

Using extensive reading to improve vocabulary for students at Hanoi University of Mining and Geology

Dang Thanh Mai*

Hanoi University of Mining and Geology

ABSTRACT

Lack of vocabulary is one of the barriers for foreign language learners in reading, speaking and writing English. The range of vocabulary that students acquire from the lessons in the textbook seems not enough. Therefore, research on extensive reading was conducted to help learners improve their vocabulary. The experimental research was conducted with 45 students studying English in a class at Hanoi University of Mining and Geology for 7 weeks. Before conducting the experiment, the group of students did a pre-test in vocabulary. Then, they chose short stories from the list provided by the teacher. Each week, they completed reading 2 books. After reading, they wrote a summary of the content of each story within 50 words and also stated their opinions about it in 50 words. After 7 weeks, they took a post-test. It can be clearly seen that students have achieved a considerable improvement in vocabulary after the experiment. The average score showed that the post-test's results are higher than the pre-test's. To increase the reliability of the research, students continued to participate in the survey and most of them responded positively to this activity. The results of the study showed that extensive reading not only helps students develop vocabulary but also gain other benefits such as expanding knowledge, improving their vocabulary and forming their reading habits.

Keywords: extensive reading; improving vocabulary; forming reading habit

1. Introduction

Dagiima (2009) defined: "Vocabulary as a basic set of words which foreign language learners need to master in order to read, speak and write. Limited vocabulary has proved to be an obstacle in mastering languages in general and English in particular". It means that without basic vocabulary there is little they can do. Wallace (2007) also emphasized: "The need for attention towards vocabulary development because students must acquire sufficient vocabulary in order to read effectively. In fact, foreign language readers often find reading difficult because of the lack of vocabulary". Students at Hanoi University of Mining and Geology (HUMG) are not exception. The scope of vocabulary taught in reading and vocabulary lessons is believed to be inadequate for comprehension of diverse texts. Additionally, it is recognized that relying only on classroom lessons to build vocabulary might leave students ill- equipped to comprehend longer and more difficult texts as they progress in their language skills.

This brings up the question of what other methods which can be used to help students improve their vocabulary outside of the classroom reading and vocabulary lessons. The answer might be found through the practice of extensive reading (Grabe, 2001)

For a considerable time, extensive reading has been viewed as an essential and inspiring way to improve general language proficiency in the teaching of a second language (Green, 2005). Powell (2005) also said: "Extensive reading did help students improve their vocabulary to read better".

The goal of this innovation is to investigate the use of extensive reading as a tool for developing students' vocabulary at Hanoi University of Mining and Geology, with following research questions:

- *Do extensive reading activities contribute to the vocabulary development of 1st year students at HUMG?*
- *How does extensive reading support the growth of students' vocabulary?*

2. Literature review and research methodology

2.1. Literature review

According to Robb & Susser (1990), extensive reading as a language teaching or learning procedure is:

* Tác giả liên hệ:

Email: dangthanhmai@humg.edu.vn

“...reading (a) of large quantities of material or long texts; (b) for global or general understanding; (c) with the intention of obtaining pleasure for the text. Further, because (d) reading is individualized, with students choosing the books they want to read; (e) the books are not discussed in class”.

The advantages of extensive reading have been confirmed through various research studies, as reflected in language education studies.

According to common belief, students' reading proficiency is improved through extensive reading. (Lituanas, Jacobs & Renandya, 2001). By reading regularly, students can enhance their reading speed and become more familiar with the formats and content of different texts. Lituanas et al. (2001) and Lao and Krashen (2000) found that groups involved in extensive reading for duration of six months and four months, respectively, had better post-test results in reading than the control groups who did not take part in extra reading outside of class.

Extensive reading helps students not only to develop their reading proficiency but also to improve their language skills in numerous ways. Students can expand their access to language that they can easily comprehend. (Krashen & Bribbons, 2004). Extensive reading is thought to be the most immediately available form of input. Continuous and repeated exposure to the input helps students strengthen what they already know and enhance their input.

Additionally, students have opportunities to expand their vocabulary and improve their word knowledge. Clearly, vocabulary is rarely learned from just a single exposure to words. Extensive reading allows students to see words and phrases multiple times, especially since these terms often appear in consistent contexts. Like comprehensible input, consistent exposure to vocabulary can enhance the quantity of words a student knows. (Hoey, 2005).

