

The Impact of Extensive Reading on Learning and Increasing Vocabulary at Elementary Level

Syeda Asima Iqbal^{1*}

¹ Department of English, NCBA& E, Lahore, Pakistan

* Syeda Asima Iqbal, E-mail: asima.imran@yahoo.com

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Abstract

It is an utter necessity to become fluent, self-sufficient and independent English readers with highly skilled reading comprehension abilities. There is no point to doubt that extensive reading can be the best strategy to attain this. This research is about the impact of extensive reading on elementary level school students which helps in the enhancement of global language skills especially their vocabulary. As extensive reading is not a regular part of any curriculum in any educational institute, this research is a little step in the realization of its importance in language learning mainly focused on vocabulary. Tests and observations were the methods used to collect the data. On the basis of analysis and interpretation of the collected data, it was clear that there was improvement in students' vocabulary.

Keywords

extensive reading, graded readers, vocabulary, input frequency, Krashen Theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

- a) To gauge the enhancement of vocabulary by comparing participants' writing before and after extensive reading at an elementary level.
- b) To find out the retention of vocabulary after extensive reading through testing.
- c) To explore participants' enjoyment and curiosity about extensive reading through observation.

1.2 Research Questions

This study has following questions of research:

- a) How extensive reading helps participants in learning and enhancing new vocabulary words in an interesting way?
- b) Do participants retain vocabulary words and use them in their writings as a result of extensive reading?

1.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were made for this research which may be found correct or incorrect.

- a) Extensive reading does not help participants in learning and enhancing their vocabulary.
- b) Extensive reading does help participants in learning and enhancing their vocabulary.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Although there is a great need to become fluent English readers, students do not automatically want to read in English. In short, the relevant literature and this research is important because extensive reading in a foreign language has high outcomes not only from a linguistic standpoint, but from a psychological and educational point of view as well. For that reason, extensive reading should take place in the ESL/EFL classrooms more often than it does currently.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

- a) The data for the study was collected from sixth grade students at an elementary level.
- b) This study was limited to assess only the vocabulary of the students in the sixth grade.
- c) The sample was taken from one private English school in Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

1.6 Justification of the Study

Word knowledge plays an important role in comprehension. Many studies have also found a strong relationship between vocabulary size and reading comprehension. This study observed how students enhanced their vocabulary by reading extensively and participating in different activities willingly after reading. There are many approaches to teach vocabulary which may help increase student reading comprehension but few strategies are very effective.

2. Literature Review

It was believed during the mid-10-80s that reading skills and vocabulary develop when learners are exposed to enormous amount of comprehensible input which in turn causes language acquisition. Krashen (1989) suggests that the learners can acquire new vocabulary and develop their spelling ability through maximum exposure of “comprehensible input” through extensive reading. Additionally, Krashen (1993) also explains that ER is the most efficient way through which a learner can learn new vocabulary.

2.1 Extensive Reading Researches and Krashen Theory

Krashen (2003) declared that in language education, free voluntary reading is the most powerful learning tool. It helps to improve language skills and enhances vocabulary size. Reading advocates such as Nutall (1996) stated that extensive reading programs were the most effective method of enhancing vocabulary size, improving reading skills and expanding overall language ability. Many studies found that extensive reading worked efficiently and it was compared with and associated well with achievement in reading comprehension. For example, Robb and Susser (1989) studied the comparison of extensive reading with a skill building approach and Hafiz and Tudor (1989) did a three month experimental study of extensive reading through graded readers.

2.2 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is a language teaching process where learners are exposed to a variety of reading materials to gain a global understanding although may read for pleasure (Day & Bamford, 2004). Students choose books of their own choice to read independently and it should not be followed up by any task related to the reading material. If they do not feel any interest in the chosen material or find the content hard to understand, they can leave it there and start off with the new book or text. Students of any age and level can benefit from this extensive reading but at least they should have basic skills to read it (Day & Bamford, 2004). According to Krashen (2004), extensive reading is also like free the voluntary reading approach, sustained silent reading and independent voluntary reading.

