



Towards Implicit Vocabulary Acquisition of Young Learners: The Use of Input Flooding and Peripheral Learning

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Introduction

In a general sense, learning explicitly as Hulstijn (2002, p. 206) clarifies, “is a conscious, deliberative process of concept formation and concept linking”. Opposing to that, Williams (2005, p. 269) states that “implicit learning occurs without intention to learn and without awareness of what has been learned”.

Implicit learning, as defined in this study based on the words of Ellis (1994, p. 1), is “the acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of a complex stimulus environment by a process which takes place naturally, simply and without conscious operation”. Many researchers support the idea of natural learning that occurs without intention, for example Williams (2005) who has argued that learning can occur without awareness and at the level of noticing.

In the context of language learning, Krashen (1989, p. 440) mentioned that “language is subconsciously acquired while you are acquiring, you don’t know you are acquiring; your conscious focus is on the message, not form”. Krashen (1981, 1994) has also explained that there is no relation between implicit and explicit knowledge. For example, explicit knowledge of specific rules does not guarantee the implicit acquisition of those rules. Based on that, Krashen (1989) commented that the process of teaching a language should concentrate on acquisition, and not on language learning.

Doughty and Williams (1998, p. 236) state that “it is sometimes possible to aim more or less implicitly to attract the learners’ attention to linguistic features and promote the processing of these features without providing any sort of explicit guidance”. As such, Greenwood and Flannigan (2007, p. 249) comment that “90% of the words that a student learns over the course of a year are without direct instruction. These words are learned through incidental contact”. Krashen’s research on this shows an important fact that although he reviewed about 144 studies in relation to the acquisition of vocabulary learning, it is essential to mention that most of these studies include native speakers, not second language learners. Accordingly, Coady (1997, p. 226) states that “research that positively supports Krashen’s claims as regards second language vocabulary acquisition is still very limited”. In this vein, the work on implicit learning in relation to vocabulary acquisition, specifically with non-native speakers, can yield very good implications for effective second language learning vocabulary instruction.

In sum, based on what is mentioned by Allen and Reber (1980) which focuses on the fact that implicit knowledge may be retained more among students than explicit knowledge, the effectiveness of implicit learning will be tested in this study. As far as young learners are concerned, it is important to note that young learners’ mechanisms of learning are more implicitly oriented, unlike adults who tend to use more explicit ones (Ellis, 2009). This justifies the use of peripheral learning and oral input flooding as both of

them are representatives of implicit learning and both of these techniques intend to help young learners to acquire the English language naturally without conscious awareness to the learning process. Input flooding and peripheral learning, as defined by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 241), are as follows; input flooding is to “promote students’ noticing by using particular language items with great frequency”, while peripheral learning occurs when “students learn from what is present in the environment even if their attention is not directed to it”. These two ways of teaching suit more EFL teaching environments where learners lack the use of native teachers and direct interaction with them. Therefore, this study is an attempt to measure the effectiveness of these two implicit techniques, input flooding and peripheral learning, in the EFL context of teaching young learners.

Literature Review

As a general definition, implicit learning means as Hulstijn (2005, p. 131) states “input processing without intention”. A comparison between implicit and explicit learning is usually constructed. According to Brown (2007, p. 302) “the explicit category are the facts that a person knows about language and the ability to articulate those facts in some way”, while implicit knowledge “is information that is automatically and spontaneously used in language tasks”. In the same context, Ellis (1994, p. 1) mentioned that implicit learning is “the acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of the complex stimulus environment by a process which takes place naturally, simply and without conscious operation”, While explicit learning is “a more conscious operation where the individual makes and tests hypotheses in a search for structure”. Bialystock (1982, p. 183) defines explicit and implicit learning in terms of analyzed and unanalyzed knowledge. She states that “unanalyzed knowledge is the general form in which we know most things without being aware of the structure of that knowledge”. The other analyzed knowledge is the opposite of that.

The use of implicit learning ways in teaching vocabulary is very crucial because of its capability to make learners acquire the new vocabularies easily and then turn them into explicit knowledge to be used in everyday life. Nation (2001) mentioned that vocabulary acquisition consists of three processes; noticing, retrieval, and creative or generative use. His statement clarifies the important role of noticing in learning vocabulary. Some researchers differentiate between implicit learning and incidental learning of vocabulary. Reider (2003, p. 28) argues that “incidental learning as being composed of implicit learning processes (which happen without the learner’s awareness) and/or of explicit learning processes (which take place without learning intention but nevertheless involve online awareness and hypothesis formation)”.

