LACK OF READING HABITS AND VOCABULARY AMONG FRESHMEN AFFECTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The main idea to publish this article is to recognize the importance of a lack of reading habits and vocabulary; as an essential aspect to having good communication, especially when people start to learn a new language, in this case, English as a second language. Herewith there are some of the reasons that lack of reading habits and vocabulary are affecting the student's academic performance. Thus, vocabulary learning verifies to play an important role in oral communication. Reading proficiency is the key to knowledge. In modern life, reading depends on the individual's capacity to interpret printed or electronic pages fully and accurately. The overall objective of this research was to examine how the lack of reading habits and vocabulary is affecting academic performance. The justification for this article is based on the identification of these main problems freshmen are facing, and how these issues are affecting the academic performance of students at the university level. Is important to recognize the importance of the parents in the acquisition of good reading habits. And of course at the school level from part of the teachers, to promote good reading habits in order for students will not have difficulties in their academic performance.

Keywords: Academic performance, reading habits, lack of vocabulary.

1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation must be the main purpose for reading, in some homes, reading becomes part of the family's daily activities. Thus, if kids are exposed to reading times, they will grow with this good habit as a part of their life. Also, the school plays a role in the process of acquiring reading habits through the activities assigned by the teachers. Promoting reading skills in the classroom depend on students learning styles, in this way teachers need to use all the strategies, techniques, and resources available to promote and keep the good habits in students already have it.

Following studies carried out over the years and in different countries of the world, you can find and appreciate a large number of articles focusing on these main problems. The lack of the reading habit, and vocabulary, and how this affects the academic performance. According to Ogbodo (2002), Bhan & Gupta (2010), and Singh (2011) have carried out research on reading, especially on how it affects the academic performance of students. However, the majority of these researchers' work belongs to the international community. The reality in Panama does not escape that of the international community, since the habit of reading has been lost in a large majority of our young people. For this reason, this has caused students who wish to study English as a second language to find it difficult to communicate, as a consequence of the poor vocabulary.

Vocabulary is an essential skill for learning to read and write, and it is necessary when students are reading to learn across the core curriculum content standards. Students use vocabulary in their daily life to understand ideas and use expressive phrases and words to acquire and convey meaning. When a student does not have a strong vocabulary he/she may struggle to gain meaning from the text while reading and understand new concepts presented in oral discussions. A lot of research shows how the lack of good reading habits and vocabulary is affecting academic performance, taking the case of, schools, high schools, and universities.

2. Good reading habits in kids and young people

Nowadays, with all information available through the different media, reading must be more interesting and satisfying because the list of topics is just a click; such as, blogs, online books, magazines, articles, or visiting a bookstore can cover the interest to increase the reading habits. Reading helps us to be analytic, and critical, develop critical thinking, understand the purposes, grow as an intellectual, and finally increase vocabulary. D'Angelo (1971) stated "critical reading consists not only learning certain skills but also includes a critical attitude toward what we read" (p.946). Without a good attitude to reading critical thinking can be affected.

Researchers show people use technology and social networking for other reasons instead of reading books. In a study conducted at the universities of Ankara and Erciyes, turns out that 29% out of 326 students, read one book a month. Most of them choose the reason of being informed, followed by personal development, and leaving relaxation at the very end as a choice (Erdem, 2015). Until the results of another study conducted in Zaria, Nigeria, students' reading habits are negatively affected by the use of social networking. Out of 200 undergraduates, 72 (36%) answered that social networking distracts them from reading.

According to Aforo (2014): "most of the students do not see social media and its components as a tool for enhancing reading for education" (p.94). In other words, it means students use social media for pleasure, to be updated about lifestyles, but not necessarily to get good reading habits. In this case, they are not taking advantage of the media components, later on, they will deal with their reality in the classroom, when they have to be able to demonstrate their understanding and the capacity to have conversations is limited by the lack of vocabulary that is essential to communicate with others in our mother tongue or any other language.

Reading can be evaluated and valued too, as an achievement. In this sense, if students become good readers, they will reach their personal, academic, and professional life goals. Students who are interested in reading for different reasons like personal, or academic reasons will likely be more open to instruction and development (Pressley, 2002).

Another author stated "reading is the ability to understand words contained in a document and make use of the knowledge for personal growth and development" Dadzie (2008, p.12). This ability allows you to give meaning to the information read, either in print or digitally. The habit of reading is developed for different reasons and purposes; within which can be mentioned, acquiring knowledge comes to be considered as a first purpose, then for pleasure, relaxation, or leisure.

Hence, the acquisition of vocabulary has an extreme relationship with reading in context. It requires identification and comprehension. Comprehension skills help the learner understand the meaning of words in isolation and in context (Palani, 2012). Indeed, he thinks reading is essential in critical thinking and solving problems. In this case, parents must work on students' reading habits and promote to them how to solve problems because the information they got from printed material will be the basis for making good decisions and having successful communication in their personal and academic life.

