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Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India

Issue 3: Managing resources

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Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India

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Managing resources

All three papers in this issue of *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* investigate the professional practice of managing resources and the process of selecting and exploiting materials best suited to supporting effective learning. Through this professional practice, teachers can make informed choices about resources and how to use them, reflecting on to what extent they have effectively supported learner outcomes.

These three papers discuss the use of a wide range of different resources. Both KN Shoba and Vijaya Lakshmi have researched the use of resources to expand learners' vocabulary. **KN Shoba** reports on the successful use of 'word walls' in the classrooms of tertiary learners of English for Science and Technology (EST) and recommends their wider use in the teaching of ESP. **Vijaya Lakshmi** reports, recommends and exemplifies the use of comics to teach lexis to young learners and demonstrates how the use of comics can help young learners to recognise different combinations of words and improve language chunking skills. **Sujata Noronha** reports an investigation into what kinds of stories encouraged young learners to respond enthusiastically and effectively in a mobile library project in an under-resourced housing community.

About the authors

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About the English Language Teaching Research Partnerships (ELTReP) Award programme

India has a long tradition of educational research but the results of this have not always reached the wider world. Through a range of programmes, British Council India places considerable emphasis on encouraging and supporting inquiry. A key strand of that work between 2012 and 2016 has been the English Language Teaching Research Partnerships (ELTReP) Award programme. The programme aimed to facilitate high quality, innovative research to benefit the learning and teaching of English in India and to improve the access of ELT policy makers, professionals from India and the United Kingdom and the global ELT community to that research. All writers contributing to the eleven issues of *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* were

selected and supported in their research by the ELTReP Award programme.

All three papers in this issue have been written by practitioners in the field, whether teachers, lecturers, educational department personnel or other roles that involve day-to-day contact with the teaching and learning of English. The researchers, many of whom will be seeing their work published for the first time, have designed and implemented their studies and present results which in each case are innovative and thought-provoking. Each paper reflects the creativity, detailed awareness of context and practical suggestions of a wide range of writers, from different backgrounds and working in different situations.

We very much hope you enjoy *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* and that you feel the insights the papers provide into a variety of educational environments are applicable to your own context, wherever you may be working.

Acknowledgements

The opinions expressed in the papers in this issue are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the British Council.

1

Can word walls enhance vocabulary at the tertiary level? An experimental study

KN Shoba

1. Introduction

Word walls are visual aids that are generally used at the primary and secondary level as a strategy to teach and enhance vocabulary skills of learners. Being constant reminders of wordlists that learners should know and use, they can be great functional tools once used systematically. In the ESL context, can word walls still work to develop vocabulary skills of tertiary level learners with the specific purpose of familiarising words related to Technical English within the broader realm of English for Science and Technology in engineering colleges? Having come across successful experimental studies on using word walls at the primary and secondary level, this study is an attempt to extend the same at the tertiary level. This article describes a classroom action research project designed to improve vocabulary skills of first year students by investigating the use of word walls and word wall activities during an eight-month period. It was found that word wall activities could have been one factor that strengthened meaning-making and word recognition resulting in a significant improvement in the learners' vocabulary.

Vocabulary is the foundational skill upon which the other four language skills namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing are based. At the tertiary level, learners are expected to possess a considerable range of mental lexicon that facilitates communication both fluently and accurately. To achieve this end, teachers of English employ several strategies that have proved to be fruitful in other geographical and linguistic contexts. The broader framework of vocabulary teaching allows the teacher to sensitise the learners to the importance of acquiring a word bank, enhancing their vocabulary skills and retaining what has been acquired, not to mention a lifetime of continuous learning.

The purpose of this action research project was to improve student vocabulary acquisition through a two-way method - a conscious and a subsequent subconscious instructional approach with the aid of word walls. The study involved one teacher and a target population of 106 students in first year engineering grade classrooms of Velammal Engineering College, Chennai. The intervention was implemented from October 2013 through May 2014 and analysed in the following three-month period.

The goal was to gather evidence of a marked improvement in the number of vocabulary words that students recognise, understand, and use. Pre- and post-tests gathered data on student knowledge of fifty key content area vocabulary words per month. Three cycles of interventions

based on word observation and word learning through the installed word walls were implemented via specially designed vinyl banners. The data gathered indicates that students clearly understood and found it effective to become familiarised to words through word walls after this intervention. The results of the study show that a multisensory, direct instructional approach can improve student vocabulary acquisition.

1.1. Teaching vocabulary in the ESL Classroom

Teaching of vocabulary in the tertiary classroom is problematised by the complexity of its linguistic, semantic and psycho-cognitive aspects. Three approaches to vocabulary instruction and learning have been elaborated by Alan Hunt and David Beglar in their study '*Seven Principles of Vocabulary Teaching*' (1998). These three approaches are Incidental Learning, Explicit Instruction and Independent Strategy Development. The first principle which Hunt and Beglar propose deals with providing opportunities for the contextual learning of vocabulary. Nagy, Herman and Anderson (1985) observe that learning vocabulary from contexts is a gradual process. The contextual learning of vocabulary through extensive reading can benefit language curricula and learners at all levels. The second principle analyses which of the 3,000 most common words learners need to acquire. This is discussed under the second approach Explicit Instruction. By explicitly teaching the target wordlists it believed that the need-based language items can be covered. For second language learners entering university, Laufer (1992) found that knowing a minimum of about 3,000 words was required for effective reading at university level, whereas knowing 5,000 words indicated the likelihood of academic success.

The third principle deals with providing opportunities for the intentional learning of vocabulary. Intentional learning through instruction, significantly contributes to vocabulary development. Explicit and conscious teaching of vocabulary is particularly essential for beginners whose lack of vocabulary limits their reading ability. Coady (1997) calls this the beginner's paradox. He wonders how beginners could learn enough words to learn vocabulary through extensive reading when they do not know enough words to read well. His solution is to have learners supplement their extensive reading with the study of the 3,000 most frequent words until the forms and meanings of words become automatically recognised. Extensive reading aids in arriving at contextual meanings which through repetition are ingrained over a period of time as it is understood that just knowing words does not guarantee meaning-making. The fourth principle deals with providing opportunities for elaborating word knowledge. Nation (1990) identifies various aspects of word knowledge such as knowing related grammatical patterns, affixes, common lexical sets and typical associations and how to use the word receptively and productively. Receptive knowledge means being able to recognise aspects of word knowledge through reading and listening. Productive knowledge means being able to use words in speaking and writing.

The fifth principle focuses on providing opportunities for developing fluency with known vocabulary. Fluency can be facilitated by developing sight vocabulary through extensive reading and studying high frequency vocabulary. Fluency exercises include timed and paced readings. In timed readings, learners may try to increase their speed by sliding a 3x5 card or a piece of paper down the page to increase their speed while attempting to comprehend about 80 per cent of a passage. In paced readings, the teacher determines the time and pushes learners to read faster. The sixth principle of guessing from context comes under Independent Strategy Development. To guess successfully from context, learners need to know about 19 out of every 20 words (95 per cent) of a text, which requires knowing the 3,000 most common words (Hunt and Beglar, 1998). However, even if one knows these words, Kelly (1990) concludes that unless the context is very constrained, which is a relatively rare occurrence, or unless there is a relationship with a known word identifiable on the basis of form and supported by context, there is little chance of guessing the correct meaning. As guessing from context fails to direct attention to word form and meaning, relatively little learning

occurs. The seventh principle involves examining different types of dictionaries and teaches learners how to use them. Bilingual dictionaries which provide L1 synonyms have been found to aid vocabulary learning. A bilingual dictionary can help lower proficiency learners in reading comprehension because their lack of vocabulary is a significant factor in their inability to read (Knight, 1994).

1.2. The word wall approach

A word wall is popularly defined as a collection of high-frequency sight words that are age appropriate, classified into groups or categories, and is located on the wall of a classroom for children to easily see and learn (Brabham and Villaume, 2001; Copper and Kiger, 2003). In general terms it can be understood as a visual aid – usually a bulletin board that showcases a collection of desired words to be taught to the target learner-group. They can be theme-related, topical, unit- or chapter-specific or categorised in a particular order. Joseph Green's *The Word Wall: Teaching Vocabulary through Immersion* (1993) highlights that the word wall is theoretically built upon the spiral model of mastery – repetition and reinforcement of previously learned principles. Janet Allen's *Words, Words, Words* (1999) is another text that recommends integration, repetition and meaningful use of words learnt. Allen also advocates the use of word walls in vocabulary acquisition as they are actually learning tools that are easily integrated into any classroom management system.

Much of the research work that has been done on vocabulary learning so far has focused on three findings. According to Grabe and Stoller (1997), vocabulary learning requires multiple exposures to new lexical items in various discourse contexts. Multiple exposures, of varying intensities and in contexts different in nature are said to gradually lead to a large recognition vocabulary. According to their research, elaborate vocabulary learning occurs when learners make meaningful connections between new and already familiar words. Consequently, students use known words in new contexts and use new words with practical associations. This in turn allows for faster processing of words which are related

semantically. According to Stahl, context can be a powerful influence on learners' vocabulary growth. But learning words from context is a long-term process. By means of explicit instruction, language teachers can 'compress that process so that students can learn more words in a shorter period of time' (Stahl, 1999 p.14).

The word wall approach accommodates the three principles of vocabulary learning mentioned above. The word wall provides opportunities for multiple exposures to lexical items. It encourages learners to make connections between new and known words. It can be used in response to meaningful contexts or to build relevant contexts around new words. Equally important, the word wall promotes active learner involvement, a key to effective learning in general. The word wall approach (Green 1993) was originally designed to develop vocabulary learning skills and to internalise new vocabulary items. Green literally surrounded his learners with words using a set of word-filled wall panels and the ever-present 'walls of words' became an integral part of Green's classroom.

1.3. Classroom action research

Classroom-based action research involves a systematic investigation of teaching and learning, followed by data-driven improvements resulting from the outcomes of the investigations providing not only a viable, but also a valuable, professional development alternative. It comprises a four-step cyclical process (Mertler, 2012), consisting of the following steps: planning for your action research, acting on the plan, developing an action plan for future cycles, and reflecting on the process.

Classroom action research involves the use of qualitative interpretive modes of inquiry and data collection by teachers with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices. The practice of classroom action research has a long tradition but has swung in and out of favour, principally because the theoretical work that justified it lagged behind the progressive educational movements that breathed life into it at certain historical moments (McTaggart, 1991a; Noffke, 1990, 1997). Primacy

is given to teachers' self-understanding and judgments. The emphasis is 'practical', that is, on the interpretations that teachers and students are making and acting on in the situation. In other words, classroom action research is not just practical idealistically, in a utopian way, or just about how interpretations might be different 'in theory'; it is also practical in Aristotle's sense of practical reasoning about how to act rightly and properly in a situation with which one is confronted by a problem (Dadds, 1995; Elliott, 1976–1977; Sagor, 1992; Stenhouse, 1975; Weiner, 1989).

