

THE IMPACT OF USING WORDLISTS IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ON STUDENTS' VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT: *Vocabulary has always been an area of interest for many researchers since words represent “the building block upon which knowledge of the second language can be built” and without them people cannot convey the intended meaning (Abrudan, 2010). Nation (1988) emphasised if teachers want to help their learners to deal with unknown words, it would be better to spend more time on vocabulary learning strategies rather than spending time on individual words. However, Schmitt in Schmitt and McCarthy (1997:200) stated that among vocabulary learning strategies only ‘guessing from context’ and ‘key word method’ have been investigated in depth. Therefore, there is need for more research on vocabulary learning whose pedagogical implications may contribute to the field of second language learning. Considering the above-mentioned issues, vocabulary is a worthwhile field to investigate. Hence, this paper aims at proposing a framework for vocabulary teaching strategy in English as a foreign language context.*

KEYWORDS: Wordlists, Vocabulary Teaching, Word walls, Vocabulary Learning Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary has always been an area of interest and concern for many researchers and teachers alike since words represent “the building block upon which knowledge of the second language can be built” and without them people cannot convey the intended meaning (Abrudan, 2010). Anderson and Freebody (1981) state that a strong correlation exists between vocabulary and academic achievement. Accordingly, Hatch and Brown (1995:372) remarked that a great deal of approaches, techniques, exercises and practices have been introduced into the field to teach vocabulary and how learners acquire vocabulary has always interested teachers. In addition, knowing about which methods work better could assist learners in adopting more profitable strategies. Hulsjin (1993) cited in Morin and Goebel (2001) suggests that teaching vocabulary should not only consist of teaching specific words but also aim at equipping learners with necessary strategies to expand their vocabulary knowledge. Similarly,

Nation (1988) emphasised that if teachers want to help their learners to deal with unknown words, it would be better to spend more time on vocabulary learning strategies rather than spending time on individual words. Many learners do use strategies to learn vocabulary but they are mostly inclined to use basic vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt, 1997). Thus, strategy instruction needs to be an essential part of any foreign or second language program especially if students are learning English for academic purposes because they will be exposed to a myriad of words. Students need training particularly in deciding which words are worth spending more time to learn. However, Schmitt in Schmitt and McCarthy (1997:200) stated that among vocabulary learning strategies only ‘guessing from context’ and ‘key word method’ have been investigated in depth. Therefore, there is need for more research on vocabulary language learning and strategy training whose pedagogical implications may contribute to the field of second language learning.

Having the above-mentioned issues in mind, I believe vocabulary is a worthwhile field to investigate. Hence, this paper aims at proposing a framework for vocabulary teaching strategy in English as a foreign language context.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Vocabulary knowledge is “a disarmingly simple term for a complex multidimensional phenomenon” (Harley, 1996). The components of word knowledge can be regarded as form, word structure, syntactic patterns, meaning, lexical relations with other words and collocations (Richard 1976, Nation 1988). Owing to this complexity, classroom teachers need to adopt a comprehensive approach to vocabulary development in order to help their students reach a higher quality and quantity of L2 output (Swain, 1996). However, there has been a debate among educators on choosing the most effective way of teaching vocabulary. Some researchers believe that instructional methods such as contextual and mnemonic methods offer language learners great advantage. Beheydt (1987) believes context is of utmost importance to vocabulary acquisition since learning words is a process of “semantization”, i.e. “a continuing process of getting acquainted with verbal forms in their polysemous diversity within varying contexts” (p.56). Many researchers, however, do not believe in the efficiency of context alone and call for other methods such as vocabulary enhancement activities or explicit teaching of vocabulary teaching (Coady and Huckin, 1997; Schmitt, 2002b).

One guideline for effective vocabulary teaching either deductively or inductively is careful selection of words to learn or to teach. Acquiring vocabulary is a daunting task for language learners, especially if the goal is to do academic studies in the second language. However, “the task becomes more manageable if students know which words are more important to learn than others, or which words are most useful to know as a precondition to learning others” (Cobb & Horst, 2004). In order to help learners, a teacher should, himself or herself, know which words to select and prioritize for teaching. Nation (2004) claims that a teacher should deal with unknown words by adopting principles that reflect the nature of vocabulary learning. He supports his idea by saying ‘if a teacher is asked “Why did you skip over that word?” or “Why did you spend so much time helping learners guess the meaning of that word?”, a teacher should be able to indicate the goal of such attention and give sensible informed reasons for choosing a particular option. Vocabulary teaching and learning should not be a random, ad hoc, process but should be guided by well supported principles’ (2004:28).