2.3 The Benefits of Extensive Reading

Many researchers have proved that there are many benefits of extensive reading. Bamford has stated that extensive reading not only enhance knowledge and confidence of the reader but also improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills along with vocabulary expansion Bamford (1987) admires the positive characteristics of extensive reading by looking at the basic benefits in developing positive attitudes toward the target language and in addition to this students will be motivated to read more.

- Extensive reading fixes many problems to bridge the gaps. It can help to improve reading fluency, comprehensibility and strengthen vocabulary in a natural way.
- Students are independent in learning and feel encouraged to do self reading in English either at home or in a reading class.
- All classes have students with different reading ability level s and extensive reading provides graded books to cater to these different levels. They not only choose books on their own but read entirely at their own pace and level.
- By maximizing the reading ability of the student it will help them increase that ability in their future offspring.

2.4 Input Frequency and Vocabulary Learning

Many studies have been conducted to find out the relationship between frequency of word occurrence in the input and its long term memory retention. The results were as expected that the more exposure the participant had to the word meant longer term word retention. In one study of begin ESL students in Bahawalpur, Palmberg (1987) found out that learners seemed to remember words from text books which occur frequently or were repeated in the text.

In the “book flood” study by Elley and Mangubai (1983) and Elley (1991) in elementary school’s determined there was a high correlation between maximum input vocabulary and vocabulary gain. In a review of recent trends in teaching second language vocabulary, Sokmen (1997) emphasizes that the more contact with words will result in learning those words. Another study conducted by Kachroo (1962) on the same relationship found out that when the word is repeated number of times in a text is most likely learned by the students while less frequent words are learned less or unknown by the learners. Saragi, Nation and Meister (1978), found in another study that if words are repeated more

than six times then those words will be learnt by 93% of the students. On the contrary, Nation and Wang (1999) found that a word 10 times to help in its acquisition but still it is not certain that word will definitely be learned. In a review of several such studies Zahar, Cobb and Spada (2001) suggested that extensive reading is inefficient for vocabulary acquisition because learner are unable to identify more than 1/14 words tested. They further argue that it depends on the learners' level, low ability students need more contact with words for long term memory retention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The purpose of this study was to find out the impact of extensive reading on learning and enhancing vocabulary at an elementary level. The main objective was to find out the enhancement of vocabulary after extensive reading by comparing the tests results before and after extensive reading. This was a mixed methods approach where data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.2 Population

There were twelve registered private English schools in Bahawalpur where the population of grade six of elementary school was approximately 1040 students and 66 English language teachers. In this study, participants consisted of both females and males. Their ages ranged from 12-15 years.

3.3 Sample

First, the schools were selected according to convenient sampling and then the students of the study were selected randomly. The sample was specifically grade six elementary students. The participants were studying General English as a compulsory subject and received instructions in English language in the classroom. Out of population only 50 students were selected where 25 boys and 25 girls took part. 20 teachers and 4 head teachers were also part of this research.

3.4 Data Collection Method

This sort of research requires detail which is why tests were given to the participants to measure data quantitatively and observations were taken by the English teacher during extensive reading sessions to collect qualitative data to supplement.

3.4.1 Vocabulary Test

Waring and Takaki's (2003) vocabulary test was administered to the participants in the first week of extensive reading program. Three types of vocabulary tests were used in two test times: immediate and delayed tests. The immediate test was used to observe whether learners learned new words from reading and the delayed test was conducted after the completion of the extensive reading program. The delayed test was used to observe that vocabulary was retained through reading as Krashen's (2004) Input Hypothesis states that vocabulary is best learned through incidental learning. Like Waring and Takaki's (2003) study, three types of tests were used that include: word-recognition test, multiple choice meaning recognition test, and word translation test. Following Waring and Takaki (2003) and Brown et al. (2008), in order for the test to be reliable, 25 words from the graded readers were selected

as test items in each test type. 25 words for the recognition test, 25 for the meaning recognition test (multiple-choice test), and 25 for the meaning translation test with the total number of test items 75. These words include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The test took about 60 minutes and participants were required to answer 25 items in each test type. During the test, researcher was present to facilitate the need of the participants to avoid any sort of uneasiness and discomfort.