1.4. Literature review

Several studies have been carried out using word walls for vocabulary acquisition. However, they focus on contexts involving young learners. Jasmine and Schiesl (2009) conducted a study examining '*The effects of word walls and word wall activities on the reading fluency of first grade students*'. This was a project designed to improve reading fluency of first grade students by investigating the use of word walls over a four-week period. It was found that word wall activities might have been one factor that strengthened high-frequency word recognition resulting in an increase of words read per minute. Renee Dastyck in her study '*How does the use of word walls in an intermediate classroom affect the spelling of students with learning disabilities?*' (2007) shows that word walls were beneficial to the students who participated in this study. The students utilised the word walls on a daily basis for writing activities and started to retain correct spellings in their long term memory. Word walls have proved to be useful by encouraging learner's active involvement in the learning process, rather than their passive reception of information (Shapiro and Kirby, 1998). The learners consciously look at the word wall for any specific word and its usage in their learning activities. Harmon, Wood, Hendrick, Vintinner, and Willeford (2009) found that word walls have the potential for enhancing vocabulary learning in seventh grade students in conjunction with other instructional methods such as flashcards, storytelling or extensive reading.

2. Methodology

The major research instruments used in this study are questionnaires and tests. Pre- and post-tests were implemented to determine if growth could be assessed (Glanz, 2003) and were summative in nature (Hendrick, 2009). The tests were specifically designed by the researcher keeping in mind the levels and backgrounds of the students. They tested certain basic vocabulary items such as synonyms, antonyms and word usage. The students marked their answers and returned the sheets. A sample question paper can be found in the appendix. These assessments were administered to determine the vocabulary level of individual learners at a specific time. The entire course of the research can be divided into three phases.

This classroom action research project employed an experimental study approach using cyclical data collection and analysis. Two classes assigned to the teacher-researcher for the academic year 2013-2014, each comprising 52 and 54 students, respectively, were chosen for carrying out this action research. One class, hereinafter referred to as Class A, was the experimental group and Class B, the control group. Both the classes had mixed and multiple-level proficiency language learners. The choice of the experimental class was therefore not based on a specific differentiating parameter. The only difference is that Class A studied Electrical and Electronic Engineering and of the 52 students of Class A 18 were girls. Class B belonged to the Mechanical Engineering stream and consisted only of boys.

In order to make sure that the respondent(s) were informed of the ethical implications of the research, an orientation lecture was given to the students seeking their agreement and clarifying any concerns during the first week of October 2013.

Phase I

A pre-study questionnaire of close-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale was administered to examine the vocabulary-enhancement strategies adopted by the learners

independently in both the experimental and control groups. The aim of this test was to

- identify the strengths and weaknesses in a learner's knowledge of the language
- have a focus on weaknesses that leads to remediation in further instruction
- enable a detailed analysis of the situation
- acquire indirect feedback to be acted upon.

The pre-test was based on the content soon-to-be covered focusing on specific elements of technical vocabulary. The researcher had prepared the content to be used for the word walls and some target words from this content were included in the pre-test.

Phase II

Cycle 1: A word wall containing 50 words and their meanings was displayed in the classroom for the experimental group. The words were chosen from the vocabulary section of the university question papers from previous years. The words were technical in nature, pertaining to science and engineering. The word wall was actually a vinyl banner of 72 by 48 inches. The control group received the same wordlist on printouts. At the end of the month, both the groups were tested.

Cycle 2, 3 and 4 were repetitions of Cycle 1. However, in Cycle 2, the parts of speech of the words were added in a column. This change was a result of the feedback and self-reflective process that followed.

Phase III

A post-test was conducted with both the groups and the scores of the previous tests in Cycle 1, 2, 3 and 4 were tabulated and analysed. A feedback questionnaire was then administered to the experimental group to find out their opinion about word walls being used for tertiary level learners.

The results of the pre-test and post-test were analysed by using a statistical technique to find the students' mean score. The data from the test were analysed in order to indicate whether or not implementing word walls assisted vocabulary

enhancement. In this research, the students' mean score of the cyclical test 1 was compared to the students' mean score of the final test to know whether there was any improvement in the students' vocabulary acquisition. The results corroborate the hypothesis of the study in a positive way and indicate the efficacy of word walls in enhancing vocabulary skills of the experimental group.

3. Data analysis

3.1. The pre-study questionnaire

The learners were in the first year and were not fully aware of the importance of vocabulary in efficient communication. For them, vocabulary skills meant knowing the meaning of a word when tested. However, they were conscious of the fact that good writing requires a considerable range of words. While some felt memorising new words was central, a majority understood mere memorising will be of little help in the long run. They have never maintained vocabulary notes and when the advantages of making notes on new words was explained, they were ready to try it out.

Though most had dictionaries, they preferred online versions, the ones on mobile phones, as they catered for ready reference. Most expressed difficulties in taking up reading habits seriously because of the hindrances caused by words they did not understand which caused them to give up reading. Some were even sceptical of how improving their vocabulary could make them communicate better. The questionnaire was a portal to understand the learner's attitude towards vocabulary and the process of acquisition.

The pre-test was helpful in understanding the levels of the vocabulary proficiency of the students. Only around six per cent of the learners were able to score above 90 per cent, the rest were above average and average learners. The learner demography scoring 50 per cent and below comprises a larger number; nearly 65 per cent of the learners fell in this category. About 36 per cent of learners needed assistance in vocabulary acquisition.

3.2. Analysis and interpretation of the cyclical and final assessments

A comparison of the final scores in the above documentation clearly substantiates the increase in proficiency of the experimental group of students who have been exposed to the word walls continually unlike the control group who were just taught the words and meanings.

As we can see in the table above, at the close of the second semester, test scores were consistently higher and a greater range of lexical acquisition was in evidence. In addition, the technical context for vocabulary discussion has been a positive choice because the learners were pursuing engineering and technology-based courses. Initially, the scores were moderate but, as the class grew used to this activity, it gained momentum. One trend that was observed was students maintaining the wordlists and using them in their writing. There was a rise of just over eight per cent in total average test scores

Pre-test scores:

Table 1: Pre-test Scores

Marks	Class A	Class B	Class A%	Class B%
40-50	3	4	5.8	7.7
30-40	9	15	17.3	28.8
20-30	12	9	23.1	17.3
Below 20	16	17	30.8	32.7
Below 10	12	9	23.1	17.3

Table 2: Assessment scores - final

Marks out of 50	Class A (52 participants)					Class B (54 participants)				
CYCLE (C)	C1	C2	C3	**C4**	**FINAL**	**C1**	**C2**	**C3**	**C4**	**FINAL**
40-50	6	6	8	11	10	5	4	5	6	7
30-40	19	21	20	20	22	14	16	11	13	16
20-30	15	16	19	18	16	8	7	8	9	12
10 TO 20	9	7	5	2	2	15	16	18	16	11
BELOW 10	3	2	0	1	2	12	11	12	10	8

Table 3: Assessment scores (per cent)

Marks out of 50	Class A (n=52)					Class B (n=54)				
CYCLE (C)	C1	C2	C3	C4	FINAL	C1	C2	C3	C4	FINAL
40-50	11.5	11.5	15.4	21.2	19.2	9.6	7.7	9.6	11.5	13.5
30-40	36.5	40.4	38.5	38.5	42.3	26.9	30.8	21.2	25.0	30.8
20-30	28.8	30.8	36.5	34.6	30.8	15.4	13.5	15.4	17.3	23.1
10 - 20	17.3	13.5	9.6	3.8	3.8	28.8	30.8	34.6	30.8	21.2
BELOW 10	5.8	3.8	0.0	1.9	3.8	23.1	21.2	23.1	19.2	15.4

over the period, although the last test showed an overall dip of 0.8 per cent. This was probably due to the general fatigue that can set in towards the end of an academic year, and might suggest that the improvement over the course of the experiment might have been slightly more than is apparent from the results. While familiarity with the test format might account for some of the improvement, this would only be minor. Other elements, such as the increased number of attempts at modifying lexemes, indicate that a genuine improvement in understanding is taking place. In addition, a significantly greater than five per cent development in the grammatically correct usage of vocabulary items in the appropriate context shows that words were not only being retained, but placed within an overall appropriate contextual framework.

The final test was conducted as the concluding event of the whole project. It was again a vocabulary test from wordlists that the learners were already familiar with that were displayed on the word walls. Both the experimental and the control group took the test and the scores were analysed after tabulation.

The feedback questionnaire materialised out of informal discussions with the experimental group who offered a few key insights worth documenting. It contained ten close-ended questions with participants having to mark on a five point Likert scale regarding their experiences of learning vocabulary using word walls for the entire period of the project. The questions were based on aspects of learning words using the word wall and how the experimental group benefitted from it. The word walls were installed in the classroom for a period of four months during which the students were constantly in contact with the words. With every month, a new word wall being installed, students had the opportunity to acquire and retain many words. Students quizzed each other and self-checked themselves not just on the meanings but also on the spellings, word forms and pronunciation.

In an otherwise paper-based and discussion-oriented teaching of vocabulary, the word walls were to an extent imposing and learners were

psychologically induced into a frame of mind where they thought learning these words became important and was expected of them as part of their curriculum.

3.3. Challenges and limitations

The sample word bank which the students get exposed to is limited in number though word association is taught to Class A. Constraints of time, changes in time-tables, class allotment to other apparently core subjects also hindered certain procedures. Student absenteeism, rescheduling time-frameworks, classroom shifting were other inconveniences. Given the major challenges faced as mentioned it would not be reasonable to expect everything to turn out perfectly. However, a few points on matters for reflection and further development have been identified. Infrastructural issues facilitating the installation of extra white-boards at least in every floor of the building if not in every classroom has been recommended to the management to be used as word walls. The printing costs of the vinyl-banners proved to be expensive and an alternative strategy has to be identified.

4. Conclusion

The results indicate that there was a gradual movement from a less effective learner-reliant model to a more effective combined teacher-directed and learner-centred one. With regards to student attainment and performance, the sources of evidence have helped in understanding the efficacy of the project: first, detailed observation and analysis of what students were able to do in class, second, analysis of their performance in special in-college tasks and third, their performance in international external language examinations like BEC (Business English Certification). Taking all of this together, it is strongly believed that positive implications are emergent and a majority of the students have gained much from such focused vocabulary enhancement strategies, especially ones such as the word walls which by their very presence can bring about an interest in learning words.