Frequency has been the most common principled way of selection of vocabulary in second or foreign language learning. There are four different lists of vocabulary categorized by Nation (2001): high-frequency words, academic words, technical words, and low-frequency words. These wordlists provide learners with a useful solution to a problem in the naturalistic acquisition of the vocabulary needed for academic studies. In Nation’s view, high-frequency words are vital to second language learning and they should be taught explicitly. Academic and technical vocabulary is also worth focusing on for students who study in an English medium university. Conversely, teachers do not need to spend time on teaching low-frequency vocabulary in class since these words occur rarely and students can deal with these words on their own if they are taught necessary strategies (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2012). Students can independently decipher the meaning of these words. However, the teacher must first show the students a strategy which illustrates how to do this (Watts, 1995). Nation (2001) suggests that an important vocabulary acquisition strategy is “noticing” which means seeing and recognizing a word as something to

be learned using meta-cognitive skills. Therefore, teachers can help students get in to the habit of noticing by making clear which items should be learned during classroom time. In that sense, wordlists which are designed to make students focus on a particular set of vocabulary words might be a good way of developing the idea of noticing.

The effectiveness of vocabulary lists has been, given importance and has been advocated by so many (Millington and Siegel, 2010; Sokmen, 1997; Schmitt and Schmitt, 2012) and several benefits have been ascribed to the use of vocabulary lists. Millington and Siegel (2010) states, “the creation of vocabulary lists should be taken as an important duty that can have profound implications, assuming that students will invest time and effort attempting to acquire these lexical items, in addition to being evaluated on vocabulary tests” and they will probably acquire more knowledge about the target words since they spend considerable time engaged with new vocabulary.

One of the problems with making use of a word list is that some learners and some teachers focus solely on working with the list alphabetically and students might not find the words in context in materials they are reading (Coxhead, 2011). Another problem that might arise is that students may never practice the words in any meaningful way if they focus only on the spelling and meaning of words, but not on using the words themselves in speaking and writing (Coxhead, 2011). Therefore, in order to get the real benefit from the wordlists, teachers need to make sure that they provide learners “frequent encounters with the words being taught” since it is crucial to vocabulary acquisition (Watts, 1995). As Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) suggest, when students are exposed to the same words many times, the result will be a higher degree of learning, an increased ability to remember and use the word. Therefore, one of the effective ways to achieve this may be using an interactive word wall on which students have a wordlist. Word walls are the collections of developmentally appropriate vocabulary items which are displayed somewhere in a language classroom for study by students (Brabham and Villaume 2001; Thompkins 2003; Vallejo 2006). According to Brabham and Villaume (2001) word walls are composed of several common attributes:

- *All are collections of words that are developmentally appropriate for study by students in the classroom.*
- *Words are selected for specific instructional purposes.*
- *Collections are cumulative; as new words are introduced, familiar words remain for further study.*
- *Activities and talk about word walls provide conversational scaffolds that structure the ways that students study, think about, and use words.*
- *Words on walls serve as visual scaffolds that temporarily assist students in independent reading and writing.*

Word walls are useful tools for both teachers and students since they let teachers and students see and monitor what has been taught and learned. In addition, they serve as guides for teachers to determine what needs to be added to make word study systematic and to avoid gaps in the curriculum (Brabham, & Villaume, 2001).

Cunningham (2000) argue that teachers should not “only have a word wall but, more importantly, also do the word wall by involving the students actively in both creating and interacting with the words on the wall”. Similarly, Cambourne (2000) supports this by arguing that the artifacts are only valuable when students are actively engaged in meaningful tasks with them. In addition, the regular use of word walls enhances vocabulary learning since students engage in activities

centered around the word wall (Harmon, Wood, Hedrick, Vintinner, & Willeford, 2009). This wall holds instructional potential for contributing to the learning of new items according to Dual-Coding Theory. Clark and Paivo, quoted in Sokmen (1997), states that this theory claims that “the mind contains a network of verbal and imaginal representations for words” (p.244). Therefore, the wordlist on the interactive word wall is effective since it serves as a memory aid helping the learners to visualize the network of relationship between new and familiar words (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Consequently, regular use of the word wall ensures greater retention of vocabulary since the use of it allows teachers to recycle many words (Green, 2003).

