

THE EFFECT OF EXTENSIVE READING ON IMPROVING LEARNERS'  
VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE IN TERMS OF SIZE AND ACADEMIC WORDS

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This dissertation is dedicated to  
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my brothers and sisters for being patient and supporting me over the years of my  
education  
and all those who believe in the richness of learning.

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## ABSTRACT

Many studies have investigated the effect of extensive reading on language learners' vocabulary acquisition with using various kinds of language texts and assessments and the focus was mainly on the receptive vocabulary. However, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the effect of extensive reading on improving language learners' vocabulary knowledge in terms of size and academic words in addition to promoting learners' reading motivation among international ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) students. In order to conduct this study, twenty language learners from among the intermediate level students in IEC (Intensive English Course) classes in UTM (University Technology Malaysia) have written a pre-writing essay and a post-writing essay in the beginning and at end of experiment (during one month). Then, they answered some interview questions. The findings revealed a relationship between extensive reading and vocabulary improvement in terms of size, while extensive reading did not have a significant effect on improving the learners' academic vocabulary. In addition, extensive reading improved the learners' motivation to read and increased their vocabulary knowledge.

## ABSTRAK

Terdapat banyak kajian yang menyiasat kesan pembacaan yang meluas terhadap pembelajaran kosa kata bahasa dengan menggunakan pelbagai jenis teks bahasa dan penilaian dimana tumpuan adalah terutamanya terhadap perbendaharaan kata. Walau bagaimanapun, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan pembacaan yang meluas untuk memperbaiki pembelajaran kosa kata bahasa dari segi saiz dan perkataan akademik disamping menggalakkan motivasi membaca di kalangan pelajar antarabangsa ESL (Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua) dan EFL (Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing). Bagi menjalankan kajian ini, dua puluh pelajar bahasa dari kalangan pelajar peringkat pertengahan di kelas IEC (Kursus Intensif Bahasa Inggeris) di UTM (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia) telah dipilih untuk menulis esei sebelum dan selepas di peringkat awal dan pada peringkat akhir eksperimen (dalam satu bulan). Seterusnya, mereka menjawab beberapa soalan temuduga. Kajian ini menunjukkan terdapatnya hubungan antara bacaan yang meluas dan penambahbaikan perbendaharaan kata dari segi saiz, manakala pembacaan yang tidak meluas mempunyai kesan yang signifikan terhadap meningkatkan perbendaharaan kata akademik dikalangan pelajar. Disamping itu, kajian menunjukkan pembacaan yang meluas meningkatkan motivasi pelajar untuk membaca dan meningkatkan pengetahuan perbendaharaan kata mereka.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

AWL	Academic Word List
EFL	English Foreign Language
ELPT	English Language Placement
ESL	English Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
IEC	Intensive English Course
L2	Second Language
SL	Second Language
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
UWL	University Word List

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Teaching vocabulary is considered as one of the main issues in ESL/EFL classes. Wilkins (1972) stated that one of the most significant factors that help learners in acquiring or learning language is learning or acquiring vocabulary. He also clarified that nothing can take place without words. Since the end of 1980s, the importance of teaching vocabulary has been drawing attention of many researchers to write about the issues in teaching vocabulary knowledge and find a successful and persuasive method of instructing vocabulary knowledge which can be helpful for learners to learn a massive proportion of vocabulary. Moreover, Horst (2005) stated that reading is considered as one of the most crucial aspects in improving language proficiency and vocabulary knowledge.

Not all individuals have the same competencies in learning vocabulary knowledge and the same performance in reading comprehension. As vocabulary seems to be one of the important sub-skills affecting all four language learning skills, everybody needs to improve vocabulary knowledge. In addition, research (e.g., Alderson, 2000; Mehrpour and Rahimi, 2010) stated that two factors have effects on reading comprehension 1. Variables related to the readers of the texts 2. The variables

related to the texts themselves. Readers' background knowledge can consist of an amount of vocabulary they know. Moreover, reading and understanding texts are influenced by the size of vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, Nation (2006) indicated that 98% of the running words should be known by learners so as to have an adequate comprehension of various texts.

