Enhancing the Reading Skill of the Engineering Students through Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract— This research paper aims at developing the reading skill for fourth year students from Technological University (Mandalay) through vocabulary learning. Reading skill is the ability of an individual to read, comprehend and interpret written words on a page of an article or any other reading materials. Vocabulary is a crucial component of reading comprehension at all levels. Although the students from fourth year have been learning English language since their very beginning of learning, they have difficulties in reading skills due to the lack of vocabulary learning and grammatical structure. In this research, a survey on selected students from fourth year was carried out to find out the students' needs, lacks and wants. Students were given needs analysis questionnaires to collect data. To work out this research, pre and post reading comprehension test and follow-up exercises were provided. Based on the findings of needs analysis, effective reading strategies and activities are presented in this research in order to improve students' ability in reading skills. It is hoped that this research paper will give lots of support for development of students' reading skill through effective vocabulary acquisition.

Key Words: reading, vocabulary learning, comprehension, effective.

1 INTRODUCTION

As English is a compulsory medium of international communication, most of the students are interested in learning English. This research paper is intended for the fourth year students who are attending at the Technological University (Mandalay)to develop their reading skill through vocabulary acquisition. To acquire a language, four skills are needed: listening, speaking, reading and writing, ordered in the way they are acquired and taught. Although the students are science students, they need to develop their reading skill to communicate with others.

Reading is one of the most important means of obtaining information and it has a significant place in the life of an educated person. Vocabulary awareness is a key to reading comprehension because readers cannot comprehend a text without knowing what most of the words mean. To improve reading comprehension students need to have interests and focus more on using vocabulary. When the students learn more vocabulary, they will be able to read any type of text and understand almost of it. Students who lack adequate vocabulary have difficulties in getting meaning from what they read, so they read less. As a result, they know fewer words because they are not reading widely enough to encounter and learn new words. Vocabulary knowledge can help the students to improve their reading, and reading can contribute to vocabulary growth. So, vocabulary and reading are both important elements for students' learning in the English language.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary knowledge plays a vital role in reading skill and it is significant in learners' overall language success. Readers cannot understand what they are reading without knowing meaning of the words. When students have wide vocabulary knowledge, they are able to learn to read more easily as they can figure out unfamiliar words based on the knowledge of words related to the context. Therefore, the more words the learners know, the more they are able to understand what they're reading.

2.1 Types of Reading

Reading is one of the most important and efficient skill for language learners. Students need to master reading skill because of its importance as a communication and as a learning tool. There are

two kinds of reading: intensive reading and extensive reading.

2.1.1 Intensive Reading

Intensive reading involves learners reading in detail with specific learning aims and tasks Students will study short stories and extracts from novels for the interest and learn to know detailed meaning from the text by using dictionaries. It can support learners to know difficult grammatical structure, vocabulary knowledge and idioms basically. Although intensive reading needs a lot of patience and attention, it helps strengthen the readers' knowledge. It is often necessary to read and re-read the passage and indeed to pause and check the meaning of some words or concepts. Teachers should provide students with some opportunities to engage in intensive reading by the careful selection of text. The benefits of intensive reading include enhancing reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and helping student's word study skills and developing critical thinking as students need to answer all required questions after reading.

2.1.2 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. It is a rapid reading of large quantities of material of longer reading for general understanding. It helps learners to develop reading fluency and emphasizes general understanding. The reader guesses the meaning of words and uses a dictionary only to translate key words indispensable for the overall meaning of the text. While it deals with shorter texts, extensive reading is generally associated with reading large amount amounts of material. Thus, both intensive and extensive reading should be applied in the learners' reading skill development.

Intensive Reading	**Extensive Reading**
• Fouses on vocabulary and gammar to understand	• Focuses on getting the main ideas and filling in the details.
• Word-for-word reading	• Fluent reading (rapid)
• Very-slow	• Fast and even pace
• 100% understanding	• Overall understanding
• Limited reading	• Reading a lot
• Difficult texts	• Easy texts
• Use dicitionaries	• Ignore or guess unknown words

2.1.3 Good and poor readers

Both good and poor readers use different strategies in order to grasp the meaning of the material that have been read. It is important that teachers are responsible for stimulating both readers' motivation to improve their good reading habits. According to Klinger (2000), the most successful way to characterize good readers is to say, they are more strategic than poor readers.

Good readers are active readers and they have strong purposes for their reading. They typically look over the text before they read, noting such things as the structure of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals. So, they are able to read selectively and know what important information is written in the text and what is to read or not to read and so on. Good readers have the ability to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text and draw from, compare, and integrate their prior knowledge with material in the text. Good readers construct, revise and question the meanings they make as they read. Moreover, good readers are able to draw upon their translation skills and monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustment in their reading as necessary.

2.2 Kinds of Vocabulary

Some experts divide vocabulary into two types: receptive and productive vocabulary.
Receptive Skills are listening skill and reading skill and productive skills are speaking skill and writing skill. Receptive vocabulary is words that learners recognize and understand when they are used in context, but which they cannot produce. Receptive vocabulary recognizes in reading and listening.

