

14 Teaching Vocabulary Through Shared Reading

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1 INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is an important aspect of L2 learning but it is one that my learners often have difficulty with. How far learners are able to remember words must be related in some way to how these words are taught (Ur, 1996); in this study, therefore, I want to explore the relative effectiveness of two different ways of teaching vocabulary – through listening to recordings of stories and through shared reading.

2 SHARED READING AND L2 VOCABULARY LEARNING

2.1 Vocabulary Learning

Hatch & Brown (1995), cited in Cameron (2001), suggest several 'essential steps' in vocabulary learning. First, learners should have a source to encounter the new words. Second, a clear image should be provided, either visual or auditory, to connect with the meaning of the words. A strong connection between the form and meaning of the new words should also be made. And learners should have opportunities to use the words. Additionally, Cameron (2001:91) believes that "young learners learn many of their first language words through social interaction with adults". She argues that stories could provide similar context for L2 vocabulary learning.

2.2 Shared reading

Pidgeon (1990:2) defines shared reading as "a text that is shared among the participants for their mutual pleasure and understanding". Hyland (2005) believes that shared reading is a middle step between reading to the learner and independent reading. Thus in shared reading the teacher models skilled reading

behaviours. Furthermore, according to Hyland (2005), shared reading is a type of interactive reading where the teacher invites the learners to read along with her when they can.

2.2.1 Characteristic of Shared reading

Shared reading has certain characteristics. It should use an oversized big book with enlarged print to enable all the learners to see it. This attracts learners' attention and allows them to join in. Bafile (2003) argues that shared reading should provide learners with an opportunity to see and hear vocabulary in a meaningful and memorable context. Another characteristic of shared reading is that learners sit around the teacher. Bafile (2003) argues that this creates a comfortable group atmosphere. Wright (1995) believes that this changes the relationship between the teacher and learners in a positive way. A final characteristic of shared reading is interaction between the teacher and the learners with a text. Robinson & Al-Zedjali (2005) believe that this interaction supports the learning of L2 vocabulary.

2.2.2 Stages of Shared reading

Shared reading can involve various stages (see, for example, Hamayan, 1987; Smudden, 1998). Shared reading should start by preparing learners mentally for the story. This can involve presenting the big book, the title and the characters then reading the story. Then the teacher can re-read the book whilst drawing learners' attention to new vocabulary or grammar. Bafile (2003) suggests that teachers might only focus on a single word each day with young learners. Shared reading can also involve a discussion of the events in the story or a focus on print conventions. For example, teachers can show learners how the text is divided into a title, paragraphs and sentences. While sharing the reading, the teacher could also ask learners some questions about the story or pause and ask them to predict. This is in order to stimulate their imagination and make them interact with the events (Paran & Watts, 2003). Then finally the story can be re-read and learners respond orally with the teacher or by doing written activities such as sequencing the events or they could retell the story in pairs or act it out in groups.

2.2.3 Value of Shared reading

Shared reading has social, educational, and linguistic value. According to Cameron (2001), stories can give learners information and a positive feeling about other countries and cultures. Hyland (2005) adds that shared reading provides social opportunities for young learners. This is because they gain confidence, share knowledge and work co-operatively. Shared reading can also motivate learners and promote a positive attitude toward reading. It can also draw learners' attention to print and provide a model of correct reading behaviours in English, such as moving from left to right.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

The main question examined in this study is which approach to vocabulary learning is more effective for my Grade 2 learners – the textbook-based method or shared reading using a big book? There were two sub-questions: how much vocabulary can learners recognise immediately after each reading text is taught using a particular method? Which approach seems to help learners remember vocabulary better after a period of time?

3.2 Participants

For this study I selected two classes from Grade 2, each with 30 learners. They were both mixed classes of boys and girls aged 7-8 years old and of mixed ability. It was their second year of learning English and they followed the Basic Education curriculum using the textbook English for Me (EFM). They had not experienced shared reading before. This was also their first year of learning to read English.

