

ARTICLE

The Effects of Extensive Reading of Culturally Relevant Materials on Incidental Vocabulary Learning– A Literature Review

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to review some recent studies on the effectiveness of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and culturally relevant materials (CRM) on incidental vocabulary learning (IVL). The papers looks at various studies carried out in the last few years to see if there is any positive effect of culturally relevant materials on vocabulary learning. The studies conclude that reading of culturally relevant materials (CRM) may yield better results if it is supported by other means and techniques.

Keywords: Extensive Reading (ER), Culturally Relevant Materials (CRM), Incidental Vocabulary Learning (IVL)

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บทความวิชาการ

ประสิทธิผลของการสอนโดยอิงวัฒนธรรมและสื่อการเรียนรู้ที่เป็นบทอ่านอิงวัฒนธรรมต่อการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์แบบบังเอิญ

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาทบทวนงานวิจัยด้านประสิทธิผลของการสอนโดยอิงวัฒนธรรมและสื่อการเรียนรู้ที่เป็นบทอ่านอิงวัฒนธรรมต่อการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์แบบบังเอิญ โดยศึกษาจากงานวิจัยที่ดำเนินการในช่วง 2-3 ปีที่ผ่านมา เพื่อศึกษาว่าสื่อการเรียนรู้อิงวัฒนธรรมมีประสิทธิผลเชิงบวกต่อการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ของผู้เรียนหรือไม่ ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การอ่านสื่อการเรียนรู้ที่เป็นบทอ่านอิงวัฒนธรรมอาจจะเกิดประสิทธิผลดีขึ้นเมื่อใช้ควบคู่กับรูปแบบและเทคนิคการสอนอื่นๆ

คำสำคัญ: การอ่านเชิงกว้าง, สื่อการเรียนรู้ที่เป็นบทอ่านอิงวัฒนธรรม, การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์แบบบังเอิญ

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Introduction and background of the problem

The English proficiency level of Thai students is the lowest among all ASEAN group countries. They are at the bottom of the table faring better than Laos only in terms of various proficiency skills.(Prapphal, K. 2003) This fact is supported by some latest studies (Bolton, 2008; Bunnag, 2005a, 2005b), showing that Thai test takers' scores were significantly low compared to those of Southeast Asian countries in TOEFL and TOEIC tests.. Moreover, according to 2017 Education First English Proficiency Index (EFEPI, 2016), Thailand ranks 56th – the second-lowest rank – with an average score of 47.21 and is in the category of 'very low proficiency' countries. (EF EPI, 2017 March, retrieved from <http://www.ef.co.th/epi/>)

Although English has been there in Thailand as a subject in terms of teaching and learning for a long time, the problems of teaching and learning the language in Thailand still continue.(Somdee, M. 2007) Many Thai students are not able to use English skills properly. (Jaiyai, Torwong, Usaha, Danvirattana, Luangthongkam & Piyadamrongchai, 2005). Moreover,As Punthumasen (2001) points out, most of the Thai learners are not motivated or inclined to study English because the subject is boring to them and the teaching methods and techniques used in the classroom are not exciting enough to inspire them. Also, there is lack of interesting textbooks and materials in English which can motivate them to learn English. (Punthumasen, 2007) The fact that Thailand was never colonized by the UK can be one of the reasons why English proficiency level in Thailand would be lower than its neighboring countries like Malaysia or Singapore. (Crystal, D.1988, Philipson, R., 1992)

It has been established and suggested that English proficiency and vocabulary knowledge are interlinked. Without words, the humans would be reduced to some aliens who can only use gestures and symbols to communicate. (Hermann, 2003). Li (2007) concluded in her research that lexical knowledge and vocabulary size has a high correlation (0.39) to the overall language proficiency. She conducted her research on 168 English major students and the results showed that the depth of vocabulary was a significant indicator of language proficiency skills. The greater the vocabulary the higher the proficiency level of all the four skills. (Laufer, 1998) In English (as in any other language) a strong vocabulary is required for communication. (Schmitt, 2010) Studies suggest that vocabulary is probably the most significant parameter of second language performance and proficiency (e.g., Schmitt, 2010; Staehr, 2009) Many researchers concluded that vocabulary knowledge is a vital element in developing learners' language proficiency. (Laufer, 1986; Knight, 1984; Hermann, 2003)

Reading is perhaps the most powerful tool for vocabulary learning and this can lead to higher proficiency and better skills of communication and writing. However, the research suggests that a mere reading has not been successful enough. Therefore, the pioneering figures like Stephen Krashen (1989, 1993) and Paul Nation (2004) advocated and supported the theory of extensive reading. This is also called as pleasure reading because reading is a source of enjoyment too (Nation, 2005). He gave the

idea of ER plus. This has been supported by studies across a wide spectrum of educational and ELT research. (Daskalovska, 2014; Krashen, 2013; Nation 2011).