Most theories that are related to first language acquisition support the important role of input material for sufficient learning (White, 2008). According to Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975), input flood occurs as a result of the noticeable impact of frequent forms as opposed to infrequent ones. Input flooding, according to this study, is an implicit technique that is used for presenting forms by showing the learners the text of examples in order to attract their attention (Rodriguez et al., 2009).

The second technique of implicit learning that was dealt with in this study is peripheral learning. It refers to the kind of learning that occurs unintentionally as a result of a large amount of exposure to the intended material. The main principle of it is based on the idea that learners can acquire more from their environment than in a deliberate way of teaching. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 81) clarify that the peripheral learning technique “is based upon the idea that we perceive much more in our environment than we consciously notice”. They add that “by putting posters containing grammatical information about the target language on the classroom walls, students will absorb the necessary facts effortlessly”.

Implicit learning has been investigated by many writers and in different contexts. Liu (2011) studied the incidental learning of vocabulary by using bilingual glossing and multiple-choice glossing, and he gained positive results with the last one. Al-Darayseh (2014) tried to show the impact of using both explicit and implicit teaching strategies on learners’ vocabulary size and enhancing their reading skills.

He concludes that using a combination of explicit and implicit teaching strategies was very effective. Yaghoubi and Seyyedi (2017) investigate the impact of implicit and explicit teaching ways on learners' vocabulary building. They conclude that explicit learning is more effective than implicit learning. Doncheva (2015) reports on the importance of using Bulgarian folklore games with preschool children as a means of implicit learning to enhance their education and training. It is clear that implicit learning can be achieved via different techniques and strategies, but the real challenge is the applicable ways that can be used by teachers easily and effectively specifically in EFL contexts, and this is what this study wants to show.

Hypothesis

For the purposes of this study, three null hypotheses have been postulated:

1. There is no significant impact of using input flooding on third primary learners' acquisition of vocabulary.
2. There is no significant impact of using peripheral learning on third primary learners' acquisition of vocabulary.
3. There is no significant difference between the two experimental groups in the acquisition of vocabulary.

Methods

The Experimental Design

In order to answer the questions of the present study, and to verify the hypotheses, the researcher has used the "pre-post-test control group design" as illustrated in Table 1:

TABLE 1
The Experimental Design

<i>Group</i>	<i>Test</i>	<i>The independent variable</i>	<i>Test</i>
Experimental Group 1	Pre-test	Using input flooding	Post-test Written and oral
Experimental Group 2	Pre-test	Using peripheral learning	Post-test Written and oral
Control Group	Pre-test	No additional technique or material.	Post-test Written and oral

Context of the Study

This experiment was conducted with third primary school learners. In Iraq, learners are used to studying English from the first primary, mostly with unspecialized teachers for the first three primary stages (first, second, third). Unfortunately, its teaching does not receive any attention in these first stages due to the lack of specialized teachers and in addition, the focus is on teaching them their first language. So, learners do not make any real progress, especially since all learners are passed at the end of each year without formal end of year examinations. Teachers spend their time focusing on helping the learners master English letters spending the rest of the year on writing the new English words in their books neglecting to a large extent the listening and speaking skills. This situation excludes the other three primary stages; fourth, fifth, and sixth primary as more attention is paid to them. So, the use of implicit learning techniques may help in finding a solution to this dilemma.

Participants

The sample consists of three classes of the third primary from Kawla- bint Al-Azwar Primary School in the Diyala governorate of Iraq. The researcher chose these three classes from the original five classes in the school. Each class consists of thirty learners. The choice of this stage is intentional since their abilities to use the English language are still under construction and they are considered to be a bit mature than first and second primary stages whose main focus of study is on the English letters or alphabet. All ethical considerations have been put into action by the researcher and were conducted under the supervision of the school staff.

In order to control the variables that may affect the result of the experiment, the researcher make every attempt to ensure better equivalence of the three groups. In addition, the researcher tried her best to control the influence of extraneous variables that could influence the experiment.

The Experiment

The experiment lasted for six weeks during the academic year 2018-2019. On the first day of data collection, the learners were tested to see their current level of antonym knowledge. The pre-test used is the same one used at the end of the experiment.

As far as the experimental group is concerned, the lectures of the first experimental group, those who were exposed to the input flooding technique, consisted of two lessons a week usually in their English class. The researcher used three videos of animated short stories and a song that contained antonyms.

The learners were exposed to the videos without drawing their attention to the antonyms that were found in them neither by telling them the subject of the video nor by explaining its content. The only instruction the teacher gave was "let us see this video".

