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The Effect of Extensive Reading through MoodleReader on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition of EFL Learners in Iran

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In the Name of God
The Beneficent,
The Merciful

Declaration

I – Afsaneh Keivanshekouh (888044) – an M.A. student of English language teaching at the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research, and that I have provided exact references wherever I have quoted someone. I also declare that the topic of my research is an original one and has not been worked upon before. I hereby promise not to publish the findings of this research and not to make it accessible to others without the permission of Shiraz University. Shiraz University holds the copyright on this research.

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Date: January 2012

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Dedicated to

My Family

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Abstract

The Effect of Extensive Reading through MoodleReader on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition of EFL Learners in Iran

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The present study aimed to investigate the effect of Extensive Reading through the MoodleReader on incidental vocabulary acquisition of Iranian EFL learners with different degrees of vocabulary learning strategy use. The participants of the study included thirty eight Shiraz University sophomores majoring in English Literature who were randomly assigned to a control and an experimental group. The control group was involved in a traditional extensive reading program, while the experimental group was engaged in an on-line one; namely, the MoodleReader. At the end of the study, the participants of both groups were assessed on their incidental vocabulary acquisition as well as the degree of their strategy use. The results revealed that the experimental group had improved in both vocabulary recognition and production. Besides, a significant relationship was found between the students' use of vocabulary learning strategies and the experimental groups' vocabulary production. However, no significant relationship was observed between the use of vocabulary learning strategies and the control groups' vocabulary recognition, its vocabulary production, and the experimental groups' vocabulary recognition.

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1. Introduction

1.0. Introduction

In the first chapter of the present thesis, the researcher is first going to mention the importance of vocabulary in ESL learning. Next, mention will be made of incidental vocabulary learning, and its relationship with extensive reading. There will then be a section on introducing the MoodleReader and how it can be used as an instrument to promote ESL extensive reading (henceforth ER). Vocabulary learning strategies are going to be defined in the next section. Finally, the significance of the study, the objectives, and the research questions will be presented.

1.1. Importance of Vocabulary in ESL Learning

Teaching and learning vocabulary has always been a main issue in research on ESL/EFL teaching and learning. The importance of teaching vocabulary is stressed by Wilkins (as cited in Chen, 2009) who believes that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". Besides, Krashen (as cited in Rodriguez & Sadoski, 2000) believes that learning the vocabulary of a language is an essential step toward the mastery of that language, and lack of the knowledge of vocabulary is something that the language learners mostly complain about. Of course, according to Allen (1983), the importance of vocabulary was ignored during the 1940 – 1970 period because first, some educationalists focused on grammar and how words work together in

sentences. The second reason was put forward by researchers who believed that it was not possible to adequately teach the meanings of words so we had better avoid teaching them altogether. Finally, some scholars stated that exposing the learners to a lot of words will lead them to confusion and making mistakes in sentence construction. However, Allen (1983) continues, more research on the subject revealed that lack of emphasis on vocabulary would result in breakdowns in communication. Consequently, vocabulary is believed to be the essence of a language since the language learners' mastery of vocabulary determines to a great extent their second/foreign language proficiency. Moreover, without words speakers will not be able to communicate with each other. As Schmitt (2008) mentions, "Learners need large vocabularies to successfully use a second language, and so high vocabulary targets need to be set and pursued" (p. 353).

As the status of vocabulary has improved in language teaching and learning, more attention is being paid to research on vocabulary acquisition as well (Day, Omura, and Hiramatsu, 1991; Hamzah, Kafipour, and Abdullah, 2009; Nakata, 2006; Pigada, and Schmitt, 2006), encouraging both ESL/EFL teachers and learners to find ways of promoting vocabulary acquisition.

Nation (1997) recognizes the major problem in teaching vocabulary being the small number of words language teachers can cope with at any given time. Teachers can deal with this limitation, he continues, by involving the learners in incidental vocabulary learning from listening or reading comprehension tasks. Hence, a distinction is made between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning.

1.2. Intentional and Incidental Vocabulary Learning

Language learners typically learn their second language vocabulary either intentionally or incidentally. Simply put, while involved in incidental vocabulary acquisition, students learn without concentrating on the vocabulary item. Conversely, in intentional learning, they focus their attention on the words to be learnt. Chen (2006) mentions that:

> "The distinction between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning takes its origin from experimental psychology (Hulstijn, 2001). In the literature of psychology, incidental learning and intentional learning are distinguished from each other with different pre-learning instructions. Incidental learning refers to a situation in which the learners are not informed of their responsibility for learning certain information but are evaluated on that information later. In intentional learning, on the other hand, the learners are informed of their responsibility for learning certain information before doing the task" (p. 16).

Based on Chen's view, in incidental learning, learners are not aware of the learning goal before completing the learning task. Rather, they encounter an unexpected test based on the very learning goal just after the task is over. In the same line, Ellis (1995), also, defines implicit vocabulary learning as the acquisition of the meaning of new words unconsciously as a result of being repeatedly exposed to a variety of contexts.

According to Ellis (as cited in Shokouhi, 2009) one can differentiate intentional and incidental learning based on the distinction between focal and peripheral attention. He states that "intentional learning requires focal attention to