Good lexical knowledge is considered as an extraordinarily important tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary in a second language halts successful use of speaking and writing. Researchers such as Paul Nation (2011) have underscored that a good lexical knowledge is required for successful second language use and it serves as a great asset in terms of spoken and written capabilities. Schmitt (2000) highlights the connection between vocabulary and the language proficiency by saying that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” p. 55.) Vocabulary knowledge and language use complement each other. (Nation 2001)

At the same time, vocabulary knowledge has been a tricky term and the linguists have tried to define and settle it down through various research. Question of size or depth has always been in debate. Laufer (2003) has underscored few ‘assumptions’ related to vocabulary learning. She talks about the ‘noticing assumption’, ‘the guessing ability assumption’, the guessing-retention link’ and the ‘cumulative gains’.

Noticing assumption, as Laufer describes, is referred to as the condition where the reader notices the word in the first place without knowing any details of it. The ‘guessing retention link’ means the hypothesis where if someone guesses the word, he/she may retain it. There are no empirical studies though to support this assumption. The ‘cumulative gains’ means the more the reader comes across certain words the more the possibility of retaining the words. The ‘guessing ability’ is referred to as the condition where the reader infers the meaning of a word from context. (Laufer, B. 2003) She however contends that mere reading is not highly effective unless it is supported by other activities such as word-focused tasks.

It is important to see what kind of vocabulary a person possesses when we talk about vocabulary learning. There are times when a person is familiar with certain words when he/she sees or encounters them but this familiarity is not strong enough to help the person use that vocabulary in speech or writing. It takes long time for the person to be in total control of these words in terms of using them. This is called passive vocabulary knowledge. In more simple words, learner recognizes the words but he/she is not a position to use them as yet. Active vocabulary, on the other hand, is referred to as the condition where the learner is in total command and he/she can use it in their spoken and written discourse. However, one must understand that this difference of active and passive is a gradual process and it is just a matter of time and more encounters when the learner can use the vocabulary effectively. This difference is not a fixed solid boundary wall where a person cannot enter or sneak into other territory. (Meara, P. 1990)

In the second language vocabulary teaching and learning, vocabulary learning is categorized into two: incidental learning and intentional learning. As the name suggests incidental vocabulary learning is

referred to as a process where the students learn vocabulary without intentionally learning it; intentional learning, on the other hand, is described as something planned by teacher or students. As far as vocabulary learning is concerned, incidental learning always means the approach of learning it through texts, or doing other activities that are not directly related to vocabulary. On the contrary, the intentional learning specifically focuses on vocabulary itself, and mixes with all kinds of intentional or deliberate vocabulary learning strategies and means of memorizing words.

Extensive reading (ER) dates back to almost thirty years. Stephen Krashen (1989) a leading figure in the field, emphasized on reading in second languages. Extensive reading is also referred to as Sustained Silent Reading (SSI), Pleasure Reading (PR). Paul Nation (2004), another pioneering personality in the field of vocabulary acquisition and ER, while talking about the objectives and benefits of ER, describes various goal of ER like language learning goals, ideas learning goals and skill learning goals. If the reading material is interesting and if the students go through substantial amount of reading, the ER program can be highly productive and beneficial. (Nation, 2004)

Extensive reading, or pleasure reading (Hovard, 2011) sustained silent reading (Lin, 2012; Rosseau, 2012; Noland, 2014), has been increasingly popular of late with the concerned linguists and teachers as an apt reading method in various ESL/EFL stings. (Grabe, 2009, 2010).