In the second experimental group where peripheral learning was used, the researcher put many pictures of opposites on the walls of the class. These pictures show the opposite words with a picture of them. The words used were the same ones that appeared in the videos. The learners dealt with these pictures by themselves without the teacher drawing their attention to them.

In the control group, the learners did not receiving any additional information concerning the antonyms. They participated in a traditional English language class.

Instruments

Two types of tests were used in this experiment in order to check learners' acquisition of vocabulary. The first one was a 50-item written test which consisted of four types of questions (multiple-choice items, matching, true or false, and item completion). The second instrument was an oral test. The teacher showed each learner ten pictures of opposites and asked him/her to guess the words.

Results

The mean score of the pre and post-test of the three groups are shown in Table 2. It shows that the results of the three groups were approximately equal in the pre-test. It further shows that the mean score of the two experimental groups are higher than the control group in the post-test and that the first experimental one (input flooding) is higher than the second one (peripheral) in the two post-tests types; oral and written (see Figure 1).

TABLE 2

The Mean Score of the Performance of the Three Groups in the Pre and Post-tests of the Written Test

Mean				
No	Groups	Pre-Test	Post -Test	
1	Control	22.13	22.20	
2	Experimental 1	23.56	35.36	
3	Experimental 2	22.33	32.43	

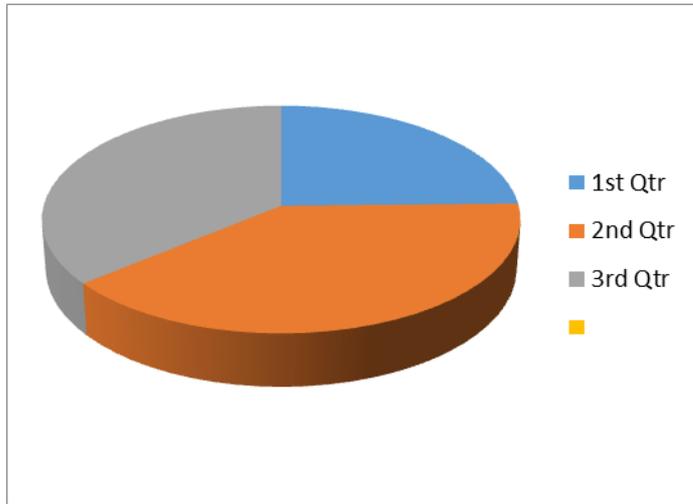


Figure 1. The mean score of the three groups in the written post-test.

The other type of test is the oral test that was used at the end of the experiment. The results show that the mean of the first experimental group is higher than the other two groups, and this is followed closely by the second experimental group. These results can be found in Table 3.

TABLE 3

The Mean Score of the Performance of the Three Groups in the Post Oral-test

Mean			
No	Groups	Post Oral Test	
1	Control	12.90	
2	Experimental 1	18.06	
3	Experimental 2	17.33	

Table 4 shows the results of the pre-test for the three groups after applying the t-test formula for the three groups.

TABLE 4

The Statistical Analysis of the Performance of the Three Groups in the Pre-test by Using t-test

Pre-test							
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	Computed t. Value	Tabulated t. Value	Level of significance
Experimental Group 1	30	23.56	8.07		exp1+con=0.68		
Experimental Group 2	30	22.33	8.83	58	exp2+con=0.091	1.35	0.05
Control Group	30	22.13	8.26		exp1+exp2=0.56		

In Table 5, the researcher clarifies the statistical results of the three groups in the written post-test after conducting a t-test.

TABLE 5
The Statistical Analysis of the Performance of the Three Groups in the Written Post-test by Using t-test

Written Post-test							
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	Computed t. Value	Tabulated t. Value	Level of significance
Experimental Group 1	30	35.36	8.87		exp1+con=5.82		
Experimental Group 2	30	32.43	8.57	58	exp2+con=4.60	1.35	0.05
Control Group	30	22.20	8.62		exp1+exp2=1.30		

The analysis of the performance of the three groups in the oral post-test scores are calculated and analysed by using a t-test, as found in Table 6.

TABLE 6
The Statistical Analysis of the Performance of the Three Groups in the Oral Post-test after Conducting a t-test

Oral Post-test							
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	Computed t. Value	Tabulated t. Value	Level of significance
Experimental Group 1	30	18.06	2.39		ex1+con=6.39		
Experimental Group 2	30	17.33	2.48	58	ex2+con=5.87	1.35	0.05
Control Group	30	12.90	3.30		ex1+exp2=1.16		

The Verification of the Hypothesis

1. There is no significant impact of using input flooding on third primary learners’ acquisition of vocabulary.

After applying the t-test formula for two independent samples, results show that there is a significant difference between the two groups in favor of the experimental one (see Tables 5 and 6). This means that using input flooding technique with young learners has a high positive impact on young learners’ acquisition of vocabulary. Based on this result, the first hypothesis is rejected.

