

## Original Article

# The Effect of Integrated Language Teaching on Students' Vocabulary Retention as Compared to Non-Integrated One: The Case of Grade Ten Students of Jimma University Community School.

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### *Abstract*

*The main objective of this study was to assess whether or not the vocabulary lessons in the Grade Ten English text are effective in enhancing students' vocabulary retention. In order to conduct the study, two grade ten sections of Jimma University Community School (JUCCS) were involved as experimental and control group. Section A was taken as an experimental group and the students were offered vocabulary lessons designed by the researcher in an integrated manner taking the core vocabulary items that are included in units three and four of the grade 10 English textbook. On the other hand, Section B was used as a comparison group and students in this section were made to attend the usual vocabulary lessons and activities that appear in the student textbook.*

*The main instruments used to collect data for the study were classroom observation, interview and vocabulary retention tests. Two tests were administered for all the students of the two sections after each unit was covered. The results of the observation were analyzed together with the results of the interview descriptively. Besides, the mean and standard deviation of the test scores were computed and analyzed. In addition an independent samples t-test was administered to see if there was a significant difference in vocabulary retention between the two groups.*

*The study revealed that the students in the experimental group scored a significantly better result than the students in the control group in the vocabulary retention tests administered to both groups.*

## INTRODUCTION

The role vocabulary knowledge plays in learning a foreign language is so crucial that many theorists and language educators argue that learning a foreign language is basically a matter of learning the vocabulary of that language (Rodriguez and Sadoski, 2002; Kitajima, 2001). A number of research studies indicate that lexical problems frequently interfere with

communication; and communication breaks down when people do not use the right words (Allen, 1983).

The study of vocabulary is central to language teaching and learning (Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997; Nation, 1990). Current studies in language teaching also

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insist on intentional teaching/learning of vocabulary items (Lewis, 1993; Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997; Jordan, 1997). In addition to emphasizing the central role vocabulary plays in learning a second language, the way English language tasks are designed; the amount of time devoted in using and practicing the tasks; and the extent to which the vocabulary items are recycled need consideration. These issues will highly affect the effectiveness of the vocabulary teaching/learning. Therefore, vocabulary teaching/learning needs to be developed in an integrated approach whereby the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing are interwoven during instruction. This approach leads to optimal language learning. If this weaving together does not occur, the strand consists merely of discrete, segregated skills in parallel treads that do not touch, support, or interact with each other (Oxford, 2001).

Vocabulary teaching/learning in an integrated approach will create a fertile ground for better learning and helps students to

- encounter the target words frequently by presenting a variety of tasks in different sub skills like, reading, speaking and writing;
- encourage interaction among students and facilitate meaningful practice; and
- promote better retention.

The more students are involved in a series of vocabulary tasks that integrate different skills, the better the retention/the better they learn (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001).

Some studies were undertaken on vocabulary teaching/learning; however, almost all of them revolve on the

*techniques/methods* of vocabulary teaching. Nevertheless, in the absence of well-integrated and adequately developed vocabulary activities, the techniques have very little to do by themselves in second language learning. Hence, the task design pertaining to vocabulary lessons - the integration of various skills that make use of the new words, the provision of a variety of purpose-oriented communicative activities that engage the students in using and practicing the words, etc. are critical success factors in language learning. This comparative study, therefore, investigated the appropriateness of the vocabulary lessons in the light of an integrated language teaching approach in general and the effectiveness of the lessons in enhancing students' vocabulary retention in particular. Thus, the study

- examined how effective the vocabulary lessons are in integrating different macroskills together as well as fostering favourable ground for students to use/practice the language, and
- explored how much vocabulary lessons are intensively addressed to promote meaningful practice and retention.

To achieve the objective of the study, the following null and alternative hypotheses have been formulated. The key hypothesis of this study was:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in vocabulary retention between students who attend vocabulary teaching/learning using the prevalent mode of instruction and those students who attend vocabulary lessons designed in an integrated approach. This was tested against:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is significant difference in vocabulary retention between the students who attend vocabulary teaching/learning using the prevalent mode of instruction and those students who attend vocabulary lessons designed in an integrated approach.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Subjects** - The study involved Jimma University Community School (JUCS), a grade 10 English teacher of the school, who was the only English teacher for this grade, and all the students of section A & B of the same grade.

