

USING BILINGUAL STORIES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT FOR FRESHMEN MAJORING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION-ENGLISH AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

Nguyen Thi Hong Minh¹, Pham Hoang Anh²

¹ Nguyen Thi Hong Minh, Faculty of Foreign Languages Education, Thai Nguyen University of Education, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

² Pham Hoang Anh, Faculty of Foreign Languages Education, Thai Nguyen University of Education, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

There has been a common assumption that who read more either in the native language or the target language has bigger vocabulary size, which no doubt facilitates their language learning. This experimental study attempts to investigate the impact of reading bilingual stories on vocabulary development of first-year students majoring in Primary Education-English at Thai Nguyen University of Education, Vietnam during the school year 2020-2021. The research employed a quantitative method with the use of questionnaire and tests as research instruments. A group of 20 Primary Education-English students at Thai Nguyen University of Education were invited to join the project in 12 weeks during which they read 14 different stories which are presented in English and then followed by Vietnamese. The results of both pre-test and post-test were administered and analysed by SPSS version 26. The findings revealed that the participants, who read bilingual stories, demonstrated significantly better performance in the vocabulary post-test. Those findings suggest that using bilingual stories should be encouraged among students for the increase of students' vocabulary size.

Keyword: *bilingual stories, bilingual reading, vocabulary development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English has been considered as the most common foreign language in Vietnam and become a compulsory subject at any level, including higher education. The use of the language in recent years has not only limited in the academic field but also has gone beyond for more practical use. Therefore, in order to use English successfully, learners should obtain a sufficient number of words, and more importantly learn to use them. Among a wide range of vocabulary strategies, reading dual languages material is documented as a critical tool for building and developing second language learners' vocabulary. The present study seeks to discover the extent bilingual stories contribute to vocabulary development of a group of students majoring in Primary Education-English at Thai Nguyen University of Education in Vietnam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English has been considered as the most common foreign language in Vietnam and become a compulsory subject at any level, including higher education. The use of the language in recent years has not only limited in the academic field but also has gone beyond for more practical use. Therefore, in order to use English successfully, learners should obtain a sufficient number of words, and more importantly learn to use them. Among a wide range of vocabulary strategies, reading dual languages material is documented as a critical tool for building and developing second language learners' vocabulary. The present study seeks to discover the extent bilingual stories contribute to vocabulary development of a group of students majoring in Primary Education-English at Thai Nguyen University of Education in Vietnam.

2.1 Why bilingual story?

2.1.1 Vocabulary and language proficiency

Vocabulary has been well acknowledged for its significance in second language learning and contribution to successful language use. Establishing the vital foundation for how well language learners demonstrate their four language skills performances, vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency [17]; [12]; [14] and "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language" [19]. Vocabulary knowledge and language use, as Nation [13] declare, are in a complementary relationship: "knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and, conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge." The reason is without an extensive vocabulary, learners are unable to use the structures and functions they may have learned for comprehensible communication [18].

Different authors have explained the impact of vocabulary on language proficiency in different perspectives. Krashen [8] highlights the importance of a large vocabulary to the mastery of a language by stating that second language learners "carry dictionaries with them, not grammar books" and they consider the lack of vocabulary as a major problem in the second language learning. Laufer and Hulstijn [9], Read [16] further pointed out that language learners are conscious of the reality that vocabulary size is essential to second language learning and limitations in their vocabulary knowledge hamper their ability to communicate successfully in the target language. In this regards, Hatch & Brown [4] claimed that learners who can convey their ideas and concepts with ease in a "more native-like manner" are those who have an extensive vocabulary because of their better communicative language competence in the target language. Yet, it is generally agreed that there is an obvious close relation between language proficiency and vocabulary knowledge.

2.1.2 Reading and vocabulary

There are close relationships between reading and vocabulary. Success in reading comprehension is highly dependent upon vocabulary development [1]; [2]. According to Bromley [3], vocabulary is a key which contributes to comprehension and fluency. Another study conducted by Jitendra et al. [7] also stated that having knowledge of vocabulary can improve the reading achievement. With a large amount of vocabulary, students can read easily and extensively, and thus have better performances at school [11]. Therefore, it comes to conclusion that word knowledge is very necessary in comprehending the texts.