According to Nagy and Herman (1987), children are capable of learning around 3,000 words each year. The direct teaching of vocabulary in class accounted for a negligible amount of the total vocabulary learned. On the other hand, extensive reading was the primary source for acquiring most of the vocabulary. Developing a larger vocabulary helps students improve not only their reading but also their listening, writing, and speaking abilities.

To summarize, extensive reading not only boosts students' reading skills but also provides a range of additional advantages. Students are expected to see improvements in their language abilities, and their reading habits and interests will also be established and heightened. Other aspects of language, such as vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures, are also advanced.

2.2. Research methodology

An experimental with 45 students from an English class at HUMG was conducted. They started the first English course at HUMG, so It would be advantageous for the change agent to assess vocabulary growth after introducing the innovation, as the existing vocabulary is somewhat limited. The course book used for English 1 is the New English File – Pre-intermediate by Clive Oxenden and Christina Latham-Koenig, Oxford University Express. They learn the first 4 units: unit 1, unit 2, unit 3 and unit 4. Practice Tests 1 and KET 4, KET 5 are their reference books. At HUMG, students primarily expand their vocabulary through classroom lessons and homework assigned in workbooks by their teachers. A limited number of students actively pursue vocabulary improvement through self-study.

The innovation took place in 7 weeks.

In the first week, guidance was provided to these students on how to perform extensive reading activities. 20 short stories were introduced to them. They were online stories at pre- intermediate level with a variety of topics. The students could choose the stories of their favourite topic to read. Every week they were asked to read 2 stories. After finishing one story, the students were tasked with giving their views on the story they read, noting whether they found it enjoyable or not. A brief summary of the story's content was another requirement for the students. Each of the two requests was written in 50 words. The response logs were collected and marked to make sure that students really did their readings as required.

Data for the innovation was collected from three main sources: the pre-test's result, the post-test's result and the survey. In response to the first research question—whether extensive reading would help students expand their vocabulary—vocabulary and reading assessments were designed and carried out. Before the innovation was introduced, students completed a pre-test designed to evaluate their vocabulary. After the 7-week period of innovation, a post-test was performed using the same format as before but with new content. To see if there was progress in students' scores, the results of the two tests were evaluated against each other. Any changes in scores between the two tests would reflect possible advancements in students' vocabulary after the innovation.

Data for the third source was collected through the survey. 45 students wrote down the answers for the questions on the paper. They were explained about the survey. Its objective was to measure the efficiency

of extensive reading in expanding their vocabulary. Students were invited to honestly discuss their thoughts on the extensive reading activities, including the suitability of the activities, the appeal and effectiveness of the materials, and any noticeable gains in their vocabulary. To obtain the most detailed information from students, the researcher made it clear that she valued all types of feedback, including criticism, and was open to both positive and negative comments about the innovation.

Students answered in their first language, Vietnamese. Because the participants were new to English 1, their English may not yet be developed enough to clearly convey their thoughts on this issue. As a result, communicating in their native language proved to be the most appropriate method for obtaining extensive feedback from the participants.

3. Findings and discussions

To see if there was any progress in students' vocabulary after the innovation, the scores from both tests were analyzed. You can find the comparison of these scores in the table provided:

	Pre- tests score	Post- tests score
Total score	158	293
Average	3.51	6.51

It is evident from the table that there was a marked enhancement in students' vocabulary skills after the innovation, as indicated by a much higher average score on the post-test compared to the pre-test. To better understand the effects of extensive reading on vocabulary, a detailed analysis of the survey data is needed.

As mentioned earlier, the researcher had clearly explained the survey's purpose to the participants before it was conducted. She guaranteed the students that the results would be unbiased and expressed her willingness to accept all constructive feedback, regardless of whether it was positive or negative.

The survey's first question focused on students' attitudes towards extensive reading, asking if they liked it and if the activities were enjoyable for their language learning. Forty out of forty-five students shared positive feedback, noting their interest in the short stories. For example:

"I have never thought of reading any stories in English because I think my vocabulary is not enough to comprehend the stories; however, in the list of short stories, I could find a lot of stories that are easy to understand. The content of them is simple and interesting to me. I had a lot of fun reading the stories in English and seeing the pictures in the story".