“Extensive reading involves the independent reading of a large quantity of material for information or pleasure.” (Renandya, Rajan, & Jacob, 1999) Extensive reading is “an approach that sees reading not merely as translation or as a skill, but as an activity that someone chooses to do or not to do for a variety of personal, social, or academic reasons” (Day & Bamford, 2000, pp. 85–98). Some of the characteristics of extensive reading are as follows

1. Students read as much as possible without bothering too much about the meaning of difficult words.
2. Students read a lot of interesting stuff for pleasure.
3. The material should be of their own interest, something they enjoy reading.
4. The reading should happen both in and outside the classroom. (Day & Bamford, 2000)
5. The learners read comprehensible self-chosen materials.

Extensive reading is defined against intensive reading where the emphasis is more on the theoretical learning of English, not on the practicalities of it. In class, the students spend much of their energy on haggling with grammar translation method. The students are kept busy in translating sentences from their own language into English, or otherwise, and in doing various other activities instructed by the teachers.

One of the most significant studies was conducted by Pigada and Schmitt in 2006. It was a case study that tried to find the significance of extensive reading on vocabulary learning. The subject had read a large amount of fictional materials for almost four weeks. Examining the target vocabulary of more than hundred words from the materials that the participant read, the often used technique of pre-and

posttests was employed. The researchers explored three aspects of vocabulary learning (meaning, spelling, and grammatical knowledge) in terms of the number of word occurrences in the texts. Here, extensive reading impacted greatly where the subject had the gain of 65% of the target words. As the researchers themselves mentioned, this study may have limited impact elsewhere because a case study with a highly motivated student is not a barometer to judge the true effects of extensive reading. Another probable impediment of the study is the fact that the researchers conducted pre-and posttests in a very short duration of one month; the short interval might have had an impact on test results.

In recent times, extensive reading has taken a center stage and there has been a lot of research in the field. A number of studies support the theory that ER can have a positive effect on second language acquisition. Most recent studies on the effects of ER upon rate, comprehension, and vocabulary gains include the one by Nakanishi (2015). Nakanishi' (2015) research included two kinds of empirical studies—those having control groups and experimental groups, with the later going through the pre and post-test process only.

The research carried out by Nakanishi (2015) concluded that ER results in a positive effect. However, this result needs to be looked at more carefully. Vocabulary improvement results might have been genuine enough because of the tool used to check the vocabulary gain. In his research, the type of vocabulary test employed by Nakanishi was a standardized Vocabulary Levels Test. This Vocabulary Levels Test might not contain vocabulary items from the text which the students were made to read during the course of ER program. More in-depth sampled vocabulary evaluation is required, particularly with regard to high-frequency vocabulary items in order to get a more concrete and relevant measure of gains made during the course of extensive reading program. Also, of 34 studies that he reviewed, half of them did not have any control groups. Lacking control groups in the experimental study means lack of surety of whether extensive reading treatment itself had any impact or something else (Nakanishi, 2015).

The studies on extensive reading that Elley (1991) was associated with are the most concrete in terms of the duration (12–36 months) and the number of students (several thousand). The studies involved the learners reading for most of their class time the books that excited them. The study resulted in positive results in terms of improvement in second language vocabulary acquisition. (Nation, 1997) Hafiz and Tudor (1990) investigated the usefulness of ER in terms of reading graded readers on students' language use. Findings suggested that the scores of the experimental group have increased between pretest and posstest. The case study of four women by Cho and Krashen (1994) found that apart from vocabulary, the ability to speak and understand everyday English improved as well. Participants in Renandya, Rajan and Jacobs' study (1999) not only enjoyed extensive reading stuff, but considered them highly useful in improving their lexical knowledge.

The research by Alzubi (2014) investigated as to how effective is the extensive reading program on student's reading, vocabulary and grammar. Forty-one university students from different Jordanian universities who study English were selected and the study lasted for three semesters. Like any other

experimental, a pre-test for the general reading comprehension was administrated. By the end of the experiment, the researcher administrated the reading comprehension post-test. The t-test was also used to find out any significant differences between the pre-test and post-test on the reading, grammar, and vocabulary. The research concluded that ER program helped the students improve their vocabulary because of repeated exposure to vocabulary item (Krashen, 1982). Moreover, because the students had to read a lot and of interesting stuff, the students benefitted from the variety of vocabulary items.

