Depth and Breadth of Vocabulary Knowledge: Assessing their Roles in Reading Comprehension of High-School EFL Learners in the UAE

عمق واتساع المعرفة بالمفردات: تقييم دورهما في فهم القراءة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية بدولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
Master of Education in TESOL
Faculty of Education

Dissertation Supervisor
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November-2012

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. It was conducted through two phases, quantitative and qualitative. The first quantitative phase of the study, which included 93 high school participants, investigated the degree of correlations between two aspects of vocabulary knowledge, breadth (vocabulary size) and depth, and reading comprehension. Furthermore, it investigated whether breadth or depth was a stronger predictor of learners' reading comprehension. It adopted three language tests: two vocabulary tests and a reading comprehension test. The second qualitative phase, which involved four subjects (a subsample of the first phase), explored how these subjects used their vocabulary depth to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words in a written text. To achieve this purpose, semi-structured interviews were employed as a method of data collection.

The study has empirically shown several findings. Moderate positive intercorrelations among the scores on the three language tests were obtained. Breadth proved to be a more powerful predictor of reading comprehension scores than depth. Students with greater depth of vocabulary knowledge were more successful in inferring the meaning of unknown words while reading than those with less depth. A positive association was found between students' vocabulary depth and their lexical inferencing ability. These results confirm the importance and the value of developing students' breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in EFL classrooms.

ملخص البحث

يدرس البحث الحالي العلاقة بين اتساع وعمق المفردات وفهم القراءة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية بدولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. أُجري هذا البحث خلال مرحلتين: المرحلة الأولى كمية والثانية نوعية؛ أمّا الأولي فتشمل (93) مشاركاً وتبحث في تحديد أياً من سمات معرفة المفردات – الاتساع أو العمق – كمتنبئ أقوى تأثيراً لفهم القراءة لدى المتعلمين وقد استخدمت هذه الدراسة ثلاثة اختبارات لغوية: اختبارين للمفردات واختباراً لفهم القراءة. وأمّا الثانية فتشمل أربعة طلاب (عينة فرعية من المرحلة الأولى) وتظهر كيفية استخدام هؤلاء الطلاب لعمق المفردات لديهم من أجل تخمين معنى الكلمات غير المألوفة في نصٍ مكتوب. ولتحقيق هذا الغرض تم إجراء مقابلاتٍ شبه معدة كطريقة رئيسة لجمع البيانات .

ولقد أظهرت الدراسةعدة نتائج ، أولها الترابط الإيجابي بين درجات الاختبارات اللغوية الثلاثة ، ثم إثبات أن الاتساع وليس العمق هو المتنبئ الأقوى لدرجات فهم القراءة ، وكذلك اكتشاف أن الطلاب ذوي العمق الأكبر للمفردات هم الأكثر نجاحاً من ذوي العمق الأقل في تخمين معاني الكلمات غير المألوفة عند القراءة ، وأيضاً تمّ إثبات وجود علاقة إيجابية بين عمق المفردات لدى الطلاب وقدرتهم على تخمين معاني المفردات. وتؤكد هذه النتائج أهمية وقيمة تطوير اتساع وعمق المعرفة بالمفردات في صفوف تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who passed away before sharing me these moments of rejoicing. If they had been alive, they would have been the happiest people on earth. May Allah rest their souls in peace.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to the Almighty Allah. Without His providence, this dissertation could not have come into being.

I am greatly indebted to Professor Amanda Howard, my dissertation supervisor, whose comments and suggestions have contributed to the organization and clarity of this work.

I would like to thank my wife and kids from the bottom of my heart as they bore a lot with me. Thanks for your support, understanding and patience. To them, I am really grateful.

Special thank-you goes to my colleague Ahmad Alrahl and my brother Hussein Elmasry for their insightful comments that helped me edit this work. I am also appreciative of Professor Paul Nation's and Professor David Qian's professional advice and support on this dissertation.

Finally yet importantly, I am grateful to the British University in Dubai for awarding me a master's scholarship to achieve my dream. I can never forget my tutors, Dr Clifton and Dr Sufian, who opened new horizons of research for me. I am also grateful to all the library staff for their assistance and cooperation.

In the end, I wish to extend my thanks to all the people whom I might have forgotten to acknowledge on this page.

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