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***COMPARING EXPLICIT VS. INCIDENTAL
TEACHING WHEN ACQUIRING NEW
VOCABULARY IN EFL***

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This study compares the acquisition of new vocabulary in EFL through reading. Two different conditions will be compared: explicit vocabulary teaching and incidental vocabulary teaching. Practicum II was the ideal opportunity to carry out the study because the researcher was given the chance to work with 1st of ESO groups and the students of these groups were taken as the subjects of the research. Students in both groups were given the same text, but only group B had the opportunity of asking anything related to the vocabulary of the text. Just after the reading, the researcher took all the text copies back and the students were asked to complete two different tests; one at a time. The first test consisted on asking them the translation of 20 English words linked to the topic (meaning recall). The second test presented the same 20 words, but this time students had to match them to their corresponding definitions (meaning recognition). A week later, the same two tests were passed again in both groups in order to check the vocabulary they had learnt. The results show that explicit learning may be more effective than incidental learning when acquiring new vocabulary in EFL.

I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Several lexical researchers have proposed two main approaches when acquiring new vocabulary in a L2. On the one hand they have explicit learning in which every word is explained. On the other hand, they have incidental learning in which learners acquire new vocabulary through reading; they are not explained anything. The first approach will be referred to as Read-Plus condition while the second approach will be referred to as Read-Only condition.

Many researchers agree on the fact that incidental learning is the dominant way when acquiring new vocabulary in the L1 and it seems to occur also in L2 vocabulary acquisition, but only with small structures and after a repeated exposure (Waring and Takaki, 2003).

Different studies have shown the combination of both approaches is effective and that is the reason why many teachers of EFL combine both methods when teaching new vocabulary.

Some studies say that incidental learning occurs when students are repeated things as many times as possible. They say that the more exposure students receive, the more they keep up. Furthermore, some researchers have mentioned that it could be helpful to combine incidental learning with explicit learning when teaching mid-frequency terms (Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt, 2010).

A previous research carried out by Suhad and Sonbul (2009) suggests that the vocabulary acquisition under the Read-Plus condition obtains better results than the vocabulary gains obtained through the Read-Only condition. They made a research

where they compared the gains obtained by these two different approaches. In order to carry out their study, they worked with 40 female students of Medicine at Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, that were enrolled in a first-year English for Specific Purposes module. Both approaches led to vocabulary acquisition, but the results suggested that the Read-Plus condition led to a larger quantity of vocabulary knowledge.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

Is explicit learning (Read-Plus) more effective than incidental learning (Read-Only) when acquiring new vocabulary in EFL?

III. THE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS

63 students took part in the study, but only 56 of them completed the four tests so the results analyzed would be the ones of these 56 students. 27 girls and 29 boys were taken as the subjects of the current research. They all were students from the 1st year of ESO that study English as a school subject.

MATERIALS

The reading passage used during the study was taken from the Practicum II English teacher's extra materials. It was decided to work on a text entitled "New Island". It was a 300-word text that included 20 words that students had never seen or heard according to what their English teacher mentioned. These 20 words were taken as the target items for the study.

Two tests were prepared to measure the acquisition of the target items.

Firstly, a meaning recall test was assigned where students had to provide the L1 translation to every target word.

GREENHOUSE: _____

Secondly, students were asked to match each word to its suitable definition in order to measure their meaning recognition.

Words:

1. GREENHOUSE: __
2. GLOBAL WARMING: __

Definitions:

D. It is the rising average temperature of Earth's atmosphere and oceans since the late 19th century.

J. A glass building in which plants that need protection from cold weather are grown.

PROCEDURE

The researcher did not need to assess a pre-knowledge test in order to select the 20 target items because the teacher she spent time with during Practicum II assured her that they did not know any of the selected words.

The study was carried out in two different sessions with each group (group A will be referring to 1st of ESO A group while group B to 1st of ESO B group) and these two sessions took part with a one week interval.

On the first session, students were given the text and they had to read it individually for about 5-10 minutes. Unlike students in group A, students in group B were asked to underline every word they did not understand.

Once they had finished reading, students in group B were given the opportunity of asking about the meaning of every word they did not know or that they did not understand while students in group A could not ask anything. In other words, students in group A worked under the Read-Only condition while students in group B worked under the Read-Plus condition.