Having considered all these, the study described in this paper seeks to investigate the effect of the use of vocabulary lists on a word wall in an EFL classroom setting on students’ vocabulary acquisition as well as the attitudes of the students.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Having taught and observed students’ performance in English both in receptive and productive skills for 8 years, I realized our students experience a great difficulty in learning and using target vocabulary. One of the important underlying reasons is that students are exposed to a myriad number of words every day and do not know which words provide them with a working vocabulary. In order to address this issue, wordlists were used in the institution I had worked before. However, the curriculum specialists eliminated wordlists from the curriculum and they justified their decisions by arguing that wordlists were not useful since students became too much dependent on the lists and ignored the other important words. Since then, this issue has been discussed in school meetings and some teachers insist that wordlists should be back. However, the question is whether the wordlists used in class really work or not. Thus, the answer to this question has been of concern to me and this research will be conducted in an attempt to explore the effectiveness of making use of a word list in classroom and students’ views on the process.

Significance of the Research

Considering the academic environment where students are exposed to vocabulary more than they can handle, helping them to prioritize the important words to learn is crucial so as to enable teachers and learners to work together towards a mutual goal which is to enhance students’ vocabulary knowledge. Since the present study aims at exploring whether using a wordlist in the class through a word wall is an effective vocabulary learning strategy to improve their repertoire of words, the findings might attract the interest of both foreign language teachers and students, and encourage them in the way of adopting the mentioned strategy in their studies.

Research Questions

The aim of the research is to explore whether the use of wordlists on a word wall helps students improve students’ vocabulary acquisition. To be able to find an answer to this question, the questions focused on throughout the research were:

1. Does the use of word lists on a word wall in the language classroom improve students’ vocabulary acquisition?
2. What are students’ views on using word lists on a word wall in the language classroom?

METHODOLOGY

Setting

The study was conducted at the School of English Language Instruction in a private English-medium university, in Istanbul, Turkey. The preparatory school is a one-year program, whose mission is to develop students who have an excellent command of written and oral English so that they can excel in their studies both at the undergraduate level and beyond. The Program has five levels (Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate, and Advanced) and students are placed into one of these levels after taking a placement test at the beginning of the academic year. Students study English for 20 hours a week in a program that consists of integrated skills and language teaching.

Prerequisites to pass the levels are keeping a learning portfolio and being successful in Mid-Module Assessment Test and Level Assessment Test which is administered at the end of the course. Students who meet the course requirements at the Advanced level have the right to sit the proficiency exam. In all of the exams, vocabulary is tested directly.

Vocabulary in the context of the institution

The applications of teaching vocabulary mostly involves explicit teaching in which students are provided with meaning, form and collocations of the target vocabulary items. Vocabulary is directly assessed in the program. There is a vocabulary part in elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate levels where students are asked to complete controlled activities such as choosing the correct word from the box to fill in the blanks in a paragraph and multiple choice questions in which students choose the correct word to fill in the blanks. In addition, in all levels vocabulary is assessed through the paragraphs or essays students produce in the exams. Students are expected to use a great range of these target words accurately and meaningfully in their production. However, vocabulary is the area in which students are the least successful considering students' performance in class and exams.

Participants

Purposive sampling in which researchers 'handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000:103) was used while determining the sample. 2 classes were selected purposefully for this study. One class served as the experimental group with whom the wordlist was used in the classroom, and the other class constituted the control group with whom the word list was not used in the classroom so that I could get more evidence by comparing the groups. The experimental group was chosen because I was the main class teacher of that class, and the control group was chosen since I taught 10 hours in that class as a support teacher so that I could gather more information about the sample and decrease the effect of another teacher on the control group. Each class comprised of seventeen Turkish students (24 males and 10 females). Their ages ranged from 17 to 22 years old. However, in each class 3 students did not take the post exam since they left the course or were absent on the day of the test. Therefore, I had to do the research with 14 students from each class (20 males and 8 females). The majority (24) of the students began the preparatory programme in September 2011. The other 4 students started the programme last year and repeated elementary and pre-intermediate level several times.

Research Tradition and Approach

The research was classroom research which was conducted by the teacher “for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of her educational environment and improving the effectiveness of her teaching” (Dörnyei, 2007:191). Furthermore, mixed methods research was adopted in the research process. As a method, mixed methods research “focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies and its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (Creswell, & Plano, 2007:5).

