

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of the study was to examine how the implication of the two teaching techniques—labeling and labeling plus questioning during shared storybook reading, affect EFL children’s vocabulary acquisition. Student’s performance in vocabulary learning was looked upon in the previous chapter. The following section is presented to address the research questions; students’ vocabulary gain, retention of novel words, and the outcome of supports from different techniques to students with diverse English proficiency are discussed in depth. Then pedagogical implications are provided as a reference for educators. Finally, limitations and suggestions for future study regarding EFL children’s vocabulary learning are presented.

Influence of Different Techniques to Children’s Vocabulary Learning

Research question (1) aimed to find out what effects different teaching techniques would bring to children’s novel word learning during shared storybook reading. Results gathered from the present study revealed that both labeling (L), and labeling plus questioning (L+Q) upgraded children’s vocabulary acquisition. Comparing student’s performance in PVT from pretest to posttest, big progress was made after L or L+Q was utilized during storybook reading. Student’s receptive vocabulary gain was notable.

However, no significant difference was found between CG and EG. It is to say that L is as helpful as L+Q to promote student’s novel word learning form storybook reading. When questioning is added to labeling technique, it didn’t boost children’s receptive vocabulary acquisition. The result of the present finding is in line with Justice’s (2005) study in which exposure through labeling resulted in significantly

greater gains in receptive word learning as compared to questioning. It's also in keeping with Senechal & Cornell's (1993) finding that requesting active participation in the book-reading interactions did not boost children's vocabulary learning. They found that repetition of novel words in sentences was as effective as requesting preschoolers with what- and where- questions for acquisition of receptive vocabulary.

There are some possible explanations for the outcome that questioning technique didn't accelerate children's vocabulary acquisition. First, although some empirical studies reported positive relationship on vocabulary acquisition with questioning condition and active participation (Whitehurst et al., 1998; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000), the effects were more salient with the measure of expressive vocabulary. Since the present study aimed to find out how student's receptive vocabulary gain was influenced by different teaching techniques, the outcome of EG's performance might not reflect the benefits that questioning have upon students.

Secondly, children acquire new vocabulary when their attention is drawn to those words in the storybooks; the type of question asked might not be as important in terms of receptive vocabulary acquisition. Walsh and Blewitt (2006) found that young children who were asked questions during shared storybook reading sessions did perform better than those who were read stories through verbatim; however, whether questions required children to answer them with or without target words in it did not play a significant role in children's vocabulary learning. Because L and L+Q techniques were implemented in the present study to help students center on the target vocabulary using the illustrations in the storybooks, thus both techniques met the requirement of focusing students' attention on novel words. This might explain why CG and EG both improved students' novel word knowledge.

Thirdly, several researchers have proposed the argument that the process of

acquiring receptive and productive knowledge of a word might be different. First of all, Senechal & Cornell (1993) conducted a study to examine the effect of active participation on preschoolers' vocabulary acquisition from listening to a story. They found that the introduction of new labels in the context was effective in receptive vocabulary learning. They further inferred that active participation does not enhance learning when the context is sufficient to support acquisition of receptive vocabulary. Also, Senechal (1997) later reported in her study that repeated-reading of a storybook contributed mainly to young children's receptive vocabulary gain, whereas answering questions during multiple readings was more helpful to acquisition of expressive vocabulary. Senechal found that in the production of words, children needed supports from speaking them in answering questions during the reading, but in the comprehension of words, children were able to show their word knowledge in posttest whether they or the experimenter had spoken them during the book reading. This finding supports the notion that retrieval practice was crucial to the acquisition of expressive vocabulary, but not for the receptive vocabulary. Combining results from previous findings, the inference is drawn that sufficient context information and frequency are correlated with children's acquisition of receptive vocabulary. Thus, L technique is adequate for receptive vocabulary learning in repeated shared storybook reading, and the effectiveness of L+Q technique does not seem to be sensitive in the measure of PVT.