Then, the texts were taken back and students were asked to complete two different tests in order to measure their meaning recall and their meaning recognition. The tests were completed separately to avoid them using the content of one of them to complete the second one and vice versa.

The second session took place a week later and students had to complete the same two tests they had already answered the previous week, but this time they had to use their memory because they could not have a look at the reading. Just like in the first session, the tests were completed separately to avoid them using the content of one

of them to complete the second one and vice versa. These tests were used to measure the vocabulary they had retained.

The tests were scored out of 20 points each, one point for every correct answer. Some answers were given half a point because of their partial correctness although in general each answer was assigned 0 or 1 point.

IV. RESULTS

As all the students started with zero knowledge of the target words, the following two tables show the correct answers students provided. There are two tables for each group, one indicating individual results and a second table with the groups' correct answers percentages. They could have a maximum of 20 points in each test so the answers shown are out of 20.

The following two tables show the results obtained from the tests completed by students in group A, the group that worked under the Read-Only condition.

Table 1. Group A students' individual results.

	SESSION 1		SESSION 2	
	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION
STUDENT 1	11	12	11	12
STUDENT 2	9	11	10	12
STUDENT 3	8	1	8	1
STUDENT 4	6	0	6	0
STUDENT 5	12	9	12	9
STUDENT 6	12	12	13	11
STUDENT 7	7	12	10	10
STUDENT 8	3	3	2	5
STUDENT 9	8	7	10	6
STUDENT 10	3	2	3	3
STUDENT 11	8	5	10	8
STUDENT 12	9	11	11	13
STUDENT 13	1	0	0	8
STUDENT 14	6	4	7	2
STUDENT 15	4	5	5	2
STUDENT 16	8	7	13	5
STUDENT 17	12	5	10	2
STUDENT 18	9	14	12	9
STUDENT 19	9	9	10	2

STUDENT 20	12	11	10	12
STUDENT 21	9	2	8	1
STUDENT 22	6	6	6	6
STUDENT 23	8	2	7	2
STUDENT 24	8	7	8	3
STUDENT 25	9	9	10	7
STUDENT 26	8	8	12	12
STUDENT 27	7	6	6	2
STUDENT 28	3	1	4	0
STUDENT 29	9	6	9	3

Table 2. Group A's correctness averages.

	SESSION 1		SESSION 2	
	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION
RESULTS	224/580 → 38.62%	187/580 → 32.24%	243/580 → 41.89%	168/580 → 28.96%

The following tables show the results obtained by students in group B, the group which worked under the Read-Plus condition.

Table 3. Group B students' individual results.

	SESSION 1		SESSION 2	
	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION
STUDENT 1	7	18	10	18
STUDENT 2	4	12	10	9
STUDENT 3	13	9	13	12
STUDENT 4	15	9	12	11
STUDENT 5	8	3	6	5
STUDENT 6	9	6	9	15
STUDENT 7	9	10	8	10
STUDENT 8	13	10	13	10
STUDENT 9	15	13	14	12
STUDENT 10	11	8	9	17
STUDENT 11	12	17	13	18
STUDENT 12	15	13	16	10
STUDENT 13	9	0	6	0
STUDENT 14	14	12	14	11
STUDENT 15	17	20	17	16
STUDENT 16	4	15	11	20

STUDENT 17	10	11	11	6
STUDENT 18	11	16	11	16
STUDENT 19	13	10	11	16
STUDENT 20	17	15	16	14
STUDENT 21	9	4	10	4
STUDENT 22	15	15	14	18
STUDENT 23	9	11	9	2
STUDENT 24	15	15	16	15
STUDENT 25	10	18	11	2
STUDENT 26	16	10	15	14
STUDENT 27	16	11	12	12

Table 4. Group B's correctness averages.

	SESSION 1		SESSION 2	
	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION
RESULTS	316/540 → 58.51%	311/540 → 57.59%	317/540 → 58.70%	313/540 → 57.96%

Table 5. Both groups' results.

