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Effectiveness of Direct Vocabulary Learning Instruction for English Language Learners (ELL)

Name

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Statement of the Problem

The struggle with vocabulary has been a challenge not only for students, but for me as a teacher too. It is seen that students need to build up their word knowledge for complete understanding of four levels of skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. So, it is very important for teachers and learners to absorb the affective strategies of vocabulary learning and teaching. Whereas many leading educators advocate for Direct Learning Instruction, others not; so my study will examine how Direct Learning Instruction benefit students in Vocabulary learning?

Context of the Problem

Background

With growing concern for international communication and academic success, better understanding and comprehension of English language lies in comprehension of reading materials. In this regard it is observed that student’s encounter frequently prevents them from understanding reading materials and test questions. Many ELL students state that unfamiliar vocabulary keeps them away from understanding the materials. Despite of their skill in using context clues word meanings too often just cannot be ascertained. As a Second Language Learner, I notice that better learning and teaching can be implemented through proper application of the method.

Audience

This research is oriented to ESOL/ESL teachers who are seeking knowledge to teach ELL students in their classrooms in easiest possible means.

Purpose

The main purpose of this research is to provide ELL teachers that how Direct Learning Instruction or strategies affect vocabulary Learning Skills for English Language Learners in English Language Teaching and Learning context.

**Methodology**

To find out the effectiveness of Direct Vocabulary Learning Instruction, factors and variables emerged as possible educational issues after 2 months of research performed in two IEP classes at Southeast Missouri State University, Missouri where a large group of international attending Intensive English Program, a gateway to higher education in USA. 25 students were found at last as to be studied in the survey. They had a different L1 background and had beginning to low Intermediate level of language background. Again, two teachers were instructed who are American and certainly their native Language is English. One of them used to teach in Korea. In one class there were 16 students and another had 9 students.

Concerning the factors and variables, a mixed method of qualitative, quantitative and experimental survey research conducted within a framework of a multi-participants case study best served the research process. Quantitative data were collected from surveys and questionnaires to test possible relationship among students – peers and academic performance.

The vocabulary items were tested by administering a pre – test. Task achievement was measured by post – test. At the six week of the first eight week session, pre-test was taken to measure their vocabulary knowledge through assessment evaluation criteria which will give validity and reliability. Then next four weeks twice in each week teacher taught and students learnt to build their vocabulary through Direct Learning Instruction method in both classes and test was taken to evaluate their progress. In the study, learning method was the controlled variable, whereas students, teachers and performance were subsequently independent and dependent variables. Given Stal’s three levels of word mastery and the information available in WordNet, 6 types of questions were generated: definition, synonym, antonym, hypernym, hyponym, and close tests. Each of the six types of questions can be generated in several forms, i, e; the primary ones being wordbank and multiple choice. In the meantime, data were collected using immediate introspection procedure. Students were asked to report what they did to learn words as soon they finished studying them. In case of strategy of Direct Learning Instruction will be measured based on Oxford’s Vocabulary Learning Strategy Inventory. And Statistics results were done on the rate of frequency in which the more the frequency strategies will be, the more effectiveness Direct Learning Instruction will be.

The Literature Review

Direct Instruction is an approach to teaching. It is skills-oriented, and the teaching practices it implies are teacher directed. It emphasizes the use of small – group, face –to- face instruction by teachers and aides using carefully articulated lessons in which cognitive skills are broken down into small units, sequenced deliberately, and taught explicitly (Schug 2001). Again, it – one type of focused instruction – fosters rapid and reliable achievement in students regardless of ethnicity, “race”, family background, or socioeconomic status. The synthesis growing out of these studies identified common “teaching functions” abstracted from the experiments that had proved effective in improving student learning. These teaching functions included teaching in small steps with student practice after each step, guiding students during initial practice, and ensuring that all students experienced a high level of successful practice. Instruction of this sort was described variously by the people who used it and discussed it. It was sometimes called systematic teaching, or explicit teaching, or active teaching. In an influential essay, Barak Rosenshine and Robert Stevens (1986) called it direct instruction, and this is the name by which it is now most often known (Schug 2001).