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Appendix 1: Pre-study questionnaire

Put a tick mark in the appropriate column

1=Strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=uncertain, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Knowing new words is important to achieve language proficiency					
2	I spend a few minutes every day learning new words					
3	I prefer memorising wordlists to enhance my vocabulary					
4	Repetition is the best way to remember words					
5	It is necessary only to remember one dictionary definition					
6	I use an English dictionary					
7	I analyse the word structure (prefix, root and suffix) when guessing the meaning of the word)					
8	I look at the part of speech of the new word (to guess the meaning of the new word					
9	I make use of my knowledge of the topic to guess the meaning of word					
10	I know what clues I should use in guessing the meaning of a particular word					
11	I make a note of words that seem important to me					
12	I look up words that I'm interested in					
13	I know which words are important for me to learn					
14	I only focus on things that are related to examinations					
15	I try to find out all I can about the new words I learn					
16	I can identify the meaning of most words through reading					
17	I think about my progress in vocabulary learning					
18	When I learn the word I pay close attention to its new usage and new meaning					
19	I use the words I have learned					
20	I can acquire a large vocabulary by memorising individual words					
21	Guessing words in context is one of the best ways to learn vocabulary					
22	I revise the new words I have learned					
23	I learn new words only in my class from my teacher					
24	I learn new words from reading English materials (e.g. newspaper, novels etc.)					
25	I use the dictionary to find only the meaning of the word					

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Appendix 2: Sample Question Paper

Match the appropriate meanings (10 marks)

consolidate	make sure that something is followed
diagnostic	crisis
revolutionary	deciding from symptoms
enforce	make whole
priming	thing or part added to improve
indispensable	preparing
supplement	consider beforehand
anticipate	necessary
augment	entirely new
cataclysm	increase

Choose the best synonym (10 marks)

1. Some believe that the open source era is coming to _____. = Some believe that the open source era is about to end.

an end / an ending / a finish

2. Her programming skills are top-_____. = She has great programming skills.

heavy / notch / hat

3. We've witnessed some _____ technological progress. = We've witnessed some incredible technological progress.

reproachable / ravishing / remarkable

4. This software is full of _____ . = This software is faulty; it has defects.

bugs / insects / headaches

5. I've programmed many sites. = I've _____ many sites.

codified /   give code to / coded

6. It seems there has been a bit of a _____. = We didn't properly communicate our needs to each other.

misinformation /   miscommunication / mist

7. Their website became really _____. = Their website really took off.

useless /   unique / successful

8. It's a _____ problem. = It's a problem that happens over and over.

reticent /   recurrent / stagnant

9. You can use this widget on more than one website. = You can use this widget on _____ websites.

multi-level /   multiple /   multiplied

10. This solution is alright, but it's not the best (one). = This solution is adequate, but it's not _____.

optical /   optimistic / optimal

Match each word in the table below to an antonym 1 to 10. (10 marks)

termination	transparent	calm	neglect
buoyant	industrious	acquired	genuine
link	fortune	tasty	excellent

1. idle _____

2. inborn _____

3. cherish _____

4. fake _____

5. inception _____

6. break _____

7. melancholy _____

8. opaque _____

9. calamity _____

10. boisterous _____

Make sentences with the words that follow. (10 marks)

parameter	resonance
hypothesis	preceding
bias	cursory
latent	diminished
rational	ambiguity

Appendix 3: Feedback Questionnaire

Put a tick in the appropriate column

1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Disagree and 5=Strongly disagree

		1	2	3	4	5
1	Knowing new words gives me more confidence					
2	Repeated learning and testing of the words is useful to memorise word meanings					
3	Learning new words using word walls was different from the usual methods					
4	The word wall has helped in spelling the learned words correctly					
5	I took note of the wordlists in my notebook					
6	Word walls have created an interest in learning new words					
7	The words used in the word wall are now part of my vocabulary					
8	The word wall has helped in scoring better in academic tests					
9	I used the word wall to quiz my classmate on the words					
10	Word walls are an effective medium to learn new words					

2

Supporting language learning through a library programme

Sujata Noronha

This study describes how a small sample of children who access a mobile library programme in an under-resourced housing community were closely investigated to capture how they use and respond to stories in ways that enabled them to strengthen their own language production. A set of activities enabled the study to reveal that certain stories appear to trigger more authentic responses which stimulate more vigorous use of vocabulary and stretch language production.

1. Introduction

Multilingual speakers bring a wide range of life experiences, educational experiences and academic backgrounds to a learning space. They represent a variety of socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. In an English learning environment, these speakers need to acquire both the content knowledge and the competence (often written and oral) simultaneously. Since this is developmentally difficult, multilingual speakers tend to lag behind in their acquisition of English and fare poorly on English language tests that are designed by English language speakers for English speaking populations.

In this study, a process of an alternate assessment for English language learners in a library program was used to measure children's language growth

and also understand if there are certain kinds of books that trigger more expressive engagement than others and if these kinds of texts can be used more extensively in language learning programs.

2. Literature review

The theoretical understanding that underlies literacy practices is closely linked to a socio-cultural theory of literacy (Gee, 2001), the role of the narrative in developing the mind (Bruner, 1986) and the Balanced Literacy Approach (Honig, 1996). The concept of language and literacy as a social practice is fundamental to this study area. It is through texts that people express and share the vitality of cultures and communities; tell the stories of cultures; contribute to the shaping of personal, group and national identities; explore ideas and feelings that invite reflection on knowledge, values and practices; promote shared cultural understandings and actively participate in communities. It is through shared socio-cultural spaces that individuals come to know. Language is central to all these cultural explorations.

Modern study of intellectual development has shown that children's minds do not grow passively, but rather they grow by acting on the world and learning from what happens. The concept of passive reception of knowledge is

now firmly outdated. So while active discovery is a cornerstone of learning, there is also the need to articulate that this learning is best in social situations. Stories play a vital role in the socio-cultural space of a learning context where children may make meaning from stories the same way they take meaning from life.

Encouraging language development in a second/foreign language involves facilitating young learners' ability to navigate increasingly more complex linguistic designs and contexts (Myers, 1996). Research by Nancy Hornberger (1994) concludes that a well-constructed foreign/second language curriculum should influence literacy skills in both the first and second language and provide an enthusiastic venue for language learning.

Research on the characteristics of a learning context that promotes literacy in children highlights the importance of purposeful classroom language. Judith Schwartz (1988) suggests that literacy means an environment rich in meaningful language experiences and driven by a philosophy of learning to read and write by reading and writing and where both activities are an integral part of the learning curriculum.

The integration of all four modes of language assures the development of comprehensive language skills in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A focus on meaning, with attention both to what students bring to a text and what they get from it, and an emphasis on reading and writing as thinking processes that require the same kind of problem-solving skills as those required outside the classroom, provide for the effective correlation of linguistic and cognitive development. This critical understanding underlies the study's implementation and it is the benchmark of the library programme design referred to in this study.

Furthermore, research indicates that an exploration of literature in groups facilitates language learning and fosters more engaged readers and language learners. Reader response (Rosenblatt, 1976) is therefore a strong component of the approach to this study and the practice of strengthening language learning through discussions and book talk.

The Balanced Literacy approach is a philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support multiple environments by using various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). Balanced Literacy programmes include community, home and library involvement as well as structured classroom plans and use of activities such as read-alouds, guided reading, shared reading and independent reading and writing (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). Throughout the design of the library programme, the philosophy of a Balanced Literacy approach is a guiding principle.

The study builds from the reality that understanding that negotiating the symbol system for decoding and comprehension is a barrier to reading literature. The target group that the study worked with are children in difficult environments, marginalised by social, economic, linguistic and physical factors – the library programme is one that recognises these complexities and has refined and developed an approach of reading aloud to build on listening comprehension, vocabulary enrichment, listening to whole language, making meaning of texts, connecting with themes and experiences and relationships with books.

3. Methodology

This was an intervention study that aimed to understand the influence of various dimensions of a library programme on the English Language Learning (ELL) of multilingual learners. The main question measured the effect book choice had on student's expressive language and engagement with content in the target language (English). The study also explored the various approaches one can consider critical to assessment when working with multilingual diverse communities of learners. English language teaching was couched within a library–literacy after school programme in outreach multilingual sites around Panjim, Goa, India.

To understand the broad question of how a library programme can support ELL, some supporting questions were also raised:

- what is the nature of the learning environment of such a programme?

- what are the key literacy- language activities and underlying principles of a programme like this?

- what are the tipping points that seem to trigger language learning (L, S, R, W) in a library programme?

- what are some of the alternative approaches to assessment that can be used to measure language learning in a multilingual context?

3.1. Time frame

The entire study design, implementation and analysis was spread over 14 months. The field data collection was over a period of 16 weeks. Students typically were exposed to one session per week in the programme design.

3.2. Sample

The study focused on Grade 3 to Grade 5 children between the ages of nine to eleven across four sites. All participants voluntarily come to the library sessions (Mobile Outreach Programme - MOP) and attend the weekly sessions. All participants belong to marginalised groups but are highly motivated to read and learn and acquire English proficiency skills. The students for the sample were selected based on a three step process:
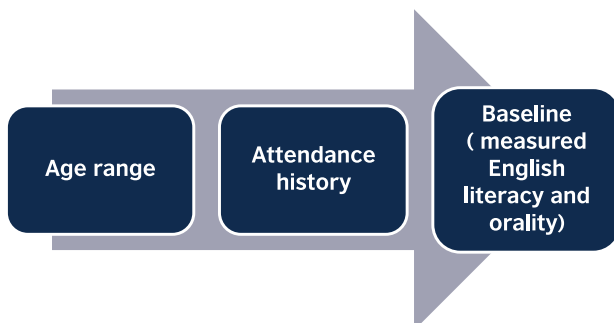
The result of the process was a small sample of three children chosen as 'target' children in each of four sites resulting in a total sample of 12.
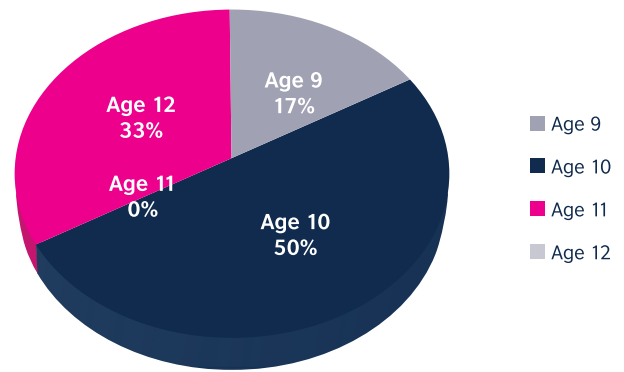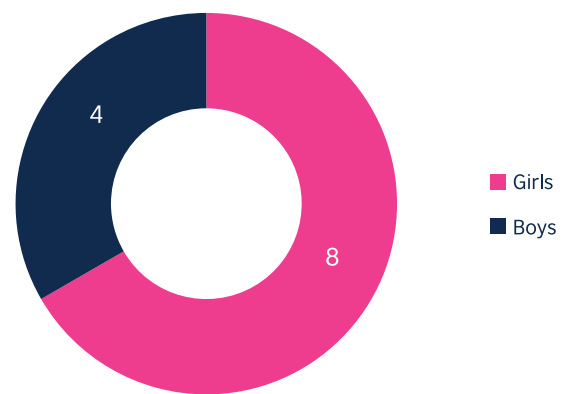

Figure 1: Age of sample (n=12)

Figure 2: Male/female distribution of target children (n=12)

3.3. Ethics

Once students were identified, they were orally informed about being part of a study that would require attendance, cooperation, and participation in the activities of the programme. While this might appear to be a limitation to the positivist researcher, it is interesting to note that children in an informal safe environment with familiar secure facilitators quickly forget that they are the 'objects' of study. Throughout the study period no child was singled out or made to feel different. Recordings and observations were an integral part of the programme design and therefore did not seem out of place, leading to a sense that students were natural in their performance and output.