Productive vocabulary is the words that the learners understand and can pronounce correctly and use constructively in speaking and writing. It involves what is needed for receptive vocabulary plus the ability to speak or write at the appropriate time. Therefore, productive vocabulary can be addressed as an active process because the learners can produce the words to express their thoughts to others. According to Ma (2004) the receptive vocabulary is larger than the productive vocabulary.

2.2.1 Suggested Activity for Reading Comprehension through Vocabulary Learning

Read the news article below.

This weekend, thousands will wake up early to attend and participate in the Columbus Day parade. Teenaged marching band members, football players, and beauty pageant contestants will all conquer their

adolescent sleep cycle to put on a spectacle for the town.

The holiday commemorates when Christopher Columbus navigated across the Atlantic Ocean and landed on a Caribbean island. His voyage made the Western world aware of the Americans and led to the founding of the United States.

Many question the practice of celebrating such a controversial historical figure. Not only is his supposed discovery of   questionable at best, but he also forced the native people off their lands. Many also claim that celebrating Columbus for discovering America is inaccurate. By the time Columbus arrived, Native Americans had been living here for many generations. Some people have suggested that, instead, we trace our celebration back to the Native Americans and rename it "Indigenous Peoples' Day". The fight for this change has been long, but it has gained acceptance recently. The first Indigenous Peoples' Day celebration was in 1992, on the 500th anniversary of Columbus'1492 voyage, in Berkeley, California.Now, the rebranded holiday is celebrated in cities across the country.

Other Americans have opted to view Columbus Day as a time to celebrate Italian heritage. In fact, the holiday was officially recognized in 1997 because of the efforts of a first- generation Italian immigrant named Angelo Noce. At the time, Italian Americans were seen as second-class citizens. In an effort to improve that situation, Noce campaigned to make Columbus Day a national holiday.

Whatever your feelings about the holiday, this year's parade promises some stunning displays. Dozens of floats will roll down Main Street, and there is strong competition. Participants have been trying to dethrone the reigning champion for years, but Harrison's Farm is holding strong with their straw replicas of the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria.

The recent torrential rain should end tomorrow, and Sundays' weather is predicted to be mild with moderate cloud coverage The size of the crowd last year was staggering, with thousands of spectators, so come out well before festivities start at 10: 00 a.m. if you want a front- row seat.

I.Read the statements and circle true or false.

1. Opt is a synonym for "choose".   True False
2. Staggering could indicate a small amount.
                                                        True False
3. If the weather predicts moderate showers, there will most likely be torrential rainfall.   True False
4. If someone says that you look stunning, it is a compliment.   True False

5. We can trace our ancestry using DNA.
                                                        True False

II. Write your own definition using the words from the box.

heritage   campaign   commemorate   discovery

III. Answer the following questions.

1.What makes the western world know about Americans?
2.Who chose to view Columbus Day   as a time to celebrate Italian heritage?
3.Who are treated as second- class citizens?
4.What are the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria?
5.What should you do if you want a front- row seat?

2.2.2 Suggested Activity for Developing Vocabulary

I. Matching the words with the correct definitions.

1. emission	a. an effort to achieve a large goal
2.humanity	b. begin ot create
3. endeavour	c. send off into the air
4. launch	d. all of the people that live on the earth
5.invest	e. highly skilled or talented
6.competent	f. make someone want to do something
7.inspire	g. put time or money into a project or goal
8.admire	h. hope to achieve something
9.aspire	i. able to do something well
10.gifted	j. respect of personal value

II. Choose the correct answers.

1. Mariah tries to _____ her favourite celebrities by talking, dressing, and acting like them.
   a. motivate   b. instructc. emulate
2. It's important that we _____ cultural traditions as a way of remembering the past.
   a. Reassure   b. preserve   c. abandon
3. Our class _____ to create a monument commemorating our departed professor.
   a. accumulated   b. campaigned
       c.shocked
4. The president of our college _____ the outbreaks of violence following last Sunday'protest.
   a. condemned   b. united   c. instructed
5. Sandra always _____ to be the best. That's why she was so upset when she got

B on the final exam.
a.   traced   b. plotted   c.aspired

6.   It takes a _____ mind to work long hours on a single project.
a. staggering b. moderate   c. disciplined

7.   During our camping trip, we built a _____ shelter out of sticks and leaves.
a. extinct   b. driven   c. primitive

8.   Tasha was admired for her _____ through all the challenges that she faced during the competition.
a. perseverance   b. legacy   c. heritage

9.   The boy thints that it is time for the president to ____due to the scandals that are coming to light.
a. aid   b.opt   c. step down

10. It is important to have _____ if you are attempting to run for political office.
a. intruders   b. allies   c. poverty

3   DATA ANALYSIS

Through the questionnaire survey supported to the fourth year students at TU (Mandalay), their strength and weakness are found out.
Please mark ☐ in the appropriate boxes and answer the questions.