"At first, I found no interest in doing the reading. I saw the new words everywhere and could not understand the meaning of the whole story. After being helped by my teacher, I found much more pleasure in doing the reading..."

Out of 45 students, two expressed no enjoyment in the activities. They stated that they only read the stories because their teacher required them to. They felt that the stories on the provided list were uninteresting and were overwhelmed by the number of new words.. "I would prefer to read some comics, which are of much more fun".

Although a few students had a negative view of extensive reading, the majority clearly found the activities interesting.

The second question aimed to gather more specific details about the positive outcomes students observed after participating in extensive reading. When some students didn't fully understand the questions, the teacher had to offer more detailed explanations. She advised them to consider the benefits of extensive reading on their background knowledge, grammar, or vocabulary. Surprisingly, each student identified at least one benefit they gained. Even the two students who said extensive reading didn't interest them admitted that it had been somewhat beneficial. Most participants reported that their background knowledge, reading skills, and vocabulary improved thanks to extensive reading, with 39 out of 45 students recognizing vocabulary enhancement after the innovation.

As the second research question aimed to explore the impact of extensive reading on vocabulary development, participants were asked to provide more detailed explanations of their vocabulary improvement.

The interview's third question addressed the advantages of extensive reading for vocabulary development. Similar to their responses to the second question, students expressed positive views on how their vocabulary had improved through extensive reading. For example:

“I think my vocabulary range has been broadened. I have learnt many more new words...”

“I could memorize the new words much better through extensive reading than through learning vocabulary in the lessons in class. I learnt how to use the words in specific context. Unlike when I learnt vocabulary in class, I just focus on learning by heart the meaning and pronunciation of a word. When reading stories, I saw how the words were used and I could learn that...”

“New words are everywhere”. However, by the end of week 5, he had found it much more confident in reading. “New words were still found but I realized many of the words which occurred in the previous reading texts. I remember some of them, some of the words looked familiar but I could not remember the meaning. I checked in the dictionary once again and the next time, I no longer forget.”

“Of course, my vocabulary increased as I had to read every day. However, I can’t say how much it increased. It’s just my feeling that my vocabulary is developed. I think six weeks was a bit short to say how much vocabulary is developed...One problem is that I looked up a lot of new words when I read, but I could not remember them all. Or to be honest, I remember quite few. I would like the teacher to show us the way to memorize new words when reading...”

In conclusion, students valued the vocabulary benefits gained from extensive reading. It helped them expand their vocabulary range, improve their memory of new words, and understand how to use words in context. However, given the short duration of the innovation, some students were uncertain about the degree of vocabulary growth they experienced. A longer study might be necessary to determine the long-term effects of extensive reading on vocabulary development.

In response to questions four and five, which asked about the limitations of the extensive reading activities and suggestions for improvement, students found it difficult to identify many shortcomings. Forty-three out of forty-five students mentioned that the limited time and resources were issues, suggesting that the seven weeks were not sufficient for them to fully appreciate the benefits of extensive reading. “I would like this activity to be applied in 2 courses”. “I think the teacher have had good support for us during the reading. However, at the beginning of the course, she should have given us some tips on reading extensively; for example, how to memorize new words well, how to deal with new words during the reading...”

4. Conclusion

The success of the extensive reading innovation in developing students’ vocabulary is clear. The benefits were substantial, as indicated by the pre-test and post-test results and the survey feedback. Students improved their vocabulary and also enjoyed additional gains, including increased background knowledge, better reading comprehension, enhanced writing ideas, and improved grammar and structural understanding.

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TÓM TẮT

Sử dụng đọc mở rộng để nâng cao vốn từ vựng cho sinh viên Trường Đại học Mở - Địa chất