DATA COLLECTION

Implementation of wordlists

An 8-week schedule for the implementation of word lists in the classroom was drawn up. Each week target words were chosen from the chapters of the course books that would be covered. While choosing the words a pool which had been formed by the school having analysed using Vocabprofile (lex Tutor.ca/vp/eng/) and Academic Word List (AWL) and which included mostly the most frequent 2000 words and words from the Academic Word List were used. The words were written on colourful flashcards and after being presented to the students in context, they were added to the list on the wall every day. Therefore, the list was compiled by the teacher rather than asking the learners to do so. There were two lists on the walls. Each day a revision activity was conducted and when students knew the word, the word appeared in the *use list* but when they could not, it was put in the *lose list*. Knowing the word included aspects of word knowledge such as part of speech, synonyms, antonyms, collocations and example sentences. In addition to use it/lose it activity, the implementation schedule also included different production activities such as:

Story writing: Students were divided into groups and given 7 words from the list. Then, they were asked to write a short story using the target words. After each group finished their story, they exchanged their papers with another group to get feedback from their peers.

Hot seat: The class was split into different teams. Then, two chairs were put in front of the board and one student from each team was asked to sit this chair, facing the team members. They had their back to the board. The teacher chose a word from the list and wrote it on the board. The aim of the game was for the students in the teams to describe that word, using synonyms, antonyms, definitions, collocations etc. to their team-mate who was in the hot seat. The hot seat student who found the word first won a point for their team.

Posters: The teacher divided the class into groups and assigned 10 words to them from the list. The students were supposed to prepare posters with these words including their synonyms, antonyms, definitions, collocations etc. After they prepared their posters, they were also asked to present them to the other groups.

Quizzes: Students were divided into groups and asked to prepare a quiz with 20 words from the list. After they finished their quizzes, they were supposed to exchange the quizzes and do them. Each group gave feedback to the other group who took their quiz.

Vocabulary Conversations: Learners were given opportunities in-class to practice a conversation in pairs. The conversations had to include a selection of words from the vocabulary

list in context. As Brabham and Villaume (2001) stated, the words themselves became the materials of instruction as students used them to construct knowledge in minds-on conversations.

Adopt the word: Each student was asked to adopt a word from the list. Then, they were provided with the following template:

Word	Meaning	Part of speech	Example of usage

Students were supposed to do some research on the word they adopted using the template above. Then, each student gave a short presentation on his or her adopted word. Finally, the words were stuck to a large paper chart on the wall.

Instruments

Vocabulary Tests: In order to investigate the effectiveness of the use of word lists a vocabulary test (See Appendix 1) which included a receptive test which was modelled on Nation's (1990) Vocabulary Levels Test and a controlled productive test which was modelled on Laufer and Nation's (1999) Productive Vocabulary Levels Test were designed by the teacher using the vocabulary that appeared in the units covered over the 8-week period. The test, used as both pre-test and post-test, includes 83 target words chosen from the vocabulary syllabus of the school. In the receptive part of the test, the test-takers were supposed to match the definitions with the target vocabulary words. There were three definitions and six target vocabulary items. While preparing the test items, utmost attention was given to ensure that words used in the definitions or context were of higher frequency than those being tested. Below is an example of an item from the receptive vocabulary test:

<i>a)</i> Convince	
<i>b)</i> Allow	
<i>c)</i> Determine	___ find out the facts about something
<i>d)</i> Praise	___ make someone feel certain that something is true
<i>e)</i> Access	___ let somebody do something
<i>f)</i> Wish	

The controlled productive test consisted of 17 items. The number is lower than the receptive part owing to the increased reading load of the productive test. In these items students were expected to elicit the intended word. In order to avoid dictation of non-target words which may fit the sentence context, the first letters of the target words are provided for the students. Below is an example of an item from the controlled productive vocabulary test:

Studying regularly will **ena**_____ you to pass the exam.

Interviews: To discover the students' attitude towards the use of wordlist in the classroom, semi-structured interviews with specific questions determined in mind were conducted in the 8th week of the study. 14 students in the treatment group were interviewed individually. The interviews were conducted in English and audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis with the permission of the students. Each interview took about 5-10 minutes. Interviews took place in a quiet meeting room where the interviewer and the interviewee sat side by side. The interview "gave participants the opportunity to reveal their own perspective" and the samples served as

concrete documents to support the findings (Maxwell, 1996: 90). In the interview, participants were asked mainly the following questions:

- How did your teachers use to deal with unknown vocabulary in the classroom?
- Did you find making and using a vocabulary list on a word wall in the classroom useful when you compare it those activities?
- What did you like about the technique?
- What did you dislike about it?
- Would you like to continue using this technique in your future courses?