No less important; authors consider the best age to promote good reading habits is at an early age, "reading habit is best formed at a young, impressionable age in school, but 2 once formed it can last one's lifetime" (Greene, 2001, p.85). Failure to read will be a barrier the way for all kinds of catastrophes in society. People need a society able to generate critical thinking and solve problems. Thus, being able to read well is crucially important for language learners. Successful performance at the elementary and high school level, as well as at higher levels of academic education, is partly dependent on the ability to read (Laličić & Dubravac, 2021). It means proficient reading will be developed by those students who have grown up with good reading habits.

As stated Baba & Rostam (2020, p.100): "ability to read is crucial as reading affects the intellectual and emotional growth of an individual. People who improve reading will have more opportunities to get success in their lives". These authors worked on collecting data using a questionnaire to know about students' reading habits, preferences, and, attitudes in a population of students of Malaysian. Understanding this study just lets us know teachers also have a great impact on reading habits when they motivate students to do it.

As a matter of fact, reading is considered one of the four main language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and is taught and practiced from an early age. After learning how to read as the main skill, students are also taught by parents and teachers to convert reading into a habit which will help them develop to have a better personality, understanding, better academic performance, and self-confidence in knowledge will be tool for success in their lives. Reading is a permanent language function and skill becomes an individual habit. When it comes to individual terms reading becomes a very important element in creating a developed and well-built personality. Reading books, newspapers, magazines or other materials is all helpful and important in building a sustainable reading habit. Following this, (Ejupi, 2017, p.2) stated "it is crucially important to have a well-developed reading habit when you are a student".

According to Blaha & Bennet (1993), as cited in Erdem (2015), reading is a habit is a characteristic behavioral pattern, as soon as the same and similar acts are repeated in a way that allows us to obtain good results in academics, then it can be said that a habit has been acquired. McKenna et al. (1995) define "reading attitude" as a system of feelings related to reading and how it either enhances or hinders the individual's reading habit. However, positive attitudes toward reading have improved reading experiences and academic success (Memis & Kandemir, 2019; Park et al., 2020; Samsuddin & Aspura, 2021).

Communication is an art that involves a lot of aspects such as voice, gestures, mimics, eye contact, and attention. In regards, that communication being very important for people in every situation. Brun (2010) stated the following:

The study of communication is important because every administrative function and activity involves some form of direct or indirect communication. Whether planning and organizing or leading and monitoring, school administrators communicate with and through other people. This implies that every person's communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness (p.45).

It seems reasonable to conclude that one of the most inhibiting forces to organizational effectiveness is a lack of effective communication (Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010). Moreover, good communication skills are very important to one's success as a school administrator. A recent study indicated that recruiters rated communication skills as the most important characteristic of an ideal job candidate (Yate, 2009). It means people need to have enough vocabulary to keep a conversation or transmit a good message, especially if he or she is going to apply for a job. By the way, if people have enough vocabulary, they can transmit their ideas clearly. Thus, the lack of vocabulary is a barrier to the communication process.

3. Lack of vocabulary

Vocabulary learning helps acquire language, develop the learners' reading proficiency, and is beneficial for reading comprehension (Tozcu & Coady, 2004). Thus, teaching vocabulary is one of the critical ways of improving vocabulary knowledge. It should be well-programmed and planned since it aids the students to expand their vocabulary and when they realize it is most needed for message-focused tasks like listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nation, 2005, cited in Özgül & Abdülkadir, 2012). Vocabulary knowledge is also a fundamental facet of literacy skills (Pulido & Hambrick, 2008). When a freshman learns a new language, in this case, English the acquisition of vocabulary is the way to produce the language in a real environment.

Robinson (1988) refers "to vocabulary as the simple Lexis of paraphrase and explanation" to illustrate procedural vocabulary and calls the procedural words "the main element in our interpretation and categorization of specific frames of reference" (p.51). Thus, It could be argued that "knowledge of etymology may help some learns to understand and retain new vocabulary items" (Jackson, 1988, p.175).

All the definitions are right with no doubts. But vocabulary is not as simple as that. It does not only mean understanding the definition of single words or collocations, but it also requires the knowledge of how the words fit into the context. Therefore, it is very difficult to be fully mastered by students. Vocabulary learning does not officially count among the language skills (which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing) but it might be included there as there is no way of making progress in a language without building vocabulary that can be then applied to grammar and create meaningful utterances through which people communicate among themselves. It is difficult for students to communicate without developing their own lexicon.