Various strategies are used in language classes in order to teach vocabulary knowledge. Some language instructors teach vocabulary in separation while others teach vocabulary within context. The isolation teaching of vocabulary means offering learners a word-list to memorize or giving learners a list of vocabulary with pictures. In contrast, teaching vocabulary within text or context means learning words within sentences or texts. Folse (2005) illustrated that new strategies of teaching vocabulary within context provide learners to learn a large amount of words. On the contrary, the isolation method which may be considered as a tedious method causes lack of motivation in language classes. In addition, teaching vocabulary within context improves learners' competence in other aspects in language such as linguistic competence, rules, guessing unfamiliar words based on the meaning of the text or sentence and using words in appropriate circumstances.

In contrast to the above statements which support teaching vocabulary in context, research (e.g., Prince, 1996; Laufer and Shmueli, 1997) stated that teaching vocabulary in isolation is more effective in terms of controlling form-and-meaning connection. They also believed that learners' focus in isolation methods of teaching vocabulary is on the new words while within context it is hard to concentrate on new words.

Vocabulary is one of the essential bases of language and human beings cannot learn or acquire language without the aid of vocabulary (Krashen, 1989; Nation, 1990). Furthermore, Blachowicz and Fisher (2000) maintained that vocabulary knowledge has a crucial role in expressing ideas and thoughts, conveying meaningful messages,



communication, discussion and interaction in various texts. The above studies show the influence of word knowledge on various aspects of language.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

During the past decades, the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension was one of the main subjects under investigation by many reading researchers because it was one of the obvious issues in language courses. Most of the findings demonstrated that there is a noticeable contribution between learning vocabulary and reading comprehension (e.g., Koda, 1989; Laufer, 1992).

According to Doró (2008), vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are interrelated variables. Vocabulary knowledge can be acquired through reading comprehension. On the other hand, learners need vocabulary knowledge in order to have an adequate reading comprehension. Based on the findings, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) indicated that the meaning, spelling and grammatical characteristics of vocabulary knowledge can be developed through extensive reading. The above studies assisted the researcher to use reading to improve vocabulary.

Day and Bamford (1998) stated that extensive reading has various goals including reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge growth. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), extensive reading is a pleasurable reading which exposes learners with a massive amount of reading texts that appropriate to the learners' language proficiency and linguistic competences. Research has found that extensive reading leads to a great improvement in vocabulary knowledge and reading fluency (Horst, 2005; Huckin and Coady 1999). Hence, this study focuses on extensive reading so as to include all the strength of extensive reading on expanding vocabulary knowledge in the English classes.

Instructing vocabulary knowledge is an issuable process. In order to teach vocabulary effectively, various aspects should be kept in mind such as assessments, the number of the words, frequency of words and the goal of teaching. Moreover, Nation (2001) stated that vocabulary knowledge is taught for certain purposes. In order to achieve vocabulary goals and provide an effective plan for teaching vocabulary, three aspects should be concentrated on so as to know how much vocabulary is required for using language effectively. First, the total number of the lexis in the target language. Second, sum of native speakers' vocabulary knowledge. Third, the appropriate number of the necessary words in order to use language efficiently.

Receptive and productive are two dimensions in vocabulary knowledge and each one is used for specific purposes. Recent studies have concentrated on receptive vocabulary knowledge including recognizing the form of the lexis in the reading and listening. While, few studies have focused on productive vocabulary knowledge which is the ability to retrieve the meaning of the words that have been learnt and using those words in the writing and speaking (Pearson, *et al.*, 2007; Webb, 2008). Therefore, this study explores the improvement of productive vocabulary knowledge in order to know whether learners' can use the words that they acquire through reading in their writing.

Studies on vocabulary knowledge have used various assessments based on the purpose of the study. In recent studies, the most common assessments have been conducted through providing synonym, defining target words, multiple choice vocabulary test, matching the words and recognition of the meanings of the words by choosing rating options (e.g., yes, no, somehow I know the meaning) (Pearson, Hiebert, and Kamil, 2007; Read, 2000; horst, 2005). Few studies focused on contextualizing assessments of vocabulary knowledge which is focused on the meaning and the usage of words within contexts. Furthermore, Harmon *et al.* (2007) stated that assessing vocabulary knowledge means assessing behaviour, function, action and usage of the words. In the light of the above studies, decontextualized assessments cannot identify all aspects of word knowledge. Thus, the current study investigates the improvement in

vocabulary through context in order to know the improvement in vocabulary knowledge in terms of meaning, function and usage within context.