Field Notes/Reflective Writing: In this study, reflective writing which “is a major tool for a teacher researcher who wishes to investigate and research practice with a view to improving and refining his or her own practice” (Campbell, McNamara & Gilyn, 2004:87) is used in order to collect more data to answer the research questions. Smiles and Short (2006) emphasizes the importance of field notes by stating that teachers should write about a real classroom context in order to get the readers into the classroom setting. My field notes were like a personal/reflective diary which included my thoughts about issues such as the effectiveness of the activities used in the class, student motivation and the improvement in students’ vocabulary acquisition. I took very brief notes just after the class each day because recording events as they happen or shortly afterwards ensures that details, and indeed the entire event, are not lost to memory (Mulhall, 2003).

Procedure: The vocabulary pre-tests were given to the students in both classes, during a regular class session before the implementation of the wordlist began in the experimental group. During the 8-week implementation period, the control group followed the same curriculum as the experimental group. They used the same textbooks and course materials. They were also exposed to the same lessons, the same course and the same target vocabulary items. However, they did not have wordlists in the classroom. The teachers of the control group including myself adopted the usual techniques in dealing with the new words in each lesson. These techniques generally included writing the target words on the board, along with their parts of speech and collocations, giving the definition of the word or eliciting it from the students and asking students to use them in a sentence. The teachers used different activities to revise the words in this control group.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. With the data from the pre and posttests of receptive vocabulary tests, descriptive statistics were calculated to investigate the differences between two groups. The same groups were also compared at the start and end of the process. The answers were scored as correct or incorrect. Each correct answer was given one point. There are fifty items in the tests, the maximum score is therefore 50. In the controlled production part, an item was considered correct when it is semantically correct. When students wrote the word in the wrong grammatical form (e.g. *prefers instead of prefer), it was not marked as incorrect. Similarly, if students made a spelling mistake which did not distort the word (e.g. *approximatly instead of approximately) the item was not marked as incorrect as well. This is because the aim of the test is to test vocabulary acquisition rather than grammar or spelling.

Secondly, the interview transcriptions were analyzed for key words and recurring themes to learn about students’ views. In order to extract answers to my research questions from the data collected through interviews I followed the steps suggested by Drever which are “*Data Preparation* in which you tidy up your raw data and put it into a form that is easy to work with;

Analysis, in which you try various ways of categorizing and reorganizing the prepared data, seeking patterns in it that have a bearing on your research questions; *Summarising Results*, where you see the patterns to develop conclusions” (2003:60). Furthermore, I eliminated any bias, preconceptions and values in order not to impose my own understanding which would affect the validity of the interpretation (Maxwell, 1996:89). To draw objective and valid qualitative conclusions; that is, conclusions without any predispositions or assumptions, I analyzed all the data inductively and interpretatively (Cohen, Manion & Marison, 2000).

Finally, reflective notes which I kept regularly during the research process were analysed to check whether there was any mismatch between the data gathered from the test results and the interviews. The notes were in the form of observational notes which are "statements bearing upon events experienced principally through watching and listening". (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973:100). Therefore, I interpreted and categorized them.

Quality of Research

In this study triangulation method which is defined as “the mixing of data or methods so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon atopic” was adopted (Olsen, 2004). More than one data collection method which were test results, interviews and reflective writing were employed to validate the claims arising from the study (Brown and Rodgers, 2002).

The test was spot-checked before it was used by two experienced colleagues and level specialists since “the quality of questions asked will directly affect the type and the quality of responses” (Campbell, McNamara & Gilyn, 2004:101). In addition, to maximize objectivity and validity and to avoid “inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data”, I supported all my conclusions by evidence, recorded and transcribed the interviews (Maxwell, 1996:89). The test was also piloted with another Intermediate level class in order to “identify ambiguities in the instructions; help clarify the wording of questions, and alert you to omissions or unanticipated answers in multiple choice or ranking questions” (Anderson, 1998:179). To minimize subjectivity, all conclusions drawn were supported by evidence either from the test result or student answers in the interviews.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Receptive vocabulary acquisition

Table 1 shows the receptive vocabulary acquisition scores of the two groups before and after the treatments were implemented. Means for part 1 in both pretest and posttest were calculated separately for the control and experimental group, and presented in Table 1.

	n	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement from pre-test to post-test (%)
Control Group	14	16 (5.02)	18.93 (4.27)	18.30
Experimental Group	14	13.79 (7.43)	21.07 (7.36)	52.85

*Standard Deviation is given in brackets.