Simultaneously, the importance of reading in vocabulary development is also acknowledged. Through reading, EFL learners have opportunities to connect with the variety of words and find it easier to comprehend thanks to the texts. In other words, reading give chances for students to learn or revisit words learned in specific situations; hence, they can apply these words to real life communication. Furthermore, their speed of reading and their attitude towards this skill are improved as well. Learners can not only enrich their vocabulary but syntactic knowledge while reading [13]. In addition, many studies had shown if teachers want to use an incidental approach to teach vocabulary, they should choose reading as it shows most exposure to language. The study conducted by Horst [5] stated that more than 50% of unfamiliar words were learnt based on the graded readers that participants read. Without a doubt, reading has become an important part which provides learners with a huge amount of vocabulary.

2.1.3 Bilingual reading and vocabulary development

Reading bilingual is the reading practice with materials which are presented in two versions: one is learner's target language and the other is their native language. By reading bilingual materials, students will quickly realize the meaning of the words without looking up them in a dictionary. The theory of comprehensible input suggests it is important for learners to accurately understand what they are reading [8]; therefore, bilingual reading has become

one of the easiest methods to make sure that students comprehend the text. With proper instructions, bilingual books can be a powerful resource for improving language proficiency and thus are viewed positively by language learners, teachers, and even parents [6]; [15].

The preference for bilingual books as an enjoyable learning resource to use in language learning may come from the fact that the difficulty of understanding a L2 text leading to learners' lack of motivation for further reading is reduced and overcome with the dual language materials. L2 learners can connect their linguistic differences through dual languages materials; their L1 and L2 fluency as well as L2 vocabulary knowledge is developed through bilingual stories [10]. Moreover, bilingual reading allows students' transfer of conceptual knowledge and skills across languages [20], and therefore is beneficial in helping students increase L2 vocabulary knowledge across languages.

3. METHODOLOGY

This experimental study attempts to investigate whether bilingual stories develop vocabulary for freshmen majoring in Primary Education-English at Thai Nguyen University of Education (TNUE). The university as a regional university is one of the key teacher education universities in Vietnam, where English is the foreign language subject in curriculum of all education levels. The research utilized a quantitative method to assess the impact of reading dual languages materials on learners' vocabulary development.

3.1 Participants

20 students majoring in Primary Education-English at Thai Nguyen University of Education (TNUE), one of the key teacher education universities in Vietnam, were selected to participate in this study based on convenience sampling. All of participants are females at the age range of 18-19 and their L1 is Vietnamese. English is one of the three subjects in their national exam, which is used for university entrance nomination; consequently, their English proficiency level is supposed to be at elementary level (whereas other TNUE counterparts may demonstrate their proficiency at beginning level). These students are trained to become primary school teachers who can teach all content subjects in the primary school curriculum (including English).

3.2 Research instruments

A pre-test and post-test were used as the research instruments in this study. The same 244 target words in the 14 stories were designed into 23 exercises in the pre-test and 19 exercises in the post-test. The pre-test tasks included categorizing words into groups, filling in the missing letters within a word, matching words with their definitions, underlining the correct words, filling in the blanks with suitable words and finding words' synonyms and antonyms. Meanwhile, the post-test exercises consisted of filling in crossword, filling in the blanks, choosing the best answers, and finding missing letters. The tasks in the pre-test and post-test aimed to test students' understanding of the spelling, definition, use and meaning of the target words.

3.3 Materials

A collection of 14 short stories in English and Vietnamese was introduced to the participants in the study. The stories, which are of between 250 and 400 word length, are generally at high elementary and low pre-intermediate level. These levels of text difficulty are assumed to be relevant to the students' current proficiency level, as Krashen (1982) claimed, and thus the reading is neither too boring nor too challenging to the students, which ensures their motivation in reading those materials. The stories cover relatively familiar topics to the participants and convey meaningful educational messages, which helps maintain their interests while reading and their application in the future job as a teacher at primary school.

3.4 Research instruments

To start the study, the researchers conducted a meeting with 25 first-year students majoring in Primary Education-English. Participants were explained about how the treatment was going to be implemented and invited to join in the project. 20 of them then agreed to participate in the research for 12 weeks in the academic year of 2020-2021.

The participants were then given instructions on how to complete the pre-test so that an understanding of how many target words in the list that the students had known was provided. Students' test papers were marked and results were recorded. In the next stage, the participants went through 3-month-intervention in which they read 14 different short stories in English and then in Vietnamese. After reading each story, students were asked to complete some tasks (vocabulary games, role-play, story summary, mini-test, picture drawing, etc.) for the retention of the target words and for the consolidation of their comprehension of the story. Finally, the post-test was given to know whether the participants' knowledge of vocabulary increased or not after the treatment. The same procedure for scoring the post-test was applied, and both pre-test and post-test results were analysed with SPSS version 26.0. After the analysis, the researcher would compare the results of the two tests and evaluate the effectiveness of reading bilingual stories to students' vocabulary development.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Student's performances reflected in the pre-test

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of pre-test on students' performance*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Pre-test	20	52	112	71.75
Valid N (listwise)	20			

Table 1 indicates the results of students' vocabulary performance before they took part in the treatment. The lowest score in the pre-test was 52 out of 244 (equivalent to around 21.3% completion of the test). Meanwhile, the highest score was 112, which is equal to about 45.9%. In addition, the mean score of the pre-test is 71.75, which means on average, the students knew one-third of total target words given.

