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A Strategy based on a semantic-field theory to Develop EFL Vocabulary Learning and Functional Composition for Primary Stage Pupils

A Research extracted from MA. Thesis in Education
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قسم المناهج وطرق التدريس

إستراتيجية قائمة على نظرية الحقول الدلالية لتنمية تعلم مفردات اللغة
الانجليزية والتعبير الوظيفي لتلاميذ المرحلة الابتدائية
(بحث مستل من رسالة ماجستير)

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مستخلص البحث

هدف البحث الحالي إلى التحقق من تأثير إستراتيجية قائمة على نظرية الحقول الدلالية في تنمية تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية والتعبير الوظيفي لدى عينة من تلاميذ المرحلة الابتدائية. وقد اتبع البحث المنهج شبه التجريبي. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف قامت الباحثة بإعداد أدوات البحث اللازمة والمناسبة لعينة البحث من تلاميذ الصف الرابع الابتدائي. وتمثلت الأدوات كالتالي: قائمة مهارات تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية، قائمة مهارات التعبير الوظيفي للغة الإنجليزية، اختبار قبلي - بعدي لتعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية، اختبار قبلي - بعدي للتعبير الوظيفي للغة الإنجليزية، إستراتيجية قائمة على نظرية الحقول الدلالية. وقد تمثلت عينة البحث من (٦٠) تلميذا وتلميذة تم اختيارهم بشكل عشوائي من تلاميذ الصف الرابع الابتدائي بمدرسة عمر بن الخطاب الابتدائية بمدينة المنصورة - محافظة الدقهلية. وقد تم تقسيم العينة إلى مجموعتين: مجموعة ضابطة ومجموعة تجريبية، واشتملت كل مجموعة على (٣٠) تلميذا وتلميذة. وقد قامت الباحثة بتطبيق اختبار قبلي - بعدي في كل من تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية والتعبير الوظيفي على المجموعتين لقياس أداء التلاميذ قبل تطبيق الإستراتيجية وبعد تطبيقها. ثم تدريس المجموعة التجريبية باستخدام الإستراتيجية القائمة على نظرية الحقول الدلالية، بينما تم تدريس المجموعة الضابطة باستخدام الطريقة التقليدية. وبعد معالجة النتائج إحصائيا توصلت نتائج البحث إلى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطات درجات المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة في اختبار المفردات واختبار التعبير الوظيفي لصالح المجموعة التجريبية، ولصالح الاختبار البعدي، مما يشير إلى فاعلية الإستراتيجية القائمة على نظرية الحقول الدلالية في تنمية تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية والتعبير الوظيفي لدى تلاميذ عينة البحث. وفي ضوء نتائج البحث، يوصي باستخدام استراتيجيات تدريس تستند لنظرية الحقول الدلالية في تنمية تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية والتعبير الوظيفي لتلاميذ المرحلة الابتدائية وغيرها من المراحل التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية، التعبير الوظيفي، نظرية الحقول الدلالية، تلاميذ المرحلة الابتدائية

Abstract

The research aimed at enhancing EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition among fourth year primary school pupils through using a strategy based on a semantic field's theory. It adopted the quasi-experimental design. The participants of the research were 60 fourth year primary stage pupils enrolled in Co.op Bddein Primary School, Mansoura, and Dakahliya Governorate. The participants were divided into two groups, one control group (taught using the traditional method) and another experimental group (taught using a strategy based on a semantic field's theory). The two groups received pre- and post- administration of the research -instruments. To fulfill the purpose of the research, the following instruments were designed and used by the researcher: An EFL vocabulary learning checklist required for fourth year primary school pupils; A pre / post vocabulary learning test to measure pupils' vocabulary learning; An EFL functional composition checklist required for fourth year primary school pupils; A pre / post functional composition test to measure pupils' functional composition. The experimental treatment was conducted during the second semester in the academic year 2022/2023. Results revealed that a strategy based on a semantic field's theory was effective in developing EFL primary stage pupils' vocabulary learning and functional composition. These points can assure this: (a) The experimental group pupils outperformed the control group pupils in the post administration of both vocabulary learning and functional composition tests, (b) The experimental group pupils' mean score in the post- administration of both vocabulary learning and functional composition tests were much better than their mean score in the pre-administration.

Keywords:

Vocabulary learning, functional composition, semantic field theory

Introduction

Vocabulary is of vital importance in language study because it is the essence of a language. Wilkins (1972) has the famous line "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. (P.111)" (cited in Changhong,2010) .