JUCS was selected to carry out the study due to the fact that it doesn't make use of televised instruction. The other high schools in the town employ televised lessons as a result of which it would be ethically difficult to detach one section and form it as a study group which is deprived of the televised mode of instruction. Thus, JUCS was more appropriate for the study.

**Sampling Design** - A quasi-experimental design was used to carry out the study. Thus, the two grade ten sections of JUCS were involved. All the students of both sections were taken as sample because their number was of a manageable size (64 in sum). The two sections enabled the researcher to compare differing approaches of vocabulary instruction. The groups were identified as experimental and control using lottery method.

- **Experimental group** - Section A students were offered vocabulary lessons designed by the researcher in

an integrated manner (by producing extended writing, speaking, reading and listening tasks to be done one after the other) which are made up of the core vocabulary items that appear in units three and four of the grade 10 English Textbook.

- **Control group** - Section B was taken as a comparison group, and students in this section were made to attend the usual vocabulary lessons and activities which are available in the student textbook.

Therefore, the presence of the two sections which received different approaches of language teaching enabled the researcher to study the language teaching approach which is more fruitful in building students' vocabulary and promote better retention. Furthermore, the researcher thought that involving two groups in the study - the **Control Group** and the **Experimental Group** would help rule out the single-group threats to internal validity.

The English lessons for both the study group and the comparison group were taught by the classroom teacher, and the researcher was an observer. The researcher briefed the classroom teacher during the pilot study as to how to handle the lessons designed by the researcher. In addition to this, the researcher held thorough discussions with him after each observation during the main study.

**Data Collection Instruments** - Pertinent data were collected for the study using the following research instruments:

**Direct classroom observation** - Four observations were made with each group to examine the actual vocabulary sessions in progress and collect data with the help of a checklist. The target of the observation was

to explore the intensity of the vocabulary activities; i.e. how well the vocabulary lessons integrate different language skills, and how much they are practiced.

**Interview** - A structured interview was designed and held with the grade 10 English teacher. The purpose of holding the interview was to explore whether or not the vocabulary exercises in the student text were designed in an integrated approach helping students use different macro skills and practice the language intensively.

**Vocabulary Retention Test** - The researcher developed 2 tests that comprise 25 questions each. The tests were vocabulary retention tests and all the target words were taken from Units 3 and 4 (English for Ethiopia Student Text for Grade Ten). The two tests were administered in turn after each unit was covered to find out if there is a significant difference between the test scores of the students who attended the prevalent vocabulary teaching approach and those students who encountered integrated vocabulary instructions with regard to their retention of the target words. The first test was administered as soon as the teacher covered unit three, and the second test was also given after covering unit four with both groups. The tests, which were designed by the researcher, were administered as a usual classroom quiz by the classroom teacher himself. The two tests were scored out of 100%.

**Data Collection and analysis** - Classroom observation was carried out four times using a checklist when vocabulary lessons were presented. The observation was aimed at investigating the type of tasks provided and practiced during vocabulary lessons in both sections. When conducting the classroom observation, each item on the

checklist was rated by putting a tally for every type of exercise presented and the activities students practiced. Then, the option that obtained the highest number of tallies was taken or rated as a usual or most frequent practice. Using these procedures, four observations were made with each section; and at last the four of the observation checklists were compiled into one final result taking the average into account. Finally, the results of the observations were tabulated and summarized descriptively.

When the observation was over, vocabulary lessons were prepared for units three and four using an integrated approach for the experimental group. The classroom teacher taught the lessons to the study group under the supervision of the researcher. Then, two vocabulary tests were given in turn at the end of each unit for all students of the two sections. The students took the test in their own classroom as a usual quiz. The tests were corrected and the mean, standard deviation and the mean difference were computed and analyzed.

