Second Language Acquisition in Elementary Aged Students

Florida International University

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Abstract

Second language acquisition is the process by which individuals learn a foreign language other than their native speaking language. Knowing vocabulary words is the key to acquiring a second language, as well as an important part of language development. The more words individuals learn, the easier their transitions to becoming fully bilingual.

Statement of the Problem

Around the world, teachers have seen a significant increase of second language learners in schools (Dixon, Wu, & Daraghmeh, 2012). While some students have bilingual backgrounds, others become bilinguals by receiving educational programs throughout their early childhood school years. However, some discrepancies and concern is expressed regarding the level of high proficiency in both languages. Dixon et al., (2012) stated that the dominance between the two languages would depend on many factors including family socioeconomic status, language exposure at home, as well as learning styles. Several individuals believe that bilingual individuals cannot effectively communicate on either of the two languages simultaneously. For example, an individual can be dominant in one language and low proficient in the other one (Dixon et al., 2012).

Many research studies suggest that the level of vocabulary proficiency in each language is facilitated by the amount and the extent of exposure children receive in the target language. As a consequence, the longer the exposure to that language, the better the acquisition will be (Méndez, Crais, Castro, & Kainz, 2015). Based on Barcroft's Five Principles of Effective Second Language Vocabulary Instruction (2004), children are

more likely to remember and retain foreign vocabulary when they are exposed to it more frequently.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this action research study is to explore whether the incorporation and use of real objects is an effective teaching method to increase students' ability to learn new words. The research question is as follows: How effective is the use of real objects in increasing students' memorization and retention of new vocabulary words during second language acquisition?

Literature Review

Communication takes place and is facilitated by vocabulary. Therefore, vocabulary learning is the key and plays an important role for second language acquisition. There is a general consensus regarding the importance of vocabulary development in this matter. The process of vocabulary acquisition occurs in an incidental and implicit manner (Tight, 2010). A variety of excellent sources such as watching television, listening to target language, as well as reading tremendously facilitate second language acquisition. However, a direct vocabulary practice and the implementation of additional strategies would accelerate the process and would provide efficient ways to acquire the second language. Unfortunately, research data does not provide consistent evidence to support direct vocabulary instruction as a valid strategy that could facilitate the process of language acquisition (Tight, 2010).

According to Tight (2010), there is no one size fits all method applicable to vocabulary. There are several factors that either interfere or contribute with the process of second language acquisition including an individual's learning style, background, and environment, as well as the different ways of collecting, taking, processing, and

remembering new concepts and skills. In Tight's (2010) study, he suggested that different learning styles are an important role for second language acquisition.

Research Methodology

The action research will be conducted at a Broward County public elementary school. The school provides the Dual Language program. Two kindergarten classrooms will participate in the study during circle time for each group. The kindergarten classes have an enrollment of 32 students where they receive 1½ hours of daily instruction in Spanish. The classes are combined with English and Spanish speaking students. It is unknown at this time if any of the students have learning disabilities.

Baseline data will be conducted through a list of 20 words in Spanish. To achieve the goal of increasing retention, the use of real objects will be used as an intervention to measure if the use of concrete objects helps in the second language acquisition

The materials used in this study include real object (based on the vocabulary being taught) and the dual language curriculum currently being used in the school.

Results

After I complete my action research project I hope to find that my students' memorization and retention of new vocabulary words during second language acquisition will improve by the use of the real objects. If the intervention is successful I hope to continue teaching other vocabulary words as well.

Research findings will be available in time for the conference and will be presented.

Implications

The dominance between the two languages will depend on many factors including family socioeconomic status, language exposure at home, as well as learning styles.

Several individuals believe that bilingual individuals cannot effectively communicate on either of the two languages simultaneously. I hope to share my project and the idea of teaching vocabulary words by using real objects. I would like to meet with other teachers and come up with new ideas for how we can incorporate new vocabulary lessons into our daily lessons.

References

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