3.3 Data Collection

I taught three stories to each class. One class was taught following the procedures suggested in the curriculum (i.e. learners listen to a recording of the story), while the other was taught using shared reading. The first story was 'The Adventure', which was in the Grade 2 EFM syllabus. The second story was 'Carl the Caterpillar', which I adapted from the EFM syllabus for Grade 3. The third story was "Salim and the New Town". This was taken from the Arabic syllabus for Grade 2 and translated and adapted for use in this study.

After each lesson learners completed a vocabulary test (see Appendix for an example). The tests used were of the 'read and match' type: learners had to draw a line between pictures and the words describing them. Each test consisted of six items. The same tests were repeated some time after their first administration. The first test was repeated after a month, the second after two weeks and the third test after one week. I initially intended to allow one month for all delayed tests but in the time available before the end of the school year this did not prove possible.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 First Story

Figure 1 shows the results for the test given after the first story. This shows that the number of learners who scored full marks on this test was higher in the EFM class than in the shared reading class. The same was true for the number of learners who scored 5 marks out of 6. More EFM learners, though, also scored 0 out of 6. In terms of the mean scores of each group, it was 3.3 for the EFM class and 3.2 for the shared reading class.

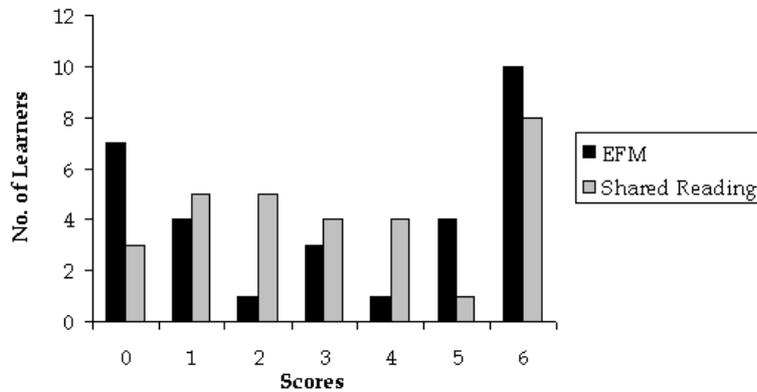


Figure 1: Immediate test results for story 1

These results suggest that the EFM class – who were taught the story using the normal curriculum materials (audio recording of lesson plus the textbook) – did better than the shared reading class.

Figure 2 gives the results for the same test administered one month later. On this occasion the shared reading group did better with an overall mean score of 3.8 compared to 2.6 for the EFM group.

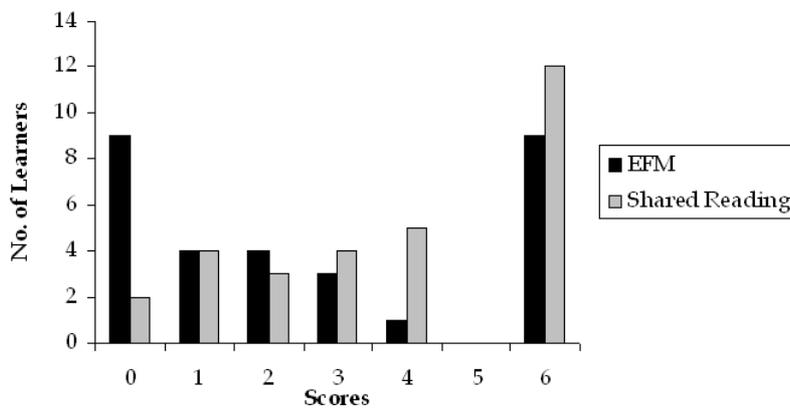


Figure 2: Delayed test results for story 1

4.2 Second Story

The second story was 'Carl the Caterpillar'. Figure 3 shows the results for the first test given after this story. Whereas 13 learners from the shared reading group scored full marks on this test, only eight from the EFM group did. The mean scores also favour the shared reading group, for whom it was 4.2. For the EFM group the mean score was 3.3.

