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READING COMPREHENSION INPUT BENEFITS ON THE VOCABULARY ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE ADULT STUDENTS

ESTUDIANTE

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Reading Comprehension Input Benefits on Vocabulary Acquisition of ESL Adult Students

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Abstract

This article focuses on the positive effects reading comprehension has on the vocabulary acquisition process of ESL adult learners. The purpose is to show students the benefits of reading comprehension and motivate them to read more. The article is a literature review of different authors who talk about reading comprehension effects and methods.

 Keywords: adult ESL students, reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition

[1] Francinie Hernández Porras is an ESL teacher for teenage and adult students. She usually teaches beginner and intermediate students who have taken English courses before,who due to different reasons, stopped the learning process and years later come back to classes. This situation has made Francinie very aware of the importance of keeping students motivated and creating lessons adapted to her students' needs. She has a Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching and a Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy with an Emphasis on Didactics.

Introduction

The following article aims to determine the benefits reading has on adult learners, specifically in terms of vocabulary acquisition, which is an important aspect when learning a language. For this purpose, the article is divided into three sections. The first section talks about the effects reading comprehension has on vocabulary acquisition in adult learners.

Then, based on the reading comprehension effects found, some methods are going to be recommended to implement with adult students. As Vargas (2020) mentioned, several aspects such as motivation, age, skills, and life experiences have to be taken into account to help students to acquire new vocabulary. Therefore, the methods that are going to be suggested are going to be focused on intermediate and advanced ESL adult learners, who do not have the habit of reading even in their native language.

At the end of the article, some of the benefits of reading are going to be explained to motivate adults to engage in reading as a vocabulary acquisition method. Boakye (2017) defined extensive reading as a pleasure activity and mentioned it has benefits on vocabulary acquisition and other aspects important in the language learning process, such as sentence and discourse organization.

Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition

As educators, it is common to hear in our workplaces that reading is important for young children, that it can develop critical thinking and increase vocabulary, and that it is very important to motivate our students to read and include more readings in our lessons. However, does reading comprehension really help to acquire vocabulary? and do adults obtain the same benefits from reading as children?

Effects of Reading Comprehension on Vocabulary Acquisition in Adult Learners

Relationships

Caretti et al. (2009) mentioned that there is a strong relationship between working memory and reading comprehension. They explained that working memory is not only a matter of information storage, but it also requires visuo-spatial and attentional tasks. This piece of information is useful for educators because it shows how behind a single aspect, such as memory, students are working on other tasks without noticing it. It is easy to think that when someone reads, this person is just obtaining the information from the text. However, if what happens when a person reads is carefully analyzed, it is possible to notice that he or she is working on several cognitive processes.

When reading, a person can analyze each word from the text in terms of meaning and associations. Regarding the definition of a word, especially when the text is a foreign language, the reader tries to remember the meaning of it. About relationships, students can remember where they have seen that word before and relate it to a specific moment or piece of information. When a person reads, he or she may also analyze the meaning of the sentence as a whole; unconsciously, he or she is reviewing or learning grammar structures. Finally, students find new words and review vocabulary they have not seen in a long time.

Extensive Reading

Jiren (2018) mentioned that teaching vocabulary does not guarantee that students will succeed at reading, but a lack of vocabulary leads to poor reading comprehension; the author also analyzed different studies of the effects of extensive reading and found that it has significant positive effects on vocabulary acquisition.

But what is extensive reading? Boakye (2017) defined extensive reading as reading for pleasure and mentioned that it has benefits on vocabulary acquisition and other aspects that are important in the language learning process, such as sentence and discourse

organization. Also, Nation (2009) explained that extensive reading focuses on the input and fluency improvement by providing more unknown vocabulary to the reader.

Other Reading Options

As Jiren and Boakye mentioned, extensive reading has proven to help students to acquire new vocabulary, but it is not very frequently used in second language classrooms. Then, why is it not applied despite the proven benefits? If some teachers think about their experience as educators, they can believe that they do not have enough time for extensive reading in our class because they need to cover other language skills and their students have other school occupations. Therefore, teachers may look for other options so that their students can learn vocabulary by reading.

Shirin (2016) conducted a study about reading short digital texts, concluding that the usage of digital reading resources had a positive impact on reading comprehension. This is not the opposite of extensive reading because as Shirin (2018) mentioned, online reading gives students the opportunity of choosing a text based on their level and interests. This option is shorter and therefore faster to cover texts. But at the same time, it creates a reading-for-pleasure environment as it happens in extensive reading.

