

Utilizing Vocabulary Builder in an ESL Classroom and the Lexical Competence of Grade Nine Students

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Abstract:- The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of vocabulary builder strategies on the lexical competence of the Grade 9 learners at Pacita Ramos Mendoza Memorial National High School. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions. 1) What is the mean pre-test scores of the respondents in lexical competence before utilizing vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic map in terms of: word forms; word meanings; and word usage?; 2) What is the mean post-test scores of the respondents in lexical competence after utilizing vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic map in terms of: word forms; word meanings; and word usage? and 3) Is there a significant difference in the mean pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents before and after utilizing vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic map?

The study used one group pre-test post-test research design under pre-experimental study where students answered pre-test and post-test instruments and was participated by 39 Grade 9 students during the third grading period of academic year 2022-2023. Results revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents indicating that the utilization of vocabulary builder strategies namely word detective and semantic mapping strategies was an effective way of developing the lexical competence of the learners.

Keywords:- *Lexical Competence, Vocabulary Builder Strategies, Word Forms, Word Meanings, Word Usage*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool to have communication with other people. There are so many languages in the world. English is just one of them. Many people in the world speak English, because English is used as the international language. Many countries use it for international communication, including Philippines, where people use it as a second language. English is also being studied in the country from preschool to college and becomes a language to be learned.

In studying the English language, learners need to master the four major skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing and also the three language components that include vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. And for the students to communicate effectively, they need to develop their lexical competence. Lexical competence is the ability to produce and understand the words of a language. Vocabulary is needed for the students to understand and use the English words adeptly.

Vocabulary is the center of language and is very important to language learners. Words are the primary elements of language because they name objects, actions, and ideas. Without words, students cannot express what they want to convey. There are many benefits that learners get from having a wide vocabulary like the ability to understand what they read, and express ideas well when speaking or writing. However, lexical competence is not something that can ever be fully mastered; it is something that expands and deepens over the course of a lifetime. This could be attained through teaching students to use vocabulary learning strategies efficiently. In the past, vocabulary teaching and learning were often given scant attention in language programs, but recently, a renewed surge of interest in the nature and the role vocabulary plays in learning and teaching a language was witnessed (Ibrahim, 2017) [1].

This can be attributed to the fact that traditionally it was believed that vocabulary knowledge can be gained incidentally in an automatic fashion, so attention was given to other aspects of language such as grammar, reading and speaking (Ibrahim, 2017)[1]. But nowadays, the status of vocabulary seems to be changing.

Based on the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which was participated by 79 countries and economies in the world, the Philippines scored the lowest in reading comprehension.

In addition, the results of the National Achievement Test of Grade 10 students in 2018 showed that the MPS in English subject area was 43.01%, which is below the national standard of 75%.

Results of these national and international assessments showed that Filipinos have limited comprehension, and this can be attributed to their inadequate vocabulary since a good vocabulary is needed to be able to understand what they read. Hence, many researchers are conducting studies on how to develop learner's vocabulary or lexical competence.

One of the challenges faced by the teachers at Pacita Ramos Mendoza Memorial National High School in San Juan, Batangas is also the poor comprehension of the students. In fact, in the conducted Division Reading Inventory and Comprehension Test last September 2022 at PRMMNHS, the results revealed that 81.33% of the students fell in the Frustration and Non-Reader Categories when it comes to comprehension level.

In addition, the researcher experienced students' low performance in the English subject. Students had trouble grasping the idea of the subject with the use of traditional teaching methods and students have also inadequate vocabulary. These were shown in their class performance such as recitation and written tests. Thus, the researcher felt the strong need to develop the lexical competence of the learners.

In this study, the researcher combined the word detective strategy and semantic maps to develop the lexical competence of the Grade nine students at Pacita Ramos Mendoza Memorial National High School in San Juan West District.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine the effect of vocabulary builder strategies on the lexical competence of the Grade nine learners at Pacita Ramos Mendoza Memorial National High School.

Furthermore, this study sought to answer the following questions.

- What is the mean pre-test scores of the respondents in lexical competence before utilizing vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic map in terms of:
 - Word forms;
 - Word meanings; and
 - Word usage?
- What is the mean post-test scores of the respondents in lexical competence after utilizing vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic map in terms of:
 - Word forms;
 - Word meanings; and
 - Word usage?
- Is there a significant difference in the mean pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents before and after

utilizing vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic map?

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized one group pre-test post-test research design under pre-experimental study. In this study, the researcher used a pre-test and a post-test before and after implementing the vocabulary builder strategies to improve respondents' word forms, word meanings, and word usage. The respondents were tested using this method to see if the vocabulary builder strategies would help Pacita Ramos Mendoza Memorial National High School Grade Nine students in improving their lexical competence.

The respondents of this study were the thirty-nine (39) Grade 9 students of Pacita Ramos Mendoza Memorial National High School for the school year 2022-2023. The students were heterogeneously grouped since there is only one section in each grade level in PRMMNHS.