Table1: Pretest and posttest results for Part 1 (receptive vocabulary acquisition)

According to the results given in Table 1, it can be observed that the control group demonstrated a slightly better performance than the experimental group in the pretest before the treatment. As for the results of the post-test, both groups made improvement. However, the mean for the experimental group increased by %52.85 while it increased by %18.30 for the control group. Therefore, it appears that the experimental group has shown significantly greater improvement in receptive knowledge of the target words than the control group.

Controlled productive vocabulary acquisition

Means for part 2, which was a controlled productive test, in both pre- and posttest were calculated separately for the control and experimental group, and presented in Table 3. From Table 3, it can be seen clearly that initial productive knowledge of the target words was low in both classes. Table 2 also reveals that both groups appear to show at some slight degree of improvement in terms in controlled productive acquisition; however, the improvement in the experimental group appears greater. Thus, it can be concluded that, as it was seen with the receptive vocabulary test results, the experimental group made a greater gain in controlled productive knowledge of the target words compared to the control group.

Table 2: Pretest and posttest results for Part 2 (controlled productive vocabulary acquisition)

	n	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Improvement from pretest to posttest (%)
Control Group	14	7.21 (2.36)	7.43 (3.34)	2.97
Experimental Group	14	7.57 (7.43)	9.21 (4.51)	21.77

Significance of the difference

Since the number of students were below 30 and they were not randomly chosen, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, which is a non-parametric test, was conducted on the groups' mean gain scores to investigate whether the observed differences were indeed significant. The SPSS analysis of this test is displayed in Table 3.

Ranks

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Posttestcontrol - PretestControl	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	,00	,00
	Positive Ranks	13 ^b	7,00	91,00
	Ties	1 ^c		
	Total	14		
Posttestexperimental - Pretestexperimental	Negative Ranks	0 ^d	,00	,00
	Positive Ranks	14 ^e	7,50	105,00
	Ties	0 ^f		
	Total	14		

a. Posttestcontrol < PretestControl

b. Posttestcontrol > PretestControl

c. Posttestcontrol = PretestControl

d. Posttestexperimental < Pretestexperimental

e. Posttestexperimental > Pretestexperimental

f. Posttestexperimental = Pretestexperimental

Test Statistics^b

	Posttestcontrol - PretestControl	Posttestexperimental - Pretestexperimental
Z	-3,190 ^a	-3,315 ^a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	,001

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Table 3. Results for the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test showed that an 8 week, vocabulary treatment elicited a statistically significant change in the performance of experimental group in the vocabulary test ($Z = -3.315$, $P = 0.001$). As it can be seen in Table 3, the sum of negative ranks is zero rather than being intermixed randomly. This obviously indicates a strong treatment effect on the difference between the scores of the control and experimental group.

Students' attitudes towards using vocabulary lists in the classroom

The first question asks how students' previous teachers used to deal with unknown vocabulary in the classroom in order to enable them to think of their previous experiences so that they could compare using wordlists and those activities. 9 of the students stated that they did not have word lists. Their teachers wrote the words on the board, the Turkish or English definition of the word and an example sentence on the board. Some of them added that they forgot the words easily because they did not take notes. 3 of the students who studied at the university for a year said they were not provided with lists but their teachers used to teach vocabulary in a context and they

did productive activities during the classes. 2 of the students said they did not remember how they learnt vocabulary in the class.

The second question asks whether students find using a wordlist in the classroom useful compared to the previous experiences. When the students were asked to compare the use of vocabulary lists to their previous experiences, they mostly agreed that using a wordlist in the classroom was better. 13 students out of 14 found using a wordlist in the classroom more useful than the ways they learnt vocabulary in the past. According to students' responses, the reasons why using a wordlist is more effective are various. Examples for each different reason are given below:

Student C: "It is a more useful way to learn words because sometimes I don't go out during the breaks and look at the walls to see which words I know. If I don't know a word, I ask to my friend and I learn words in the breaks".

Student D: "In the past I did not know which words I am responsible for and I tried to memorize all words. But it was very difficult to learn all of them. And finally I got low scores. This list is useful because I know what I need to learn. Thanks."

Student I: "Yes, I agree. When I am in the exam, I remember the word very well. I remember where it was on the wall and what we said about it in the class. In the past I did not remember and could not answer exam questions".