The author mentioned digital texts have benefits, but are printed books useful, too? Delgado et al. (2018) made an analysis on how reading printed books and reading digital books impact reading comprehension, concluding that the participants who read printed texts had better results than the ones who used printed books.

Those investigations provide important information that needs to be considered when choosing reading materials for our students. However, we also need to pay attention to our environment and listen to our students. In my experience as a teacher of adult ESL students, my students have had both options, printed and digital books. We may think most of them preferred the digital version because it is convenient, but most of my students have

expressed that they prefer or need to use printed materials because they want to take notes about them. This does not mean that digital books do not work; every student will have different preferences and needs.

As teachers, we have to provide different options to our students, printed and digital readings, extensive and short readings, because our real goal is not to grade them but to help them to find methods that improve their language skills, and help them to acquire more vocabulary.

Reading Comprehension Methods Recommended to Implement with Adult Students

Thornbury (2002) mentioned that a traditional vocabulary learning method was memorizing lists of words; on the other hand, text provides the opportunity of learning vocabulary for sentence building purposes; words are presented in context, showing students not only the meaning of a word but also how it is used in different grammatical structures. Thornbury (2002), Jiren (2018), and Boakye (2017) agreed that reading can increase the vocabulary range due to the relationships created between the new words found in the text and the context they are found in, but reading by itself is not a method; it is just an activity.

Aziza and Bakar (2019) reviewed several articles about reading comprehension strategies. Their article is divided into Cognitive and Metacognitive Reading Strategies. Cognitive reading strategies consist of dividing the activity in this case reading comprehension into tasks, such as scanning the reading, underlining, and summarizing. These strategies are used in traditional lessons in which students are asked to read a text and hand in a summary, or in some cases, students are taught to scan a reading.

Metacognitive reading strategies refer to monitoring and analyzing the learning process. To apply metacognitive strategies, an educator can provide students with a variety of texts to read during the course. After every reading, students can be asked orally what

they understood and learned from it, instead of handing in a paper with the reading summary. Finally, after listening to the students' comments about the reading, the teacher can give them other texts chosen based on their needs and level. This can be a practice done along the course; the students' comments are the tools the teacher can use to monitor their learning process, and by talking about what they learned, students can be more aware of their improvement.

On the other hand, Yusmalinda and Astuti (2020) focused on specific methods instead of kinds of strategies. It is important to clarify that the methods mentioned by these authors are not specifically for reading comprehension; they are well-known language learning methods that, in this case, were focused on reading.

Among them, the one that could be useful for vocabulary acquisition is the Grammar-Translation Method. According to Yusmalinda and Astuti (2020), the teachers first assign students to do a reading and then open a space for students to ask questions about words or phrases they did not understand in the text. The activity mentioned is focused on learning new vocabulary by exposing students to reading material with words and phrases they do not know yet.

The traditional way of applying the activity mentioned would be letting students read, underline the words they do not know, and finally, the educator explains the meaning of those words. However, it can be changed in order to avoid a traditional teacher-centered class; students can work in groups. After reading, they can ask their peers if they know the meaning of the words they did not understand. In this way, students can share their knowledge and acquire new vocabulary with the help of their classmates.

On the other hand, for adult learners, the Project-Based Learning method could be meaningful. Yusmalinda and Astuti (2020) explained that students were asked to read a recipe and perform it after reading. This project can help students to learn by doing but also

perceive reading as something useful and necessary because they are doing it with a very clear purpose.

This method can be applied to many different projects and purposes. For example, it can be used in different majors; tourism students can be asked to create a tour itinerary, mechanics students develop a manual to assemble a machine, computer science students can write a user manual for a software program, etc… In order to accomplish those projects, students are going to need to read about the countries that are going to be visited or the machine they are going to assemble. This experience can show students that they not only can read stories, as it is usually done in language courses, but also they can read for practical purposes, such as learning for a job.

Benefits of Reading

Vargas (2020) mentioned that several aspects, such as motivation, age, skills, and life experiences, have to be taken into account to help students to acquire new vocabulary. In Costa Rica, readings are assigned at primary schools and high schools, some students may read on their own at home for fun. But in my experience as a student and teacher, when a group is asked about the books they read, very few or even in some cases no students answer; they may be shy or do not read at all. Some students are also honest and comment that they do not like reading. Therefore, with a population that has to read for school but not always as a leisure activity, it is important to motivate them and explain to them the benefits extensive reading has on fluency and vocabulary acquisition.

Fujiyaki (2018) talked about two types of motivation, integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation in language learning is focused on a social reason to learn, such as making friends, learning about other cultures, or traveling. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is test-oriented.