Đặng Thanh Mai

Trường Đại học Mở - Địa chất

Vốn từ vựng hạn chế là một trở ngại trong việc học tiếng Anh. Thiếu vốn từ vựng là một trong những rào cản đối với người học ngoại ngữ trong việc đọc, nói và viết tiếng Anh. Lượng từ vựng mà sinh viên tiếp thu được từ các bài học trong sách giáo khoa dường như chưa đủ. Vì vậy, nghiên cứu về đọc mở rộng đã được tiến hành để giúp người học nâng cao vốn từ vựng. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện với 45 sinh viên của một lớp tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Mở - Địa chất trong vòng 7 tuần. Trước khi tiến hành thực nghiệm, nhóm sinh viên đã làm bài kiểm tra số 1. Sau đó, các em đọc những truyện ngắn online. Mỗi tuần các em đọc 2 cuốn. Sau khi đọc xong mỗi cuốn, các em viết tóm tắt nội dung trong vòng 50 từ và nêu cảm nghĩ của mình về câu chuyện đó cũng trong phạm vi 50 từ. Sau 7 tuần, các em làm bài kiểm tra số 2. So sánh điểm số giữa 2 bài kiểm tra thấy rõ rằng các em đã có sự cải thiện về vốn từ vựng sau 7 tuần thử nghiệm. Điểm trung bình của bài kiểm tra sau cao hơn bài kiểm tra trước. Để tăng độ tin cậy của nghiên cứu, sinh viên tiếp tục tham gia khảo sát và hầu hết các em đều phản hồi tích cực đối với hoạt động này. Nhìn chung, kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, đọc mở rộng không chỉ giúp người học phát triển vốn từ vựng mà còn đạt được những lợi ích khác như mở rộng kiến thức và hình thành thói quen đọc sách.

Từ khóa: đọc mở rộng; cải thiện từ vựng

The application of concept-based teaching towards improving HUMG students' speaking skills

Nguyen Dao Ly Nhan Phuc*
Hanoi University of Mining and Geology

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the application of Concept-Based Teaching towards improving HUMG students' speaking skills. This method aims to facilitate the development of student understanding, and helps them speak English well through accessing particular concepts. Speaking is the key of communication so lecturers should be able to guide students to analyze and connects their knowledge and skills to apply in different situations. Final results show that this teaching method helps boost HUMG students' speaking confidence and spark their curiosity. Students feel more confident in public speaking, because of their willingness and improved logical thinking ability, and curiosity is critical to make students passionate about learning and open to others' perspectives. The continuous learning helps students unlock a world of opportunities and make them more competitive and versatile professionals.

Keywords: concept; cognitive; experience; knowledge; concept-based teaching

1. Introduction

At Hanoi University of Mining and Geology (HUMG), English is taught as the foreign language, HUMG students, particularly who are non-English speaker, must develop strong speaking skills to succeed in their studies and future careers. Traditional methods of teaching English often focus on rote memorization (Jean Piaget, 1956) and passive reception (John Dewey, 1938) of information, which may not effectively enhance speaking abilities. Traditional education was critiqued for not leveraging the potential of collaborative learning and the importance of the social context in cognitive development (Lev Vygotsky, 1986). We teach our students to know (for knowledge or facts) and do (for skills). Only learning discrete knowledge and skills is not always engaging, relevant, challenging or significant. Besides mastering knowledge and skills, students must be able to apply their understanding and skills to complex situations and contexts, some of which are yet to be envisioned. Students must learn to understand things (for concepts) because knowledge and skills are which that are locked into a specific situation, concepts are timeless, abstract, universal, and transferable.

Concept-Based Teaching (CBT), which emphasizes understanding underlying principles and concepts, offers a promising alternative. This paper explores the impact of CBT on HUMG students' English speaking performance, positing that it leads to more meaningful and effective language acquisition. Lecturers can get students to think at greater depths. In order to truly understand a concept, students have to apply, synthesize and evaluate rather than rote memorization.

Every student has probably experienced a concept once in their life. Concepts are broad, timeless, universal and abstract. They are accessible to everyone and connect us to one another. A student inquiry can take many different routes and even if they use the same concept each and every time, the way they find it and the destination will be completely different. It is a journey that requires dedication, practice, and resilience. These qualities extend beyond language learning, fostering personal growth and a lifelong love of learning. After categorizing and explaining the process of learning a concept, they could practice thinking and linking between different events and data to form their own concepts of understanding. Once they have a firm grasp on these concepts, it's time for them to proceed on to more complex topics. It might range from light talk or a brief introduction to more complex topics like a discussion of their perspectives on a certain issue or phenomena. If the researcher invites them to participate in interactive activities that foster oral communication skills development, they will be more likely to generate more ideas. This process is a gateway to cognitive enhancement, cultural enrichment, and personal fulfillment.

* Tác giả liên hệ

Email: nguyendaolynhanphuc@humg.edu.vn