	SESSION 1		SESSION 2	
	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION	MEANING RECALL	MEANING RECOGNITION
GROUP A (READ-ONLY)	38.62%	32.24%	41.89%	28.96%
GROUP B (READ-PLUS)	58.51%	57.59%	58.70%	57.96%

V. DISCUSSION

First of all it is important to know that the results analyzed belong to the students that completed the tests in both sessions and all students' results were taken into account.

Since both groups read the same text, the results obtained in these two groups are directly comparable. As it has been previously mentioned, as all the students started with zero knowledge of the target words, the two tables show the correct answers students provided. There are two different tables for each group, one indicating students' individual results and a second table with the groups' correct answers percentages. They could have a maximum of 20 points in each test so the answers shown in the first table of each are out of 20.

On the one hand we have the results obtained under the Read-Only condition. The students that worked under this approach (Group A) gained very little meaning recall and meaning recognition in both sessions. In session 1 students' meaning recall was 38% and meaning recognition was 32% while in session 2 the results are 41% and 28% respectively.

On the other hand we have the results obtained under the Read-Plus condition. The students that worked under this approach (Group B) gained more meaning recall and meaning recognition than the previous group in both sessions. In session 1 students' meaning recall was 58% and meaning recognition was 57% while in session 2 the results are 58% and 57% respectively.

Comparing the result obtained by both treatments, students in the Read-Plus condition obtained higher scores at both levels of mastery (meaning recall and meaning recognition) than students under the Read-Only condition. The amount of advantage of the Read-Plus treatment over the Read-Only condition was large for both meaning recall (20%) and meaning recognition (30%) in both sessions.

On the basis of these results, the research question can be answered. Read-Only condition results in lexical gains, but they are quite modest while Read-Plus condition obtained greater gains so the Read-Plus condition seems to be more effective than the Read-Only condition.

Comparing these results with the ones obtained by Suhad and Sonbul (2009), the current study strengthens the idea that the Read-Plus treatment results in greater gains than the Read-Only treatment.

The outcomes also show that students under Read-Only approach obtained lower grades in session 2 tests than session 1 tests while students under Read-Plus approach also obtained lower grades in session 2 although the difference is not as significant as in Group A because students in Group B obtained more or less the same results in both sessions. Results from students under the Read-Plus condition decreased about a 1% while the results from students under the Read-Only condition decreased about 6% in meaning recall and about 13% in meaning recall.

From these results we can conclude that the Read-Plus approach results in a greater amount of memorized words.

The 4 tables show that students in both groups did better when recalling the meanings of the words than when recognizing their meanings in both sessions.

Meaning recall > Meaning recognition

These results, unlike the ones obtained by Suhad and Sonbul (2009), show that productive knowledge (meaning recall) is easier than receptive knowledge (meaning recognition). Suhad and Sonbul (2009) mentioned in their research that many teachers focus on meaning rather than the form and that is the reason why the researcher has focused more on the form in this study and that seems to be the reason why the meaning recall has resulted in better gains.

VI. LIMITATIONS

The first limitation was that the researcher did not know whether the subjects knew the target words or not. The teacher said that they did not know them and the researcher had to believe her. It could be interesting to include a pre-test in a future research because this kind of pre-test would be significant to select the target words.

The main limitation was students' attitude towards the tests. They asked whether the tests would be counted as a school test and because of that be marked and as it did not, some of them seemed to complete the tests without paying any attention. This may have affected the results because many students could have done the 4 tests much better. Results may have probably been better if they had been told that they counted because they would have probably made more efforts when completing the tests. This should be taken into account by any future researcher that would like to work on the same research question.

Another limitation was time restraints. It would have been interesting to add a third test were form recall would have been tested but it was not possible since the class hours lasted for 50 minutes and everything had to be completed in a session. It would have been interesting to see whether they would have done better or worse than they have already done with the other two tests (meaning recall and meaning recognition).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, although all the subjects worked with the researcher with the same materials and during the same amount of time, students under the Read-Plus condition learned and kept back more vocabulary items than students under the Read-

Only condition. For that reason, using the Read-Plus approach seems to be more effective than the Read-Only condition when teaching new vocabulary in EFL contexts.

VIII. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Teachers of English should use whether a Read-Plus condition or a combination of both Read-Plus and Read-Only approaches when teaching new vocabulary in EFL.