As mentioned before, in Costa Rica, students are used to reading at school to complete homework, or answer a test. This means that their motivation to read is instrumental due to their life experiences. With traditional methods, such as vocabulary lists, students are more likely to use their instrumental motivation, by memorizing the lists only for a test.

However, educators can generate integrative motivation by asking their students why they want to learn the language and take their comments into account when choosing readings for the class. If teachers ask a group of students why they want to learn English, they are going to get different answers, all of them giving information about what motivates the group. Some students may say they want to move to another country; others may want to learn English to get a better job, and others may want to travel, etc…, but it is possible to say all of them have the desire of acquiring fluency for the different purposes they mentioned.

Jiang (2016) collected some definitions of fluency; most of them agreed that fluency is the ability to read effortlessly, quickly, and understand the text. Jiang (2016) also mentioned that if a student has difficulties recognizing individual words, fluency is going to be affected. Therefore, to acquire the desired fluency, students need to learn vocabulary and reading can be the tool to acquire that vocabulary. It is useful to know the students' reason to learn the language because in this way, teachers can provide them texts that help them to acquire vocabulary useful for their personal goals. Once students notice the results, such as understanding or remembering the vocabulary needed to express their ideas, they can become more motivated to keep reading.

Also, explaining to our students that reading can help them to acquire new vocabulary can be a key point to motivate them to read more. However, Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) mentioned that just telling students that reading is going to help them, it is not going to make them feel motivated, especially when educators assign a reading. I agree with the

authors; just by hearing that something is good does not mean the audience is not going to immediately start enjoying it. Also, the word "assign" can turn any project, no matter how exciting it is, into another simple and tedious homework assignment, and unfortunately, most of us as educators must give assignments as part of an institutional requirement. So how can we make our students read more and as a pleasure activity?

People tend to do activities with a specific purpose; for example, students memorize irregular past tense verbs for their past tense test. If students do not have an objective for reading, such as an assignment or test, their instrumental motivation will not be present; therefore, they will not have a clear or specific reason for reading. But if students are able to experiment by themselves the benefits of reading, they are going to see the purpose of it; after some weeks of reading, teachers can ask their students what new words they have learned, so they become more aware of their own improvement and stay motivated. The goal is not to get students to read or love books; the purpose is to show them the benefits or goal of reading, so they have more reasons to start reading.

Conclusion

Different authors mention reading comprehension has cognitive benefits. All kinds of texts were recommended, long, short, digital, and printed material. But it is important to point out that most of the authors noted the benefits of reading for pleasure.

As it was commented before, just by telling our students reading is good for them will not make them like this activity. But they need to be conscious that if they want to see significant improvement; just reading a couple of short texts will not be enough. As in many other skills we learn, persistence is a key element; therefore, doing an activity by pleasure can help to find the process less tedious and even forget they are doing it to study.

The authors also commented the importance of taking into account different aspects of the population, such as personal interests and motivation to learn the language. For this

purpose, I would recommend asking students what they like and why they want to learn the language before assigning a reading in order to have more possibilities of choosing readings that keep students motivated and help them to enjoy reading.

Also, it is helpful to know the difference between integrative and instrumental motivation. Due to their institution obligations, teachers may use instrumental motivation; they have to apply tests and summative assignments, and with the intention of helping students to succeed on those tasks, it is possible to deliver the wrong message without noticing it: "study for the test". However, as mentioned before, this can be changed by taking into account the reason why students want to learn and helping them to experience the benefits of reading; turning this activity into something they know can be useful and beneficial for them.

Most of the authors agreed that reading comprehension has benefits, not only for vocabulary acquisition due to the relationships that are created between the new words, their meaning, and the text they were found in, but it also has benefits for other skills' acquisition, such as fluency and grammar awareness. However, teachers need to be aware that no one learns from other people's experiences; if they want to awaken in their students the love for reading, educators have to provide students with the tools they need to experience the benefits and joy of reading.
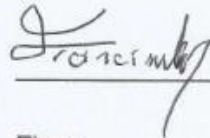
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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Francinie Patricia Hernández Porras, cédula de identidad 116440370, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de las responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado **"Reading Comprehension Input Benefits on the Vocabulary Acquisition of English as a Second Language Adult Students"**, para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Aprendizaje del Inglés.

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Firma

Heredia, a los 3 días del mes de setiembre del año 2021.

Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación de la estudiante Francinie Hernández Porras, cédula 1 1644 0370, que lleva como título **Reading Comprehension Input Benefits on the Vocabulary Acquisition of English as a Second Language Adult Students**, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

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