Fourthly, most studies, which show efficiency of using questions to facilitate children's learning of new words, were conducted in English as a native language context (Ewers & Brownson, 1999; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000; Walsh & Blewitt, 2006). Though the use of questioning technique was positive in cultivating children's word knowledge, the presupposition might be that participants did understand English

words or sentences that adults proposed. They need to have fair amount of aural and oral comprehension skills that are compatible with the level of storybooks. Thus, the absence of the effects of questioning technique have on students' vocabulary acquisition might due to the fact that not many of them had adequate English proficiency to understand the meaning of teacher's questions related to each vocabulary. It explains why only students with high English proficiency were most assisted with questioning technique in learning new vocabulary while listening to stories.

Finally, students in Taiwan might not be familiar with learning vocabulary through incidental reading. This might explain why questioning did not accelerate students' vocabulary learning in shared storybook reading. Lin (2001) investigated sixth graders' English learning strategies through an ethnographic study. She reported students had limited use of learning strategies when dealing with unknown words. They preferred to ask teachers for word definition or check meanings from resources. She also found the scope of students' vocabulary learning was limited to rote memorization. Moreover, Chu (2008) stated in the study that most frequently used strategies by Taiwanese forth-grade students are reviewing often and rote repetition. Although many teachers in Taiwan introduce storytelling in their teaching, the most recognized and practiced word recognition skills are spelling, finding words in the dictionary, phonics, and K.K. phonetics (Shieh, 2005). These findings can somehow explain why some students in the present study had trouble understanding questions proposed by the teacher, or getting the information they need from picture clues and texts.

Effect of Different Techniques to Children's Retention of Novel Words

The finding related to the effect various teaching techniques have on children's retention of learned vocabulary was that both L and L+Q techniques were helpful for EFL children to retain their vocabulary knowledge acquiring from previous shared storybook reading sessions. Drops of word gain in delayed PVT posttest of CG and EG were 4.2% and 3.3% respectively. Though the result of declining in words learned is slightly higher than Elley's study (1989) in which children of 8-year-olds in New Zealand performed only 2-3% decline from the immediate to the delay posttest; nevertheless, L and L+Q are effective teaching techniques to assist students in learning novel words and keeping those knowledge in permanent storage.

Different Techniques to Children of Diverse English Proficiency

In regard to the influence of L and L+Q techniques on learners with different English proficiency, two findings were generated. First, overall performance of HEP on vocabulary gain and retention of word knowledge improved more significantly than that of LEP; in other words, L and L+Q techniques applied in the study didn't overcome the Matthew effect in reading. Second, L+Q technique was most beneficial for HEP's vocabulary learning.

The first facet of this section of discussion focused on the finding that HEP benefited more from acquiring novel words through reading. If we compare the present findings with previous studies, our finding is in agreement with the previous studies on the point that children with better language ability gain more words (Ewers & Brownson, 1999; Reese & Cox, 1999; Penno et al., 2002); it failed to match the result some of the studies found (Elley, 1989; Coyne et al., 2004; Justice et al., 2005; Walsh & Blewitt, 2006) in that children with lower initial language ability learnt more

words in the consequence of storybook reading episode. Noticeably, HEP received vocabulary learning instructions clearer and their progress of vocabulary growth was more distinguishable. The Matthew effect in reading (Stanovich, 1986) is also evident in EFL learning context. It demonstrates richer-get-richer effect in one's vocabulary acquisition from reading activities. The same result was seen in Huang's study (2008) as well. She conducted a study to examine the effects of giving word instruction in L1 or L2 on story-listening to 5th graders in Northern Taiwan. The result indicated that children with higher English proficiency performed better on both receptive and productive vocabulary test. Children with higher English proficiency also benefited more with L2 word instruction than those with lower English proficiency.

Some possible reasons might account for the Mathew effect presented in the present study. For one, HEP might have more experience with storybook reading outside of school. This may add their familiarity with story context (Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Ewers & Brownson, 1999), or give them better understanding of how stories are organized; therefore, comprehension becomes easier due to their increasing of sense of stories (Schickedanz, 1999). It is possible that children with high initial skills and language competence are more efficient in utilizing context cues, both the text and illustration, to derive the meaning of a novel word. The understanding of word meanings enables HEP to comprehend a story, and leads them to acquire more vocabularies.