3.4 Limitations

The study was severely limited by its own tight time frame, the complexity of the dimensions that were being examined and recorded and the

multiple threads of assessment that could not be woven into a systematic whole.

3.5 Method

The study followed a mixed method approach of using both quantitative data (in the form of attendance, rubrics for evaluation and book record numbers) as well as qualitative methods of participant observation, thick notes and observations of target students in order to arrive at tentative conclusions about library programme design features and about texts that can prove to be powerful learning tools for language learning.

The study recognises that reading is a complex interactive process. Interactions in the library programme were not only between the reader, the text and a given context but also between the mental processes involved in comprehension (O' Malley and Valdez Pierce 1996). These range from the decoding of words on printed pages to making use of prior knowledge and making inference and evaluating what is read. The study chose to use alternative assessment modes to measure students' English language learning, believing they provide a more complete picture of what students can and cannot do. Empirical findings in multiple studies have indicated that

Table 1: tools

Tool	Modes of Alternative Assessment	Explanations
Numeric record	Attendance	Presence and sustained attention for the duration of the session attended.
Rubric	Oral expression in English	Using a rubric to measure quality and proficiency levels of spoken English in every session.
Numeric and genre/level record	Book lending and borrowing records	To assess if engagement and diversity in type and level of book showed any link with quality of interaction and language learning.
Checklist	Self-assessment about reading proficiency	To ascertain how students view themselves as English language learners.
Physical samples/ observation sheets	Opportunity to show and practise comprehension and knowledge in non-language dependent ways	Drawings, diagrams (Venn/charts), mind maps, sequencing activities
Observation sheets	Participation in non-threatening situations that encourage experimentation with target languages	Word and sentence games, dumb charades, skits and mimes are all part of the story programme that encourage participation in non-threatening ways
Students writing samples, running records	Language experience approach for assessment	The language experience approach is a significant aspect of the programme design and using this content for assessment of fluency and reading accuracy provides a rich alternate assessment approach to ELL
Observation sheets	Responses in native/home language	Assessment measures captured comprehension, separate from expression and students were encouraged to demonstrate understanding or prior knowledge in their home/ native language
Design and feedback	Collaborative assessments	Used for whole group feedback and design

alternative assessments are fairer to English language learners and provide teachers with more direction on what they need to do for their students. (O'Malley and Valdez Pierce 1996).

Ehler-Zavala (2002) found that alternative assessments allow teachers to assess English language learners' literacy in naturally occurring situations and document students' progress more thoroughly and progressively. The study thus

used the following tools to measure students' engagement and language learning.

4. The library programme

MOP provides a library experience for children who would not have access to a library – literacy programme of this kind. The programme is a weekly after school intervention within the community space and is open access.

What makes language very easy or very hard? *(From Goodman, 1986):*[1]

It's easy when ...	It's hard when ...
It's real and natural.	It's artificial.
It's whole.	It's broken into bits and pieces.
It's sensible.	It's nonsense.
It's interesting	It's dull and uninteresting.
It's relevant.	It's irrelevant to the learner.
It belongs to the learner.	It belongs to somebody else.
It's part of a real event.	It's out of context
It has social utility.	It has no social value.
It has purpose for the learner.	It has no discernable purpose.
The learner chooses to use it.	It's imposed by someone else.
It's accessible to the learner.	It's inaccessible.
The learner has power to use it.	The learner is powerless.

Table 2: topics and indicators

	Topic	Language Indicator	Time
Book Lending and Returns	Greeting/conversation	Oral language	5 mins
	Book browsing	Relationship with print	15 mins
	Independent reading	Reading support	10 mins
	Song/poem	Oral languages	10 mins
	Game	Building context	5 mins
	Pre-story discussion	Oral language	5 mins
	Story Read-Aloud	Listening	20-30 mins
	Post-story discussion	Oral language	5 mins
	Extension activity	Relationship with print	15 mins

[1] What makes language very easy or very hard? (From Goodman, 1986)

The guiding theoretical principle behind MOP resides in the understanding that language is acquired as a whole and is contextual. The programme therefore keeps language whole and involves participants in using it functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs (Goodman, 1986). As Goodman argues, teachers ought to invite their learners to *use* the language and get them to talk about things they need to understand. It is necessary to show learners that it is okay to ask questions and ask them to write about their personal experiences. Language learners should be encouraged to not only read for information, but to simply enjoy a good story. These principles tie into a child's natural language acquisition, so learning becomes meaningful.

Story books are used as learning aids. Based on these guiding principles the MOP sessions are designed to include language experiences and opportunities that support this philosophy. Each session of the programme is captured in the following table.

All aspects of the programme are heavily supported with talk, conducted in an open access, cooperative and collaborative environment in the library space.

4.1. About the community and location

Unlike larger Indian states, Goa a relatively small state, is marked by a sense of prosperity. This does not hold true for the migrant population that constitute the working class and the backbone of the state's development and infrastructure work. The urban poor are marked by significant aspects of marginalisation.

At the top is the effect of economic marginalisation together with issues of 'belonging' closely linked to language. By virtue of being migrant there is a significant pull and push that does not allow the child of non-Goan ethnicity to truly integrate into the social community, either in school or at home.

All the MOP children live in 'ghettos'. Profile data indicates that children from one community/ region/religion/ linguistic group cluster together

in their bid to make their way in life. This has an impact on admissions and attendance at MOP sessions as the children come and go in groups. It also leads to divides between children and the larger community that they integrate with in school. Linguistic marginalisation is further compounded by the medium of instruction issues in Goa that offers early elementary grades (1-4) education in either Konkani, Marathi or English and upper elementary grades in Marathi or English. The tenth board and beyond is only offered in English in the state.

None of the children's home languages in this study match the school language. There are however some positive indicators that enable healthy learning.

Enrolment: 99 per cent of the children enrolled in the MOP programme are school goers. 100 per cent of them are first generation schools goers.

High motivation to learn: socio-economic conditions compel parents to have high aspirations for their children through the means of education. Retention within the school system is fairly high, at least until the age of 14 years.

English in the environment: The linguistic atmosphere in Goa is peppered with English. Environment print, signs, hearing the language spoken in society, having teachers with a fair degree of fluency in English and music and other cultural markers of 'English' provide a good framework from which to introduce a more formal programme for English language learning.

4.2 Nature of the MOP intervention

The library experience sessions are the first enablers in supporting language learning. The intent is that children must acquire discourse strategies that enable them to begin to make meaning from language as an active process.

It has long been established that the stories shape who we are, give body to experiences and take us beyond the confines of everyday life – into the past, the future and what might be. Literacy we know is both socially constructed and a symbolic

sequential system of narration and the story is the best fit to be a vehicle for enabling language learning.

4.2.1. Greetings
Part of the discourse in learning a new language is the natural way in which people greet each other and this is manifested in the steady greetings of '*good evening*', '*how are you?*', '*where were you last session?*', '*I am fine, thank you*' and the like. Social situations require that an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance be first established. This is ensured by greeting words and gestures and welcoming children by name as they enter the library space. Brief interactions are conducted subtly to ensure that each child who comes to the session feels welcome as well as being acknowledged as a member of the library session.

This is also the time that some intimate sharing in the non-target language often allows insights into the world of the child. Someone might tell us about a death in the community, or a new baby being born or an upcoming festival. We talk about these issues or even more mundane ones like someone stealing sweets from the shop, a visit from the local police, the large effigy that is being constructed and the donations that the children are trying to collect.

It is during these interactions that target students' oral expression was recorded systematically over time. A brief analysis demonstrates that as students share their world experiences code switching which is typical of bilinguals (Baker 2001) is very frequent. All conversations begin in English and rapidly move to the native or home language as the content of the narration gets more intense and personal. We have observed that code switching occurs when a child does not know the target word in English, for example 'Ma'am *Haresh is giving me **dhamkhi**',* or when the pace and telling are fast and recall of words in the 'foreign' language slows down the narration.

4.2.2. Self-assessments
We use book behaviours as proxy indicators of fostering relationships with books. We have however observed over the course of this close

supervision of the project that school events have a great impact on book borrowing. There was a severe drop in lending during school term exams despite continued engagement during the sessions.

A simple reading self-assessment checklist was administered to get a sense of how children feel about themselves as readers. Results showed that children's assessments of self as readers mapped onto the general assessment of the programme evaluation.

Besides this, we used other self-assessments, believing they convey the message that students are in control of their own learning and the assessment of that learning. Every Read-Aloud/ library session has a segment of time devoted to connections. Drawing on the connections chart prescribed by Lenski-Ehlers and Zavala, 2004, we use oral and written prompts to engage students in making connections through prediction points, eliciting prior knowledge, reflecting on experience and making connections with other texts. Analysis of the responses has shown that students grow in confidence in sharing their knowledge of the world and make attempts to keep the discourse in English if the facilitator is focused on this aspect.

4.2.3. Independent reading
As the entry into the session is free and open, children come in small groups and stagger in for the first 20 odd minutes. This provides the Resource team with a good adult/child ratio for independent reading time. Children choose a book and read with an adult. Often two children may read at the same time making complex demands on the adult. When a child is reading aloud there is a natural inclusion of younger children who lean in to listen, follow the text and visual cues and in a sense have additional read aloud opportunities from one of their own peers.

We observed that children rarely choose texts that are too difficult and it therefore becomes a predictor of the level at which the child places himself/herself. The onus is upon the facilitator to match the texts and reading level and gently nudge or recommend different book choices. This is not often successful as children who are

just beginning to see themselves as 'readers' and want to be validated as such will choose texts that are very familiar, thoroughly understood and also much loved after repeated readings.