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Incidental Learning of Collocation

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This study investigated the effects of repetition on the learning of collocation. Taiwanese university students learning English as a foreign language simultaneously read and listened to one of four versions of a modified graded reader that included different numbers of encounters (1, 5, 10, and 15 encounters) with a set of 18 target collocations. A surprise vocabulary test that was made up of four tests measuring receptive and productive knowledge of the form of the target collocations and receptive and productive knowledge of the form and meaning of these collocations was administered after the treatments. The results showed that (a) collocations can be learned incidentally through reading while listening to a graded reader and (b) the number of encounters has a positive effect on learning. If learners encounter collocations 15 times within a graded reader,

sizeable learning gains may occur. The extensive reading research carried out by Nakanishi concluded that extensive reading results in a positive effect. However, this result needs to be looked at more carefully. Lexical gains results may be affected by the type of vocabulary gain measure used. In his research, Nakanishi reported that the most frequently used type of vocabulary test was a standardized Vocabulary Levels Test. This Vocabulary Levels Test may not include vocabulary items from the text which students read during extensive reading program. More in-depth vocabulary evaluation is required, especially ones with many high-frequency vocabulary items to yield a useful and relevant measure of gains made during the course of extensive reading program. Also, of all the 34 studies, measuring rate, comprehension, and vocabulary gains that Nakanishi included in his study, 16 did not include control groups. Without control groups, it is hard to conclude whether extensive reading treatment itself had any impact. The research by Alzubi (2014) investigated the effect of extensive reading on the

student's reading, vocabulary and grammar. Forty-one university students from different Jordanian universities who study English were selected and the study continued for three semesters. Before carrying out the experiment, a pre-test for the general reading comprehension was administrated. At the end of the experiment, the researcher conducted the general reading comprehension post-test. The researcher used the t-test to investigate any significant differences between the pre-test and post-test on the reading, grammar, and vocabulaThe research concluded that ER program helped the students enhanced their lexical strength because of repeated exposure to vocabulary item in a comprehensible input over a long period of time that made it easier to students absorb the target words (Krashen, 1982). Moreover, due to the extensive reading of several topics, the students benefitted from the variety of vocabulary items.

The research by Chun, Choi, and Kim (2012) on 26 Korean Students evaluated the impact of extensive reading in the retention of vocabulary items for short and long periods. The study was different in that it had, apart from a pre-test and immediate post-test, a delayed post-test design. It was found that extensive reading was comparatively more useful than paired-associate learning in long-term vocabulary retention. The study lacked in that it did not measure the partially known words and also there was a long interval between immediate post-test and delayed post-test. This may have affected negatively on vocabulary retention.

Chen, Chen and Wey (2013) examined the effectiveness of extensive reading of electronic books on about a hundred students in Taiwan. The subjects were divided in two groups, experimental group comprised 46 students and the remaining 43 students were in the control group. The results of the research explained that the experimental group's reading attitude, reading comprehension and vocabulary benefitted more and showed greater improvement than the control group. The researchers, however, could have opted for mixed methods instead of going with only quantitative one because it was better on their part to take note of the individual thoughts and feeling (through interviews, classroom observation etc.) toward the project. The researchers could have used interviews to obtain the views of the participants. Moreover, the data collected might contain incomplete information since the participants might have faked good or bad.

Yamashita (2008) conducted a research to check the effects of ER program and she included as many language learning aspects as possible including the general reading ability and other language abilities. Thirty-one newly enrolled students at a Japanese university participated in the extensive reading study. As the study concludes, the subjects did not show better improvement in the area of spelling, learners improved to a great extent in reading ability. The impact of ER was seen on three counts: ER put students in a comfort zone and reduces nervousness towards EFL reading. The study affected positively on the students in terms of how they perceive the academic and intellectual benefits of reading.

There are some relatively old but highly regarded studies which are important to mention and which are frequently cited. In an ESL setting, Horst (2005) carried out a research to find out how much vocabulary the students gained in an extensive reading program for a duration of six weeks. Vocabulary growth was measured for the grades readers that students read. The researcher used three tools, by scanning some part of the reading texts, the employment of word occurrence profiling, and the preparation of vocabulary knowledge test consisting 100 items. Findings from all the pre-and posttests demonstrated that the participants gained a mean of 17 words from 1,001–2,000 frequency band words. Although the findings seem to suggest that the participant gained new vocabulary by reading extensively, the participants' word power improvement cannot be completely connected to the extensive reading because the pre-and posttests were not similar. Moreover, the fact that there was no control group in the study affects negatively on the findings of the study.