**Operational definition** - the following operational definitions of terms were used in the study:

**Integrated Language Teaching:** A language teaching approach where the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing are interwoven during instruction. (Oxford, 2001).

**Disintegrated Language Teaching:** A language teaching approach which capitalizes on discrete language items where the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing are not properly woven together in an instruction; where the lesson consists merely of discrete, segregated skills in parallel treads that do

not touch, support, or interact with each other (Oxford, 2001).

**Ethical Clearance** - The school administration was informed in writing about the research and it showed its interest and willingness as well. The students were communicated through their English teacher and their consent was approved.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Two major results were found from the study:

1. The study mainly revealed that the students who attended vocabulary lessons designed in an integrated approach scored a significantly better result in the vocabulary retention test than those students in the control group.

2. From the results of the observation as well as the assessment of the textbook, the way vocabulary lessons/activities are designed and practiced in the student text book seems to be unsatisfactory. Nearly all the vocabulary exercises are composed of fragmented phrases and clauses. Thus, they don't let students practice the language (vocabulary items) in any extended and meaningful activity, i.e. engaging students in activities that require those English words for exchanging information or expressing personal feelings, etc.

#### **The Design of Vocabulary Lessons**

To explore the design of the vocabulary lessons in the grade 10 English text book, the following critical issues pertaining to integrated vocabulary teaching/learning were set on the observation checklist. They were also discussed during the interview.

Items	#	%
The vocabulary exercises that appear in the text are <b>usually</b>		
A. <i>made up of discrete sentences and or phrases and clauses which have no semantic relationship to one another;</i>	3	75
B. <i>composed of more than one sentence that are interwoven into a coherent text;</i>	1	25
C. <i>activities composed of various types such as dialogue, debate, writing, etc.</i>		
The vocabulary activities <b>usually</b> demand students		
A. <i>to write/produce tasks (short messages, stories, personal experiences, etc using the vocabulary items they learnt) that are meant to be read and discussed in small groups;</i>	2	50
B. <i>to compose complete but discrete sentences that do not have a common theme (i.e. complete sentences but isolated in meaning from one another);</i>	2	50
C. <i>to write the meaning of vocabulary items by guessing from the context.</i>		
The Vocabulary activities/exercises the English textbook <i>provides mainly focus on</i>		
A. <i>listening and reading exercises.</i>	1	25
B. <i>speaking and writing activities.</i>	1	25
C. <i>integrated activities which incorporate listening, speaking, reading and writing.</i>		

Appropriate vocabulary exercises are essential to help students practice language items. In the 75% of my observations the vocabulary exercises discussed in class were mainly composed of discrete phrases and clauses that do not relate to one another in meaning.

Furthermore, it can be witnessed from the investigation of the textbook that many of the exercises that are set for vocabulary practice are designed in a discrete way.

This is what the classroom teacher confirmed in the interview. There were no any other vocabulary exercises that further facilitate learning in an integrated manner. Therefore, the students were not frequently required even to write complete sentences using the new words they learnt. Thus, the exercises were not demanding in that they did not let students produce some kind of meaningful paragraph and share what they have come up with among themselves.

In such a way, the organization of the exercises is defective in that it does not provide fertile ground for students to use vocabulary items in more extended communicative activities. That is, it does not engage students in activities that require those English words for the exchange of information or the expression of personal feelings, opinions, etc.

Item 2, which is meant to elicit information regarding the intensity of vocabulary activities students practice, is one of the most critical areas that deserve thorough consideration/attention. Results of the observation revealed that 50% of the vocabulary exercises demand students to write the meaning of vocabulary items **by guessing** from the context in which the words are used. Surprisingly all Part I vocabulary exercises of the text book are matching exercises. Moreover, 50% of the vocabulary exercises are made up of only fragments of phrases or clauses that are meant to give clues of the meaning of the target word in the reading passage. Students were required only to scan for the words that have similar meanings from the passage and write them down. This is in line with what the classroom teacher responded in the interview.