Motivation might be another factor to support the Matthew effect in reading. Stanovich (1986) not only pointed out the reciprocal relationship of reading and vocabulary growth, he mentioned that children who are reading well and have more vocabularies will read more, therefore enjoy the success in other areas demanding reading ability. This results in more exposure and motivation to reading. The above

statement was proved by Hsueh's study (2007). 171 sixth-grade students from southern Taiwan were divided into high, mid, and low English learning achievers, and their motivation toward picture book reading instructions (PBRI) were examined. The result of the survey showed that high English learning achievers' had more positive attitude toward PBRI. They enjoyed reading storybooks with illustrations and it helped them learn more English. On the contrary, low English learning achievers found learning new words, sentence patterns, and story comprehension through the help of illustrations and PBRI difficult. Their motivation toward PBRI was not as high as students of other levels. As for LEP, Robbins and Ehri (1994) provided a speculation for children with less initial skills demonstrating disadvantage in learning vocabulary incidentally. They stated, "Perhaps these children were less experienced in listening to stories and therefore attended to the overall plot rather than to new words. Or they perhaps were less interested in or motivated to learn new words" (p. 60).

An additional reason responsible for the Mathew effect found in our study is due to the fact that HEP employ more vocabulary learning strategies when learning new words. Kung (2004) distributed a survey to 6th-grade students in Taiwan in order to find out how young EFL learners of different proficiency levels act in utilizing vocabulary learning strategies while learning. The result indicated that HEP used vocabulary learning strategies more frequently than LEP. When dealing with unknown words, the most frequently used strategies by HEP were observing the illustrations, using dictionaries, sounding out words, and guessing from the suffixes. The only strategy applied by LEP was using dictionaries. The result of correlation test also showed positive significant relation between the use of vocabulary learning strategy and English proficiency. It is to say that LEP don't know and don't employ efficient strategies in learning vocabulary. The above details provide reasons that

might explain why HEP outperformed LEP in vocabulary growth during shared storybook reading in the present study.

The second facet of the discussion focused on the notion that children with higher language proficiencies benefit more from questioning initiation. Some possible causes are illustrated in detail. The first reason might be that the adult's reading style, which demands more cognitively challenging talk, benefit more to HEP's novel word learning. Reese & Cox (1994) examined the effect of various reading styles on children. They revealed that if children's initial literacy skill is taken into consideration, children with higher initial levels benefited more from higher demanding styles, such as asking them conceptive questions, or asking questions prior and after storytelling without interruption.

The second reason to explain why HEP learned better from questioning technique might be the speculation that only students whose English proficiency are better have the capability to understand questions and find context clues to match the answers. So outcomes of their vocabulary growth are more impressive. The situation applies especially in EFL learning environment.

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the major findings of the study, several pedagogical implications concerning the issue of EFL children's vocabulary teaching and learning through shared storybook reading are generated.

To begin with, benefits of shared storybook reading on EFL children's vocabulary growth are evident. EFL children can acquire novel words from listening to stories, and their vocabulary acquisition can be reinforced by teacher's highlight of new words and repeated exposure of a story.

Secondly, both L and L+Q techniques are recommended for elementary school teachers and parents to foster children's literacy development. The findings suggest that both L and L+Q techniques can promote EFL children's receptive word knowledge, but L+Q technique had the advantage over children with higher English proficiency. Thus, the implementation of L+Q technique can suit different needs of children with various language abilities. For children that are younger and have lower English skills, the use of L can help them to acquire unknown words from repeated listening of stories; as for children that are older and have more experiences with English learning, L+Q can activate their initiation in acquiring the meaning of a new word, comprehending the essence of a story, and hopefully retaining the word knowledge permanently.

Thirdly, although questioning used during shared storybook reading benefits HEP students' English learning in several ways, it might be too demanding for LEP students. If we want to help children with lower initial language skills enlarge their vocabulary size, teachers need to adopt less demanding storybook reading styles in their teaching. For example, slowing down reading speed, increasing the number of times in reading the same story, and accompanying chorus reading.