Pigada and Schmitt's (2006) study is a regularly cited research in the area of ER and vocabulary knowledge. The participant (an individual) in the case study read extensively the four graded readers of around thirty thousand words for four weeks. The study evaluated around one hundred thirty French words from the graded readers that the participant read, employing the same pre-and posttests method. The researchers tried to examine the three types of vocabulary knowledge (i.e. meaning, spelling, and part of speech) in terms of the frequency of the word items in the texts. Findings suggested that the participant improved his lexical knowledge of 65% of the target vocabulary items, with spelling improving the highest for both nouns and verbs. As the researchers mentioned, this study may have restricted implication because it is a case study of a gifted and brilliant student. Another drawback of the study might be the limited time gap between the pre-and posttests (i.e., one month); had there been a delayed test, the results of the study might have been different.

Hafiz and Tudor's (1989) study, though relatively old, is a widely cited research. In their experiment, using Krashen's (1977) *input hypothesis*, they tried to investigate the effects of extensive reading for pleasure program in Leeds (UK) on Pakistani origin students. It emerged clearly from the results that the experimental group improved substantially between pre and posttest. The study, on one hand, confirms Krashen's input hypothesis in that the students benefitted from extensive reading in a tension-free environment, the research participants, however, were second generation migrant children who had the exposure to English in their school life with native speakers. Studying with native children in a native speaking country is itself a privilege which learners in other settings may not enjoy. The study also supports some degree of teacher control in this kind of program 'to ensure learners do read'.

Waring and Takaki (2003) investigated the rate at which the learners learn and retain vocabulary while and after reading a story called *A Little Princess*. The results supported the notion that vocabulary can be gained incidentally from context. However, as the study itself suggests, few new words are learned in this manner and even those new words are lost easily. This does not, in any way, suggest that reading is of no help when it comes to vocabulary gain simply because the researchers

used only one graded reader. This goes to support the idea that the more the learners read the better the results (Nation and Wang, 1999).

Renandya, Rajan and Jacobs's (1999) study with a group of Vietnamese government officials studying English in Singapore is cited widely and is different because it deals with older adult second language learners. The study concluded that in order to carry out a successful extensive reading program, the reading material should be interesting as the results showed high degree of comprehension. However, careful planning and implementation should be in place for the learners to be fully immersed in this kind of program because the learners complained the lack of time to read such a long text as they were busy in other assignments.

The pioneer among all is Stephen Krashen. His (Mason and Krashen, 1997) studies convincingly show that extensive reading does have an impact on students' vocabulary. Among many of his studies, the one with Pitts and White with ESL students in the US resulted in increase in vocabulary knowledge. (Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989)

Cho and Krashen (1994) had this ER program with a couple of participants and tried to investigate the learning of unknown words occurring in the text. Three of the participants were asked to underline unknown words in the 'Sweet Valley' novels they read (although they varied in how much they did this) and were interviewed post treatment about these words' meanings. The fourth participant was examined differently, as he was given pre- and posttests. Despite the fact that the subjects had varying degree of proficiency level, Cho and Krashen found that all of their participants were able to enhance their vocabulary, gained more confidence, and reported improvements in aural skills.

The studies carried out in the last couple of decades show a strong connection between extensive reading and incidental vocabulary learning (Waring and Takaki, 2003; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006) and the older ones like Pitts, White and Krashen, 1989 and Mason and Krashen 1997. However, it is important to see what kind of vocabulary a person possesses when talk about vocabulary learning. There are times when a person is familiar with certain words when he/she sees or encounters them but this familiarity is not strong enough to help the person use that vocabulary in speech or writing. It takes long time for the person to be in total control of these words in terms of using them. This is called passive vocabulary knowledge. In more simple words, learner recognizes the words but he/she is not a position to use them as yet. Active vocabulary, on the other hand, is referred to as the condition where the learner is in total command and he/she can use it in their spoken and written discourse. However, one must understand that this difference of active and passive is a gradual process and it is just a matter of time and more encounters when the learner can use the vocabulary effectively. This difference is not a fixed solid boundary wall where a person cannot enter or sneak into other territory. (Meara, 1990)

Incidental learning can be understood as the by-product of learning something else (Nation, 1990). It is the idea that learning can occur anytime anywhere without actually planning for learning. The idea behind ER is that learners enjoy reading and reading becomes a source of fun for them, which will

hopefully improve the overall language ability, and a source of inspiration (Krashen, 1994). Some researchers suggest that extensive reading is mainly for the purpose of reinforcing partially known words so that they may move up to known words, rather than focus on building new vocabulary (Nation & Wang, 1999; Waring & Takaki, 2003).