2. There is no significant impact of using peripheral learning on third primary learners’ acquisition of vocabulary.

The results clarify that learners’ performance of the second experimental group (peripheral learning) in the two post-tests, oral and written, is higher than the control group. The result is verified after applying the t-test formula for two samples. This result indicates that peripheral learning has a positive impact on young learners’ retention of vocabulary (see Tables 5 and 6). Accordingly, the second hypothesis is also rejected.

3. There is no significant difference between the two experimental groups in the acquisition of vocabulary.

As the results of the t-test show, the computed t-value is less than the table one in both experimental groups, as clarified in Tables 5 and 6, so the third hypothesis is accepted. This means that both experimental groups are of equal importance though there is a little difference between them in favor of input flooding.

Discussion

The main aim of this study is to promote the use of implicit learning methods for young EFL learners by applying two implicit learning techniques; input flooding and peripheral learning to check their effectiveness in comparison with traditional teaching and to see which one has a more positive impact on young learners' acquisition of vocabulary. This study comes to find an urgent solution to EFL young learners, in Iraq and in other EFL contexts, by finding easy and applicable ways of teaching that do not overload schools and at the same time increases learners' motives and stimuli.

In order to train young learners to acquire language naturally, it is a very good idea to begin teaching them implicitly. This fact seems evident in this study, as the results show. Learners' level of learning vocabulary, specifically in mastering antonyms, shows a qualitative leap in both written and oral tests. Their engagement with the experiment is reflected in their performance.

The results clarify that the use of input flooding has a greater impact on young learners' acquisition of antonyms. By applying two types of tests after the experiment, the researcher could prove that this way of implicit learning had a highly positive impact on learners' acquisition of vocabulary. One cannot ignore the crucial role that the use of animations played in this experiment for young learners. During the experiment, learners actively engaged and tried to understand what was going on in the video. This led to a greater concentration on the content, which make learners focus on each word. It is evident that this was the main reason for gaining such good results.

The focus on implicit ways of learning led the researcher to select peripheral learning as another choice along with input flooding. In this type of learning, teachers exploit each minute of learners' school time by exposing them to an environment that is full of colourful pictures with familiar and striking characters. The antonyms are written on each picture and hung on the walls of the classroom. The researcher's observation indicates that learners spent a considerable amount of time trying to spell and read each word more than once. Learners spent their time looking at the pictures often competing with each to guess the meaning.

The final result shows slight superiority of the input flooding method over the group who were exposed to the peripheral learning technique. This may be due to the positive impact of the use of animations with the audible and visible nature of input that is usually used in the videos. The learners keep echoing the words like a song with a full mastery of the words' pronunciation and their meaning. This fact indicates that there are positive effects of some implicit learning techniques on the automaticity of the learning process.

It is worth mentioning that the results of this study provide additional evidence that implicit learning has a positive impact on learners' acquisition of vocabulary as opposed to Yaghoubi and Seyyedi (2017) who concluded that explicit learning had a more positive impact on learners' learning of vocabulary. The results come in line with Liu (2011) who gained positive outcomes as a result of using incidental learning of vocabulary. It also agrees with Doncheva (2015) who mentioned an important role of implicit learning in the education of young learners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study comes to prove that implicit learning techniques, such as input flooding and peripheral learning, are more effective than explicit methods of learning, specifically with young learners' acquisition of vocabulary in EFL teaching environments. These results are manifested in the responses of the learners, whether in the two post-tests or the through the daily observation of the researcher. Their development proceeds naturally without apparent effort from the researcher. The first experimental group (who had the input flooding intervention) shows a more positive impact than the control group and even more than the second experimental group. This provides evidence that young learners need more innovative methods of teaching than traditional ones. Though the peripheral learning group had less

positive results than the input flooding group, still it has more positive effects on young learners than the control group who were taught through traditional teaching methods. The use of YouTube videos of stories and songs in addition to colourful pictures contributed to the effectiveness of these methods. The use of implicit learning in the EFL context, specifically with young learners, should go hand in hand with explicit learning in order to ensure full mastery of the material. Wherever explicit learning methods fail for any reason, implicit learning techniques should be used to support the process of learning and to provide learners with remedial work. So, focusing on implicit teaching techniques in future research is essential specifically with young learners.

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