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the Degree of MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

Title:

**The Impact of Using Inspirational Quotes on Abstract
Vocabulary Recall**

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In the name of God

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated
to my kind husband,
who was cheering me up and stood by me each step of the way
and

To my parents
Whose love and patience are the constant sources of inspiration and
encouragement.

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to investigate the potential impact of inspirational quotes on improving English abstract vocabulary recall. To achieve this goal, a multiple choice language proficiency test of 60 items including vocabulary and grammar component was administered to a sample of 63 second-semester male and female students whose age ranged between 17 to 22 and they were studying English translation in Birjand University, Iran. The 40 upper-level language students were selected and randomly assigned to two groups of 20 as an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was exposed into inspirational quotes, through which the 22 abstract target words were instructed, and the control group was instructed to the same abstract vocabulary through plain sentences. At the end of the treatment a cued recall achievement test was used to measure the participants' immediate recall of the target words. Two weeks after the treatment, the same test was administered to explore the delayed recall of participants and to estimate the effect of inspirational quotes on long term recall of abstract vocabulary by experimental group compared with that of control group. The results revealed the satisfactory effect of inspirational quotes on the participants' immediate and delayed recall of abstract vocabulary. Analysis of immediate and delayed cued recall achievement tests through two series of *t-tests* confirmed the hypotheses that inspirational quotes had a significant effect on both immediate and delayed recall of abstract vocabulary. Based on these findings it is concluded that inspirational quotes can be utilized not only as a supportive context for teaching and learning of abstract vocabulary, but also as motivational, emotional and meaningful pedagogical sources, conveying much needed humanistic values to students in this modern technological age.

Key words: 1.Abstract Vocabulary, 2.Emotion, 3.Inspirational quotes, 4.Motivation, 5.Vocabulary recall

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Abbreviations

Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC)

Behavioral Activation System (BAS)

Context Availability Model (CAM)

Dopamine (DA)

Dual-Code Theory (DCT)

English Language Teaching (ELT)

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)

Inspiration Scale (IS)

Level of Processing (LOP)

Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

Positive Affect (PA)

Positron Emission Tomography (PET)

Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)

Second Language (L2)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

“ . . .you can’t separate intellect and feelings in the work of the mind. They’re both there all the time. Real learning—attentive real learning, deep learning—is playful and frustrating and joyful and discouraging and exciting and sociable and private all at the same time, which is what makes it great.”

Eleanor Duckworth (in Hatton, 2005, p. 21)

Since the 1970s, attention to vocabulary acquisition strategies has shifted from various aspects of the mechanical memorization of a word list to meaningful learning and deeper processing strategies. Rote memorization refers to the memorization of decontextualized facts rather than active construction of new schema. It continues to be an overused strategy that is often implemented within the classrooms. Human beings think, feel, and act. Every learning event involves to a greater or lesser degree all three of these actions. But much of what we ask learners to “memorize” has little emotional load to it. People are better at remembering

information that is emotionally charged – rather than information that is neutral or flat. Zambrana-Ortiz (2011) believes that emotions are related to body as well as mind. There is no cognition without emotions, or emotions outside the limits of a cognitive experience, and progressive explanations of human learning and development must take into consideration the fusion of both.

Considering the importance of emotion in human's development from the perspective of the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), numerous studies have shown that positive emotional states broadens people's thought-action repertoires, and allows individuals to build vital social, physical, and cognitive resources.

Emotions are a significant component of learning and instruction in general (Sansone & Thoman, 2005). For example, it has been demonstrated that emotions mediate students' school performance and their decision-making more strongly than scientific and sound reasoning (Glaser-Zikuda et al., 2005). Likewise, emotions are an important factor in our interaction with the environment (Ulrich, 1983), being said to be essentially an ecological phenomena that "link us, as individuals, to our environments" (Milton, 2005, p. 25). Emotions are considered paramount to the success of various environmental education initiatives (e.g. Newhouse, 1990). Therefore, emotion cannot be considered separate from the learning environment (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).

The highly accepted significant role of emotions in humans' cognition and perception leads to the outgrowth of meaningful learning as an anti-memorization movement toward rote learning. According to Carl Rogers (1969), *meaningful* learning must be able to arouse the interest of the student, who, as well as a need to feel totally involved (from the cognitive, affective, and emotional point of view) in the process, is also able to perceive that the experience is capable of filling certain knowledge gaps felt as such by the student. Accordingly the characteristics of "meaningful" learning may be summarized as follows:

- a. learning is total; it involves the cognitive, emotive, affective, and social sphere;
- b. learning is a constructive process, one of integrating new information with the student's pre-existing concepts;
- c. the quality of learning, in terms of memory persistency, is conditioned in a positive or negative way by motivation, which in turn largely depends upon factors internal to the student, like, for instance, interest, pleasure, and need. (Caon, 2006, p. 12)

The main rationale in meaningful learning seems to be focused on the importance of students' engagement and motivation in learning outcomes. Recent studies have shown that motivation produces an enhancement in executive function¹ (Engelmann and Pessoa, 2007; Engelmann et al., 2009), it can enhance detection sensitivity during a challenging attention task (Engelmann and Pessoa, 2007) and more importantly, as Pessoa (2009) showed motivation enhances the efficiency of performing a main task and simultaneously ignoring the distracters in a conflict.