3.4.2 Observations

Another instrument was observation to record the participants' involvement and learning during the extensive reading programs in class, participants' need for support, and teachers' remarks on the extensive reading program each week. It was a qualitative observation where instructors were observed without telling that they were being observed. This activity was also helpful to get some knowledge of teachers' observations and perspectives over the extensive reading programs for possible ideas for improvement in the program. In addition, teacher could write things observed during lesson and suggestions could be noted down.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Data Analysis of Teachers' Observation Log

Teachers' observation logs showed that most of the participants were engaged during reading time and few were found distracted because they might have chosen a book too hard for this level and felt difficulty in reading. Teachers approached those participants and helped them find the right book for them and explained what kind of story it might be so that they could make an informed decision. Teachers' observations showed that few participants observations showed that a few participants were reluctant to speak in English as either their spoken English was not good or they were too shy to speak in front of everyone. Majority of the participants took turns and spoke to others about the story they had read. According to them, activities were making positive changes in the participants but their lifelong habits of not reading or only reading a little bit would change only when they practiced regularly.

3.5.2 Vocabulary Test Analysis

To examine the amount of vocabulary knowledge, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics for three measures were used. In short, the results of the tests were compared and analyzed in terms of comparing the mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) by conducting One Way Repeated Measures ANOVA using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software. Tables and charts were used to illustrate the trends and relationships in the data.

Table 1. The Results of Descriptive Statistics for Three Immediate Test Types (Test 2)

Tests	95% confidence interval of difference					
	N	Mean	S. Deviation	SD Error	Lower	Upper
Word Form Recognition	50	15.84	3.01	0.42	13	18
MC Recognition	50	15.64	2.70	0.38	14	18
Translation	50	13.14	2.92	0.41	11	15

Note. P for all analyses, $p \leq .05$.

Table 1 displays the total scores for test 2. The results show a vocabulary increase with a mean score of 15.84 for the word recognition test, a mean score of 15.64 for the meaning recognition, and the mean of 13.14 for the translation test. The mean scores for all three test types post-test indicate an overall increase in the students' vocabulary knowledge through incidental learning. This finding also supports the results of the study by Brown et al. (2008) that indicated incidental learning occurs through reading. The table also proves that the highest achievements were in word-form recognition tests. The score for the Multiple Choice (MC) recognition test was almost half of the word-form recognition test. The lowest score were in translation test. The results for word-form recognition test show that 54% of the words were learned. The highest vocabulary gain was obtained from word recognition test. The difference in the mean score of word form recognition is 0.96, multiple choice vocabulary recognition was 1.5 and translation was 1.12. These pre and post results show that there were improvements in the participants' vocabulary. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis (where extensive reading does not help participants in learning and enhancing new vocabulary words) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Findings

The results of the pre- and post-tests show a difference of 18.5% in marks which indicates that there was improvement in the vocabulary of the participants and they were able to use the maximum number of words in context. Though this twelve week program was insufficient to help the participants in memorizing or retaining of all words present in the graded readers it was evident that if students read extensively, it can make positive changes in their learning. Brown and Hirst (1983) have stated that understanding is affected if the process of taking in the information is long but as graded readers repeat words, it help readers to infer meaning and retain them for long term. So, according to these results, the researcher has achieved the first objective of the research and found the answer of first question as affirmative. Retention of vocabulary words is very important in extensive reading. For this reason, many researchers have recommended graded reader to encourage extensive reading as vocabulary

words are repeated at every level and maximum exposure of words lead to permanent retention in the minds of the learners. The results of the tests were proof that the maximum number of participants were able to retain new vocabulary and could use them in sentences as well. Participants were observed by their teachers over the period and according to those observations it was clear that due to the congenial environment, colorful books and stress free atmosphere that the learning enhanced. Krashen (1981) was cited by Harmer who states that students can acquire language on their own if they get sufficient exposure to comprehensible language in a calm and tension-free environment. Extensive reading involves reading a variety of comparatively easy material and with less or no testing or follow-up work.

4.2 Discussion

According to the findings of the present research, the overall effect of extensive reading on vocabulary development to students in grade six was positive. The results indicate that extensive reading is beneficial and the selection of reading material for the students does have different effects on their language development. An interesting finding was the prominent improvement in the retention of the new vocabulary. This serves to indicate the success of the use of graded readers in word repetition for language acquisition. There is a causal relationship between extensive reading and vocabulary enhancement so it is concluded that extensive reading is a good approach to teach not only for vocabulary enhancement but for all language skills indirectly.