Student J: "Yes. It was useful because my pronunciation improved. Now, I can pronounce the words better because I heard the words in the class a lot."

Student K: "Yes, it is useful. I loved the colours. It was motivating for me. Learning words from the book was boring."

Student L: "Yes, it is a better way because every day I see words on the walls and I know I need to memorize the words in the lose part".

Only 1 student said he did not find it useful. He explained the reason as follows:

Student A: "No. Because it is childish. We are not kids. We are university students. I do not like colourful papers on the walls. My friends from the other class laughed at me. I think we can study words at home. It is easy for me."

The third question asks what students find useful about using the wordlist in the classroom. Some selected excerpts are given below:

Student M: "Yes. Especially, I liked the activities in the class. They were beneficial. I did not forget the words after the activities. I especially liked the games. It was funny."

Student K: "Games were enjoyable. I learnt a lot because of games."

Student C: "I liked the group work most. I learnt from my friends. We wrote good paragraphs together. The role play was also good."

Student D: "Role plays were very funny. I learnt and the same time I laughed."

When students asked what they did not like about the activity, most of them stated that they could not think of any negative aspects of the activity. However, 3 of the students expressed their concerns. Their comments are given below:

Student J: "I was disappointed when there are many words that I did not know on the wall."

Student A: "I think there are other good methods which are not childish. I did not like this activity."

Student B: "When the teacher asked the words in front of my classmates, I was very nervous. I was afraid that the word would go to the lose part."

The last question asks whether students would like to continue using this activity in their future courses. 13 of the students said they would like to continue using wordlists in the class in the future. However, one of the students admitted that he would not like to continue to use wordlists in the classroom:

Student A: "No. As I said before, I did not like using wordlist in the class. We are university students. We can choose the words we want to learn."

Reflective notes

My reflective notes supported the test results in the sense that students showed an improvement in vocabulary knowledge thanks to using a vocabulary list through a word wall in the language classroom. Some of my comments are given below:

Monday, January 12, 2011

Today I asked 5 words to Burak, who is one of the weakest students in my class, while revising the vocabulary items from the word wall. He was able to come up with the definition, collocations and different forms of the 4 of them. It was a great achievement for him. I think the list works 😊

Thursday, January 22, 2011

Melis who got a good grade in the vocabulary part of the exam thanked me during the break. She told me that vocabulary had always been a problem for her and got low grades in the exams. However, she said the wordlist on the wall helped her a lot in this course. She added that she could remember the words and even the examples his friends used in class.

My notes also revealed that students were motivated to learn vocabulary items through the wordlist on the wall. Some comments supporting this claim are as follows:

Monday, January 5, 2011

Today begum and Gokcem asked me what we were going to do in the last block during the break. I said we were going to revise vocabulary using the wordlist on the wall. Then, Begum said to Gokcem, "OK. Then we are not leaving in the last block. I do not want to miss it."

Thursday, January 15, 2011

After I realized that I forgot the class file during the break, I went to the class. I heard students laughing and having fun just before I entered the class. When I entered the class, I was shocked

because they were actually studying vocabulary. One of the students was asking questions about the words and the others were answering. I was happy because they were having fun and at the same time revising the words.

DISCUSSION

The major goal of this study was to test the impact of an English vocabulary enrichment intervention which is using a wordlist on word wall in the classroom on outcomes for a group of English language learners. In addition, the study aimed to find about the attitudes of students towards this particular intervention.

In the light of the results of the statistical analysis, a significant and strong correlation was found between using a wordlist on a word wall in the classroom and improvement in vocabulary acquisition. In other words, the quantitative results of the study demonstrate that using wordlists in the language classroom has a positive impact on students' acquisition of target vocabulary items. According to the test results, the experimental group outperformed the control group in both the receptive part and controlled production part of the test.

It might be asserted that the results achieved here are due to the increased focus on the target words through activities conducted with the experimental group. This may, in fact, be the case; however, it should be taken into account that all of the target words tested were also taught and revised in class with the control group. The teachers of the control group used materials in the class to revise words and did revision activities such as writing a word on the wall and asking students to produce the words in a meaningful context. Therefore, the results of this study demonstrate clearly that using wordlists in the language classroom is more effective in helping students to learn the target vocabulary when compared to a more traditional method of dealing with new vocabulary in class.