A student who would repeatedly bring *Night* by Junuka Despande to read responded to the query of how many times have you read this book, with '*hmmmm das baar, nahi nahi, teacher ne bhe pehle sunaya, tho 11 baar, nahi, meine teen baar yehi book ghar le chale to 14 baar*!' / 'hmm, maybe ten times, no 11 times, wait I have taken this book home three times, so 14 times!'.

4.2.4. Game / song
Every session has a game and song component that allows children to enter the context of the story, immerse themselves in the theme and become familiar with new vocabulary, concepts and ideas that might be present in the story. The game and song have become strong catalysts for prediction. We have found this a very useful mode to the story theme and context and to activating prior knowledge.

4.2.5. Read-Aloud
It has been proposed that reading aloud exposes children to the written language register and subsequently to the complex syntax elements found in written language (Bus, van IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini, 1995).

Stories with varying lengths of complexity/ dimensions/themes are read aloud by the facilitator based on carefully prepared lesson plans.

Books to be read aloud are chosen based on themes and book types are varied to allow children multiple language experiences and dimensions to think, reflect and grow their own understanding of themselves and the world.

An analysis of responses based on the Read-Aloud varieties have indicated that children produce much longer and richer expressions when the story theme is about relationships. Thus stories that trigger responses from the children's own worlds seem to be much more powerful as a stimulus for expression and sharing than stories that are more remote or have abstract themes.

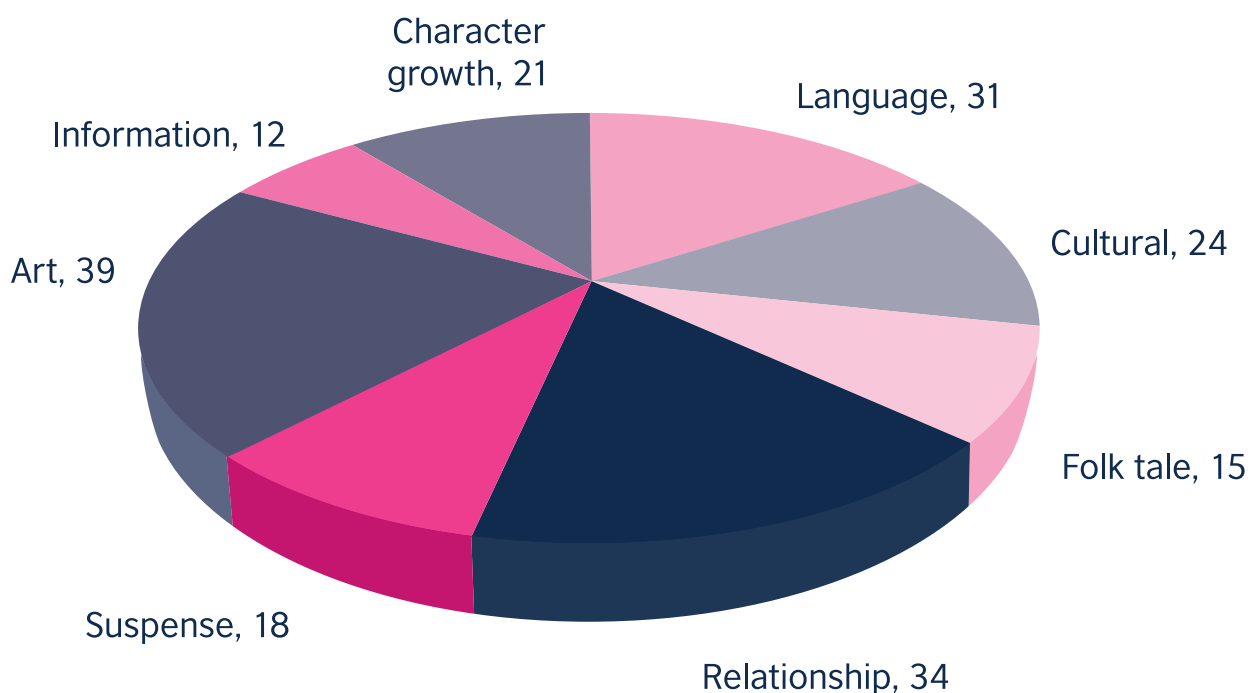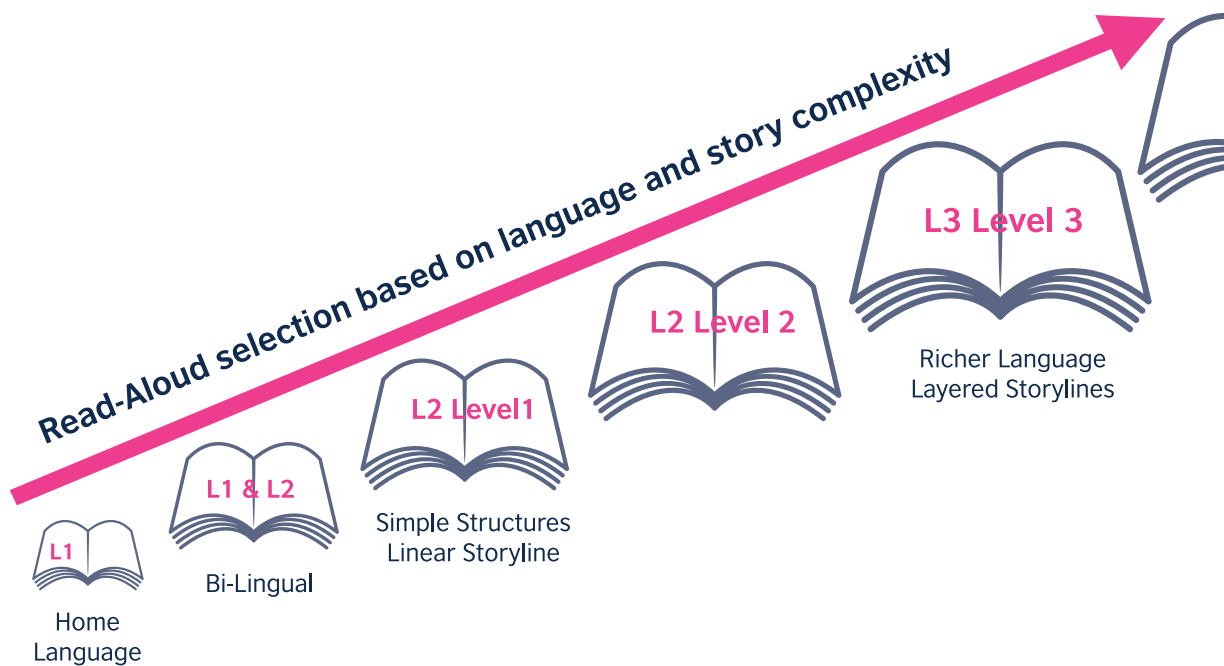The types of books read aloud are also varied. At the start of the programme books are introduced

Character growth, 21
Language, 31
Information, 12
Cultural, 24
Art, 39
Folk tale, 15
Suspense, 18
Relationship, 34

Figure 3: Book type for Read-Aloud selection

Read-Aloud selection based on language and story complexity

L3 Level 3
Richer Language
Layered Storylines

L2 Level 2

L2 Level1
Simple Structures
Linear Storyline

L1 & L2
Bi-Lingual

L1
Home
Language

based on the profile of the children and the present levels of listening comprehension in the target language (L2).

Book choices for Read-Aloud are broadly introduced in the programme in the following order:

The records of students' spoken language during focused Read-Aloud time have demonstrated that certain books seem to evoke stronger responses than others. Encouraging all students to respond to books and recording these responses orally or in writing has demonstrated that in a shared space and an intimate programme such as MOP, themes around human experience of death, moral choices, anger, sibling rivalry and economic hardships have all produced intense and animated sharing. Information based books however, tend to be accepted more passively, students appear to become concerned with the academic content and delivery of the information
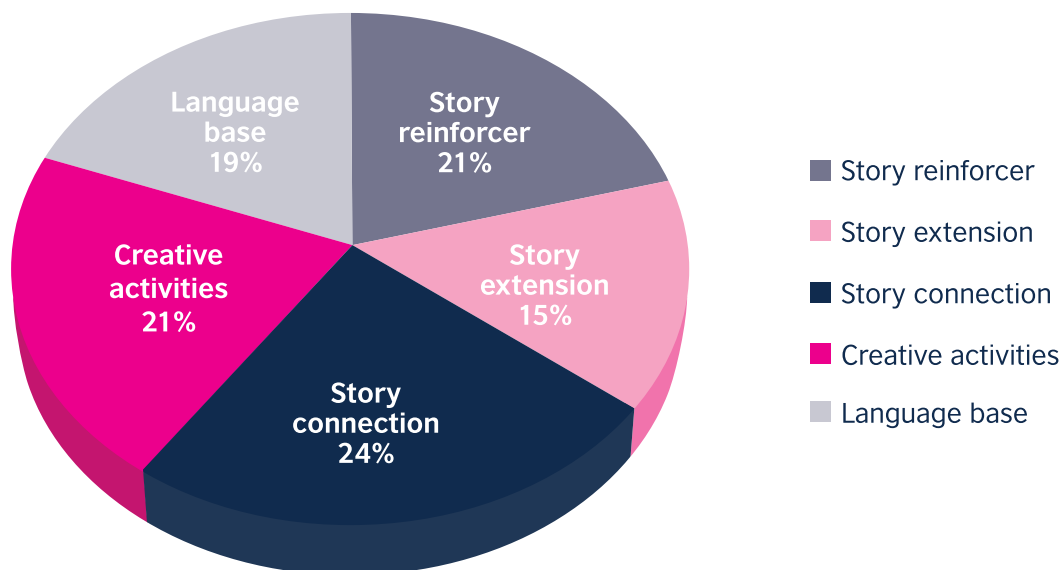

Story reinforcer 21%
Story extension 15%
Story connection 24%
Creative activities 21%
Language base 19%

- Story reinforcer
- Story extension
- Story connection
- Creative activities
- Language base

Figure 4: Extension Activity Type

4.2.6. Extension activity

Various kinds of extension activities are undertaken based on the story and the target learning outcome desired.

Story reinforcer activity

These activities were most embraced because they were familiar from school textbook based exercises. Questions and multiple choice activities that allowed the reader/listener to demonstrate comprehension was the objective in this type of activity. Great learning and motivation came from the 1:1 conferencing during correction time that afforded children the opportunity to understand where they made errors and made us realise that often in large classroom situations students do not know where they go wrong. The work often resulted in higher motivation because of the 1:1 attention and feedback given to children during 'paper correction.' It reminded us that often learners do not know where their errors lie and these mini-conferences helped greatly and increased motivation to work with texts.

Story extension activity

These activities are intended to allow the reader/listener to take the story forward, alter the character actions, and end the story differently. These activities enabled free writing opportunities and allowed children to 'show off' their ideas in written language.