Total enumeration sampling technique was used in this study. It is a method of purposive sampling in which the entire population of interest is studied. It is achieved when the target group is small, and an unusual and well-defined trait sets it apart.

IV. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The main tool used in this study was a researcher-made test, a thirty (30) item parallel pre-test and post-test which contained the lessons of English Grade 9 from week 2 to week 4 during the third quarter. In terms of content, an English teacher, Head Teacher, and Master Teacher from San Juan District were requested to validate the test questions. The test items were also read and evaluated by the research adviser, statistician, technical editor, and subject specialist.

To check the validity of the instrument, a pilot test was done. The questionnaire was first answered by 12 Grade 10 learners. Based on the responses, the items were analyzed according to index of difficulty and index of discrimination. Based on the results, the questions were retained and revised and were used for pre-test and post-test.

Lesson exemplars and activity sheets were also drafted and used in utilizing vocabulary builder strategies in enhancing word forms, word meanings, and word usage of the learners. These were also checked by the external validators and the research panel.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Mean Pretest Scores of the Respondents in Lexical Competence before Utilizing Vocabulary Builder Strategies
Legend: 8.00-10.00- Excellent, 6.00-7.99- Very Satisfactory, 4.00-5.99- Satisfactory, 2.00-3.99- Fair, 0.00-1.99- Unsatisfactory

Lexical Competence	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Word forms	4.64	2.36	Satisfactory
Word meanings	4.21	2.32	Satisfactory
Word usage	4.18	1.41	Satisfactory

From the table, it is revealed that out of ten questions on word forms, the 39 respondents' scores got an average score of 4.64 and a standard deviation of 2.36 which is interpreted as satisfactory. This mean score is less than half of the number of items which indicates that majority of the respondents got low scores on word forms. The test on word forms required the respondents to decide which of the four given word forms should be used in each given sentence.

In terms of word forms, the students were able to determine the appropriate form of words in some of the given sentences; however, the learners find it hard to identify what word form is appropriate to use in most of the given statements. And this can be attributed to the learners' poor vocabulary knowledge. Hence, there is no doubt that vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental aspect of language learning and language use (Nation, 1990, 2001) [2].

It is also presented in the table that out of ten questions, the mean score of the respondents on word meanings is 4.21 which has a verbal interpretation of satisfactory. The average score of the 39 respondents is also less than the half of the number of items which further implies that most of the respondents had low scores on word meanings. Furthermore, the standard deviation of the scores as shown in the table above is 2.32 which means that most of the scores are close to the mean which is 4.21.

The ten-item test on word meanings asked the learners to identify the meaning of the underlined word in each sentence from the given four choices. In terms of word meanings, the grade nine learners were able to give the meaning of some of the given words; however, majority of the respondents appeared to be having difficulty in determining the meaning of most of the given words as used in each sentence. This showed that they were not familiar with the given words and must enhance their vocabulary development to know many unfamiliar words and express themselves in a concise and precise way. According to Bernal, et.al. (2020)[3], vocabulary development is the process of a person increasing the number of words that he or she uses in everyday life.

The table also manifests that from the ten-question test on word usage, the respondents got an average score of 4.18 with a standard deviation of 1.41 which also suggests that majority of the scores of the respondents are near the mean of 4.18 and is verbally interpreted as satisfactory. This mean score of the 39 respondents has not met the half of the number of questions on word usage which suggests that many of the learner-respondents got low scores. Also, the learners got the lowest mean score in word usage compared to word forms and word meanings.

In terms of word usage, the learners were able to identify the errors in some of the given statements; however, they found it hard to determine if there are errors in most of the given sentences. Furthermore, they were unable to give the appropriate words to replace the erroneous words. They lack the ability of using the language appropriately. Hiebert (2005) stated that vocabulary is the knowledge of meanings of words. The learners must master vocabulary to be able to use a language [4].

Table 2. Mean Posttest Scores of the Respondents in Lexical Competence after Utilizing Vocabulary Builder Strategies

Lexical Competence	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Word forms	8.08	1.71	Excellent
Word meanings	8.64	1.65	Excellent
Word usage	7.44	2.36	Very Satisfactory

Legend: 8.00-10.00- Excellent, 6.00-7.99- Very Satisfactory, 4.00-5.99- Satisfactory, 2.00-3.99- Fair, 0.00-1.99- Unsatisfactory

From the table, it is evident that the 39 respondents' scores got the mean of 8.08 on word forms which is interpreted as excellent. This average score is 3.44 more than the average score during the pre-test. In addition, the standard deviation of the respondents' scores is 1.71 which indicates that majority of the respondents got scores close to 8.08.

From the result, most of the respondents have improved their knowledge and skills on word forms after teaching them English lessons utilizing the vocabulary builder strategies namely word detective and semantic maps. They have identified what word form is appropriate to use in most of the given sentences. In the test, they have used context clues and word part clues in identifying the appropriate word forms to be used. Also, in their daily performance in English class, they showed improvement during recitation in using the appropriate form of a word. This further implies that the use of the given vocabulary builder strategies was effective in developing the vocabulary of the learners.

