

USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AND VOCABULARY PROFILER TO ENHANCE VOCABULARY LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The paper reports a research about the effect of authentic materials and the use of vocabulary profiler on some EFL learners' master of vocabulary. An intact class of 21 students was taught Vocabulary lesson, which amounted to 100 minutes of class session every week. In addition to this regular intentional learning, they were instructed to read authentic materials and utilize a vocabulary profiler to obtain a vocabulary profile of the materials. They were taught how to interpret the result of the profiling. Next, they were asked to show their texts on a blog so as to allow their classmates to learn new words from the texts. Questionnaires were used to elicit their opinions on this teaching technique.

At the end of the semester a post-test was administered to determine the gains in their vocabulary mastery. While there was an apparent gain in their command of 5000-level English words, they did not make a similarly encouraging achievement in the new words from the texts. An explanation that accounts for the finding was offered. Meanwhile, the answers from the questionnaires seemed to reflect their positive attitude toward the use of authentic materials in this fashion.

Key words: authentic materials, vocabulary profiler, vocabulary learning, learning enhancement

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of Web-based information technology, language educators are invited to a vast world full of tools and resources that they can exploit to enhance their teaching. Gone is the day when learning is confined to the four walls and whiteboard of a classroom. It is becoming easier now to extend learning outside the classroom so as to maximize the impact of the learning tasks on the learners' ability. Obstacles that in the past hampered the effectiveness and efficiency of classroom language learning can now be overcome. Information technology, particularly the Internet, provides teaching tools that help teachers and students alike to run simple analysis of the learning materials, identify the core of the materials that is worth learning and separating it from the less important items, and even evaluate their own success, all accomplished in a more or less independent manner. Moreover, the increasingly sophisticated technologies in Web-based technology has made it possible to engage the learners in a blended e-learning, which is the combination of traditional classroom teaching and online learning.

Learning vocabulary is obviously essential in foreign language learning. While this is an obvious fact, it is equally obvious that most Indonesian students still have to struggle hard with their poor mastery of English vocabulary. The inadequacy in turn hinders their fluent use of the language for a wide range of communicative purposes in the academic or professional domain. A lot of studies that dated back as far as the 1970s have consistently pointed out the poor vocabulary knowledge of high school graduates. Nurweni and Read

(1999) reported that Indonesian high school graduates mastered a mere average of 1200 words, far below the required level of 5000 words. Kweldju (1997) found that English department students only knew around 2800 word families.

Before putting in all efforts to enrich vocabulary or, in the case of a teacher, to help students learn new vocabulary, students and teachers can benefit a lot from knowing some basic facts about English vocabulary. Knowledge of these characteristics may help them allocate the right amount of attention and effort to vocabulary learning. In addition, they will benefit from learning a few strategies for memorizing and recalling word meanings with greater ease. The paper highlights some basic facts about English vocabulary, and then suggests three techniques that are aimed to enhance the positive impact of vocabulary learning.

Characteristics of English Vocabulary

A lay person studying English for the first time will be amazed at the massive size of English vocabulary: around 126,000 words, and growing! Yet, one should not feel intimidated by that gargantuan amount of vocabulary if he or she knows some basic facts about English words. Nation (2002) states that English words fall into four major categories as displayed in the following table:

Table 1. Four Major Types of English Vocabulary

Type	Coverage	Implication for learning
High Frequency Words: 2,000 words	80% of the running words in a typical text	Very important to learn, because of its high coverage and relatively small number
Academic Words: 570 words	10% of the running words in typical academic texts	Very important for academics
Technical Words: 1000 words	5 % of the running text of a particular discipline	Important for comprehensive knowledge about a specific field
Low Frequency Words: 126,000	5 % of the running words in a typical text.	Not important for intentional learning, because they comprise a very large number of words that cover only a small part of English texts.

Thus, if one knows the basic fact above, he or she would spend her time and energy more efficiently, allocating attention to frequent words which are more worth-learning, and using them to deal with and master higher number of words that occur more rarely. In other words, the person will spend time and energy memorizing only those vocabulary with the

highest frequencies, and use these words to help her figure out the meanings of the less frequent words.