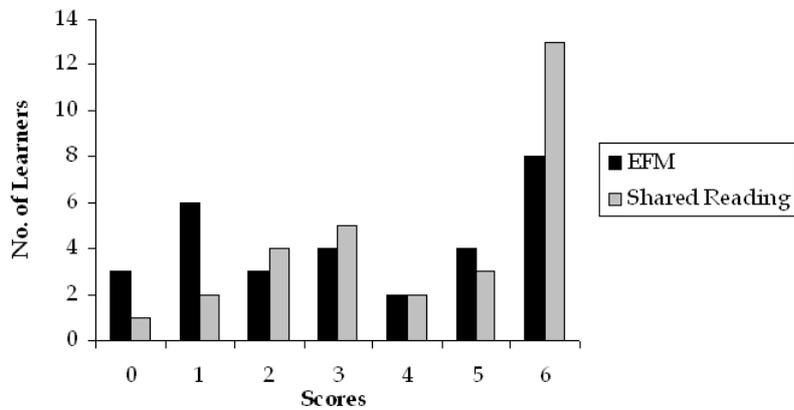


Figure 3: Immediate test results for story 2

Figure 4 gives the results for the same test administered two weeks later. This suggests that once again the shared reading group did better. The mean scores confirm this; they were 4.3 for the shared reading group and 3.3 for the EFM group.

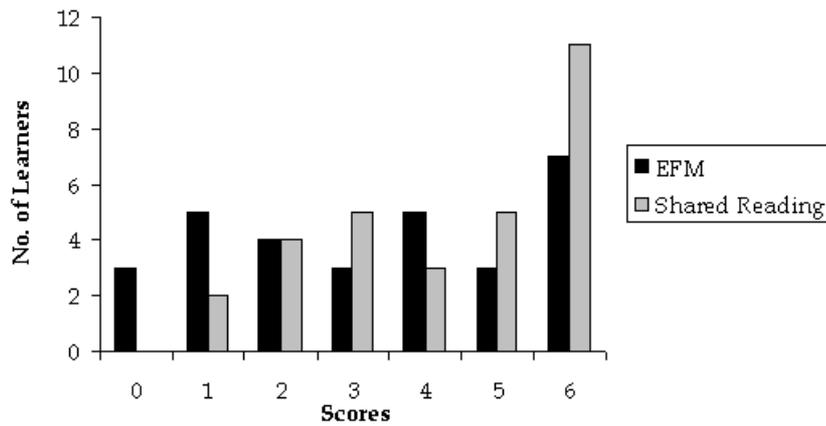


Figure 4: Delayed test results for story 2

4.3 Story 3

The story here was “Salim and the New Town”. Figure 5 gives the results of the test conducted right after this story was taught to the two classes.

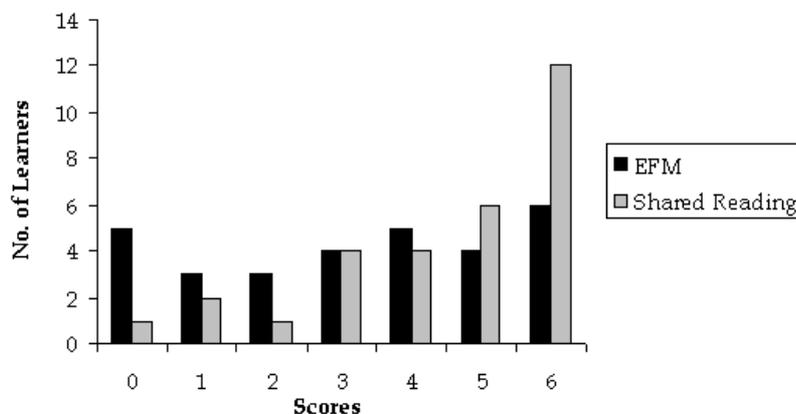


Figure 5: Immediate test results for story 3

This figure suggests very strongly that the shared reading group did better – 12 learners in that group scored full marks on this test compared to only seven in the EFM group. The mean for the shared reading group was 4.5 while for the EFM group it was 3.2.