Meaningful learning also refers to a deep understanding of the material, which includes attending to important aspects of the presented material, mentally organizing it into a coherent cognitive structure, and integrating it with relevant existing knowledge. Based on the related theories, research and experiences, engaging students in a meaningful learning process intensify their focus and attention, motivating them to attempt at higher-level thinking skills.

Successful comprehension and later recall are said to be a reflection of the ability of the person to relate the to-be-remembered materials to the contextual information present in the person's knowledge base and the extraction of these type of information involves the deeper levels of processing. The levels of processing approach also known as the depth of processing approach, which was studied by Craik and Lockhart (1972), proposes that how information will be remembered depends on how it is processed.

Emphasizing the importance of context in vocabulary learning strategies, Stahl (2005) states, "Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world." (p. 95). Predmore (2005) also asserts, "Students are learning material within a memorable context...Once they see the real-world relevance of what they're learning, they become more interested and motivated" (p. 22-23). Nash and Snowling (2006) found that using a contextual approach to instruction produced greater vocabulary gains than lessons that emphasized learning word definitions. Marzano (2002) asserts that perhaps the biggest misconception is that teaching vocabulary means teaching formal dictionary definitions. Schmitt (2000) also accepted that vocabulary learning is an integral

¹ "Executive function is an umbrella term for cognitive processes that regulate, control, and manage other cognitive processes, such as planning, working memory, attention, problem solving, verbal reasoning, inhibition, mental flexibility, task switching, and initiation and monitoring of actions. The executive system is a theorized cognitive system in psychology that controls and manages other cognitive processes. It is responsible for processes that are sometimes referred to as executive functions, executive skills, supervisory attentional system, or cognitive control. The prefrontal areas of the frontal lobe are necessary but not sufficient for carrying out these functions." (Elliot, 2003, p. 49-59)

element of language proficiency and therefore vocabulary teaching should be an integrated part of every syllabus and taught in a well-planned manner.

Based on the above discussions exposing students to words just at the surface level or memorizing through rote learning will not be effective and enough (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Stahl & Nagy, 2006; Graves, 2006), as far as not all vocabulary words require the same level (depth) of instruction, students need to know some words deeply in more supportive texts while others may be learnt only at the surface level, through rote learning or within the plain sentences.

With this in mind, there will be the responsibility for helping learners to effectively store and retrieve words in the target language (Sokmen, 1997), and this necessitates educators to use effective pedagogical methods in teaching vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction required teachers to support learners with many rich and robust opportunities to learn new words and their meanings. In this respect then students need strong instructional opportunities to build their personal storage of words, to develop deep levels of word knowledge, and acquire a tool-house of strategies assisting them for words acquisition independently.

1.2. Statement Of the Problem

Learning a foreign or second language at intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency involves the acquisition of thousands of words. Language learners look for effective ways to increase opportunities for retaining new words in long-term memory, but forgetting is a common problem. Language learners often complain that they forget new words soon after learning them. It is noteworthy that in foreign language learning, formal instruction is the primary source of input and consequently can be the source of much misunderstanding and wasted effort. Therefore, special attention must be given to presenting, practicing, and producing new vocabulary items.

Vocabulary learning problems may be barriers to successful language learning. As according to Nation (1997), vocabulary is the most sizeable and unmanageable component in the learning

of any language. Therefore, solving these problems may be of great help to both students and teachers. If we want to provide guidelines and solve vocabulary acquisition problems, it is necessary to discover those problems and perceive their nature.

Among these, abstract concepts are said to be the *Achilles` Heel* of English/foreign language learners, as it seems to be more poorly comprehended and, therefore, poorly recalled, because people experience greater difficulty in accessing the relevant world knowledge necessary for understanding such materials.

It has been demonstrated repeatedly, and with a variety of methodologies, that concrete words have a cognitive advantage over abstract words—an advantage, labelled the ‘concreteness effect’. With respect to lexical processing, early demonstrations of a processing advantage for concrete over abstract words were provided by James (1975), Whaley (1978), and Rubin (1980). James showed that at least when low frequency words are considered, concrete words are identified as words faster than abstract words. Whaley (1978) and Rubin (1980) adopted a correlational approach, showing that there is a significant negative correlation between concreteness ratings and lexical decision reaction times for the same items. With respect to memory for concrete and abstract words, it has been again repeatedly demonstrated that concrete words have an advantage over abstract words in both long-term and short-term memory tasks (e.g. paired-associate learning (Paivio, Yuille, & Smythe, 1966); serial recall (Romani, McAlpine, & Martin, 2007), free recall (Romani, McAlpine, & Martin, 2007)).