They should think before using a Read-Only condition because it seems that students under this treatment do not learn much when they have to acquire new vocabulary. Students seem to need a teacher that would explain all the vocabulary for them to learn it appropriately.

Furthermore, this study shows that reading has a positive effect on L2 vocabulary gains. Based on this finding, teachers should consider the idea of working with more readings than the ones included in the textbooks in order to teach more vocabulary than the one included in the textbooks they work with. That could also help students to improve their reading proficiency and to learn other linguistic aspects.

IX. REFERENCES

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Finally, most of the students seemed interested on the research and they tried to do their best. They participated actively in the reading and they asked a lot of questions about the new vocabulary. They even wanted to do their best because they wanted to have more time to answer the different tests in case they would remember something and get a higher mark.

XI. ANNEX

The following is the text students worked with. It was taken from the Practicum II teacher's extra materials.

A New Island

In September of this year, the 13th edition of The Times Comprehensive Atlas was published, reflecting the recent changes in the world's geography. And if you look closely at the map of Greenland, you'll see an island that wasn't in the 12th edition of the atlas. It is a new island called 'Uunartog Qeqetag', which means 'Warming Island' in the local Inuit language.

So how did this new island appear? As its name suggests, it was born as a result of global warming. It first appeared in 2006 as the ice which connected it to Greenland **melted**, and is now considered permanent enough to be called an island – in other words, the ice won't come back.

This is a very worrying trend. A recent report in the Guardian warned that sea ice is melting at its fastest pace in almost 40 years. Satellite observations of sea ice (sea ice maps are produced every day to help ships navigate in the Arctic seas) have recorded the melting of ice on a scale not seen since observations began in 1972.

So why is this happening? **Greenhouse** gases produced by human activity cause a rise in temperatures. This causes the melting of the Arctic ice sheets, which leads to the 'Albedo effect' – white sea ice reflects the heat of the sun back into space, dark seawater absorbs the sun's heat. The temperatures go up even more, melting more sea ice. It is a vicious circle which will lead to rising sea levels and flooding in low-lying coastal areas, endangering lots of major cities and whole islands.

Some scientists predict a rise in the sea level of two meters by the end of the century, which means that the pages of future editions of the Times comprehensive Atlas will have fewer islands, not more.

Next, these are the two tests that students had to complete in each session:

Name:

1. Translate the following words:

Global warming	
Sea ice	
To melt	
Trend	
Pace	
Greenhouse	
Ice sheet	
Vicious circle	
To rise	
Sea level	
Flooding	
Low-lying	
Coastal area	
To endanger	
To arise	
To reflect	
Report	
Satellite	
To navigate	
Scale	

Name:

2. Match each word to its definition:

Global warming		Greenhouse		Flooding		To reflect	
Sea ice		Ice sheet		Low-lying		Report	
To melt		Vicious circle		Coastal area		Satellite	
Trend		To rise		To endanger		To navigate	
Pace		Sea level		To arise		Scale	

- A. A general direction in which something is developing or changing.
- B. To make or become liquid by heating.
- C. To sail or travel over water or terrain.
- D. It is the rising average temperature of Earth's atmosphere and oceans since the late 19th century.
- E. Of or near a coast.
- F. It is largely formed from seawater that freezes.
- G. To move from a lower position to a higher one; come or go up.
- H. A graduated range of values for measuring or grading something.
- I. Also called rhythm is a term used to describe the rate of activity or movement, such as in running or the flow of events in an entertainment piece.
- J. A glass building in which plants that need protection from cold weather are grown.
- K. To put someone or something in danger.
- L. It is a mass of glacier ice that covers surrounding terrain and is greater than 50,000 km².
- M. To throw back (heat, light or sound) without absorbing it.
- N. An account given of a particular matter, especially in the form of an official document, after investigation or consideration by an appointed person or a piece of information that is unsupported by firm evidence.
- O. A sequence of reciprocal cause and effect in which two or more elements intensify and make each other worse, leading to a worsening of the situation.
- P. It is a measure of the average height of the ocean's surface.
- Q. To emerge; to become apparent.
- R. An artificial body placed in orbit round the earth or another planet in order to collect information or for communication.
- S. It is an overflow of water that submerges land.
- T. At low altitude above sea level.