Pearson, Hiebert and Kamil (2007) emphasized on how learners can acquire vocabulary. In addition, they supply convincing reasons for supporting teaching vocabulary within the context which can be more effective or influential than teaching vocabulary in isolation. They also stated that teachers' points of view or perspective on teaching vocabulary can be shifted if teachers grasp the relation between teaching vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. They also believed that acquiring vocabulary is one of the features that provide students to understand the concept of language knowledge.

A massive proportion of words which are learnt based on word-list or other techniques of isolation method of teaching vocabulary cannot be controlled in a prolonged period of time (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2008; Milton, 2009). Moreover, Yali (2010) found out that both intentional instruction and incidental instruction of vocabulary knowledge promote learners' size of vocabulary, but the combination of both instructions provides a better result of the improvement in word knowledge.

The previous studies have investigated various kinds of assessments, strategies and texts for various purposes. However, some types of the assessments, target words and strategies have not been investigated or focused on. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine them.

### 1.3 Statement of Problem

This study investigates the effect of comprehension reading on learning vocabulary in terms of quantity and complexity. Doró (2008) stated that learners need high vocabulary proficiency so as to be successful in any activities which related to language including reading and writing, speaking and listening tasks. Learning vocabulary is considered as an important and influential factor in language learning or acquisition (Krashen, 1989). Cho and Krashen (1994) stated that individual's capacity for learning vocabulary is different. In addition, more comprehensible reading helps learners to acquire language including vocabulary, in contrast, some language instructors think that teaching vocabulary is not important in language acquisition (Miller and Gildea, 1987; Nation, 1990).

Doró (2008) stated that large vocabulary size and a massive proportion of academic vocabulary are crucial in providing learners with a better performance in academic achievement. Moreover, lexical knowledge is one of the effective features of perceiving the meaning of texts including written and oral texts in addition to the education outcome and language proficiency (Nassaji, 2004; Hunt and Beglar, 2005; Shiotsu and Weir, 2007). Furthermore, Nation (2006) confirmed that learners with large vocabulary knowledge can comprehend various texts. Therefore, Learners' should be provided with a large amount of vocabulary knowledge before starting their academic studies.

The current study focuses on international students in Intensive English Course in the intermediate level that could not get satisfactory results the English Language Placement Test (ELPT) in UTM so as to join faculties. Students' not satisfactory results in the English Language Placement Test (ELPT) in UTM show that students' vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient. In addition, based on the survey, students confirmed that lack of word knowledge affects their academic achievements and the results of the tests.

Learners agreed that they face difficulties in writing, reading, speaking and listening because of lack of vocabulary knowledge.

Extensive reading is hypothesized to increase learners' vocabulary knowledge in terms of size and academic words. This study proposes the use of extensive reading as a treatment for helping students to overcome the issue of lack of vocabulary knowledge because learners do not have sufficient time to learn a large amount of vocabulary which are needed for academic purposes in classrooms. In addition, Nation (2006) stated around 8000-9000 word families are needed to have an adequate comprehension of written texts such as novels and 6000-7000 vocabulary is necessary for having understanding spoken texts without using other sources. Moreover, Sokmen (1997) stated that learners should be provided with new supplementary methods to learn or acquire new vocabulary knowledge on their own outside of the classroom because learners cannot acquire or learn a large proportion of words during the short time of the classroom.

Students' lack of vocabulary affects other skills in language learning such as listening, speaking, reading and writing skills which means vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in language learning. It has been noticed that learners with large amount of vocabulary knowledge can easily master other skills in a language and have. Muncie (2002) maintained that large vocabulary knowledge leads to better reading comprehension, writing and overall language tests. Muncie (2002) also stated that learners with large amount of vocabulary knowledge helps learners to have a better academic performance.

## **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to identify the relationship between extensive reading and learning vocabulary in terms of quantity and academic vocabulary. In addition, the study investigates whether extensive reading is an appropriate variable for improving learners' vocabulary which is needed for endemic achievements.

Many teachers provide learners with reading during classes while the process of reading outside of classes is passive or neglected and studies have been mentioned earlier reading activity in the classroom is not sufficient for having rich vocabulary knowledge. Another aim of this study is to examine the improvement in learners vocabulary knowledge in teams of size and academic words by exposing learners in intermediate level in intensive English course in UTM with different texts.