The same result was found out by Astuti (2018) in his study on the use of word detective strategy in teaching vocabulary to Grade 7 students [5]. Based on his study, there was significant difference on students' vocabulary mastery

who were taught by Word Detective Strategy. He then concluded that Word Detective Strategy is effective to students' vocabulary learning.

It is also presented in the table that the mean score of the respondents on word meanings is 8.64 which has a verbal interpretation of excellent. This result shows that the mean score of the respondents increased by 4.43 compared to the mean score during the pre-test. Also, the standard deviation of the scores is 1.65. This suggests that most of the respondents' scores on word meanings are near the mean 8.64.

Based on this result, majority of the respondents appeared to have developed their competence in determining the meaning of a certain word as used in each sentence after being taught using the vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic mapping.

The use of word detective and semantic maps had been effective in developing the lexical competence of the learners. This result was also found out by Ibrahim (2017) in his study "The Impact of utilizing Semantic Maps on the Development of English Language Vocabulary Learning for Saudi Secondary Students" [1]. The findings indicated that semantic mapping technique is effective in vocabulary learning.

The table also communicates that from the ten-question test on word usage, the respondents got an average score of 7.44 which is verbally interpreted as very satisfactory. This mean score of the 39 respondents is higher than the mean score during the pre-test by 3.26. Additionally, the standard deviation of the scores is 2.36 which indicates that majority of the learners' scores on word usage are clustered together close to the mean which is 7.44.

The results showed that the respondents have learned how to use words appropriately after utilizing vocabulary builder strategies namely word detective strategies which are context clues and word part clues and semantic mapping strategy in teaching them their English lessons during the third quarter.

Based on the results, the use of word detective and semantic maps had improved the word usage of the learners. Nurdin (2019) also found out that using word detective as a vocabulary teaching strategy is effective for vocabulary mastery [6].

Table 3. Test of Difference in the Mean Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Respondents in Lexical Competence before and after Utilizing Vocabulary Builder Strategies

Lexical Competence	Pre-test		Post test		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Word forms	4.64	2.36	8.08	1.71	-9.458	38	0.000	Significant
Word meanings	4.21	2.32	8.64	1.65	-	38	0.000	Significant
Word usage	4.18	1.41	7.44	2.36	-	38	0.000	Significant

Legend: If the p-value <0.05, then it is statistically significant. If the p-value > 0.05, then it is NOT statistically significant.

It is evident that there is a significant difference between the students' pre-test and post-test scores on lexical competence in terms of word forms, word meanings, and word usage after the respondents were taught using the vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective strategies and semantic mapping strategy. The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores on word forms has a p-value of 0.000, word meanings has also a p-value of 0.000, and word usage as well has a p-value of 0.000. The difference between the pre-test scores and post-test scores in the all the three dependent variables are less than 0.05 level of significance which indicates that the null hypothesis is not supported.

The difference between the mean of the pre-test and post-test scores implies that after the learners were taught using the vocabulary builder strategies namely word detective and semantic strategies, the respondents' lexical competence level have improved specifically in terms of word meanings, which has the greatest increase from 4.21 to 8.64 mean score with a difference of 4.43. On the other hand, the respondents' pre-test and post-test scores in terms of word forms recorded an increase of 3.44 and 3.26 in terms of word usage. The result still showed students' improvement in these areas.

Majority of the students were able to enhance their lexical skills with the help of the given vocabulary activities and were able to enrich their vocabulary with the aid of the vocabulary builder strategies utilized.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

After the utilization of the vocabulary builder strategies, most of the respondents had improved their lexical competence in terms of word forms, word meanings, and word usage since there was a significant difference between the mean pre-test and post-test scores in lexical competence of the respondents before and after the utilization of vocabulary builder strategies. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there was no significant difference in the mean pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents before and after utilizing vocabulary builder strategies such as word detective and semantic map was rejected.

Based on the results and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are hereby suggested:

- Since the study revealed that the use of vocabulary builder strategies namely word detective and semantic mapping strategies was effective in enhancing the lexical competence of the learners, English teachers are encouraged to integrate the strategies in instruction. Teachers may also use these strategies not just for Grade 9 English but also in the other grade levels. Moreover, teacher of different areas of discipline may also use this since vocabulary learning is a holistic pedagogy in education.
- The school administrators may give support on the use of vocabulary builder strategies since the study found out significant improvement in the lexical competence of the students. They may be encouraged to provide trainings relevant to the use of vocabulary builder strategies not just for English but also in other areas of discipline.
- Future researchers may use this as reference for their studies. They are encouraged to conduct similar studies not only in the area of English, but also in other subjects. This was supported by a study conducted by Al-Otaibi (2016) in Saudi Arabia where he utilized semantic mapping and helped expand the vocabulary of the nursing students about medical terms [7].

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