



The Effect of Teaching key Vocabularies at Pre-Reading Stage of Teaching Reading on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills: The Case of Grade 9 Students at Newland High School, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage of teaching reading on grade nine Newland high school students' comprehension skills. To this end, the study employed quasi-experimental research design. The populations of the study were grade nine students (four sections, A, B, C&D) of Newland high school in 2017 academic year. Two sections among the four (section A & B) were randomly selected using lottery method. Using the same method, the sections A & B were assigned as control group and experimental group respectively. Then, a reading comprehension pre-test was given to both control and experimental groups at the beginning of the study to make sure that the groups were homogenous pertaining to their reading comprehension skills. Next, all the students in the experimental group (N=69) were taught key vocabularies at pre-reading stage of teaching reading using communicative language teaching method through Marzano's and Yopp and Yopp' vocabulary teaching strategies, whereas all the students in the control group (N=69) were taught in the traditional vocabulary teaching method. The same vocabulary and reading comprehension test was given as a post-test at the end of the treatment to both experimental and control groups. The test scores of the control and experimental groups were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 software. The findings of the study showed that students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group in their reading comprehension skills.

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Thus, the study concluded that teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading of teaching reading brought a significant difference between experimental and control groups. Finally, it was recommended that English language teachers should teach key vocabularies at pre-reading stage of teaching reading to their students in the school in order to develop their students' reading comprehension skills.

Key Terms: Teaching key vocabularies; pre-reading stage; teaching reading; students' comprehension skills.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge and its role in reading comprehension has been one of the main areas of focus in second language research for the last twenty years [8; 15 & 17]. Although students can read a text fluently, knowing the meanings of words found in a text is critical to reading comprehension [3 & 12]. The connection between word knowledge and comprehension is unequivocal [3]. Reference [24] further assert, "Educators and educational researchers have known for years that vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in reading comprehension." Describing the importance of vocabulary in a general term, the linguist [22] says, 'without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed.'

Understanding of unfamiliar words and phrases found in a text is important to effectively comprehend the text [3&7]. One may not understand a text without knowing what most of the words mean in a text. In this regard, Reference [10] describe that vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to effectively comprehend a text. Many scholars like [10, 16 & 18] maintain that the proportion of difficult words in a text is a powerful predictor of text difficulty, and readers' knowledge of key words found in a text is indicator of how well the readers can understand the text.

Regarding the relationship between vocabulary teaching and reading comprehension, Reference [21] conducted a research on the effect of direct or explicit vocabulary instruction on students reading comprehension by using Marzano's six steps of academic vocabulary instruction method. His finding showed that the students learned new words, used the words in their interaction, and easily identified the meaning of the new words they learned when they read texts in classroom. Reference [4] on his part conducted a study on the impact of using explicit and implicit vocabulary teaching on improving students' vocabulary and reading comprehension in Saudi Arabia. The study found that the combination of explicit and implicit vocabulary teaching was effective in increasing students' vocabulary and in improving students' reading comprehension skills. In the context of Ethiopia, researchers like [6; 19; 1, 5] also conducted studies on vocabulary teaching in EFL classrooms. However, to the knowledge of the present researchers, there is no research conducted on the effect of teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage on students' comprehension skills in the Ethiopian context.

Hence, it was with this intention that the researchers conducted a research on the effect of teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage of teaching reading on grade nine Newland High School students' reading comprehension skills. To this end, the research intended to answer the following main research question:

- To what extent does the teaching of key vocabularies at pre-reading stage affect grade nine Newland high school students' reading comprehension skills?

Hypotheses

The research has the following hypotheses:

- 1) **Null hypothesis (H_0)** = There is no significant difference between experimental group and control group students in terms of reading comprehension skills as a result of teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage
- 2) **Alternative hypothesis (H_1)** = There is a significant difference between experimental group and control group students in terms of reading comprehension skills as a result of teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage

2. Material and method

The study employed quasi-experimental research design. The population of this study, as mentioned earlier, was all grade 9 students who learned at Newland High School found in Gambella town in 2017 academic year. Two sections (Section 'A' and 'B') were randomly selected from four sections (Sections 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D') found in the school, and the two sections (section A students(N=69) and section B students (N=69)) were also randomly assigned as a control group and an experimental group respectively. Then, a reading comprehension pre-test was given to both control and experimental groups at the beginning of the study to see the homogeneity of both groups in their reading comprehension skills. After making sure that the two groups were similar in their reading comprehension skills, the experimental group was taught key vocabularies at pre-reading stage of teaching reading using communicative language teaching method through [9 & 23] vocabulary teaching strategies. In order to collect data for the study, a reading comprehension pre-test and post-test was used, and the same test which was given as pre-test was given as a post-test at the end of the treatment to both experimental and control groups. However, the forms of the post-test questions were modified a little bit.

In order to maintain, the reliability and validity of the test, the reading comprehension question was piloted using 80 students of grade nine from Gambella High school, which is different from the school on which the actual work was conducted. The procedure of the pilot study lasted for two days. In order to check the reliability of the two pilot tests, Cronbach Alpha was employed, and the result was (.801) which proved the reliability of the questions. Regarding method of data analysis, quantitative method of data analysis was used to analyze the data. In the data analysis process, on the one hand, descriptive statics such as mean scores and standard deviation were used to describe the students' (experimental group and control group) reading comprehension skills. On the other hand, inferential statics which is independent sample t-test was applied to test differences between the students in the experimental group and those in the control group in their reading comprehension skills. The test scores of the control and experimental groups were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 software.

