Chapter 6
Engaging Students With Authentic Ways to Learn New Words: Use of Storytelling in the L2 Classroom

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ABSTRACT
This chapter investigates the impact of storytelling on second language (L2) vocabulary recall among secondary school students. Increasing learners’ command of vocabulary is a crucial factor in learning foreign languages. One way to increase effectiveness of vocabulary learning is through the use of storytelling. The study used a within-subject design, and the participants (n=45) were tested on their vocabulary learning in three conditions: digital storytelling (use of animated videos), storytelling (audio narration only), and explicit vocabulary learning with the use of word list and definitions. Quantitative analyses of students’ vocabulary test results revealed both audio-based storytelling and digital storytelling to be effective techniques of learning new words in the L2 classroom.

INTRODUCTION
To meet the needs of the 21st century learner, language educators must provide the students with meaningful and engaging activities. Educators aim at identifying various methods and techniques of effective vocabulary learning. It is also essential for teacher candidates to become aware of ways to engage their future language learners and be prepared to provide effective instruction in the target language related to improving the learners’ lexical competence.

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The importance of learners’ vocabulary size in increasing language capacity and fluency has been widely recognized (Nation, 2001, Hulstijn, 2005; Schmitt, 2010). Various language methods and techniques have been developed to assist learners with their vocabulary learning. Recently, new technologies have been providing novel instruments and settings to achieve this aim. The use of these technologies can facilitate vocabulary learning (Blake, 2013) by presenting information with the multimedia, and therefore offering more authentic and multi-sensory contexts for language learning.

Storytelling is known for promoting second language learning primarily with regard to vocabulary learning, but also it contributes to improving listening comprehension, speaking abilities, as well as reading skills (Kasper & Prior, 2015; Luongo-Orlando, 2001; Malkina, 1995; Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1983). Studies have also explored other benefits of incorporating storytelling into L2 classroom, for example, enhanced intercultural awareness (Hines, 1995). Storytelling is reported to stimulate imagination and promote creative thinking (Wright, 1995), as well as to develop appreciation and positive attitudes towards the target language (Luongo-Orlando, 2001) and increase interactivity in the classroom (Vecino, 2006). Although most of the studies in this area have focused on the effectiveness of storytelling in learning new words by younger learners (Cameron, 2001; Hines, 1995; Pedersen, 1995), attention has been also paid to how adult learners can benefit from storytelling in diverse professional contexts (Steslow & Gardner, 2011) as well as in the EFL classroom (Kim &McGarry, 2014; Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1983; Vecino, 2006).

The aim of this study is to investigate how incorporating storytelling into the classroom settings can contribute to secondary school students’ vocabulary learning. To provide better insights, the participants were tested in three conditions: digital storytelling (use of animated videos), storytelling (audio narration only) and explicit vocabulary learning with the use of word list and definitions.

BACKGROUND

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Traditionally there have been two main vocabulary learning strategies: incidental and intentional (Wu, 2015). The advocates of intentional vocabulary learning claim that the meaning of a word is best acquired via explicit teaching (Schmitt, 2008) and because of learners’ noticing and paying attention can lead to the effective acquisition of language (Zyzik, 2011). On the other hand, Nation (2001) argues that “incidental learning via guessing from context is the most important of all sources of vocabulary learning.” (p.232). Learning from context means acquiring new words as a result of reading or listening comprehension while students’ attention is focused on the content. Nation (2006) asserts that guessing from context, and consequently, acquiring the meaning of new lexical items is facilitated by meaningful and engaging contexts, such as stories. Finally, there are also researchers who agree that effective vocabulary instruction should include both strategies: i.e. explicit element that allows the students to notice and pay attention to the lexical items, and an implicit element that stimulates meaning-focused use by engaging contextual info. For example, Hulstijn (2005) concludes that effective progress in language learning occurs only if incidental learning is complemented with explicit learning.
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