## **1.5 Objective of the Study**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To investigate the effect of extensive reading on improving learners' vocabulary knowledge in terms of size.
- To investigate the effect of extensive reading on improving learners' vocabulary knowledge in terms of academic words.
- To investigate the effect of extensive reading on promoting learners' motivation and vocabulary knowledge.

## 1.6 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Does extensive reading improve learners' vocabulary in terms of size?
- Does extensive reading improve learners' vocabulary in terms of academic words?
- Does extensive reading promote learners' motivation and vocabulary knowledge?

## 1.7 Scope of the Study

The data of this study is collected from 20 international students at the intermediate level of Intensive English Course (IEC) in University Technology Malaysia (UTM) during one month. The participants' ages were ranged from 23 to 40 years old. The gender of the participants were 12 males and 8 females. Participants have not received extensive reading activities outside of the classroom in their reading program in the Intensive English Course (IEC). The focus of this study is on the improvement of vocabulary knowledge in terms of size and academic words in addition to the effect of extensive reading promoting learners' motivation and vocabulary knowledge.

The variables such as gender, age, nationality and previous language background are not involved in the scope of the current study. Extensive reading improves many aspects in language including fluency, grammatical competence, syntax and spelling while they will not be involved in investigated in the current study because the focus of this study is on the effect of extensive reading on improving vocabulary knowledge in terms of size and academic words. The students were asked to read extensive texts for

one month. In addition, the instruments which were used for assessing students in this study were writing pre-essays and post writing essay in addition structured interview. The other decontextualized assessments such as multiple choices, synonyms and other assessments of word recognition were used in this study.

## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

The findings of the study are hoped to provide teachers to use different types and strategies including extensive reading to improve learners' vocabulary knowledge in the language classes which is mostly ignored by teachers and syllabus designers. In addition, the study is expected to be helpful to the syllabus designers and teachers in order to include extensive program in the language courses and encourage students to have reading in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

The study is significant for students in order to be exposed to a large amount of vocabulary knowledge that they need for their academic purposes through extensive reading. Moreover, the results of this study are expected to help students expand their word knowledge in terms of size and academic words which cannot be acquired through intensive reading program in order to have a better performance in academic achievements.

Another significance of this study is using extensive reading which is predicted to promote learners' motivation to read a larger amount of materials or texts because extensive reading means reading for pleasure and the texts should be interested by readers. In other words, in this study readers themselves select the texts which are interested by them. In addition, in this study, the students themselves choose the texts which is expected to be a good strategy to provide appropriate texts for readers.



This study is significant through using different types of assessing vocabulary knowledge through students' writings because few studies have been assessed or focused on improvement in vocabulary knowledge through context especially writing. While, many studies have focused on decontextualized assessment of vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, the study focused on the improvement in academic vocabulary which has crucial role in academic tasks including writing projects, assignments, reports, and tests.

## **1.9 Definition of Terms**

The following terms which were used and discussed in this study are defined according to the aims of the study in order to provide a better comprehension. The terms are defined as following:

### **1.9.1 Vocabulary knowledge**

In this study, vocabulary knowledge refers to familiarity of words or phrases in terms of meaning, function, spelling and association with other words (Doró 2008).

### **1.9.2 Extensive Reading**

In the context of this study, extensive reading refers to expose learners with large amount of interesting texts so as to read for pleasure (Grabe and Stoller, 2002)

### **1.9.3 Size of vocabulary**

In this study, size of vocabulary refers to the number of words which learners know or use in the target language (Nation, 2001).

### **1.9.4 Academic vocabulary**

Academic words are the words which were listed by Coxhead (2000). They occur in all academic discipline and cover about 10% of the words in all academic text (Zhou, 2010).

### **1.9.5 Decontextualized vocabulary**

In this study, Decontextualized vocabulary means learning or assessing in isolation words not through context (Qian, 1996).

### **1.9.6 Contextualized vocabulary**

In the context of this study, Contextualized vocabulary refers to the learning or assessing vocabulary through context (Qian, 1996).

### **1.9.7 Receptive vocabulary**

In this study refers to learners' knowledge of the meaning of the vocabulary that is acquired through reading or listening (Laufer *et al.*, 2004).

### **1.9.8 Productive vocabulary**

In the context of this study, productive vocabulary refers to the words that learners can retrieve their meanings and use them in writing and speaking (Webb, 2005).

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