In addition, Thornbury (2002, P. 1) states, "language emerges first as words. New words never stop, nor does the acquisition of words". Therefore, it is clear that learners must devote considerable amounts of time and effort to learning foreign language vocabulary if they were to be able to communicate effectively in the target language (Shahin, 2016). So, the more words one knows, the more s/he equips himself / herself with a good body of vocabulary knowledge (Karimi&Heidori, 2015).

Teaching English requires students to master more vocabulary and use English to carry out richer and clearer self – expression. Therefore, vocabulary teaching becomes the key point of English language teaching (Liu, 2016).

From what have been previously mentioned and in order to help students learn vocabulary more effectively, many scholars provided a considerable number of vocabulary teaching approaches.

GAO and Xu (2013) indicated that in order to learn English more efficiently and gain a vocabulary that can meet the needs of normal communication; we should adopt an effective way to remember English words. Semantic – field theory plays a surprisingly big part in learning English vocabulary effectively and systematically. They added that, in recent years, more and more researchers start to pay close attention to the importance of semantic field theory for developing the language ability and efficiency. Students find it difficult to remember all the English words. Since semantic field, theory studies the relationship between words in a certain group, appropriate use of semantic field theory will make English vocabulary learning much easier.

GAO and Xu (2013) pointed out that teachers can make use of the semantic field theory to assist students to learn vocabularies. So

that the students' willingness to learn can be promoted and the effectiveness of vocabulary learning can be reinforced. Thus, the semantic field theory contributes to vocabulary instruction through the relationship between words meanings like: synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy.

Background of the Problem

In TEFL class, vocabulary learning is an extremely complex process. It is not an easy subject to deal with. This is because if EFL students cannot master vocabulary, this will affect their learning results (Wangru, 2016). Some previous studies (e. g. Atia , 2001 ; Ismail , 2008 ; Mohammed , 2009 ; Changhong , 2010 ; Gao and Xu , 2013 ; and Ali , 2017) pointed out that EFL students have many difficulties and problems in learning English language vocabulary . These researchers illustrated that EFL learners find it difficult to remember the English vocabularies. They cannot retain vocabularies and forget them when they need them in communicative situations. Students lose their attention inside the EFL classroom when using the traditional method of teaching vocabulary; many EFL students consider learning vocabulary a tedious job. That is, students are taught lists of words only to realize a few hours that their results are hardly satisfactory. The students start blaming their poor memory. The previous researchers highlighted that vocabulary learning is neglected.

Based on the personal observation of the researcher as an English language teacher, the researcher observed different classes, and it was clear that teachers are using very traditional methods to teach vocabulary. That is; he or she uses the word lists; two or three long columns of new vocabulary are written on the board saying the meaning of the new word in isolation with the native language equivalents. Also, based on the personal experience of the researcher, it was noticed that the actual level of six primary stage pupils in vocabulary learning and retention is very low. Moreover, when the researcher has analyzed the pupil's results of the first and second term exams and quizzes, it was shown that they were

relatively weak. Besides, the researcher based on unstructured interviews with English language teachers and supervisors in different educational stages (primary, preparatory and secondary stages) to identify the actual the general level of students in vocabulary learning is weak.

On the other hand , we cannot ignore the role of the vocabulary testing here . That is ; vocabulary testing has a serious role in measuring the extent of words that students have and whether they are able to use these words or not . Perhaps the most widely used vocabulary tests are the Vocabulary Levels Test and the Word Associates Test . These test were important to work on vocabulary and have been of great value to both teachers and learners . The Vocabulary Levels Test was created by Paul Nation . This test has levels . Each level has a number of words . The scores of this test indicate the extent of vocabulary at each level . This in turn indicates where vocabulary learning is needed , and this in turn may indicate the effectiveness of vocabulary learning techniques .In contrast , the Word Associates Test created by Read . It measures the different relations of the key word to other words . This test measures how well words are known . It provides a better clarification of what students can or cannot do with words (use the words) . For example, many students have learned vocabulary through different techniques. However, it lacks for useful comprehension. They are unable to use these words because of lacking that other words used together with the target words ; that is , the semantic relationships between words . (Webb&Sasao , 2013) .