Direct Learning Instruction benefits students with reading difficulties in word meanings. This includes modeling, guided practice, checking for understanding, and multiple opportunities for practice with explicit and timely feedback. The pronunciations, spellings, and meaning new vocabulary words are made clear through a systematic presentation. Researchers have identified key components of explicit lessons that make instruction more effective for struggling readers. According to Ebbers (2008), explicit instruction typically includes (a) a statement of objective or purpose of the lesson, including a rationale for learning; (b) modeling of skills and strategies, including clear explanation of concepts with examples; (c) guided practice with teacher scaffolding; (d) specific positive feedback to confirm correct responses or clear corrective feedback to clarify misconceptions; (e) independent practice with teacher monitoring(returning to guided practice if the student is not successful); (f) teaching students how they can generalize the learning or use it in different situations; (g) monitoring student learning to assure that critical concepts and skills are mastered; and (h) periodic cumulative review with multiple opportunities for practice.

But, according to Oxford (1990), direct learning falls into three classes: Memory Strategies (strategies to store and retrieve aspects of the target language), cognitive strategies (strategies for using the language and for understanding how it works), and compensation strategies (strategies for using the language despite gaps in knowledge) (Marefat 2003). Nine subcomponents of the three direct learning strategies were selected. Memory strategy has three subcategories: grouping, contextual effect, and imagery; the subcategories of cognitive strategy are: analyzing expressions, translation, and highlighting; compensation strategy consists of: guessing linguistically, guessing non-linguistically, and word coinage.

Grouping was introduced as the first subcategory of memory strategy by familiarizing learners with this term. And teacher can examine the week’s word lists for semantically rich, less familiar words; provide explicit instruction on these words that involves child friendly definitions, examples of use, and attention to multiple meanings (Marefat 2003, Manyak 2009). Then, the significance of *context*, was explained to learners, telling them to make use of acronym (as a context) to prolong their word retention. Adjectives were selected and put in three acronyms; learners had to write appropriate adjectives regarding the letters included in the acronyms. As for learning *imagery*, learners went through a few lines which elaborated on the use of imagery; afterwards, they were exposed to pictures for which they had to find an appropriate word among the words supplied. Words can be included with pictures, diagrams, labels, and charts (Andew P 2009, Marefat 2003).

*Analyzing expression* as the first subcategory of cognitive strategy, learners are taught how to divide the words into roots, prefixes, and suffixes. When directly teaching a word, teachers might follow a routine like the one described below, adapted from Ebbers (2008):

“The teacher writes the new word on the chalkboard or whiteboard in large, clear print. The teacher says the word syllable-by-syllable (or morpheme by morpheme), making a scooping motion with one finger under each syllable or morpheme while pronouncing it. Students pronounce the whole word, enunciating it clearly and stressing the accented syllable. Students listen for the word and repeat it, echoing the teacher. Students may copy the word and use a contrasting color for targeted morpheme and/or underscore it. Then the teacher provides a “student friendly” understandable definition for the word (and, if appropriate, morphemes within the word), and provides (or solicits from students when appropriate) examples and non-examples related to the word”.

Second, *translation strategy* is explained to the learners where students are asked to find the equivalent of the underlined words in sentences from the words provided at the end. And finally, highlighting is elaborated by giving examples reminding the learners that various ways of highlighting assist remembering new words more easily. The students are exposed to a sentence or passage in which word(s) are underlined / italicized. They are asked to find the synonym or antonym of these words from the given words (Marefat 2003, Ebbers 2008). This translation strategy can be associated with semantic sorting in which students can engage in a variety of lexical processing tasks, including semantic mapping, semantic feature analysis and word sorting and looking up in a dictionary (Ebbers 2008, Phillips 2008).

At last, the *compensation strategy* consists of linguistic guessing, non-linguistic guessing and word coinage. The teacher introduces the students providing example/exercise to lead students to go through the items in this part which is constituted of sentences with one underlined word, whose meaning students had to guess based on linguistic or non-linguistic factors; moreover, they were obliged to write how they have come to choose the appropriate word. Finally, *word coinage* is taught to the learners. Here for instance, some 10 words are given with two English choices; one of them was the right word in English language, while the other can be made by foreign language learners, since they already have some familiarity with these simple items (for example, the word for a person who sells flowers is florist; however, students who are unfamiliar with this word, may make a word such as flower seller instead) (Marefat 2003).

Despite the long history of extensive evaluation research that supports the effectiveness of Direct Instruction curricula, Direct Instruction has not been accepted as either as an equal partner amongst other curricula, such as whole language and other “discovery” approaches. Part of the reason, Direct Instruction is “ugly but effective” according to one well-informed observer (Traub 1999). David Elkind, an authority on child development, furthermore, described as harmful for all children (Schug 2001).