Fourthly, if we want to overcome the Mathew effect and help children build their literacy skills more effectively, especially those whose English proficiency are lower than the average, more teaching strategies are called to support student's learning. Children with a smaller vocabulary are less likely to learn new words from just listening to stories. Therefore, it would be very helpful if teachers provide more explicit vocabulary instructions for children with lower English proficiency. Some suggestions are to provide word translation or rich explanation in L1 after labeling of a novel word. This enables LEP to grasp the meaning of a new word and catch up

with the story plot. Also, teachers can activate students' prior knowledge relating to the story. Doing this might help LEP get involved in the story and be able to enjoy reading more. Furthermore, teachers can provide additional follow-up activities between repeated readings of a storybook. Those extra encounters of the storybook supply LEP with opportunities to review newly learned vocabulary, and the consequence of acquisition is more likely to be seen.

Fifthly, even though storybook reading delights young children in playful and knowledgeable ways, teachers need to pay special attention on choosing appropriate storybooks to suit their students' needs. One of the reasons making teaching English in Taiwan a challenging task is due to students' differences in their English proficiency. Whether students' English proficiency matches the phenomenon of bimodal distribution found in Chang's study (as cited in Nieh, 2004) or illustrates the curve which is a negatively skewed distribution in Nieh's study (2004), they are not the normal distribution we expected to find. In both studies, we see the existence of gaps among students' English ability. Therefore, before teachers implement storybook reading into their syllabus, it is their responsibilities to carefully select suitable storybooks to meet students' interests.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

The present study made a new mark on the existing body of research referring to the impact of shared storybook reading and adults' elaboration of vocabulary during reading on children's vocabulary acquisition. It also demonstrates the success of helping children learn novel words through listening to stories in EFL context; however, some limitations are concerned before stronger conclusion can be drawn.

First of all, the sample of participants could be expanded in two ways. The first

way is that more participants may be assembled so stronger data could be gathered and results can apply to majority of EFL young learners in Taiwan. The second way is the possibility of including demographically diverse samples in the study. The present study was conducted in northern Taiwan, so it might be both interesting and necessary to take the shared storybook reading experience to other schools in Taiwan. The comparison of the city and rural area, or children from different home learning environments will contribute a more complete picture of the impact of shared storybook reading on EFL children's vocabulary learning.

Second, the lack of the effect of questioning technique on children's receptive vocabulary knowledge suggests the need of expressive vocabulary measurement. This will enable us to examine the influence of questioning technique on EFL children's incidental vocabulary acquisition through storybook reading.

Third, qualitative data can add more depth to the topic. Survey to either inquire student's motivation towards shared storybook reading, or ask their opinions on L or L+Q technique can bring us more insight to the use of shared storybook reading and vocabulary teaching techniques. If time is available, follow-up interviews are also recommended to gather more information addressing the issue.

Fourthly, the result that HEP outperformed LEP in almost every account roused the speculation that a ceiling effect might exist. It means that the content of the storybooks might be too difficult for LEP in the study, for LEP's vocabulary growth were modest after 6 weeks of shared storybook reading sessions, four times of reading exposures of each story were implemented. What would happen if the choice of the storybook matches LEP's English competence better? Would LEP's vocabulary gain be more salient? Those questions remain until new studies are done.

Finally, Senechal & Cornell (1993) proposed an assumption that active

participation in storybook reading might serve other purposes than vocabulary learning. In other words, besides vocabulary growth, questioning might affect children's motivation to reading. It might also contribute to other parts of literacy such as story telling or writing skills. Those are areas of vocabulary acquisition that warrants further study.

In conclusion, the study of the effect of teaching techniques used in shared storybook reading sheds light on EFL children's vocabulary learning. It is not to take the place of some vocabulary instructions that teachers are already acquainted with. Rather, it is to offer English teachers an alternative way of introducing new words through storybook reading. Reading storybooks is loved by all children, so it is feasible to build their literacy through listening to stories.