The results of the current study indicate that participants have gained knowledge of the new words from extensive reading which corroborates with previous studies including those by Day et al. (1991), Hulstijn (1992), and Brown et al. (2008). Findings from descriptive statistics carried out show that extensive reading adds to the vocabulary knowledge of grade six students. The findings of this study signify that extensive reading does have a positive effect on vocabulary development of students. This finding supports Krashen's (1989) comprehensible Input Hypothesis that second language vocabulary is acquired through input which is comprehensible. This study also corroborates Pigada and Schmitt's (2006) finding that vocabulary knowledge can be greatly enhanced during reading even from a small number of texts and their conclusion is that more vocabulary acquisition is possible from extensive reading than previous studies have suggested. Thus, it was concluded that, in this study, vocabulary was incidentally learned through extensive reading of graded readers. This study also supports the findings of a more recent study conducted by Brown et al. (2008) saying that the reading approach has an important role in vocabulary learning among 35 Japanese university students. The results demonstrate that different levels of word knowledge: knowledge of form, meaning, and producing meaning can be gained from reading a graded reader. The findings give an accurate and clear picture of the process of word learning from extensive reading. They proved Krashen's Input Hypothesis stating that vocabulary can be learned through reading which is comprehensible.

5. Recommendations and Implications

5.1 Recommendations

On the basis of this research, practical conditions and findings, the researcher tries to make some practical suggestions as follows:

Flash cards of vocabulary should be available in the language class and they should include the meanings of words to help students understand them on the spot so the students do not have to consult dictionaries for every word. There should be one suggestion box in each class so that those queries and suggestions which students cannot ask directly due to shyness or lack of time can be put in the box and teacher can check it later to try answer the queries. Parents need to be aware of the change in the teaching and learning styles so that they can cooperate with their children and their teachers. Proper monitoring of child progress in both formal and informal tests should be kept under scrutiny to further help and guide the students to improve in their weak areas. Teacher should be a good role model and motivate students so that they learn by following their footsteps. Students should be given incentives like stars, stickers or positive remarks that can really boost up the energy of the students. A large range of activities, such as role play, pair work, group discussion, debates related to the reading materials can be conducted to help grow students' understanding of the material and additionally promote their willingness to keep reading in future. Finally, English language teaching, is presently facing a period of expected change. It is therefore an ideal time for schools to initiate extensive reading programs permanently in their curriculum.

5.2 Implications of the Study

- a) In theoretical terms, this research supports Krashen's Input Hypothesis, indicating that extensive second language (L2) input in a tension-free environment can contribute to the enhancement of learners' language skills significantly.
- b) It will help learners to understand that extensive reading is really a pleasurable activity and it brings not only joy in reading good material but learning a lot of language skills and general knowledge.
- c) It will bring a realization on the part of the teacher to create a love for reading in students so that instead of running away from books, they prefer to spend their leisure time in reading good books.
- d) It will also provide help to researchers who want to conduct research on extensive reading. They can also use these findings for the future research.

6. Conclusion

This study has indicated vocabulary increase from extensive reading at an elementary level. More practice and reading is required so that students can increase their word knowledge at different levels. More contacts with words and greater amounts of exposure to the graded readers are needed for more knowledge gain as the study of Nation and Wang (1999) recommends that the use of a book per week at coverage of 95% and above (Brown et al., 2008) for vocabulary development. Research indicates

that a large amount of comprehensible input is necessary for significant language acquisition and ER with graded readers can be a pleasurable, inspiring source of such input, contributing to a vocabulary enhancement and general language competence. Adding up all these results together, the more of these conditions are met in an extensive reading program, the more students are likely to gain a love of reading and attain lifelong healthy reading habits.

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Appendix A

Test 1

1. Word Form Recognition test

Circle the words you read in the graded readers.

Headdress	sadden	possessor	cultivator
oar	disrespect	cowardice	hindrance
brighten	companionship	rubbish	moderation
baggage	deceit	ripen	slippery
tame	nuisance	enclosure	rejoice

2. Meaning (Translation) test

What do these words mean? Write the meaning in Urdu.