The researcher does not intend to disregard the importance of guessing exercises particularly in reading. However, so as to address vocabulary teaching/learning intensively, more comprehensive and extended activities that actively engage students in producing meaningful tasks need to be incorporated if we want students to benefit out of the course.

Whatever techniques we employ to teach vocabulary, these steps need to go further into an extended communicative activity. As O'Dell suggests, instructional conditions should be arranged to provide

opportunities for a maximum amount of processing of the words. Students should be required to manipulate words in varied and rich ways... (cited in Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). Language teaching materials may offer the opportunity for developing 'problem-solving' abilities, by avoiding an emphasis on closed, item-level exercises and instead by providing '**whole tasks**' which require learners to consider a number of factors at the same time (Little John and Wendeatt, cited in Johnson, 1989).

In item 3, the results of the observation indicated that the vocabulary activities largely focus on receptive skills – listening and reading. Students were largely involved in listening and reading activities.

The teacher used to teach the vocabulary items through explanation and then make the students scan for the target word from the reading passage which is similar in meaning to the explanation given. Thus, in most of the sessions, students were listening to the teacher's explanation and searching for the words by scanning from the passage. In some part of the session, students used to answer questions (speaking – supplying the target word), and copy down the right answers (writing) though it was at a word or phrase level.

The teacher also confirmed that the vocabulary activities **usually** demand students to write the meaning of vocabulary items by guessing from the context. The matching exercises, which are entirely based on guessing, are usually composed of discrete phrases and clauses which are unrelated to one another. Thus, they are unlikely to form a coherent text that promotes the use of different macro skills in an integrated manner.

Therefore, no incidents were observed during the vocabulary sessions when students were actively engaged in integrated vocabulary activities using the words they learnt in speaking, reading, listening or writing activities other than listening to the teacher and uttering words or phrases in response to the exercises. In other words, situations were not created to help students compose a text (writing), read and edit what they have composed (reading), tell it to one another (speaking and listening). Such tasks are more pedagogically sound ones in that they actively engage students in generating more communicative activities and practicing new words more intensively. This in turn would help students to retain better and build their vocabulary stock. Engaging learners in communicative tasks, therefore, would enable them to consolidate their learning in a greater depth. More/meaningful tasks require learners to analyze and process language more deeply, which helps them to commit the information to long term memory (Gairns & Redman, 1986).

#### **Vocabulary Retention Test**

On the completion of units three and four, two vocabulary tests were administered to both groups (Experimental and Control Groups). The objective of administering the tests was to investigate which of the groups performed better in the vocabulary retention test. In other words, it aimed at investigating whether or not the vocabulary teaching using an integrated approach brought about a significant difference in the vocabulary retention of the students more than did the non-integrated one.

#### **The Mean Scores of the Two Groups**

The experimental groups' mean score is 81.07% (standard deviation 13.43); whereas the control groups' mean score is

65.13 % (standard deviation 13.11). The mean difference between the two groups is 15.94. It can be concluded that there is a significant gap between their test scores. Thus, considering the results of the observation along with this result, this gap could be attributed to the way vocabulary activities are designed and practiced, as discussed in the above table.

On the other hand, the test score of the experimental group showed that designing integrated vocabulary tasks that include speaking and listening, reading and writing is more rewarding in boosting students' retention. Incorporating vocabulary items in a variety of tasks would offer students ample exposure in using the language; and this in turn would promote their retention. Acknowledging the importance of engaging students in extended communicative tasks, empirical research points out that "*words that were used in productive tasks, were remembered better than words practiced in non productive tasks*" (Ellis & He 1999; Hulstijn & Trompetter, 1998; Joe, 1995, 1998; cited in Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001: 542). In other words, the more students are involved in a series of vocabulary tasks that integrate different skills, the better the retention/the better the learning (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001).