Results of the pilot study

Thus, to further investigate the problem of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot study using a vocabulary test to determine the fourth year primary pupils' current level in vocabulary. The test was designed by the researcher. It consisted of 20 items (Choose the correct answer from a, b, or c) based on the English language textbook: "Connect: 4". The test was administered to a sample of 30 fourth year primary stage pupils from El – Salam

Basic Education school in El – Mansoura. The pilot study was conducted in the academic year 2018/ 2019. Table (1) shows the test results:

Table (1)

Results of the pilot study (vocabulary test)

Total Exam Mark	Mean	Percentage
15	2.7	20%

On the other hand, the researcher conducted another test to determine the pupil's current level in functional composition. The researcher designed that test. The test consisted of a functional composition question based on English language textbooks from "Connect: 4 ". The test was administered to the same sample of 30 fourth year primary stage pupils from El – Salam Basic Education School in El – Mansoura. The test was conducted in the academic year 2018/ 2019. Table (2) shows the test results:

Table (2)

Results of the pilot study (functional composition test)

Total Exam Mark	Mean	Percentage
20	1.6	29%

The results of the pilot study revealed that 80% of the pupils did not master vocabulary learning. In addition, the researcher assessed pupils' functional composition through applying a functional composition test, see appendix(B).The researcher showed that the pupils have a low level of functional composition.

Therefore, in an attempt to provide a solution to the research problem, there is a need to have a new attractive teaching approach to facilitate vocabulary learning and functional composition. The researcher attempted to use a strategy based on a semantic field theory to develop EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition among fourth- year pupils at primary stage.

Statement of the problem

In spite of the importance of EFL vocabulary learning, there is a deficiency in EFL vocabulary learning among fourth-year primary stage pupils and a lack of functional composition. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to use a strategy based on a semantic field theory to develop their vocabulary learning and functional composition.

Aims of the Research :

The main purpose of this study is to develop the fourth year primary pupils' vocabulary learning and functional composition through the use of a strategy based on a semantic field theory.

The other purposes of the current study may be:

1. Investigating fourth year primary pupils' level in vocabulary
2. Learning and functional composition.
3. Designing a strategy based on a semantic field theory to develop
4. Vocabulary learning and functional composition for fourth year primary pupils.
5. Identifying a list of functional composition skills needed for the
6. fourth year primary pupils.
7. Investigate the effectiveness of using semantic – field theory on developing English vocabulary for primary stage pupils.

Significance of the Research

The present research is significant for:

1- EFL Pupils: as it may help in:

2- Developing their EFL vocabulary learning in general.

3- Learning through a range of meaningful activities in a fruitful environment.

4- -Using semantic fields in improving pupils' vocabulary learning and functional composition.

2-EFL Teachers: as it may help in:

Providing teachers with new strategies for developing EFL

1 Vocabulary learning and functional composition among fourth-year primary stage pupils.

2 Enabling them to learn EFL vocabulary and functional

composition in a smooth process in their classrooms.

3 Providing them with some effective ways/devices for assessing EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition.

3- EFL Curriculum developers: as it draws their attention to semantic field strategy in developing EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition using this strategy in teaching the EFL curriculum.

Questions of the Research

To investigate this problem, the present study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the effectiveness of using a strategy based on a semantic field theory in developing EFL primary stage pupils' vocabulary learning?
- 2) What is the effectiveness of using a strategy based on a semantic field theory in improving EFL primary stage pupils' functional composition ?

Hypotheses of the Research:

The present research attempts to verify the following hypotheses:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in the post administration of the EFL vocabulary learning test, in favor of the experimental group.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group and the control one in the post administration of the EFL functional composition test, in favor of the experimental group.
3. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post administrations of the EFL vocabulary-learning test, in favor of the post administration.
4. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post administrations of the EFL functional composition test, in favor of the post administration.

Design of the Research

The present research adopted a two –group quasi-experimental design wherein the participant were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group’s pupils used the proposed strategy based on a semantic fields theory while the control group’s pupils received no other treatment except for the regular way of learning. Pupils in both groups were exposed to the pre- post vocabulary learning and functional composition tests.

Participants of the Research

Participants of the research were 60 fourth year primary stage pupils. They were two classes from Co.op. Bddein Primary School in Mansoura, Dakahliya Governorate.

Instruments of the Research

1. An EFL Vocabulary learning checklist required for fourth year primary school pupils;
2. A pre / post vocabulary learning test to measure pupils' vocabulary learning;
3. An EFL Functional composition checklist required for fourth year primary school pupils;
4. A pre - post functional composition test to measure pupils' functional composition.