Teng (2014) investigated the incidental vocabulary learning of frequently occurring words in a fictional text. She chose *Love or Money* (a graded reader) which contained high frequency words. The results showed that the largest gain was found in recognition of word form. It suggests that the learners knew form before they knew the meaning. Again, the question arises whether reading one graded reader can be really called an 'extensive reading' because the words occurring only once were not learned by the participants in terms of form, meaning, and usage.

The research by Brown, Waring and Donkaewbua investigated Incidental vocabulary acquisition from three modes of input i.e. reading, reading-while-listening and listening to stories. Thirty five participants (Japanese students of English literature) read and listened once to three graded readers and each story was of around 5500 words strength. The spelling of 28 words was changed (which they referred to as *substitute words*) hence following and replicating the designs of Waring and Takaki (2003). They applied multiple-choice test and meaning-translation test. The results showed, again, that the participants benefited from the frequency of word items. The more they met a word, the better results.

Schmitt (2007) says that for incidental vocabulary learning to happen, the students need to be exposed to maximum English environment. It can be done through an all-out communication in English or encouraging more reading in English, though the best way, according to him, is to live in English-speaking country for a while. He strongly supports graded readers (like *Oxford Bookworm Library* or *Cambridge English Readers series*) for beginners to really be immersed so that they can be good readers.

Pigada and Schmitt's (2006) case study of a 27-year old learner of French demonstrated a substantial incidental vocabulary growth in the extensive reading program. It was found that around two-thirds of the target words tested was enhanced. But again, a case study is not the kind of research which can be generalized especially when the participant is a capable and highly motivated student.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

Culturally relevant material or culturally relevant text (CRT) is a term used within the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) or culturally responsive instruction (CRI) which means an approach of teaching that builds upon "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them" (Gay, 2010). The term 'culturally relevant pedagogy' (CRP) was introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings way back in 1995. CRP puts great emphasis on the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds. She herself puts CRP this way;

“A pedagogy of oppression not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order.” (p. 160)

There are three aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy; institutional, personal and instructional. Institutional means the policies of the school should be such that they engage and assimilate culturally diverse students into the mainstream instead of marginalizing them. Personal means that the educators should not only be self-aware but they must know very well the students. Instructional means the teachers adheres and performs the best practices in a culturally responsive classroom (Richards, Brown and Forde, 2006).

Theoretical Underpinnings of CRP

The question now arises whether CRP or CRM have any connection with learning of vocabulary. Studies suggest that background knowledge contributes to greater efficiency of attention during reading hence providing a solid platform to learn vocabulary. The research by Steffenson (1979) concluded that the readers, when they were familiar with particular cultural context of a word, were more successful at interpreting the text in comparison to when they were unfamiliar with the cultural context of the vocabulary items.

Gay (2000) is the most prominent proponent of culturally relevant pedagogy in recent times. She is a well-known expert on multicultural education and has written extensively on CRP and multicultural education. Her books include “Culturally Responsive Teaching” “Becoming Multicultural Educators” and “At the essence of learning”. She long held the view that students should be taught through the prism of their respective culture. She defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010).

Culture is not a static and there is no uniformity in the way culture affects people. Though there are some shared values, it does not mean that every person from that culture behaves in the same manner. The role of the teacher, therefore, becomes highly important lest he starts painting the people of one particular group with the same brush (Irvine, 2012). She advocated three Cs for culturally responsive pedagogy; *culture*, *content* and *care* to be a successful CRP educator (Irvine, 2012).

Another important educator in the field of CRP Sonia Nieto (2010) concludes in her book *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical Perspectives for a New Century* that mere blaming the teachers for the underachievement of black students is not helpful. It is the collective responsibility of school, family, teachers and the wider community to be involved.

A closer look in the field of CRP shows that a big majority of studies and researchers in the area come from the USA where there has been immense focus on the education of Blacks and Hispanics. There is a need to use and experiment the term in other settings like Asia.

What is Culturally Relevant Material?

The term is referred to those texts, whether they are books, magazine articles, or newspaper articles, to which students can connect (Hanzlian, 2013). Culturally relevant text is the kind of literature that portrays an authentic and realistic picture of the culture while upholding a culturally conscious ideology. When students read authentic texts written about people of their culture, they get emotionally connected to it (McNair, 2010 as cited by Alysse Ouimet 2011).