4.1.2. Student's performances reflected in the post-test

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of post-test on students' performance*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Post-test	20	80	157	102.20
Valid N (listwise)	20			

The results of learners' performances after the implementation of reading bilingual stories for Primary Education-English freshmen were showed in Table 2. As can be seen from the table, the minimum score of the post-test was 80 out of 244 (equivalent to about 32.8% completion of the test) while the maximum was 157 (equivalent to 64.3%). The mean score is 102.20, which rose over 42% compared to that of pre-test.

4.1.3. The impact of bilingual stories on students' vocabulary development

Table 3. *Statistics of pre-test and post-test scores*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	71.75	20	15.117	3.380
	Post-test	102.20	20	19.047	4.259

As shown in Table 3, the post-test result was higher than the pre-test by 30.45 (102.20-71.75), which means that reading bilingual stories brought benefits to the participants' vocabulary development.

Table 4. *Correlations between pre-test and post-test results*

	N	Correlation	Sig.

Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test	20	.940	.000
--------	----------------------	----	------	------

Table 4 reflected the relationship between the results of pre and post test. The coefficient of correlation of 0.940 with a corresponding p-value of 0.000 revealed a significant connection. It can be concluded that using bilingual stories has demonstrated a positive effect on students' development of the vocabulary knowledge. It is also noticeable that students who had high scores in the pre-test got high scores in the post-test respectively.

Table 5. Paired differences between pre-test and post-test

		Paired Differences					df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Interval of the Difference			
					Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	Pre-test – Post-test	-30.450	7.067	1.580	-33.758	-27.142	19	.000

The differences between pre-test and post-test demonstrated in Table 5, where the gained t-value of 19.269 and the equivalent p-value of 0.000 at df = 19 revealed substantial difference at 0.05 level of importance. This result showed the effectiveness of introduction of reading dual languages stories in developing vocabulary for first-year students.

It clearly reveals that the frequencies of students' pre-test scores are different from that of post-test scores. In general, the post-test result is much higher than the pre-test by 30.45 (out of 244). Particularly, the average scores in the pre-test was 71.75 while that of post-test was 102.20 after intervention, equivalent to a rise of roughly 42%. Moreover, the highest score in pre-test was 112, but this score grew 1.4 times in the post-test. In addition, the lowest score of the post-test was 80, which was around 1.5 times higher than that of the pre-test. The results of pre and post-test indicated that the participants' knowledge of vocabulary showed a substantial difference after the treatment.

4.2. Discussion

The finding of this study suggested that reading bilingual stories significantly contributed to vocabulary development. As shown in the pre-test and post-test results, the vocabulary test average scores rose by 42% through reading dual language materials. This finding is in parallel with those of other studies (Hu et. al., 2012; Zhang and Webb, 2019). However, the vocabulary test scores in the present study were slightly higher in comparison with those of Hu et.al's and Zhang and Webb's studies (a growth of 42% in the test score compared to 27.2% and 23% respectively). This can be explained by two reasons: (i) in the pre-test the participants may have been overwhelmed by a long test of 244 target words, many of which they had seen for the first time, and (ii) during the treatment the participants had opportunities to revisit the target words in the reading (the exact meaning in the Vietnamese version of the stories and multiple after-reading tasks).

The finding of the present study illustrated that bilingual reading had positive impact on vocabulary development. For students at lower proficiency level (like the participants in this research), the provision of the translation of L2 texts, which came right after the original stories may be beneficial for reading comprehension as well as an increase in vocabulary size. This finding may encourage language educators and learners to use dual languages materials in their reading programs. Beside the traditional L2 books, teachers and learners have a wider range of choices for reading materials. The risk of misunderstanding the text contents is lessened as students can grasp the meaning of the text with the L2 version. Once students' comprehension is ensured, it is more definite that their motivation for in-class texts and further reading will be increased. Another benefit is that class time for obtaining text comprehension is consequently reduced and thus more time can be devoted to productive activities. In addition to enhancing the ability to comprehend the texts which are slightly beyond students' current proficiency level, bilingual stories allow vocabulary development. Students can autonomously decide which are unknown words, learn