Results

To determine whether pupils' Overall EFL Vocabulary Learning and Functional Composition improved after implementing the experimental treatment using the strategy based on a semantic fields theory , the hypotheses of the research were tested by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 26) Program.

Hypothesis (1)

The first hypothesis states that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in the post administration of the EFL vocabulary learning test, in favor of the experimental group ".

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used the t-test to compare the mean scores of the experimental group pupils who used a strategy based on a semantic field theory with those of the control group pupils who used the traditional method, in the EFL vocabulary learning post-test.

Table3: Post t-test results of the experimental and control groups in Synonymy , Hyponymy and Overall EFL vocabulary learning

Skill(s)	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df.	t	Sig.
Synonym	Experimental	30	13.15	3.22	58	9.095	0.01
	Control	30	5.20	2.61			
Hyponym	Experimental	30	11.02	2.32	58	8.725	0.01
	Control	30	4.60	1.77			
Overall EFL Vocabulary learning	Experimental	30	24.17	7.13	58	12.125	0.01
	Control	30	9.80	4.36			

The table above indicates that the mean scores of the experimental group pupils are higher than those of the control group in the Overall EFL Vocabulary learning and its skills ' aspects' , where t-value is (12.125) for overall vocabulary skills 'aspects' , (9.095) for Synonymy, and (8.725) for Hyponymy which is significant at 0, 01 level of significance. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed. These differences can be attributed to a strategy based on a semantic field's theory.

The results showed that the mean scores of the experimental group pupils are higher than those of the control group in both the overall EFL vocabulary learning, Therefore, the first hypothesis is accepted. That is, the experimental group achieved more progress than the control one. This may be due to the effect of using the strategy based on a semanticfield's theory.

Hypothesis (2)

The second hypothesis states, "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group and the control one in the post administration of the EFL functional composition test, in favor of the experimental group."

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used the t-test to compare the mean scores of the experimental group pupils who used a strategy based on a semantic field theory with those of the control group pupils who used the traditional method, in the EFL functional composition post-test.

Table4: Post t-test results of the experimental and control groups in Organization, Content, Vocabulary, Grammar and Overall EFL Functional composition

Skill(s)	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df.	T	Sig.
Organization	Experimental	30	16.33	3.55	58	8.832	0.01
	Control	30	6.00	2.72			
Content	Experimental	30	5.42	2.32	58	6.023	0.01
	Control	30	2.00	2.53			
Vocabulary	Experimental	30	7.22	2.85	58	7.651	0.01
	Control	30	2.60	1.91			
Grammar	Experimental	30	7.15	2.75	58	7.121	0.01
	Control	30	2.00	2.88			
Overall Score	Experimental	30	36.15	8.26	58	10.233	.01
	Control	30	12.60	3.85			

The table above indicates that the mean scores of the experiment group pupils are higher than those of the control group in the Overall Functional composition and its sub-skills, where t-value is (10.233) for overall functional composition skills, (8.832) for organization, (6.023) for content, (7.651) for vocabulary, and (7.121) for grammar, which is significant at 0, 01 level of significance. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed. These differences can be attributed to a strategy based on a semantic based theory.

Hypothesis (3)

The third hypothesis states that " There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post administrations of the EFL vocabulary learning test, in favor of the post administration."

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used the t-test to compare the mean scores of the experimental group pupils who used a strategy based on a semantic fields theory in the pre and post EFL vocabulary learning test.

Table (5): post t-test results of the experimental group pre and post pre and post Synonymy, Hyponymy and Overall EFL Vocabulary learning

Skills	Test	N	\bar{X}	SD	df.	T	Sig.
Synonym	Pre- test	30	3.00	1.55	29	11.021	0.01
	Post- test		13.15	2.55			
Hyponym	Pre- test	30	1.90	1.32	29	10.853	0.01
	Post- test		11.02	2.32			
Overall Score	Pre- test	30	4.90	3.05	29	14.323	0.01
	Post- test		24.17	11.13			

The table above indicates that the mean scores of the experimental group pupils are higher in the post test than those of the pre-scores in the EFL Vocabulary learning and its skills ' aspects' , where t-value is (14.323) for overall EFL Vocabulary learning, (11.021) for Synonymy, and (10.853) for Hyponymy, which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed. These differences can be attributed to a strategy based on a semantic fields theory.

Hypothesis (4)

The fourth hypothesis states that " There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post administrations of the EFL functional composition test, in favor of the post administration."