Such niceties fit very well in the domain of vocabulary learning. An ideal vocabulary learning should go beyond the prescribed textbook that is used in daily teaching session. The learners should also be exposed to, and made to notice, a massive number of vocabulary that frequently come up in contemporary texts around their lives and which the textbook has not sufficiently covered. Also, they should be trained how to employ strategies that make their learning more effective and efficient. These acts should then culminate in an intensive use of the newly learned items in sentences that they create themselves, something which has proved effective (Djiwandono, 2009)

This paper reports a small-scale exploratory study of blended learning that combines conventional classroom session and individual learning from a blog. It aims to determine the degree of effectiveness of such technique in promoting vocabulary learning.

The first important issue addresses synchronous and asynchronous type of interaction. Conventional, or face-to-face classroom session usually is executed in synchronous mode, while online teaching and learning sessions can be carried out asynchronously. The latter enables the learners to access the lesson materials at different times from different locations. Though seemingly in a complementary role, they are also dependent on certain factors that will be discussed later. It is necessary that a sensitive teacher be well informed of the factors that eventually contribute significantly to the success of the blended learning he or she is committed to.

Another issue of equal importance is the type of learning that suits blended e-learning best. Closely linked to this is the concept of learning design, which is indispensable in blended e-learning. The paper raises areas to be considered that arose during the blended e-learning project.

Learner motivation is an aspect that needs attention, too. The paper reports a few opinions from the students concerning their degree of interest in engaging in the blended learning. It highlights certain features on blogging that cater for five learning activity techniques, namely assimilative, adaptive, communicative, productive, and experiential activities. Finally, the paper address some implications for further development of blended learning.

Blended Learning

Blended learning is simply defined as a combination of conventional face-to-face classroom learning and online learning. Simple as it may seem, it implicates some important issues that merit further empirical investigation. Garrison and Vaughan (2008), for instance, contend that each type of learning brings with it distinct atmosphere and entails unique learning experience. They maintain that face-to-face interaction promotes social presence, allowing learners to get a sense of belonging to a community, is important in building group identity, and serves to prepare the learners for a more individualistic style of online learning.

Blog as a Supporting Means

Nepomuceno (2011) conducted a study on the use of blog to enhance students' writing. One supportive feature of a blog that he found is the accessibility of a blog. A blog can be read by everyone, and as such, it embodies a quality of being contributive whereby learners can gain some lessons from their peers as well give them some new ideas to be learned. In a slightly different media, Ali, Mukundan, Baki and Ayub (2012) conducted a study on the learners' interest in three Vocabulary methods, one of which is using CALL. They found that the learners favored the method that used CALL for their vocabulary learning, and suggest that this is due to the match between their learning styles and the primary features of CALL. In essence, an approach that utilizes Web-based technology will likely be met with enthusiastic responses from learners. Another empirical evidence about the role of Web-based technology is by Binkai (2012). He found that learners are enthusiastic about corpus-driven vocabulary learning aided by concordancing software.

Recent Studies

A recent study that is most relevant to the topic of this paper was carried out by Webb and Chang (2012). They measured the vocabulary growth of 166 Taiwanese students who received different kinds of English instruction at their schools. They showed that one group could only learn as few as 18 words a year, while other groups could manage to gain as many as 430 words. The authors concluded that the types and intensity of English instruction is instrumental in taking the learners to an adequate rate of vocabulary learning. The present study reported in this paper tries to see if a blended learning will positively impact the students' growth of vocabulary mastery over a period of one semester.

Another study that was not very recent yet offers relevance to the present study was conducted by Laufer and Shmueli (1997). They found that glossary of new words written in students' L1 words facilitate better retention than the words explained in English as the target language. They also found that words presented in a list and in sentences were memorized better than those in text.

A closer look at the analysis of the questionnaires combined with an informal interview sessions with the learners revealed that despite the merit of online learning, they still feel the need for attending a conventional classroom session where they can get a more direct and clearer explanation from the lecturer and their peers. This supports what Garrison and Vaughan (2008) state about the indispensable power of face-to-face interaction, where the sense of community is maintained by the physical presence of the teacher and classmates.

METHOD

The small-scale exploratory research was conducted in a pre-test post-test quasi experimental design, whereby no randomization was done to select the subjects. An intact class consisting of 21 students who were taking Vocabulary class was taken as the group on which the experiment was performed. The independent variable was blended learning technique, and the dependent variable was the learners' mastery of new words. A pre-test was given at the initial stage, and a post-test was administered at the end of the semester when the course was concluded.