1. What difficulties do you face when reading a text?
   a.   Unfamiliar new words   ☐
   b.   Grammar structure   ☐
   c.   Figurative language: Simile, Metaphor ☐

2. In your opinion, how important is the role of vocabulary learning in reading skill?
   a.   Critically important   ☐
   b.   Very important   ☐
   c.   Somewhat important   ☐

3. What is the most preferred reading strategies by the students?
   a.   Skimming   ☐
   b.   Scanning   ☐
   c.   Reading the abstract of journal article to know prior infor mation ablut the article ☐
   d.   Guessing unknown words in the text   ☐

4. What type(s) of reading help students to improve reading skill, vocabulary and grammar knowledge?
   a.   Intensive Reading   ☐
   b.   Extensive Reading   ☐
   c.   Speed Reading   ☐

5. What type (s) of activities is one of the most effective ways to learn new vocabulary?
   a.   Watching English TV Series/ movies   ☐
   b.   Playing Video/ computer games   ☐
   c.   Reading English books/ magazines   ☐

   d.   Using online dictionaries   ☐

6. When you encounter unknown English words in reading, which is the most preferred strategies?
   a.   Using dictionary   ☐
   b.   Online dictionary   ☐
   c.   Asking a teacher/ a peer   ☐
   d.   Guessing the meaning from the context   ☐

7. When you come across new English words, do you ever write them down in order to remember them?
   a.   Yes   ☐
   b.   Sometimes   ☐
   c.   Never   ☐

8. What type(s) of reading give the students enjoyment and improvement general reading skill?
   a.   Intensive Reading   ☐
   b.   Extensive Reading   ☐
   c.   Speed Reading   ☐

9. In learning vocabulary fast and effectively, which way(s) are effective for the students?
   a.   Reading as much as possible and practicing with sample sentences ☐
   b.   Memorization   ☐
   c.   Watching English TV series and listening songs ☐
   d.   Playing online Vocabulary games   ☐

10. How efficient are you in reading skill and vocabulary knowledge?
   a.   Good   ☐
   b.   Excellent   ☐
   c.   Fair   ☐
   d.   Poor   ☐

4. FINDINGS

In order to investigate the actuate needs for improving reading skill of engineering students through vocabulary acquisition, questionnaires are given to 90 students. The ages of the students are between 17 and 20. Although the students have been learning English since the early age, they are weak in reading skills. According to survey, most of the students find it difficult to read and comprehend text due to unfamiliar new words and the lack of adequate knowledge about grammar structure. Through the questionnaires, students answered that while extensive reading helps to improve the reading speed and fluency of the students and structural awareness and others said that intensive reading supports the students' ability in critical thinking, analytical skills, vocabulary and grmmmatical knowledge. According to the questionnaires, students are able to get a general idea of meaning by means of skimming reading strategies and others

use scanning reading strategies to find specific information. Moreover, the result shows that the majority of the students prefer to use online dictionary when they encounter unknown words and others use dictionaries and some guess the meaning from the context. Many students read book and magazines to learn new words and practise to expand their reading ability by using the words they have learnt and other students enjoy playing video and computer games as this can make them enjoyable, interesting and effective for vocabulary improvement. According to the survey, the use of the notebook to write down the meaning of unknown or difficult words helps them to remember words and phrases.

According to the author's teaching experience, although the students are adult learners, they are weak in reading. Most students are not active whenever they read and answer the questions when they encounter unfamiliar words in reading. There are a lot of interesting and useful exercises in the prescribed text such as the following tasks: filling in the blanks, matching the words, writing sentences using words and pictures, filling the words given the initial letter, and writing own definition and so on. When the students have adequate vocabulary knowledge, they can tackle various types of exercises about vocabulary and support very much in reading comprehension.

5. RECOMMANDATIONS

According to the students' answers, although all of the students are adult learners they found disturbance in reading skills and they felt nervous when they encounter unfamiliar words in reading the texts due to the lack of new vocabulary knowledge and grammar structure. Reading is a fascinating activity, creating enjoyable learning atmosphere, helping students in enhancing a wide vocabulary, improving students' reading comprehension. It is important that teachers are responsible for stimulating students' motivation and encourage them to read more inside and outside class. In addition, teachers should explain the difficult words in the text before, during and after reading. This allows students to overcome a great deal of difficulties with vocabulary mastery and students will be competent readers and their reading curiosity will be very high.

In order to ensure good and proficient readers, students should read not only their prescribed text but also other reading materials more and more. They need to have plenty of exposure to unfamiliar new words and phrases by using different kinds

of effective strategies. Moreover, teachers need to be aware of their learners' current skills levels, strengths, and needs concerned with improving reading skills and should encourage them to become good readers. As a result, students will improve their reading skills, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper is aimed to enhance the reading skill of the engineering students. Reading is one of the most important skills to acquire knowledge. It is very important to get success in our life and that reading ability is highly valued of understanding a variety of materials. As regards the development of students reading ability, some interesting strategies and activities are presented. As a result, students will be able to read any type of text and understand almost all it. There is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Students who know more words understand the text better. When the vocabulary of the text is more familiar, students are more likely to read more and mare texts.

Vocabulary and reading are seen as two main language components that improve each other interchangeable, learners can enrich their reading skill through vocabulary acquisition. To sum up, it is hoped that this research paper will fulfil the requirements in developing students' reading skill and help students to become good and proficient readers.

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