3. Results

The results of the study were presented and interpreted below using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the experimental and control groups before the actual experiment

	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Control group	69	5.2899	1.34056	0.773	136	0.441
Exp. group	69	5.1159	1.30086			

Pre-test was conducted to check whether the experimental and control groups were equivalent on mean scores of their comprehension skills before the experiment. As indicated in Table 1 above, the mean score on comprehension skills for experimental group students was 5.1159, and their standard deviation (SD) score was 1.30086. And the mean and standard deviation scores of the control group students were 5.2899 and 1.34056 respectively. The mean and standard deviation differences between the control group and experimental group were calculated 0.174 and 0.0397 respectively. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean and standard deviation scores of the experimental and control groups. This shows that the control group students and the experimental group students had the same or equal reading compression skills before the experiment, and therefore, they are comparable groups.

Table 2: Independent sample t-test results of the control and experimental groups before the actual experiment

	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Control group	69	5.2899	1.34056	0.773	136	0.441
Exp. group	69	5.1159	1.30086			

Independent sample t-test was also computed before the actual experiment to be more confident whether the control and experimental groups were similar in their comprehension skills. As indicated in Table 2 above, the independent sample t-test result ($p=.441$) showed that there was no statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$) in scores for the experimental and the control groups in their comprehension skills. This finding further assures that the students in the experimental group and those in the control group had nearly comparable reading compression skills before the treatment.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the experimental and control groups after the experiment

	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Control group	69	7.7536	1.92052	-8.446	136	.000
Exp. group	69	10.7246	2.20217			

Post-test was conducted to check whether the experimental and control groups were equivalent on their mean

score of comprehension skills after the experiment. Table 3 above indicates that the mean and standard deviation scores on the comprehension skills for experimental group students were 10.7246 and 2.20217 respectively. On the other hand, the mean and standard deviation scores on comprehension skills for control group students were 7.7536 and 1.92052 respectively. The mean difference between the experimental group and the control group is computed 2.971. This indicates that the teaching of key vocabularies at pre-reading stage to the experimental group students significantly helped them improve their comprehension skills.

Table 4: Independent sample t-test results of the experimental and control groups after the actual experiment

	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Exp. group	69	10.7246	2.20217	-8.446	136	.000
Control group	69	7.7536	1.92052			

Table 4 above also shows that the result of the independent sample t-test for the experimental and control groups after the experiment revealed that the observed mean difference for the experimental and the control group was statistically significant, $t = -8.446$, $df = 136$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). These findings further confirm that teaching key vocabularies at the pre-reading stage of teaching reading helped the experimental group students improve their mean score (Mean=10.7246) and significantly outperform the control group students in comprehension skills.

4. Discussion

In teaching reading, students' reading comprehension skills can be improved by a host of factors. One of such factors is teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage. When reading, students should be able to quickly determine the meaning of the unknown words they encounter, and this access to vocabulary allows for uninterrupted comprehension to take place [13]. This study, therefore, investigated the effect of teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage on grade 9 students' comprehension skills with a particular reference to Newland High School in the Ethiopian context.

To this end, this study found that both the experimental and the control groups had comparable reading comprehension skills in the pre-test (seen the analysis of Table 1 and 2 under the results section above). However, while the students in the experimental group (those who were taught key vocabularies at pre-reading stage) improved their reading comprehension skills on the post-test, students in the control group (those who were not taught key vocabularies at pre-reading stage) improved their comprehension skills on the same test only slightly. After the experiment (in the post-test), a statistically significance difference (favoring the experimental group) was found in reading comprehension skills (seen the analysis of Table 3 and 4 under the results section above). This revealed that teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage helped the students in the experimental group to improve their reading comprehension skills. According to [14], pre-teaching of vocabulary can have significant learning outcomes, and this has a correlation with the finding of this study. This means, if a student knew more words prior to reading, his or her comprehension of the text would be much easier [13].

Therefore, the study concluded that teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage had a positive effect on improving reading comprehension skills. This finding is also in harmony with what is described in the theoretical literature. Reference [2 & 11] maintain that students should be taught key words found in a text to comprehend the text. Furthermore, Reference [9] asserts that students' comprehension will increase by 33 percent when a vocabulary instruction focuses on key words important to a text they are reading.

5. Conclusions

The main objective of this study, as indicated above, was to investigate the effect of key vocabularies at pre-reading stage on grade nine Newland high school students' reading comprehension skills. In order to achieve this objective, the following research question was set:

- 1) To what extent does the teaching of key vocabularies at pre-reading stage affect grade nine Newland high school students' reading comprehension skills?

In order to answer this question, quantitative data was gathered through pre-and post-test, and the data were analyzed using inferential statistics called independent t-test. Based on the results of the analysis of the data, the following findings were made from the study.

1. Both the descriptive and inferential statistics analysis results of the pre-test showed that the experimental group students and the control group students had comparable reading comprehension skills before the treatment.
2. However, analysis results of the post-test clearly showed that the students in the experimental group outperformed the students in the control group in their comprehension skills because of the treatment given to them ($t = -8.446$, $df = 136$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$)). From this, it can be concluded that teaching key vocabularies at pre-reading stage through explicit/implicit vocabulary teaching strategies improves students' reading comprehension skills.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of the above major findings, the following recommendations have been suggested.

- It is advisable that English language teachers should teach key vocabularies at pre-reading stage when they teach reading skills in their classroom so that their students can easily comprehend the text they read.
- English text book designers should consider the issue of key vocabulary teaching at pre-reading stage when they design reading tasks so that English language teachers give emphases to teaching of key vocabularies before engaging their students in the actual reading process.

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