1.	Yatch	14.	unbelievable
2.	voyage	15.	stunning
3.	precarious	16.	Country man

4.	insecure	17.	dominant
5.	latch	18.	glorious
6.	treacherous	19.	bandit
7.	delude	20.	rapidly
8.	misguide	21.	whirlwind
9.	mindless	22.	shack
10.	obtuse	23.	haste
11.	Studious	24.	barricade
12.	tireless	25.	confine
13.	incredible		

3. Multiple Choice Recognition test

Circle the words you think nearest to these words.

<p>1. WEEP: He wept.</p> <p>A. finished his course</p> <p>B. cried</p> <p>C. died</p> <p>D. worried</p>	<p>14. HAZE: We looked through the haze.</p> <p>A. small round window in a ship</p> <p>B. unclear air</p> <p>C. strips of wood or plastic to cover a window</p> <p>D. list of names</p>
<p>2. NUN: We saw a nun.</p> <p>A. long thin creature that lives in the earth</p> <p>B. terrible accident</p> <p>C. woman following a strict religious life</p> <p>D. unexplained bright light in the sky</p>	<p>15. EXCRETE: This was excreted recently.</p> <p>A. pushed or sent out</p> <p>B. made clear</p> <p>C. discovered by a science experiment</p> <p>D. put on a list of illegal things</p>
<p>3. HAUNT: The house is haunted.</p> <p>A. full of ornaments</p> <p>B. rented</p> <p>C. empty</p> <p>D. full of ghosts</p>	<p>16. YOGA: She has started yoga.</p> <p>A. handwork done by knotting thread</p> <p>B. a form of exercise for body and mind</p> <p>C. a game where a cork stuck with feathers is hit between two players</p> <p>D. a type of dance from eastern countries</p>
<p>4. COMPOST: We need some compost.</p> <p>A. strong support</p> <p>B. help to feel better</p> <p>C. hard stuff made of stones and sand stuck together</p> <p>D. rotted plant material</p>	<p>17. ATOP: He was atop the hill.</p> <p>A. at the bottom of</p> <p>B. at the top of</p> <p>C. on this side of</p> <p>D. on the far side of</p>
<p>5. CUBE: I need one more cube.</p> <p>A. sharp thing used for joining things</p>	<p>18. SKYLARK: We watched a skylark.</p> <p>A. show with airplanes' flying in patterns</p>

B. solid square block C. tall cup with no saucer D. piece of stiff paper folded in half	B. man-made object going round the earth C. person who does funny tricks D. small bird that flies high as it sings
6. MINIATURE: It is a miniature . A. a very small thing of its kind B. an instrument to look at small objects C. a very small living creature D. a small line to join letters in handwriting	19. MAINTAIN: Can they maintain it? A. keep it as it is B. make it larger C. get a better one than it D. get it
7. PEEL: Shall I peel it? A. let it sit in water for a long time B. take the skin off it C. make it white D. cut it into thin pieces	20. PATIENCE: He has no patience . A. will not wait happily B. has no free time C. has no faith D. does not know what is fair
8. FRACTURE: They found a fracture . A. break B. small piece C. short coat D. rare jewel	21. NIL: His mark for that question was nil . A. very bad B. nothing C. very good D. in the middle
9. VEER: The car veered . A. went suddenly in another direction B. moved shakily C. made a very loud noise D. slid sideways without the wheels turning	22. PRO: He's a pro . A. someone who is employed to find out important secrets B. a stupid person C. someone who writes for a newspaper D. someone who is paid for playing sport, etc.
10. BRISTLE: The bristles are too hard. A. questions B. short stiff hairs C. folding beds D. bottoms of the shoes	23. CANDID: Please be candid . A. be careful B. show sympathy C. show fairness to both sides D. say what you really think
11. AUTHENTIC: It is authentic . A. real B. very noisy C. Old D. Like a desert	24. TUMMY: Look at my tummy . A. cloth to cover the head B. stomach C. small furry animal D. thumb
12. MUMBLE: He started to mumble . A. think deeply B. shake uncontrollably	25. LATTER: I agree with the latter . A. man from the church B. reason given

C. stay further behind the others D. speak in an unclear way	C. last one D. answer
13. PERTURB: I was perturbed . A. made to agree B. Worried C. very puzzled D. very wet	

Appendix B

Test 2

1. Word Form Recognition test

Circle the words you read in the graded readers.

overflow	hesitation	descendant	revenge
disappearance	spill	rivalry	annoyance
ornament	applaud	underneath	pretense
momentary	beast	conquest	interruption
vain	ditch	sting	pardon

2. Meaning (Translation) test

What do these words mean? Write the meaning in Urdu.