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used the t-test to compare the mean scores of the experimental group pupils who used a strategy based on a semantic fields theory in the pre and post EFL functional composition test.

Table (6): post t-test results of the experimental group pre and post Organization, Content, Vocabulary, Grammar and Overall EFL Functional composition

Skills	Tests	N	\bar{X}	SD	df.	t	Sig.
Organization	Pre- test	30	4.25	2.67	29	13.121	0.01
	Post- test		16.33	3.55			
Content	Pre- test	30	2.41	2.01	29	9.734	0.01
	Post- test		5.42	2.32			
Vocabulary	Pre- test	30	2.61	2.12	29	10.832	0.01
	Post- test		7.22	2.85			
Grammar	Pre- test	30	2.22	2.81	29	11.032	0.01
Overall Score			15				
	Pre- test	30	3.85	3.85	29	13.131	0.01
Post- test		36.15	8.26				

The table above indicates that the mean scores of the experimental group pupils are higher in the post test than those of the pre-scores in the EFL functional composition and its skills, where t-value is (13.131) for overall EFL functional composition, (13.121) for Organization, (9.734) for Content, (10.832) for Vocabulary, (11.032) for Grammar, which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed. These differences can be attributed to a strategy based on a semantic fields theory.

Discussion of the Results of the Research

Results revealed that the level of the experimental group who were taught using the strategy based on a semantic field theory was higher than that of the control group who received the traditional method of teaching. These results indicated that the strategy based on a semantic field theory used in the present study had a positive effect on the vocabulary learning and functional

composition of 4th year primary stage pupils in the experimental group. The performance of those pupils in the post test was better than those of the control group pupils. Thus, the first hypothesis of the study was accepted.

In addition, the results revealed that the level of the pupils of the experimental group on the vocabulary learning in the post test was higher than their levels on the pre-test.. In that way, the second hypothesis was also accepted.

As for the hypothesis, the results indicated that the level of the pupils of the experimental group on the vocabulary learning and functional composition in the posttest was higher than their levels on the pretest. Thus, the strategy based on a semantic field theory is effective in developing EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition. The researcher noticed that the pupils of the experimental group enjoyed and were motivated by preparing and taking part in the strategy based on semantic field theory activities during the sessions. In addition, the findings indicated that the strategy based on a semantic field theory proved to have a positive effect on developing the experimental group pupils vocabulary learning and functional composition.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and results of the present research , it can be concluded that the participants' EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition of the present research were developed as a result of using the strategy based on a semantic fields theory. The experimental group pupils achieved noticeable progress in their vocabulary learning and functional composition after using the strategy based on a semantic field theory as compared to their vocabulary learning and functional composition before using the strategy based on a semantic field theory.

In the light of the findings of the present research , the following conclusions can be imbedded: the research participants showed a great development in EFL vocabulary learning with their two main aspects 'skills' : synonymy and hyponymy; and in EFL functional

composition 'invitation' with its main skills : organization, content, vocabulary and grammar. In addition, the research participants were able to know and use a strategy based on a semantic field theory; they have learned fluently. Consequently, it can be concluded that the suggested strategy based on a semantic fields theory is effective in developing EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition among primary stage pupils.

Recommendations of the Research

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are suggested

1. More attention should be paid to the importance of EFL vocabulary Learning for primary stage pupils.
2. The importance of functional composition should have more interest for EFL primary stage pupils.
3. More concentration should be paid to semantic fields theory 's principles in designing EFL primary stage pupils' courses.
4. .There should be greater focus on the effectiveness of semantic field
5. Theory on developing English language in general and EFL vocabulary
6. Learning and functional composition in particular.
7. Higher consideration should be given to semantic fields effectiveness in
8. increasing EFL pupils' functional composition.
9. 6.Semantic fields –based activities should be given more attention to help
- 10.pupils learn in an enjoyable environment.
- 11.More interest should be given to semantic fields' activities that offer the EFL pupils more practice in a fun and interesting atmosphere.

Suggestions of the Research

Based on the findings of the present research, the following implications for further research were suggested:

1. Investigating the effect of semantic fields on improving EFL vocabulary learning skills among learners at other educational levels; preparatory and secondary
2. Investigating the effect of semantic fields on other language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.
3. Identifying the effectiveness of semantic fields on developing Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills among learners at different educational levels.
4. Investigating the effectiveness of more recent activities in the EFL vocabulary learning and functional composition.

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