in order to increase the students' vocabulary and their retention of the acquired vocabulary given the role of vocabulary in language learning as concluded by Qian (2002:518) "having a larger vocabulary gives the learner a larger database from which to guess the meaning of the unknown words or behavior of newly learned words, having deeper vocabulary knowledge will very likely improve the results of the guessing work" and it is also generally accepted that second or foreign language learners who possess good word power or knowledge of vocabulary are usually more successful language learners. Simply put, people with large vocabularies are more proficient users of the target language than those with limited vocabularies. In fact, there is usually a positive correlation between one's knowledge of vocabulary and his/her level of language proficiency (Luppescu & Day, 1993).

Although the new vocabulary technique did not help the students to increase their vocabulary proficiency, the technique did make the students enjoy learning vocabulary better. This is evidenced in what they said in the interview. This implies that teachers need to vary their teaching techniques regularly to avoid the students' boredom, thereby enhancing their motivation. I believe that once the teacher manages to motivate the students to learn, the students will be able to take of their own learning.

4. Limitations and suggestions for further study

The limitations of this study lie in the fact that it used the posttest only. This limitation does not allow any comparison between students' vocabulary proficiency before the intervention and after the intervention. However, the study used three different post-tests, which certainly showed how the students progressed over time, at least during the intervention period of six weeks. In the future, a pre-test-post-test design should be used in a longer period. Another limitation is the test. In this study, I designed my own tests, and this may have problems with the test construct validity. In future studies, i.e. in the next cycle of this action research I will use validated tests to achieve more reliability and internal validity of the findings.