them in specific contexts with exact meanings and revisit them at their convenience. It is more likely that when learners have a comprehensive understanding of words, the retention of the words is developed in both short and long term memory.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The finding of this study suggests that reading dual languages stories is beneficial to learners' vocabulary growth. The scores in students' vocabulary post-test surpassing those in the pre-test prove that there exists a substantial connection between reading bilingual stories and vocabulary development. As indicated in the results, stories in L2 accompanied by L1 translation of the text help increase students' vocabulary performance by 42% % on average.

This finding also suggests bilingual stories should be employed in L2 curriculum for both educators' and students' benefits. First, a wider range of choices for reading materials is offered in addition to the regular L2 texts. In Vietnamese context where many schools, especially in remote areas, materials for foreign language learning are limited to school textbooks, this allows administrators and teachers more choices for finding more learning materials available for the students. Second, students' comprehension of the text via dual languages materials is enhanced; therefore, motivation for and interest in reading in the foreign language is developed, which has a substantial connection with language proficiency. Finally, a significant growth in students' vocabulary through bilingual stories is promoted. Students are more autonomous in their vocabulary learning and well aware of the meaning attached to a specific word in a set context, and thus can retain the words for immediate and later use. In summary, bilingual stories have potential values for learners' vocabulary development in particular and foreign language learning in general and therefore should be introduced into the curriculum as either the core or the supplementary materials.

6. REFERENCES

- [1]. Bauer, E. and J. Arazi, 2011, "Promoting literacy development for beginning English learners". *Reading Teacher*, 64(5): 383-386.
- [2]. Biemiller, A., "Vocabulary development and instruction: A prerequisite for school learning", In D. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), 2006, *Handbook of early literacy research*, 2, 41 - 51. New York: Guilford.
- [3]. Bromley, K., 2007, "Nine things every teacher should know about words and vocabulary instruction", *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50, 528-536.
- [4]. Hatch, E. & Brown, C., 1995, *Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [5]. Horst, M., 2005, "Learning L2 vocabulary through extensive reading: A measurement study", *Canadian Modern Language Review* 61, 3: 355-382.
- [6]. Hu, R., Chen, X., & Li, X., 2012, "Exploring bilingual books with five Chinese first graders: Children's responses and biliteracy development", *Reading Horizons*, 52, 57-87.
- [7]. Jitendra, A. Edwards, L., Sacks, G., & Jacobson, L., "What research says about vocabulary instruction for students with learning disabilities", *Exceptional Children*, 70, 299-322, 2004.
- [8]. Krashen, S., 1989, *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*, New York: Longman.
- [9]. Laufer, B., & Hulstijn, J. H., 2001, "Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language: The construct of task-induced involvement", *Applied Linguistics*, 22, 1-26.
- [10]. Lichty, P., 2002, *It's a small world after all. Library Talk*, 49(1), 8-9.
- [11]. Lubliner, S., & Smetana, L., 2005, "The effects of comprehensive vocabulary instruction on students' metacognitive word-learning skills and reading comprehension", *Journal of Literacy Research*, 37, 163-200.
- [12]. Marion, T., 2008, "The effect of gestures on second language memorization by young children". *Gesture*, John Benjamins Publishing, 8 (2), pp. 219 – 235.
- [13]. Nation, I. S. P., 2001, *Learning vocabulary in other language*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [14]. Nation, I. S. P., & Webb, S. A., 2011, *Researching and analyzing vocabulary*. Boston, MA: Heinle, Cengage Learning.
- [15]. Parker, M. A., 2006, "The contributions of small presses to the field of multicultural children's books (Doctoral dissertation)". Retrieved from Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3207646).
- [16]. Read, J., 2004, "Plumbing the depth: How should the construct of vocabulary knowledge be defined?" in P. Bogaards and B. Laufer (eds): *Vocabulary in a Second Language*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp.209-27.

- [17]. Richards, J. C, & Renandya, W. A., 2002, *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- [18]. River, Wilga M., 1989, *Communicating Naturally in a Second Language. Theory and Practice in Language Teaching*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [19]. Schmitt, N., 2000, *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [20]. Taylor, L. K., Bernhard, J. K., Garg, S., & Cummins, J., 2008, "Affirming plural belonging: Building on students' family-based cultural and linguistic capital through multiliteracies pedagogy", *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 8, 269–294. doi: 10.1177/1468798408096481.