Likewise Elkind, many educators have an inaccurate perception of Direct Instruction, borne perhaps of a lack of direct experience with the materials and their classroom applications. So purpose of this paper is to correct some of the myths about the Direct Vocabulary Instruction by providing firsthand experience adapted from the research and educators, who are using and benefited from it.

“I feel I am really helping those children that already seem predestined to be ‘below level’ and ‘at risk’ (Bessellieu 2001).

“I have been impressed with how quickly children can learn with DI. I taught a group of children in language for learning during the first semester, and they did not start *Reading Mastery* until just before Christmas. By January, some of these children were only on level 4 of running records, so in one semester, they at least 12 levels to level 16. I do think that it is best to start *Reading Mastery* at the beginning of first grade, if not before. If Language for learning needs to be taught in first grade, it should be taught parallel to *Reading Mastery’* (Bessellieu).

“It has vastly improved their phonics knowledge – and transference.”

“Increased vocabulary and skills increased, for example, decoding.”

“I definitely see reading scores that have improved” (Bessellieu 2001, Schug 2001).

“It has given me another resource tool to teach reading, comprehension, and writing.”

“I have enjoyed seeing my children progress in their reading. It’s a joy to see the children feel more confident in them, and see that their reading has improved so much. They can read now!” (Bessellieu 2001).

Wisconsin Policy Research Institute (Schug 2001) reported that parents and school-board members in some Wisconsin school districts have resisted the introduction of Direct Instruction. But parents served by the six schools researchers visited have been pleased by Direct Instruction programs, according to principals’ and teachers’ reports. The core knowledge school in Verona is a charter school, and a parental push for Direct Instruction was instrumental in persuading the district there to support the charter. At the other five schools, principals, and teachers described parental support. “Parents really like it,” one principal said. In explaining the parents’ view, teachers emphasized parents’ pleasure in seeing their children learn to read. “They cannot believe what they see their little five – year olds doing at home (Schug 2001).”

Results

The findings of the research analysis from test scores are seen that there is an improvement in overall achievement of students’ performance instructed by both teachers through Direct Learning Instruction gives validity and reliability of the research. The mean for the first group of students (16 students) was 29.63 in pre – test and 33.81 in post–test. The difference is 4.18. The median and standard deviation of both the tests were 31.25, 34.75 and 4.497, 4.538 subsequently.

The mean for second group (9 students), on the other hand, were 33.78 in pre-test and 40.55 in post-test. And the difference is 4.77 which are a little more than the first group. The median and standard deviation of the both tests shows 37, 40.55 and 9.286, 11.423 subsequently.

Based on the data, Direct Vocabulary Learning Instruction seems to have been better method of teaching and learning instruction. Though effects of learning and performance depends on effectiveness of teachers’ teaching criteria and students’ reception and performance ability, and despite having poor results in some students’ test performance, however, statistical analysis proves there is an overall growth in their performance. Again, frequency of Direct Learning Strategy used by students and teachers in class and self learning also shows that they followed strategies moderately good.

The study did not have a hypothesis. After the review of the literature, it is clear that Direct Learning Instruction has a better outcome. After completing the testing and examining the data, it is safe to say that the Direct Learning Instruction is an effective method in vocabulary learning.

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Appendix

1. Questionnaire for Reading class
2. Never True of Me
3. Usually not True of Me
4. Somewhat true of Me
5. Usually Tue of Me
6. Always true of me

**Please Put a Tick Mark (√) on top of appropriate letter based on the aforementioned conditions after reading the following sentences:**

1. I think of the relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.

(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)

1. I connect the sound of an English word and an image or picture of the world to help me remember the word.
2. (b) (c) (d) (e)
3. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.
4. (b) (c) (d) (e)
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.
6. (b) (c) (d) (e)
7. I use flashcards to remember new English words.
8. (b) (c) (d) (e)
9. Physically act out new English words.
10. (b) (c) (d) (e)
11. I remember the new words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.
12. (b) (c) (d) (e)

PART: B

1. I practice the sounds of English.
2. (b) (c) (d) (e)
3. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
4. (b) (c) (d) (e)
5. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English
6. (b) (c) (d) (e)
7. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.
8. (b) (c) (d) (e)
9. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.
10. (b) (c) (d) (e)

**PART: C**

1. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
2. (b) (c) (d) (e)
3. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
4. (b) (c) (d) (e)

**PART: D**

1. To learn a new word, we are encouraged to learn word by dividing the words into roots, prefixes and suffixes.
2. (b) (c) (d) (e)
3. We are asked to find synonym and antonym of the words from our lesson.
4. (b) (c) (d) (e)