Gay (2010) says “it is quite unlikely that any one author, book, or other reference is ever capable of providing a complete profile of ethnic groups and their cultures, contributions, and experiences”. This is also a fact that every culturally relevant text will not have relevant, practical culturally conscious elements, so it is equally important for teachers to use multiple resources to teach about diversity.

Using culturally relevant texts help students grasp the vocabulary more easily, and, as a result, become more excited in their reading. When texts are engaging and moving, the students are motivated to read more. (Freeman, 2004) Another significant reason for using culturally relevant texts is that they help students identify themselves and acknowledge their unique cultural identities. Schools are the places where students don't just study because of some obligation but they study because they want to find their unique place in the diverse environment. Many young English learners enroll themselves in school as monolingual speakers of their language and leave as monolingual speakers of English. In the process of losing their language, they lose essential elements of their culture, as well. (Cummins, 200)

Reading culturally relevant books results in greater student engagement in reading and in learning (Feger, 2006; Hunsberger, 2007). Alanís (2007) agrees that culturally relevant texts help students discover their own identities when they are able to recognize their own realities portrayed in the books. In addition, students develop a sense of belonging. Culturally relevant books also allow students to develop voice in their writing by enabling them to validate their own experiences and empowering them to share them (Alanís, 2007; Keis, 2006). Moreover, students are able to connect to culturally relevant texts (Hunsberger, 2007), which results in improved reading comprehension (Alanís, 2007; Ebe, 2010; Freeman, Freeman and Freeman, 2003).

Freeman and Freeman (2004) state that culturally relevant books allow students to comprehend the text better and help students decode more accurately because they are familiar with the material presented by the author. Alanís (2007) emphasizes the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension and states that culturally relevant books help activate it. Feger (2006) states that culturally relevant books increase students' desire to read. She adds that students have better opportunities to explore their own identities when reading culturally relevant texts. Another good reason to use culturally relevant books is that they improve and promote a healthy relationship between home and school (Packard, 2001).

The two studies (Pulido, 2000, 2003) although focusing on narrative reading, exclusively investigated background knowledge of everyday scenarios within the context of the native language

culture. Ebe's study (2010) investigated the connection between reading ability and culturally relevant text for primary level students. A study that was carried out in the Dominican Republic tried to find out as to how teachers could reshape their pedagogical and teaching skills using culturally relevant material to improve the overall skill levels of underperforming students from linguistic-minority groups. It was found in the study that for the students, the "use of cultural literature and practices fostered pride, participation, commitment and success" (Herrero, 2006). "The more familiar the language of the text, the actions of the characters, the description of the setting, the sequence of the events – the closer the readers' predictions will match the author's expression and the easier that text will be for the reader to comprehend" (Goodman, 1982, p. 302).

The study by Erten and Razi (2009) which investigated the effect of cultural familiarity of the text on reading comprehension reiterates the widely acknowledged view that background knowledge and cultural familiarity have a positive on reading comprehension.

Method

Based on the review of related literature, it is strong recommended that a study involving participants from a particular cultural background should be carried out. Institutions like Fatoni University can be a case in point where students from a particular cultural background study. The study will be an experimental kind of research where the participants will be divided into two groups, the control group and the treatment group. The control group would be reading ordinary reading materials while the treatment group will be reading culturally relevant reading materials. The students' background knowledge can be evaluated through a pretest. Keeping in mind the time duration of different studies, one semester will be the most suitable duration. It is neither too much or too less duration to carry out such kind of research. Any Islamic text can be used for the treatment group since it contains the vocabulary from the religious point of view.

Findings

This kind of research can yield good results if implemented properly because here the variable of religion and culture can have apposite bearing on the students.

Conclusion

Several studies that have been carried out in the last twenty years have, however concluded that vocabulary learning is a long toiling process (Pigada and Schmitt, 2006) and many researchers have doubted the effectiveness of extensive reading program especially for second language learners (Paribakht and Wesche, 1997 as cited by Yongqi Gu, 2003). Here the culture part can be a link between extensive reading and vocabulary learning. The variable of culturally relevant material in relation to extensive reading and vocabulary learning needs to be investigated as this kind of material may serve as a motivating factor for learners to enjoy reading hence not toiling hard.

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