1.	disregard	14.	applause
2.	patriotic	15.	stiffen
3.	scorn	16.	cultivate
4.	fierce	17.	annoy
5.	enclose	18.	miserable
6.	upright	19.	heal
7.	rake	20.	preference
8.	wicked	21.	lump
9.	hasten	22.	awkward
10.	suspicious	23.	tender
11.	ambitious	24.	alike
12.	confession	25.	fasten
13.	wreck		

3. Multiple Choice Recognition test

Circle the words you think nearest to these words.

1.	FIGURE: Is this the right figure ? A. answer B. place C. time D. number	14.	MAINTAIN: Can they maintain it? A. keep it as it is B. make it larger C. get a better one than it D. get it
2.	DRAWER: The drawer was empty. A. sliding box B. place where cars are kept C. cupboard to keep things cold D. animal house	15.	RESTORE: It has been restored . A. said again B. given to a different person C. given a lower price D. made like new again
3.	SCRUB: He is scrubbing it. A. cutting shallow lines into it B. repairing it C. rubbing it hard to clean it D. drawing simple pictures of it	16.	PAVE: It was paved . A. prevented from going through B. divided C. given gold edges D. covered with a hard surface
4.	DASH: They dashed over it. A. moved quickly B. moved slowly C. fought D. looked quickly	17.	REMEDY: We found a good remedy . A. way to fix a problem B. place to eat in public C. way to prepare food D. rule about numbers
5.	LONESOME: He felt lonesome . A. ungrateful B. very tired C. lonely D. full of energy	18.	ALLEGE: They alleged it. A. claimed it without proof B. stole the ideas for it from someone else C. provided facts to prove it D. argued against the facts that supported it
6.	DEVIOUS: Your plans are devious . A. tricky B. well-developed C. not well thought out D. more expensive than necessary	19.	HAUNT: The house is haunted . A. full of ornaments B. rented C. empty D. full of ghosts
7.	ACCESSORY: They gave us some accessories . A. papers allowing us to enter a country B. official orders	20.	STRANGLE: He strangled her. A. killed her by pressing her throat B. gave her all the things she wanted

	C. ideas to choose between D. extra pieces		C. took her away by force D. admired her greatly
8.	PEEL: Shall I peel it? A. let it sit in water for a long time B. take the skin off it C. make it white D. cut it into thin pieces	21.	MALIGN: His malign influence is still felt. A. evil B. good C. very important D. secret
9.	ERRATIC: He was erratic . A. without fault B. very bad C. very polite D. unsteady	22.	SHUDDER: The boy shuddered . A. spoke with a low voice B. almost fell C. shook D. called out loudly
10.	PEASANTRY: He did a lot for the peasantry . A. local people B. place of worship C. businessmen's club D. poor farmers	23.	MYSTIQUE: He has lost his mystique . A. his healthy body B. the secret way he makes other people think he has special power or skill C. the woman who has been his lover while he is married to someone else D. the hair on his top lip
11.	CRANNY: We found it in the cranny ! A. sale of unwanted objects B. narrow opening C. space for storing things under the roof of a house D. large wooden box	24.	IMPALE: He nearly got impaled . A. charged with a serious offence B. put in prison C. stuck through with a sharp instrument D. involved in a dispute
12.	JOVIAL: He was very joyial . A. low on the social scale B. likely to criticize others C. full of fun D. friendly	25.	SKYLARK: We watched a skylark . A. show with aeroplanes flying in patterns B. man-made object going round the earth C. person who does funny tricks D. small bird that flies high as it sings
13.	PIGTAIL: Does she have a pigtail ? A. a rope of hair made by twisting bits together B. a lot of cloth hanging behind a dress C. a plant with pale pink flowers that hang down in short bunches D. a lover		