A good mastery of vocabulary helps learners to express their ideas precisely. By having many stocks of words learners will be able to comprehend the reading materials catch others talking, give a response, speak fluently and write some kind of topic. On the contrary, if the learners do not recognize the meaning of the words used by those who address them, they will be unable to participate in a conversation, unable to express some ideas, or unable to ask for information. Vocabulary is the total number of words in a language (Hornby, 1995). Vocabulary is an important part of the mastery of English well. According to Piaget's theory, a child at the age of 7-10 years is always interested in recognizing and knowing new words, he stands to repeat new words repeatedly so that he will memorize them.

Considering the importance of vocabulary, and its role in learning a foreign language. The mastery of this element should be ensured and developed. Otherwise, the vocabulary mastery of the children will be limited and the consequence of it is that they will find difficulties in learning the skills of the language. Therefore, schools have a task to teach vocabulary to their students as suggested by John Carol, as showed by McKeown (1987). Although a considerable amount of vocabulary, learning is associated with primary language learning in the early years. The acquisition of most of the vocabulary characteristics of an educated adult occurs during the years of schooling and infects one of the primary tasks of the school as far as language learning is concerned, to teach vocabulary.

Having good communication needs, and managing lots of vocabulary is the key to fluency. When people decide to learn a language, they must realize that all the areas, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are important, but vocabulary becomes to be more necessary to have a fluent conversation. When people acquire English as a Second Language [ESL], the most important for its development is the acquisition of vocabulary, and it only is acquired through different written texts; such as; reading and writing. The use of vocabulary depends on the background, context, or situation.

No matter what your goal is when learning a new language, you're going to need to become fluent to achieve it. This means becoming proficient in all aspects of your target language, such as grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, writing systems, and phonology (Jerkins, 2018). Vocabulary development is a key indicator of the progression of all four skills of language learning. The role of vocabulary as in the current study develops a strong correlation between speaking proficiency and vocabulary knowledge.

The lack of vocabulary is the main barrier for students learning English as a second language because most of the time they have ideas of what to say, but these ideas are in their mother tongue, and the lack of vocabulary becomes an obstacle to having a conversation with their classmates. Since kids start reading in elementary school, they immediately get new words, all those new words help them to have a better understanding, and permit students to have the opportunity to express their ideas in the classroom and later to share those ideas at home (Krashen, 1989).

Furthermore, is important to know there are two types of vocabulary, active and passive. Active vocabulary refers to the words taught to students, and they can use these words in speech or writing as oral or written expressions. Passive vocabulary refers to the words that students recognize and understand in a context. Such a passive type of vocabulary occurs in listening or reading material. Besides, Webb & Rodgers (2009) advocates that students recognize receptive vocabulary when it is used in a context, the one seen in a reading text and the one that cannot be produced by students in a written or spoken form. To Neuman & Dwyer (2009), vocabulary refers to the words in spoken (expressive vocabulary) and listening (receptive vocabulary) forms that the learners need for a competent interaction. Hatch & Brown (1995) consider vocabulary as a group of words that the language users use differently. Vocabulary knowledge usually indicates the learners' progress. Learning vocabulary has always been a skill taught and evaluated in other language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Schmitt, 2000). Instead, it promotes the development of language skills (Mart, 2012).

Rohmatillah (2017) in a study investigated the difficulties students faced by learning English vocabulary as a second language. He presented qualitative research based on the following instruments, questionnaires and interviews, to find out different challenges based on learning vocabulary practices by the freshman. Students present several vocabulary difficulties in specific areas. In Panama, students receive a course called English for Specific Purposes trying to promote the acquisition of English vocabulary in different fields. When students are faced with different vocabulary fields, they immediately have issues with their communication, and the lack of participation in the classes is demanded by the teachers.

4. Academic performance

Academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has reached specific goals that were the focus of activities in specific areas like school, high school, and university level, proving the level of academic outcomes reached. Therefore, the academic achievement should be considered to be a multifaceted construct that comprises different domains of learning. Because the field of academic achievement is very wide-ranging and covers a broad variety of educational outcomes, the definition of academic achievement depends on the indicators used to measure it (Steinmayr et al., 2014).

Vocabulary acquisition is a key component of many areas of school readiness and academic success. Individual differences in vocabulary have a significant relationship with student differences in achievement and academic-related cognitive skills. Different facets of vocabulary knowledge, facilitate literacy development (Ouellette, 2006) and, in turn, success in school (Bigozzi et al., 2017). Duff et al. (2015) reported that fourth graders with above-average reading skills learned more vocabulary words.

5. CONCLUSION

As a result, in order to have better communication in a foreign language, reading becomes essential to get and improve vocabulary. But in these last years, with all the technological advances people had been lost the habit of reading, especially young students because they have all the information with a click. It becomes an advantage and a disadvantage because reading habits have been lost. Evidently, it has a serious consequence which is the lack of enough vocabulary related to the discussion topics in the classrooms. Without reservation, parents, teachers, and schools are in charge to promote good reading habits in order for students will get better comprehension, generate critical thinking, solve problems, and be able to have a successful personal and professional life.

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