Story connection

Activities that connect with stories are intended for the reader/ listener to make authentic connections with text. Responding to the story from a personal space has been found to be the most powerful trigger for expression. We found that when the story world entered the personal world, sharing was more vivid and authentic.

Creative activities

One of the most powerful outcomes of illustrated stories and picture books is the link with visual arts. This has strong connections with creativity and language and one dimension of post story Read-Alouds is to provide participants this opportunity to connect art and craft activities linked to the story.

Language based activities

These activities build on the language of the story. They focus more on the decoding component of the text and may include word work and language structure work.

5. Analysis of MOP strategies on language learning

In this section, an attempt is made to analyse the effects of MOP design and specific intervention strategies on language learning.

Language learning has been analysed on the basis of:
- listening comprehension (captured in the Read- Aloud milestones)

- writing work (captured in the writing progressive scale)

- reading ability (captured in the Running Record observation)

- interest and motivation with print (captured through lending records).

5.1. Listening comprehension: milestones for Read-Aloud

Since the reading of carefully chosen stories aloud is a significant part of the design of the programme and is indicative of participants' listening comprehension, vocabulary growth, creative thinking, general cognition, story grammar, etc. 'The single most important activity for building knowledge for their eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children' (Becoming a Nation of Readers, a 1985 report by the Commission on Reading, USA).

In order to track and monitor participants' behaviour and manifestations of listening and learning through story Read-Alouds, a set of milestones have been developed. These milestones have been broadly categorised into three parts based on Bloom's Taxonomy of thinking and are: (Figure 5)

Our analysis evidenced that older children (11 years+) seem to do better on the milestones and this can be due to cognitive age level, number of years in the 'literacy' circle from years of

Read-Aloud Milestones

1 **2** **3**

1
- Motivation to attend session
- Attention during read aloud
- Following the story through the pictures
- Responds to explicit questions
- Understands concept of print
- Can predict before reading based on prior knowledge and experience

2
- Following the story through pictures and text
- Responds to implicit questions
- Makes Test to life connection
- Can identify author, illustrator
- Can Infer from text
- Character descriptions
- Can compare and contrast character
- Requests for Read Aloud time

3
- Following the story through the text experience
- Asks questions as a reader
- Makes Text to text connections
- Can identify story grammar
- Can evaluate character motivations
- Can predict text during story sessions
- Can state a story preference
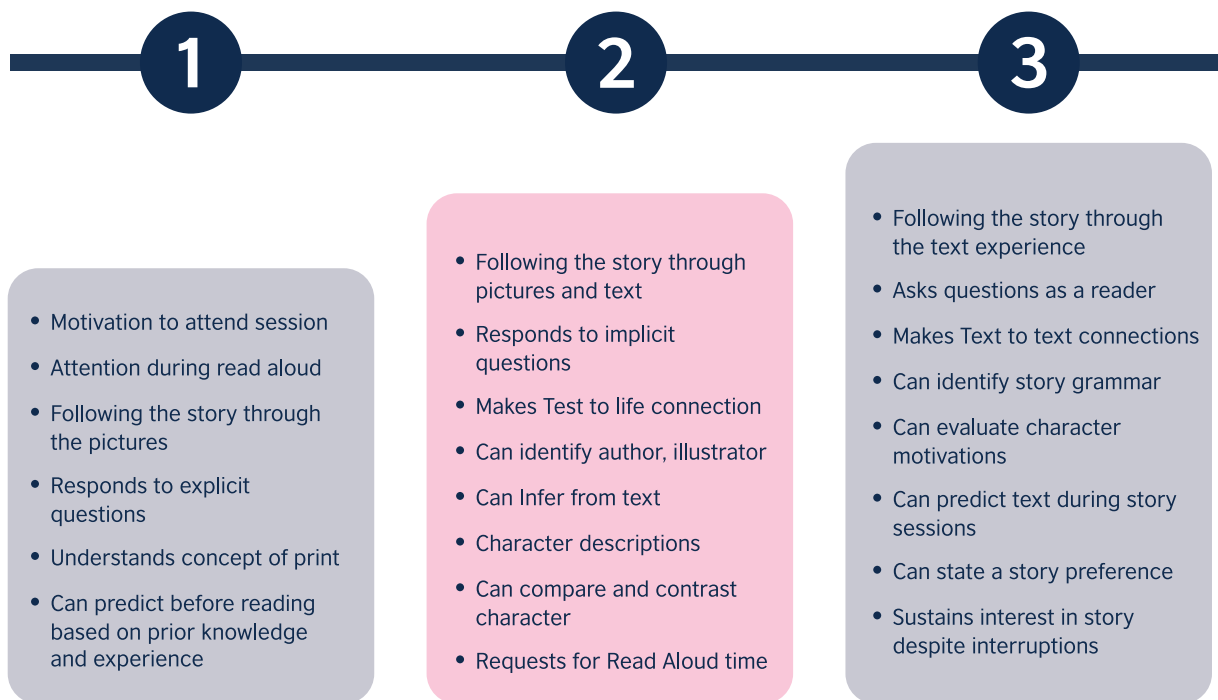- Sustains interest in story despite interruptions

Figure 5: Analysis of target children on the Read-Aloud milestones

schooling or they are at a critical age when they jump start through milestones faster. This will be an important growth area for the programme to create a baseline indicator across ages and then monitor the track record of children taking into account the number of Read-Aloud sessions attended.

5.2. Assessment of written language production

Analysis of responses to written extension activities was attempted based on a simple scale that progressed from drawing to independent writing. We have taken into account that writing in L2 means *independent* writing and copy writing is not accounted for at all. Providing scaffolds through spellings, through copy writing requested words, and through indicating sentence structures in books are all accepted practices of the writing component of the programme.

What we learnt is that stories that triggered higher personal engagement also triggered larger quantities of expressive writing.

5.3. Analysis of reading levels

A Running Record of children's reading was maintained. Both expository and narrative texts were administered separately. No difference of any great significance was recorded. However in the last few weeks of the intervention, using the philosophy of the Language Experience approach to reading, students reading accuracy was measured on pieces of writing that they had produced, and results indicated that students had much higher reading accuracy and fluency scores than on 'unseen' disconnected pieces of text that were artificially introduced. This can have a significant bearing on further research and intervention exercises to build fluency and reading proficiency.

However, it must be noted that not a single child was reading at grade level, in fact all the children were reading at least three levels, if not more, lower than where they should be but their motivation was high, reminding us that we are failing to provide children with adequate literacy instruction in the school system.

5.4. Interest and motivation with print

Besides engagement with the sessions, we tracked children's borrowing patterns and nature of books lent. A number of the older children do not borrow books from the programme as there is no 'time' to read between school and tuition. This also indicates that they are still not 'hooked' to books as independent readers but continue to derive benefits and advantages from the MOP session at a level of interaction with high levels of participation.

No children are reading books at their chronological age level. There is a distinct variation in how children select books. Since the immersion into a library programme is still relatively new to the children, book choices are still based on 'novelty' value and a book that beeps, sounds and has tabs and pulls is still highly attractive. A more thorough analysis of what influences book choice and how book choices and independent reading impact on language learning are areas for further research.

6. Summary and conclusions

The most striking finding at the end of a year of careful observation and analysis is the change process that the MOP programme design appears to have induced. Change in behaviour indicates a change in thinking and this is most evident at all MOP sessions. Children are eager, motivated, keen to participate and critical about various aspects of the library programme. This has led to many rounds of discussions that have informed book selection, choice of book extension activities, issues to be raised around a text and criteria for evaluation and further programming. Key lessons from the study are grouped in this section.

6.1. Literature socialisation

Knowledge about story forms, prototypical endings and predictive responses all come from being familiar with the form and the genre. Numerous studies have indicated that children living in literacy rich environments are able to use these forms as early as three years (Cooke-Gumperz, 1992). However other studies (Heath, 1982, Wells, 1985) have shown great variation in quantity and form of the oral/literate language

environment of children from low income homes. Thus, there is an imbalance in forms of literacy that all children are exposed to and the struggle to acquire a new language needs to be understood against this background of diversity.

Studies by Purcell Gates and others have long demonstrated that early book exposure, book reading experience and engagement with print have a positive impact on the literacy and language learning of children.

6.2. Reader response

We have found that when the facilitator becomes part of the reading community, as in the case of the MOP programme, students become involved in genuine enquiry, eager to learn, share and discuss aspects of the text that either connect with their experiences or with other texts. This process of assisting students in negotiating the relations between the experience and their reflection on the experience greatly helps comprehension and language development and also strengthens relationships with books that foster further language and literacy goals.

6.3. Transactional view

We know that students bring unique and diverse language histories to a learning space, they all have the same intellectual potential to learn (Whitmore and Goodman, 1995). The process of teaching and learning and the modes of assessment for both design and evaluation must value the learner and must help individuals reach their potential. We also conclude that when working with multilingual learners from diverse contexts, the need is to consider alternate approaches to assessment.

Conclusion

The ELTReP grant was a unique opportunity to attempt various modes of assessment and record keeping in an attempt to understand what dimensions of language teaching and intervention should be accommodated in a library programme assessment. There are multiple areas of further study and engagement that will accrue from this brief exploration.

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3

Teaching lexis to young learners through comics

M Vijaya Lakshmi

This paper reports an experiment conducted to investigate the efficacy of the Lexical Approach (LA) in language teaching. This one-year project proposes the Lexical Approach as a viable model to teach lexis to young learners.

1. Background to the project

1.1. Approaches to teaching vocabulary

Vocabulary instruction did not receive enough attention in second language teaching/learning until recent years. Before the 1970s, there was not much concentration on vocabulary teaching and learning. In addition to this, vocabulary was often taught with grammar or other skills (Nunan:1991). Linguists at that time supported the dichotomy of grammar and vocabulary with the former category consisting of structures and the latter consisting of single words. Moreover, grammar was accorded first priority while vocabulary was given secondary importance. Linguists were preoccupied with the teaching of grammar and adopted a view that vocabulary was subservient to grammar. Furthermore, they strongly believed that vocabulary should be taught only after mastering the grammatical structures of a language (Hameed: 2008).

However, after the 1970s, vocabulary teaching and learning received much more attention.

A number of linguists strove to propagate the centrality of vocabulary in language learning. Wilkins felt that 'with grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed' (1992:11). Sinclair (1995) also agrees with Wilkins' view and points out 'a lexical mistake often causes misunderstanding, while a grammar mistake rarely does' (cited in Lewis, 1997:16). At the same time, corpus-based studies gave new impetus to vocabulary learning. Those studies also revealed the widespread occurrence of multi-word chunks in native speakers' language. So a majority of linguists departed from the Chomskyan theory of language that believed in the innate ability of a native speaker to create limitless utterances. Instead, they upheld a new theory of language, the Lexical Approach, propounded by Michael Lewis in 1993, argued that native speakers have a vast stock of prefabricated items which are vital for fluent production of a language.