In recent years, there have been arguments regarding the source of concreteness effects in lexical processing. Two positions are of interest. The first, the dual-representation theory (Paivio, 1986), states that concrete words are easier to process, because concrete words have easier access to imageability. Thus, the processing superiority of concrete over abstract words is attributed to the greater availability of the imagery system for concrete words, which is not as readily available for abstract words (Paivio, 1986, p. 218). Context availability hypothesis (Schwanenflugel, 1991) emphasizes the availability of information from prior knowledge to explain concreteness effects. The context-availability hypothesis predicts that presentation of abstract and concrete verbal materials in a supportive context will result in equivalent comprehension and recall by increasing the availability of relevant contextual information from prior knowledge.

Therefore, abstract materials are recalled more poorly than concrete materials, not because of the lesser availability of imagery, but because of the availability of associated contextual information in memory for such materials. As far as students face with considerable difficulties in retrieving and marshaling their meanings, there is a need for meaningful and engaging contexts that result in more elaborate, longer lasting, and stronger memory traces.

Several studies also show that presenting abstract sentences in supportive contexts will eliminate the difference between abstract and concrete sentences in comprehension time (Schwanenflugel & Shoben, 1983) and recall (Marschark, 1985). Supportive stimulus contexts have been shown in several studies to help override this difficulty for abstract words (Schwanenflugel et al., 1989; Schwanenflugel & Shoben, 1983; Schwanenflugel & Stowe, 1989). Further, when abstract and concrete words are equated in terms of rated accessibility of information from prior knowledge (i.e., context availability), abstract words are processed as quickly and as accurately as concrete words (Schwanenflugel et al., 1989).

The corpus-based model of Vigliocco et al. (2009) directly grounds abstract concepts in a combination of linguistic and affective information. Accordingly Kousta, et al. (2011) assert that experiential information and emotional content play a crucial role in the processing and representation of abstract concepts because statistically, abstract words are more emotionally valenced than are concrete words, and this accounts for a residual latency advantage for abstract words, when variables such as imageability (a construct derived from dual coding theory) and rated context availability are held constant. Internal experiences (felt experiences of judgments, cognitive operations, emotional valence, etc.) have been hypothesized to play a special role in grounding abstract concepts, as have complex situations involving multiple actors, particularly social actors (Recchia & Jones, 2012).

Based on these studies, it can be inferred that efficient learning of abstract vocabulary will not occur successfully, except through being embedded in the senseful, emotionally rich and motivating contexts. In such type of contexts we can give our learners' both a chance for their better memorizing and recalling of abstract concepts and even a chance for being engaged in motivating, meaningful and humanistic learning procedures. We say humanistic because any type of learning deprived of humans' emotional dimension seems to be a vain attempt, being educationally and socially problematic. As Snow and Farr (1987) suggest that sound learning theories are missing and realistically require a whole person view that integrates cognitive,

conative, and affective aspects. These researchers recommend that educators cannot set these key psychological aspects aside because they interact in significant and complicated ways underlying learning/cognitive processes and performance outcomes. Otherwise, explanations about learning will be ambiguous and isolated from reality.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

Throughout the last century, there have been tremendous changes in English language teaching (ELT) in terms of the changing winds and shifting sands of the history of ELT, regarding the way the English language has to be taught and learned. In fact, English language teaching has historically stemmed from the discoveries of theoretical linguistics (Berns & Matsuda, 2006). Later on, during the 1950s, ELT released itself from the boundaries of theoretical linguistics and, began to be an interdisciplinary field that is ready to endorse the findings of other domains of knowledge such as psychology, sociology, neurology, etc.

Based on these assumptions we present an alternative model for teaching and learning of abstract vocabulary through inspirational and motivational quotes with a commonsense, humanistic, and reflective approach, relying our hypothesis mainly on both psychological and neurologic recent findings in order to approach the issue in more elaborated and systematic way to be an influential attempt toward the upgrading of current literature of English language teaching and learning.

Following this line of investigation by considering the uncontroversial role of context in promotion of learning quality especially in the case of abstract vocabulary, the current study is an attempt to explore the impact of inspirational quotes as a supportive context on improving students' abstract vocabulary learning and recall. As according to Recchia and Jones (2012) language contexts richness facilitates abstract concept recognition and recall, it can be assumed that inspirational quotes as a source of inspiration, positive emotion and positive motivation can be a potential context for learners' emotional and motivational involvement in such a way that positively influence their cognitive ability and also present learners with a rich and supportive context for learning the meaning of abstract concepts.

In describing the construct of inspiration, Thrash and Elliot (2003) designed and tested the validity of a trait inspiration. Results showed the inspiration correlated positively with the