The data collected were the pre-test scores from the 5000-word level test, the middle-semester scores, and the two final tests. The scores were analyzed using ANOVA to determine whether there was any differences between them.

To achieve the second objective, namely, identify the learners' opinions about the blended learning, they were asked to fill out questionnaires, which consist of a number of multiple-choice questions interspersed with a few open-ended questions.

The Subjects' Initial Vocabulary Mastery

The following table shows the scores of the learners on 5000-word level test at the beginning of the course:

Table 2. The Learners' Initial Mastery of 5000-Word Level (N = 21)

	Mean	SD
T1 (Initial mastery of 5000-word level)	38.095	16.785

It is apparent from the table that the students had relatively low mastery of vocabulary at the 5000-word level.

Treatment

The learners were instructed to find a text of their interest from the Internet or from the library. Then they were told to feed the text into a vocabulary profiling website at <http://www.lex Tutor.ca/vp/> to get the words in their texts broken down into several categories of vocabulary: blue colors for words of 1000-word level, green for words of 2000-word level, yellow for academic words, and red for words that do not belong to the categories previously mentioned. Once they got the result, they had to select only those red words, the rationale being those words somehow frequently show up in contemporary texts, at least according to the writer's observation, and were therefore worth learning. They were asked to provide the glossary for those red-colored words, and then post the text along with the glossary on a blog that had been prepared for this purpose at <http://katamachungers.wordpress.com>. Appendix A presents a sample of this text on the blog. It is to be noted that the glossary is written in the learners' native language, following the result of a study by Laufer and Shmueli (1997) discussed above.

With the blog containing more and more texts that also provided the glossary for new words, the learners now were instructed to read texts that their classmates had displayed and paid attention to the new words and their meanings. In this way, they began learning from each other's work, creating a virtual learning exchange in the cyberspace.

After the posting of texts and virtual learning continued for two months, a classroom session was conducted in order for the lecturer to confirm the meanings of the new words, elaborate on the semantic and syntactic aspects of the words, and answer questions from the students. In general, this session was held to consolidate the individual efforts by the students and to maintain the sense of being in a learning community. It also served to provide opportunities for the interact ants to deal with issues they could not possibly handle in the online mode of learning.

The students started posting on the blog in the middle of March 2012, and a periodical assessment was held in mid April 2012 to measure their learning gain. The assessment was in the form a test which required them to supply the meaning of some new words, and complete clipped new words in sentences (see Appendix B). The table below displays the results of the test:

Table 3. The Learners' Mastery of New Words from the Blog (N = 21)

	Mean	SD
LF1		
(Mastery of new words from the blog)	73.917	15.731

In the period from the middle-test to the end of the semester, the blended learning resumed. The class was engaged in posting new texts and learning more new words from them, both in online mode and in the classroom under the lecturer's guidance. In the final test, two tests were administered. The first was the 5000-word level test that had been given at the beginning of the semester, and the second was another test measuring their mastery of new vocabulary from the blog.

The following table shows the results of the two tests:

Table 4. Scores on the Second Tests

	Mean	SD
T2		
(Mastery of 5000-word level)	48.00	10.870
LF2		
(Mastery of new words from the blog)	64.00	16.478

FINDINGS

The following is the result of the ANOVA for the data:

Sample					
	T1	LF1	LF2	T2	Total
N	21	21	21	21	84
$\sum X$	799.9	1549	1420	1066.68	4835.58
Mean	38.0905	73.7619	67.619	50.7943	57.5664
$\sum X^2$	36104.0006	118983	101450	56544.6792	313081.679
SD	16.786	15.3717	16.4787	10.8707	20.4511
Std. Err	3.663	3.3544	3.5959	2.3722	2.2314

Note:

T1 = Scores from the first test on 5000-word level

T2 = Scores from the second test of the 5000-word level

LF1 = Scores from the first test of the new words from the blog

LF2 = Scores from the second test of the new words from the blog

To find the exact differences among the individual means, a Tukey HSD test was run after the main computation, resulting in this table below:

Table 5. Results of comparison between individual means

Differences between means	Level of significance	Status
T1 < LF1	p<.01	Significantly different
T1 < LF2	p<.01	Significantly different
T1 < T2	p<.05	Significantly different
LF1 > LF2	Not significant	Not significantly different
LF1 > T2	p<.01	Significantly different
LF2 > T2	p<.01	Significantly different

The Differences between Scores

It is surprising to see that the LF2, the average score after the learners spent more time studying the new words from the blog, was slightly lower than LF1, which was taken after they learned the new words for the first time. If a delayed positive effect took place, they should have scored higher after they took the test for the second time. Although the difference was not significant as the ANOVA shows, it still warrants a discussion.

In contrast, the change from T1 to T2 (scores for 5000-word level tests) seems logical, with T2 being higher than T1.

The Learners' Opinions about the Blended Learning

The data gathered from questionnaires were tabulated, and results are displayed in the following table (the figures indicate percentages of learners) :

Table 6. Learners' Opinions on the Effectiveness of Blended Learning

	Very effective	Moderately effective	Not effective		
The effectiveness of learning from the blog and the profiling website (lextutor)	33.33%	61.90%	4.76%%		
	Finding suitable text	Finding word meanings	Using the lextutor	Memorizing the meanings	All of the above
Biggest obstacle in learning from the blog	23.81%	0%	4.76%	57.14%	9.52%

The following table sums up the most frequent written comments from the learners:

Table 7. Most Frequent Comments on the Blended Learning

No.	Comments
1	Slow Internet connection often hampers the effectiveness of the approach.
2	This technique is not effective for students who do not have Internet access in their home.
3	Some students only read the blog when forced by tests; their motivation should be improved.
4.	Online learning frees students from taking note of the materials, because they have been available online.
5.	The blog should be given attractive decorations to make it more appealing.

No.	Comments
6.	This technique of learning from the blog is interesting and I like it. We can learn new words from one another.

DISCUSSION

It is apparent from the finding for the first research objective that the blended learning approach made a significant impact on the learners' vocabulary mastery. Of all the differences shown in the ANOVA summary table, there are three figures that indicate a significant increase from their initial mastery. The finding corroborates a standpoint from Laufer and Shmueli (1997) who maintain that new L2 words glossed in L1 prove more effective than those new words glossed in L2. Also, the presentation of new words in a list proves helpful for the learners, as confirmed in this present study.

However, the finding warrants a cautious interpretation, especially with regard to the difference between LF1 and LF2. It is worth noting here that LF2 was slightly lower than LF1, indicating that longer time available for the learners did not seem to strengthen the learning of new words from the blog. Possible causes of this may include declining performance due to heavy course load during the final exam, unequal test difficulties, or lack of repeated practice for the new words. Thus, once learned from the blog, the new words should have been practiced much more intensively in a lot of various exercises. Because the lecturer only discussed them once in a face-to-face session, the learners may not have been able to memorize the meanings and retrieve them well when the test items required them to do so. This conjecture was corroborated by the data from the questionnaires which indicated that most learners experienced difficulty in memorizing the meanings of the new words from the blog.

The second finding is a strong indication that blended learning is highly favored among the learners. Although the majority considered it as moderately effective, only a small number of them thought that it was ineffective. This supports an earlier study by Ali, Mukundan, Baki and Ayub (2012), and Bikai (2012) which also indicates high enthusiasm among students who were taught using CALL and concordance software.

The data taken from the responses to the questionnaires also prove that as far as vocabulary lesson is concerned, memorizing new meanings proves to be the most daunting challenge for the learners. Knowing this finding can help a teacher design a variety of exercises aimed to enhance storing and retrieving new words from the learners' memory.

To summarize, the findings from the data analysis at best suggest that a blended learning should still be complemented with intensive exercises that refine the storage and retrieval of the new words being learned. An approach where learners are left on their own to practice the recall of the target words themselves are probably less effective than the one which is facilitated by the teacher in either a face-to-face session or online session specifically designed for that purpose. The learners' opinions captured in this study has pointed to a more certain direction where such an effective combination of online and face-to-face session can promote a significantly improved mastery of new words.