Lewis came up with the Lexical Approach suggesting that:

> *the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, function, notions, or some other unit of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, word and word combinations.*
>
> (Richards and Rodgers 2001:132)

Lewis was also the first to popularize the idea that 'language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar' (1993, p.34).

In his book *Implementing the Lexical Approach: Putting theory into Practice (1997),* Lewis stated that native speakers store chunks in their mental lexicon to retrieve and use in their language production. Here are a few examples:

by the way	learning by doing	that'll do
if I were you	community service	most certainly
distant relative	long long ago	up to now

Nattinger (1980) supported this view of Lewis and suggested that teaching should be based on the piecing together of ready-made units appropriate for a particular situation.

Feldman (1997:188) describes chunking as a meaningful grouping of stimuli that can be stored as a unit in short-term memory. Sousa (2000) contended that chunking helps language learners to use the language accurately and fluently in meaningful contexts. He further stressed that without chunking acquisition, comprehension and production of the language would be limited and slowed down.

Thornbury (1998:8) substantiated this view and maintains that chunking serves two purposes in the early stages of language learning:

• it enables language learners to have chunks of the language available for immediate use.

• it also provides the learner with data to hold in reserve for subsequent analysis.

In this light, Lewis (2000) suggested that vocabulary teaching should include *lexis or lexical chunks* since they are necessary not only to understand the meaning of the words and their uses in a context but also to help retention and production. He also advocated that *lexis* in any language offers more communicative and expressive power than grammatical structures. This view is also substantiated by McCarthy (1991) who claimed that native speakers' language is, to

a great extent, formulaic. He says that if language is broken into pieces, learning will take a very long time and there will not be successful language acquisition. Therefore, the Lexical Approach claims that language is not learnt by learning individual words and structures but by combining them and producing them as phrases/chunks.

Though Michael Lewis enumerates a list of the principles of his approach in his book '*The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward*' in 1993, this project concentrates on only three tenets of the Lexical Approach:

1. understanding the notion of lexis

2. raising students' awareness of lexical chunks and developing their ability to chunk language successfully

3. recycling and reviewing the language taught.

1.2. The notion of lexis

While vocabulary refers to individual words in a language, lexis includes several types of formulaic chunks as well as individual words. Although the lexical items are of many different kinds, Lewis identifies them as falling into four types:
1. a) Words
   b) Polywords

2. Collocations

3. Fixed expressions

4. Semi-fixed expressions

The first category is sub-divided into *words* and *polywords*. The former is a familiar category and it refers to what we traditionally call vocabulary. It constitutes the largest of all the four categories. The Lexical Approach also recognises 'individual words' as a part of lexis but it holds that there are several types of lexical items of which individual words are only one type.

The next sub-category *polywords* is a small group of lexical items, which falls between words and major multi-word categories. These chunks are normally not reversible, for example, *bread and butter*. Lewis states that phrasal verbs and

adverbial phrases of different kinds also fall under this division. For example: *by the way, the day after tomorrow.*

The second major category of lexical items is *collocations*. Lewis defines collocation as a predictable combination of words. These are chunks that naturally co-occur by mutual expectancy. For example: *make a mistake* and *do the work*. Though *make* and *do* are considered near synonyms, they cannot be used interchangeably.

The third division of items is *fixed expressions*. Lewis states that these are comparatively rare and short. These are chunks a speaker stores as units and uses in speech, for example: *Have a nice day* and *How do you do?*

The last category is *semi-fixed expressions*. This category according to Lewis is an important one 'that contains a spectrum'. These expressions range 'from very short to very long and from almost fixed to very free' (Lewis, 1997:10). These expressions allow a number of different words or phrases to be inserted into them. For example:

It's/that's right

I would be grateful/thankful If you would bring/get/ do me……….

We are really/very fortunate/lucky to have him/her as…………….

1.3. Raising students' awareness of lexical chunks and developing their ability to chunk language successfully

Lewis holds that noticing lexical chunks in the language is a prerequisite for learning language. He argues that increased awareness helps in converting input to intake. In addition to consciousness-raising, he feels that importance should be given to developing in the learner the ability to chunk the language. He says:

> *The central idea to efficient acquisition and effective communication is chunking. Unless you chunk a text correctly, it is almost impossible to read with understanding, and*

> *unless you speak appropriate chunks, you place a serious barrier to understanding between yourself and your listeners*
> (Lewis 1997:58).

1.4. Recycling and reviewing the language taught

The Lexical Approach adopts the strategy of recycling and reviewing to teach the language. Lewis believes that learners should first be taught to recognise and produce the chunks of language. He says that they should be given chances to revise what has been learnt before. Then, through repetition, he thinks learners will be able to produce them eventually with some automaticity, thereby improving fluency. As Lewis (1997:45) states: 'recycling should be done in an interesting and refreshing way, so that learners' interest is still engaged'. Following these points, this study has made every attempt to make a revision of the chunks introduced to the learners.

1.5 Lexical Approach in language teaching

It is clear that in a Lexical Approach, lexis plays an important role in language teaching. Nattinger says that teaching should be based on the idea that language production is the piecing together of ready-made units appropriate for particular situations (1980:34). Therefore, the understanding of such units is dependent on knowing the predictable patterns in different situations. Lewis (1997:15) holds that implementing the Lexical Approach in the classroom would entail teachers paying more attention to:
- lexis of different kinds
- preparing learners to use text for their benefit
- preparing learners to chunk the language
- creating a habit of using dictionaries as learning sources.

1.6. The Lexical Approach in language learning

In the Lexical Approach, lexis in its various types is thought to play a central role in language learning. It recommends the learning of multi-word items as they aid the learner in producing the language without much effort. According to

Lewis (1997:58), students should follow a few things while practising this approach in learning a language:

- concentrating on what words mean and how words are used

- learning to chunk the language

- doing the exercises and activities designed for the text

- using dictionaries as learning resources.

1.7. Relevance of comics to language teaching/learning

The Lexical Approach emphasises the principle that language should be taught through authentic texts. Texts not only provide the learners with interesting content, but also supplement the learners with many lexical items. Since this study adopts the framework of the Lexical Approach, it has chosen to make use of authentic comics. It is worth noting here that Lewis recommended the use of a text-based approach to teach lexis and language. He further notes that 'the single most distinctive feature of the Lexical Approach is that it proposes a fundamentally different attitude to the treatment of text…. It recognises the importance of co-text and therefore prefers text or discourse in language teaching' (1997:106). A text-based approach uses authentic texts, either oral or written, for enabling learners to use the target language in different ways. As the Lexical Approach forms the theoretical framework for this research, the study explored how authentic texts like comics can be incorporated into the teaching of lexis. Comics have proved to be a rich source of all the lexical categories identified in the Lexical Approach. Besides, there are several other benefits in using them for language teaching:

- they can have all the categories of lexical phrases mentioned in the Lexical Approach

- they can be read easily with little effort

- they can contain natural, conversational English that is comprehensible

- they can have a visual appeal to the readers

- they can engage the interest and imagination of the readers

- they can divide text into meaningful chunks

- they can encourage readers to develop an appreciation for different literary styles

- learners can try to predict, deduce and infer from the pictures in the comics

- they can appeal to learners of all backgrounds, ages and genders

- they can be highly effective in warding off the boredom that emerges in the classroom.

Having described the notion of lexis and the relevance of comics to language teaching/learning, it is worth mentioning the importance of teaching lexis to young learners.

1.8. Significance of teaching lexis to young learners

It is a fact that young children are different from adults in many ways. Traditional techniques of teaching a language do not have any impact on young learners as they possess special learning strategies. Moreover, learning new words in another language can make young learners feel stressed and anxious. So, a language teacher has to explore new strategies and techniques to help young learners to use the target language effectively. In this context, lexical phrases seem very appropriate to the learning styles of young learners because they like to imitate and enjoy repetition and it can give them a sense of assurance and achievement. This view is substantiated by Ellis, Simpson-Vlach and Manyard (2008) who hold that lexical phrases are processed more fluently than they are constructed by young learners. Similarly, Lewis (2002) argues that lexical phrases and chunks are easier to learn because it is easier to deconstruct a chunk than to construct it.

Thus, by prioritising the learning of lexical phrases and chunks, we actually enable young learners to become efficient listeners and fluent speakers. Moreover, Ellis (2005) has pointed out that lexical chunks may serve as a basis for the later development of a rule-based competence.

Therefore, a language teacher should create a learning environment for young learners by using lexical phrases. The teacher should also raise the learners' consciousness of lexical phrases.

Mackenzie (2000:62) affirms that language teachers clearly need to consider the prevalence of lexical phrases in both speech and writing. Language learners retain language in chunks, and much of their mental lexicon is stored in prefabricated, and fully contextualized, lexical phrases. They routinely rely on a vast store of fixed phrases and pre-patterned locutions and they prefer to use these fixed phrases rather than generate locutions from scratch. In this sense, lexical items play a crucial role in enhancing young learners' fluency. In addition to this, the use of lexical phrases creates a comfort zone for young language learners. The more opportunities young language learners are provided to use the lexical phrases, the more they feel confident to use the target language by gaining lexical competence. This lexical competence is the ability to identify, understand and make use of words in a language like the native speakers. As Anna Goy (2002:26) states: 'it is a kind of knowledge that allows us to know the meanings of the words and use them correctly'. Hence, lexical phrases can make the language-learning environment congenial for young learners and thereby enhance their lexical competence.

2. Methodology

The experiment was conducted with 28 ESL learners of class 7 in A.A.N.M & V.V.R.S.R High School, Gudlavalleru, which is situated in a rural area in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh. Initially, a pre-test was conducted to determine the following:

a) the comprehension abilities of the students

b) to know if they were aware of the lexical chunks and their classification.

In the test, the learners were first instructed to read a comic story named *Valiant Shu Lang* and were asked to understand the theme of it. Secondly, the learners were asked to read the story once again in order to answer the questions in the question paper. The students were also instructed to refer to the comic strip to discover the answers. The questions in the pre-test were set in such a way as to test skills described above. The question paper for the pre-test can be found in Appendix 1.

Marking of the scripts was done to determine these skills and also to categorise them into Experimental Group I and Experimental Group II according to the marks they gained. The first group consisted of 14 students who performed fairly well in the pre-test. Group II consisted of the 14 students who gained fewer marks than those in the former group. An interaction with their class teachers revealed that Group I students were academically good, keen to gain knowledge and attended classes regularly, whereas Group II students were slow learners and inactive in the classes. Since the project aimed to test the efficacy of the Lexical Approach in teaching lexis to young learners and enhancing their lexical competence through comics, both the groups, irrespective of their marks, were subjected to the same treatment in the classes. Both the groups were given an opportunity to learn lexis through comics for two hours a week.