Figure 6 gives the results for the same test administered one week later. This suggests that once again the shared reading group did better. The mean scores confirm this; they were 4.6 for the shared reading group and 3.2 for the EFM group.

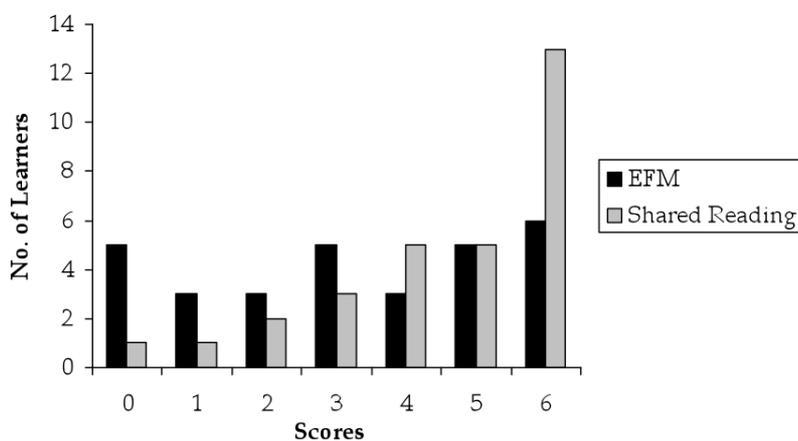


Figure 6: Delayed test results for story 3.

5 DISCUSSION

With one exception, the shared reading group in this study outperformed the EFM group on every test. Scores on the delayed tests for both groups were also generally consistent with those for the initial tests (i.e. there were no major changes), again apart from one case. Both the exceptions mentioned here relate to the tests after story 1. In this case, the EFM group did better than the shared reading group on the immediate test, while the shared reading group improved considerably in the

delayed test and did better than the EFM group. These results were initially hard to interpret, but I believe that the explanation may be a simple one. With the first story I was able to administer the test to the EFM group right after teaching the lesson. With the shared reading group, though, there was no time for this and there was also a school holiday which meant that on this occasion only the immediate test was not conducted right after the lesson. This would explain the superior performance of the EFM on the immediate test.

Overall, though, the results from this study suggest that shared reading allowed learners to remember vocabulary more effectively, in both the immediate and medium term, than stories taught through audio recordings while learners follow in their textbooks.

5.1 Limitations

One limitation of this study is that only one class experienced the intervention – i.e. shared reading. Alternating the treatment across both groups would have given more weight to the conclusion here that shared reading was more effective in promoting vocabulary learning. Given my approach here, it may be possible that the group that performed better on all but one test was simply a more able group. As noted earlier, too, a delay in one of the immediate tests after story 1 also seems to have affected the results for that test.

6 CONCLUSION

This study suggests that while the approach to teaching stories recommended in the EFM curriculum for Grade 2 does support the learning of vocabulary, it may not do so as effectively as an approach based on shared reading in which the teacher uses a big book to engage learners in a collective and co-operative telling of the story. These results will encourage me to continue using big books with my learners wherever possible. It would be valuable if workshops were available for teachers in which they could learn more about this approach to story telling as my experience suggests it not only facilitates vocabulary learning but the learning of English more generally.

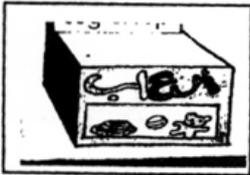
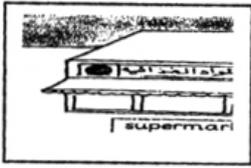
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APPENDIX: SAMPLE TEST

Read and match



supermarket

post office

school

police station

mosque

سوق

house

toy shop