#### **Results of the Paired Samples Test**

The paired samples test proved that the null hypothesis is rejected for the following statistical evidences:

1. The calculated value of the test statistics ( $t = 4.288$ ) is greater than the theoretical distribution or t-tabulated (2.048) with the given value degrees of freedom and confidence level "The higher the t-value, the more likely it is

that the difference between groups is not the result of sampling error” (Christine & John, 2002; in Dancy & Reidy, 2002:209). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

2. The p-value is very small, in fact .00. If the null hypothesis were true, such a result would be highly unlikely to have arisen by chance or sampling error ( $t = 4.288$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). *“Researchers use the convention that a probability of 5% is small enough to be a useful cut of point for us to reject the null hypothesis. Given such a low probability we can conclude with a reasonable confidence that a real relationship exists in the population under investigation”* (Dancey & Reidy, 2002:134). As indicated in the table, the p-value or alpha is .00. This means the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis by mere chance would be less than 1 in 1000. Based on such a low probability, we can say that there exists a highly significant difference between the test scores of the two groups of students under investigation.
3. In addition to this, the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference is between 8.46 and 23.97; assuming that the two populations have equal variances. This result shows that the null hypothesis ( $H^0$ ) is rejected because 0 is not found in the 95% confidence interval. Should this not be the case, i.e. if the confidence interval included zero, it would imply that if we replicated the study with a different sample, the experimental students might score higher than the control

group students (as in this case the mean difference is 15.94); or there might be absolutely no difference at all (zero) (Dancy & Reidy, 2002).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the approach, i.e. an integrated vocabulary teaching has significantly helped students better retain vocabulary items than did the non-integrated approach.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this comparative study an attempt has been made to find out the effect of integrated language teaching on students' vocabulary retention. Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions and recommendations are made.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

1. Appropriate vocabulary exercises are essential in helping students practice language items. The vocabulary exercises presented in the English text book for grade 10 were mainly composed of discrete sentences and/ or phrases and clauses that do not relate to one another semantically. The exercises were usually matching exercises, which were composed of fragments of phrases and clauses. Therefore, the organization of the exercises was defective in that it did not provide fertile ground for students to use vocabulary items in more extended communicative activities. That is, it did not engage students in activities that require those English words to exchange information or the expression of personal feelings, opinions, etc.
2. In the control group, no incidents were observed where students practically

use the language, i.e. students hardly had a chance to use the new words they learnt in a wider context to convey a message in the form of a dialogue, to express what they feel be it in writing or speaking, to describe an incident, etc. In other words, they were not observed practicing the language in any natural way other than guessing the meaning of vocabulary items, filling in missing words or matching some phrase or clauses. This trend deprives them of the chance to talk, to write, to debate, etc. using the words they learnt.

3. On the other hand, the researcher attempted to design vocabulary lessons in an integrated manner for the study group, and the lessons were successful in boosting the word retention of the students.
4. Generally, the study indicated that the students of the experimental group scored a significantly better result than the students of the control group in the vocabulary retention test. In fact, there was a high statistically significant difference between the test scores of the two groups. Therefore, teaching vocabulary lessons in an integrated approach noticeably facilitates the word retention of the students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. For proper communication to take place, knowledge of vocabulary is almost a prerequisite, without which conveying verbal or written information would be at stake. Hence, to help students gain the most out of vocabulary learning, instructional conditions that provide opportunities for a maximum amount of processing of the words should be arranged.

2. To alleviate the problems that prevail in the English for Ethiopia (EfE) vocabulary exercises, language teachers need to invest their time in designing relevant vocabulary activities that can initiate students to interact and negotiate meaning. In other words, they need to create appropriate activities on vocabulary lessons that can promote communication where students could manipulate the words in varied and rich ways.
3. The way vocabulary tasks are designed; the amount of time devoted in practicing the tasks; and the extent to which vocabulary items are recycled are important issues that need consideration in language learning. To address this core issue in course design comprehensively, the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for publishing textbooks, needs to revise the contents of grade 10 EfE textbooks and redesign them in such a way that the vocabulary exercises incorporate tasks that demand students to use the new words in extended and meaningful activities; that create situations which help students interact among themselves, that necessitate the use of different macro skills in an integrated manner; etc.

In sum, vocabulary lessons should occupy a more significant position in EfE than what has previously been the case.

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