As the Lexical Approach believes in the principle that language should be taught through authentic texts, 50 Tinkle Digests were chosen for the study. Out of these 50 books, a total of 30 stories were selected for the study based on the number of lexical chunks items present in them. From these 30 books, only 30 stories were chosen based on the number of multi-worded items present in them. Secondly, the lexical chunks that were identified from the stories were categorised according to the classification advocated by Lewis. After categorising them, exercises and activities were devised by the researcher to reinforce the chunks in the students' mental lexicon. The experiment continued for 16 weeks with the first eight weeks allotted to motivate the students to read the comics and train them in understanding the notion of lexis and raising their awareness of lexical chunks. Moreover, training was imparted to both the groups in identifying the chunks and categorising the chunks according to the classification of Lewis. During this process, 77 individual words, 71 polywords, 196 collocations, 134 fixed expressions and 54 semi-fixed expressions were identified from all the 30 stories included in the study. In addition to this, the groups were taught to refer to the word dictionaries and collocation dictionaries. The groups were also instructed in maintaining

diaries to make a note of all the lexical items which they came across in all the comic stories. The second eight weeks of the study were allotted to recycling, reviewing and reinforcing the lexical chunks in their mental lexicon. In this period, students were asked to work on the task sheets prepared for the words identified in the comic stories. In the 17th week, a post-test was conducted for both the groups on a story named *Panther's Moon*. It aimed to find out the following:

a) if the students of both the groups were able to comprehend the notion of lexis and identify the lexical chunks

b) if they are able chunk language successfully and able to refer to the dictionaries individually

c) the effect of the study on the students' lexical competence.

Questions for the post-test were set to determine the skills mentioned above. The post-test can be found in Appendix 2.

3. Data analysis and findings

The primary focus of this project was to examine the effects of using the Lexical Approach to teach lexis to young learners. In accordance with the aim of this study, three stages were followed carefully in the treatment process: pre-experiment stage, presentation and practice stage, and evaluation/testing stage.

In the first place, before the experiment, a pre-test was administered to both the groups to make sure that they were not aware of the categories of lexis to be presented to them. After a few days, the experiment began and it continued for 16 weeks (two hours a week) for both the groups. In the first eight weeks, the students read comics for pleasure as well as to identify the lexical chunks. During that period, the researcher noticed that the students evinced interest in reading more comic strips and in identifying lexical chunks. Students requested the researcher to provide some more comic stories to read at home and to make a categorisation of the chunks present in the stories.

Secondly, the participants of both the groups were exposed to the same comic stories in order to raise consciousness among learners about the lexical chunks (that were classified according to the classification advocated by Lewis). The teacher gave them various examples of the chunks from the stories and also other multi-worded items that suited the contexts. The teacher got the learners to work on the chunks with the help of a task sheet, which had exercises and activities for the items identified in the stories. The exercises and activities encouraged the students to revisit the words that existed in the comics and gave them a chance to memorise the words and reinforce them in their lexicon. The students worked individually, in pairs and groups to find answers to the questions in the task sheets. The teacher discussed the answers with students with plausible explanations and clarified their concerns.

Thirdly, the teacher also trained the students in referring to various dictionaries (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Oxford Collocations Dictionary* and *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary)* to help them to understand the meanings of difficult words and to observe the natural combinations of different words. This procedure lasted for 16 weeks.

It was followed by a post-test (25 marks) conducted for both groups to check the effectiveness of the Lexical Approach in enhancing the learners' lexical competence. In order to find out whether there was a significant improvement in the lexical competence of both the groups after the experiment, the scores of their pre-test and post-test were examined in detail. To evaluate the differences between the performances of both the groups, a paired t-test was used. A paired t-test is defined as a statistical technique which is used to compare two populations that are correlated and is also used in before-after studies, or when the samples are matched pairs, or in a case-control study.

This test when applied to the scores gained by both the groups of the students indicated a considerable improvement in their understanding of lexical categories, their abilities to chunk

language successfully and refer to dictionaries when necessary. The tables below show the scores obtained in the pre- and post-tests. On simplification, t calculated value is 1.80. Since the calculated value of t is less than tabulated value at 5 per cent level of significance, we may conclude that the adopted study is advisable for improving the students' lexical competence through comics.

Experimental group I pre-test and post-test scores:

$$t = \frac{\overline{d}}{s/\sqrt{n}} \qquad \text{where} \qquad S^2 = \frac{1}{n-1}\sum(d-\overline{d})^2$$

t tabulated value at 5% level of significance for 13 degree of freedom = 3.542

S. No	Student names	Pre-Test	Post-Test	D	$(d-\overline{d})^2$
1	Bhanu Sandeep	10	18	-8	291.4326
2	Hardhik Sai	12	22	-10	363.7182
3	Mohan Venkata Nagendra	10	18	-8	291.4326
4	Soma Sekhar	8	18	-10	363.7182
5	Uday Naga Venkata	11	21	-10	363.7182
6	Vamsi Valluru	11	20	-9	326.5754
7	Venkat Teja	9	18	-9	326.5754
8	Anusha	9	19	-10	363.7192
9	Dolly Dyanara	10	19	-9	326.5754
10	Mounisha	13	23	-10	363.7192
11	Karthik	10	19	-9	326.5754
12	Mahesh	11	20	-9	326.5754
13	Sandeep	13	21	-8	291.4326
14	Manasa	11	19	-8	291.4326

On simplification, t calculated value = 1.79.

Experimental group II pre-test and post-test scores:

$$t = \frac{\overline{d}}{s/\sqrt{n}} \qquad \text{where} \qquad S^2 = \frac{1}{n-1}\sum(d-\overline{d})^2$$

t tabulated value at 5% level of significance for 13 degree of freedom = 3.542

S. No	Student names	Pre-Test	Post-Test	D	$(d-\overline{d})^2$
1	Pragna	6	13	-7	180.3246
2	Ranjani	7	14	-7	180.3246
3	Sonalika	5	11	-6	154.4676
4	Sri Divya	8	16	-8	208.1816
5	Sri Lakshmi	7	15	-8	208.1816
6	Sushma	5	13	-8	208.1816
7	Tanmayi	6	14	-8	208.1816
8	Udaya	4	10	-4	108.7536
9	Bhuvanesh	5	11	-6	154.4676
10	Bharani Babu	6	13	-7	180.3246
11	Prakyath	7	14	-7	180.3246
12	Prem Sai	5	12	-7	180.3246
13	Ram Narayana	6	13	-7	180.3246
14	Gopal Sai	7	15	-8	208.1816

4. Discussions and reflections

This study showed a different dimension of teaching lexis to young learners through comics. It was found that using all the categories of lexis enhanced the lexical competence of the young learners. After the study, students were able to:

- recognise different kinds of combinations of words
- think about the other possibilities of words
- chunk language to a great extent
- apply their knowledge of chunking to other texts
- use dictionaries without relying on the teacher.

The findings of this study also gave positive answers to the research questions:

1. Does raising the awareness of all the categories of lexis result in the ability to chunk language?

2. Can the incorporation of comics into the teaching of lexis benefit the learners in language production?

The results of the study indicated that there was a significant difference between the scores of the pre-test and the post-test in both the groups. Teaching them all the lexical categories showed a significant gain in the ability to chunk language and, by and large, making use of the chunks in constructing meaningful and correct sentences in the classroom and in the post-test. The independent variable (lexis) had positive effects on the dependent variable (ability to chunk language). According to analysis of the scores of the test, comics enhanced the young learners' lexical competence. The predictor variable (using comics) influenced the dependent variable (language production) significantly according to the results of the analysis of the paired t-test. Young language learners in both the experimental groups improved their receptive and productive lexis because of using comics.

In the light of the study conducted, some reflections and suggestions are given below.

- The study is limited only to the young learners of a school in Andhra Pradesh. However, this project could be conducted with adult learners too.

- If lexis is to be taught in class, the teachers should be familiarised with its categories and its applications in the classroom.

- In language teaching procedures, preparing activities and exercises for young language learners is time-consuming and demanding for teachers. Therefore, it is not a practical way to teach the target language. However, teachers can use the assistance of their colleagues to design exercises and activities to present lexical phrases in a challenging way.

- The ability to recognise and combine the chunks was limited only to a period of 16 weeks.

However, this process has to be tested even in the examinations in order to develop lexical competence further.

In conclusion, the study demonstrated the effectiveness of the Lexical Approach to language teaching. The study also observed that authentic texts like comics are a rich source of all kinds of lexical chunks.

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Appendix 1

British Council Project on 'Teaching Lexis to Young Learners through Comics'

A.A.N.M& V.V.R.S.R High School
Pre-test to class 8 students

Time: 1 hour   **Max. marks: 25**

Answer all questions   **25 x 1=25**

1. What do you understand by the term *lexis*?

2. Can you provide meaning for the word 'valiant' in the title of the comic?

3. The phrase 'give training' are natural combination of words and are used most often. But, can you say 'make training'?

4. Can you think of other words which combine with 'training'?

5. What is a collocation?

6. 'The General hesitated first.' What does the word 'hesitate' mean?

7. After much 'persuasion', the General permitted her daughter to join the army. What do you understand by the term persuasion from this context?

8. Do you know what a 'polyword' is?

9. Shu Lang *set off* for the capital. Choose the right meaning of the phrasal verb from the options:

    a) direct attention   b) to arrange or display things

    c) to present ideas, facts   d) to leave a place and begin a journey

10. When you want to join your friend in some place, you use some expressions which are fixed. Can you spot out one such expression in page 91?

11. Do you know what a 'fixed expression' is?

12. All of us have 'good friends'. Can you think about any other word in the place of 'good' to describe the goodness of your friend?

13. What is a 'raging tiger'?

14. 'Her bravery stunned the Russians'. 'Bravery' means_____.

15. What does 'call for' mean?

    a) to make a call   b) to collect somebody in order to go somewhere

    c) to keep calling   d) to call upon

16. What do you understand by the words 'prowess' from the context: 'I've noticed your prowess on the battlefield'.

17. The Chinese 'put up' a brave fight. Have you ever put up any skill? If yes. What is it?

18. Do you know how to refer to a collocation dictionary?

19. What is a 'fierce battle'?

20. Is the phrase 'lift your head' correct?

21. Construct a sentence by using the phrase 'Now that war is over........'

22. We describe a wife as 'good wife', 'loyal wife' etc., Can you think of another description of a wife?

23. Shu Lang is praised by using a fixed expression: 'You've set....................'

24. 'You have made us proud.' When do you use this expression?

25. What does the expression 'You are the one for me' mean?

26. State your impressions of this comic story 'Valiant Shu Lang' on the next page.

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