A second goal of this study was to learn about the attitudes of students towards using a wordlist in the classroom. The interviews conducted with the students (See appendix 2 for one example of a full interview) and the field notes taken by the teacher revealed that students demonstrated a very positive attitude towards making and using the vocabulary lists on the walls of the classroom. Most of the students stated during the interviews that they liked the technique because it was visually appealing. The flashcards on the wall helped them to transfer information from short term memory to long term memory. Besides, when students were asked what they liked most about using wordlists in the classroom they said they liked the games. This positive attitudes observed in the interview towards the games mirror the claims of Richard-Amato in the sense that "games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely" (1988:147). This obviously contributes to retention of the newly acquired words since in the easy and relaxing atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better.

As can be understood from all types of data including the statistical analysis, interviews, and field notes all inform each other in the same way that this technique helped learners to improve their vocabulary knowledge and students had a positive attitude towards it.

Implication to Research and Practice

Stemming from the above findings, this study identified a number of implications beneficial to pedagogical contexts, especially the ones in which EFL learners and teachers are involved. Firstly, the traditional vocabulary teaching techniques may be given up or used less since they trigger a kind of unwillingness on the part of students. Teachers should familiarize themselves with the current vocabulary teaching techniques and apply them in the class if they want to help their students improve their vocabulary acquisition. Using a wordlist through a word wall in the classroom can be a useful alternative to classic vocabulary teaching techniques. The comments of the students make it clear that they find this particular technique beneficial, motivating and at the same time fun compared to traditional techniques such as writing the definition, word forms and example sentences on the board. Harmon, Wood, and Kiser (2009:58) confirm this suggestion by claiming that the word walls utilized in classrooms “associate word features and meanings with familiar ideas, concepts, and experiences and actively engage students in multiple, varied, and meaningful experiences with words”.

However, it cannot be claimed that using a wordlist in the classroom is the ultimate solution to students’ problems with vocabulary when the results of the posttests are taken into consideration. As it can be seen from the results, students in the experimental group were able to learn only about 63% of the tested target words receptively, and about 54% of the words tested in the control productive part. While these students made a greater gain than the students in the control group, there were still many words that were not learned, despite using the wordlist in the classroom. This reveals that using a wordlist in the classroom as implemented in this study, may not be sufficient to improve the vocabulary acquisition in the desired way. Therefore, teachers should attach more attention to vocabulary instruction to help their students.

Ethical Considerations

The participants of both the study and control group were informed in written form (See appendix 3) about the purpose of the research and were assured that participation is voluntary and they would have the right to “withdraw from the study any time they want without offering any explanation” (Dörnyei, 2007:68). This was necessary “because action research entails an intention to change action involving people, negotiation about ownership of data and about the uses that the researcher may put it to, are deemed important” (Bassey, 1990:43).

Although students’ names were required in the tests, confidentiality was maintained by disguising students’ identity because “information that is given to social researchers during the course of their investigation should be treated as confidential” (Denscombe, 2002:180).

Limitations of the Study

This study was subject to many limitations. First, generalizability of the conclusions might be questioned as the research will be conducted with only 2 classes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In other words, the results may not be generalizable to a large population because of the relatively limited number and scope of subjects participating in this study. Although the control group provides a comparison, my design does not allow me to ‘prove’ that the wordlists are the cause of the improvement that might be found. Another limitation for the study is that since the study was conducted in a limited time, long-term effects of the intervention could not be tested. Therefore, it is difficult to come to the conclusion that students’ newly acquired knowledge of target vocabulary will be retained over time.

As it is stated above, there are several limitations of this study. Nevertheless, in spite of its limitations, it is hoped that the total outcome of this study could be a starting point for more thorough investigations on teaching vocabulary through wordlists in classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of using a word wall including a wordlist on vocabulary acquisition of Turkish EFL learners. To achieve this goal, the study consisting of 28 participants from classes was conducted. A pre-test was given before the treatment and a post-test was given after the treatment. The analysis and correlations of the obtained data clearly confirmed that using a wordlist on a word wall can be regarded as a working factor in fostering learners' vocabulary acquisition.

However, although students in the experimental group made a greater gain than the students in the control group, there were still many words that were not learned after the treatment. This reveals that using a wordlist in the classroom as implemented in this study, may not be the ultimate solution to improve the vocabulary acquisition.

Future Research

As an extension of this research, future studies may wish to investigate teaching vocabulary through wordlists in classrooms more deeply. Teachers can better contribute to the improvement of their students' vocabulary acquisition thanks to the pedagogical implications suggested by these studies.

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