CONCLUSION

The paper set out to investigate the effectiveness of a blended learning technique in a vocabulary class, and to identify the learners' opinions about the technique. Using a pre-test post-test quasi experimental design, an experiment was carried out on a class consisting of 21 students. After an initial data of their 5000-word level test, the class was engaged in a combination of learning vocabulary from a blog and face-to-face classroom teaching. A middle test was given in the middle of the semester, and the same 5000-word level test and a test of the new vocabulary from the blog were later administered to measure their mastery of new words after the treatment was completed. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to identify their opinions on the blended learning.

ANOVA calculation showed that there was a large enough gain on the mastery of new words, despite an intervening factor that might have been responsible for a slight decline from the scores of the first and the subsequent vocabulary tests. Meanwhile, qualitative data from the questionnaires showed that most of the respondents favored the new approach. Principally, the paper concludes that regardless of the approach used, the teaching of new vocabulary should still put enough emphasis on the intensity of practice of the newly learned words. For this to happen, face-to-face interaction arguably should always complement the online learning.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF TEXT FROM THE BLOG

Friendship is a feeling of love and affection of one person for another. This feeling of love must be reciprocated. Otherwise friendship cannot be possible. Friendship does not exist where tastes, feelings and sentiments are not similar. It is said that a friend in need is a friend in deed. There may be many friends at the time of prosperity. But most of them desert at the time of adversity. We can examine the sincerity of a friend during our time of hardship and trouble. Only a sincere and faithful friend remains with us at the time of our trouble. All others leave us. It is very painful when our friends turn traitors. Money is an enemy of friendship. Everybody has an attraction for money. When lending or borrowing of money is done between two friends, there is great risk. Friendship may be affected. So it is wise for true friends to avoid monetary transaction. Vanity is another element which breaks friendship. Everybody has self-respect. When a person tries to criticize his friend, their friendship is affected. So friendship must be treated very delicately. Very often some hypocrites pretend to be friends. They are more dangerous than avowed enemies. By telling soft words they bring enormous ruin to us. A true friend never exploits. He rather surrenders. But at present, the meaning of friendship has changed. There are many fair-weathered friends. They terminate their friendly tie as soon as their interests are fulfilled. It is very difficult to find a true friend today. It is better to establish true friendship with either a dog or an elephant. Both these beasts will remain faithful to their human friends. Today, friendship between two persons is short-lived. Good friends exercise good influence. They always help their friends, in distress and inspire them to walk on the right path. But evil friends ruin us completely.

Resource : <http://www.preservearticles.com/201104306080/short-essay-on-friendship.html>

Glossary:

affection : kasih sayang

reciprocated : berbalas

sentiments : sentimen

prosperity : kemakmuran

adversity : kesulitan

traitors : para pengkhianat

monetary : moneter, keuangan

transaction : transaksi

vanity : kesombongan, kesia-siaan

criticize : mengkritik

hypocrites : munafik

avowed : diakui

surrenders : menyerah

fulfilled : terpenuhi

distress : penderitaan, stress

inspire : menginspirasi

APPENDIX B: MID-SEMESTER TEST ON NEW VOCABULARY

A. Translate the underline words into Indonesian!

1. After his victory, he enjoyed his fame.
2. The scientist is renowned for his revolutionary idea in language learning.
3. The message that it conveys worried us.
4. The desk is cluttered.
5. The speaker is vigorous.
6. Their longevity is astonishing.
7. She sneaked into his room.
8. Inanimate objects are clearly visible.
9. The soldiers were enduring freezing temperature.
10. Our nation is becoming more prosperous.

B. Complete the missing words!

1. When the teacher gets angry, the a - - - of the class becomes uncomfortable.
2. She is suffering from mental d - - - ; she gets depressed and often cries with no apparent reason.
3. One of the amazing t - - - of whales is the ability to hunt in groups. This is a feature that is really fantastic for an animal.
4. The d - - - of the telephone conversation between the secret agent and the president shocked the country.
5. The rough weather c - - - us to stay inside; we cant go anywhere because of the heavy rain and wind.
6. We have two choices and we o - - - for the first one.
7. You have to c - - - with the regulations; if you break the rules you will be sanctioned.
8. She has won the contest and now she is t - - - that achievement in her Facebook.
9. The ocean is so v - - - , much larger than the land.
10. The object is so t - - - that even a regular microscope cannot capture it.