



VOCABULARY LEARNING IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORDS KNOWLEDGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Abstract:

Acquiring vocabulary represents one of the highly pivotal skills that is required for teaching and learning a second or foreign language from early childhood days. It forms a basis towards the development of all other necessary skills such as writing, reading, listening, pronunciation, and spelling. More imperatively, words development is a crucial tool for learners during the early childhood age in their quest to use the English language effectively. Because of its function, vocabulary development tends to harness other aspects which include cognitive, social, and literacy development. It is posited that parents should always pay closer attention to these developments, as it forms the rudiments for language learning processes. Of all, spoken communication is the most effective form of communication as it contributes towards words development to a sustainable level. Hence, this paper will delve into pertinent literature that is associated with words development in early childhood, and how it enhances all other associated facets that are related to it.

Keywords: words development, vocabulary acquisition, ELT classrooms, child

1. Introduction

Learning a language qualifies an individual to communicate with others through a repertoire of words that are meaningful and conducive to the ambiance in which it is being used. Language is used by all not just to express their emotions, ideologies, and sentiments verbally but at the same time to enhance their other form of skills as well. These skills include facial expressions, written language development, gesticulations,

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pantomimes, and many others (Indrayani, 2020). The development of language increases as a child grows older, hence the words knowledge gets enhanced as well. Parents play a pivotal role in nurturing the words development since a child is considered as a blank slate during the early childhood days. As claimed by Hutauruk (2015), the reinforcement of a child's vocabulary acquisition through verbal behaviour would see their linguistic horizons being broadened and the words development vacuum being filled. Language acquisition is humankind experiencing the most imperative evolution. Without communication, they cannot express themselves and live an affluent life. Language development forms the basis of all other acquisitions, which starts from birth and lasts until an individual takes his/her last breath (Yildirim, 2021).

According to Chomsky (2009), children tend to acquire most of the things through experiences and vocabulary acquisition is no exception. It is believed that the most effective period in children's language development is referred to as the critical period. This period lies between infancy and childhood. During this period, being able to use as many words as possible would allow the children to grasp a repertoire of words as they grow. Babies first acquire the sounds and words, when they are in their mother's womb (Sansone, 2020). In this milieu speaking to the children, parental input is highly pivotal as it allows the children to imitate what they see, hear, and feel about the target language. As children develop their words knowledge, other observations could also be made regarding the elements that get enhanced as well. These are phonological development, morphological development, syntactic development, and communicative development (Law, 2017).

Furthermore, just as children learn how to walk during their initial days, likewise they ought to learn a language. As asserted by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hymans (2018), no one enters this world before we can stand and walk, however, most of the normal children start to stand and walk and do so many things around the same age as each other. The environmental factors that make it possible for vocabulary acquisition to eventuate would appear to be sufficient for the language to be used in a social context (Varshney, 2003, p. 307). Children tend to learn a language not because they have a similar conditioning process but because they possess a capacity that is inborn and that allows them to acquire a language that takes place during a natural maturational process (Fromkin, 1983, p. 329). This process is known to be universal, and the child is considered to have an innate language-acquiring device. They ought to learn a language through exposure to society and by forming hypotheses about a language, which get modified as they progress to adulthood.

Moreover, the child goes on to construct and modify the innate grammar and apply it accordingly, as the need arises. As asserted by Langacker (1973), there are remarkable reasons for the capacity to acquire a language. Firstly, there is uniformity throughout human beings, hence given the fact that no human children, who are given the chance to acquire a language would fail to learn it. Factually, it is simply phenomenal to observe children at such a tender age to grasp complex grammar rules, to construct such rules, and apply them as beautifully as they could. This clearly depicts the stages

through which children learn languages of varied nations, hence revealing an interesting aspect of the language acquisition process (Fromkin, 1983, p. 341). From this, it could be stated that it is quite challenging for children to pass suddenly from one state to the other to acquire a language. The stages of cooing, babbling, holophrastic, two-words, and telegraphic are as difficult as each other when children shift from one stage to the other. Children do not wake up in the morning with a set of new grammar rules in their head, however, as they progress day by day, social and communicative intercourses allow them to practice these set of rules (Fromkin, 1983, p. 326).

Additionally, the observations done on children's word development in different language areas of the world have revealed that the stages are highly similar and universal. Even though the stages may have overlapped for a short span of time, while in the process of transition between the stages, the observation done has been quite sudden (Gleason and Manca, 2019). As such, in the process of acquiring a language, children will certainly develop some sort of problems at every stage. Therefore, the elements of language acquisition play a crucial role in harnessing the solutions for words developments. These elements are phonology, semantics, syntax, morphology, and pragmatics. Individually, if these elements are specifically delved upon in relation to investigating individual elements, then all of them are highly relatable to one another (Clark and Casillas, 2015). In this sense, submitting inputs is significant, which further provides the solutions for improvement in word development phrases.

As claimed by Vashney (2003), vocabulary acquisition involves a process, whereby children tend to achieve fluent control of their first language. The ability to fathom a language is inherited genetically, however, the target language that the child can speak is determined by the culture and environment in which he/she is raised. All around the world, children acquire their first language without getting much tuition. On the other hand, if children are given exposure to speak in an English-speaking community, they start to become increasingly fluent. In fact, this applies to any language that if a child is exposed to a community that speaks a different language, he/she will grasp the essence of that community's language. Thus, language acquisition appears to vary accordingly given in different contexts, just as the skills of swimming, dancing, and singing vary (Qi and Kaiser, 2004). However, native language acquisition is less affected by mental obstruction in relation to the acquisition of all other intellectual skill activities. A normal child tends to learn one or more languages unless the child is brought up in isolation and remains monolingual.

2. Vocabulary Acquisition in Early Childhood

As stated above, previous researches has shown that the application of a language is innate, and children communicate by using the words that they have listened to first. This includes the use of sign language, body language, and any other forms as well (Berger, 2003). As soon as the babies begin to develop communication skills through noise and gestures, they start to show changes in their reacting patterns and respond to all other

things around them accordingly. The ability to speak is acquired in childhood and it happens without the child being taught the language. Naturally, it happens without teaching and the spontaneous use of babbling mainly prevails even before the utterance of words takes place (Law, 2017). As posited by Tomasello (2009), at a noticeably early age, children tend to do articulations to exercise their articulatory organs for the proper enunciation of words. It is considered highly pivotal that children are exposed to an environment where active use of the four macro skills is taking place (Narayan, 2021).

So much so, the foremost language that parents use is considered the primary linguistic ambiance form, which the children use as a guide to start off their early stage of communication. As asserted by Piaget (2009), it is claimed that cognitive development comes well before linguistic production. Therefore, the first words that children learn from those who are in contact with them directly, those words tend to develop a child's sensory experience and further connect them to his/her exploration of the environment in which they live (Goundar, 2023). To add on, behaviourist theorists have suggested that a child's ability to speak and fathom a language is obtained through stimulations from a milieu. Children are passive end users of a language and due to environmental pressures, they have no active role in the process of words development at the early childhood stage, thus they go by listening and imitating their parents and elders (Reimann and Saleem, 2018).

3. Factors Affecting Words Development

The means of expressing and receiving information in a variety of ways is through knowing a language (Hartanto *et al.*, 2016). Further, it is a form and cannot be claimed to be a condition, as it is known to have various systems such as arbitrary sound-symbol system, system of an order, systems of many systems, and so forth (Mackey, 2006). As claimed by (Nelson *et al.*, 2006), language development is believed to be one indicator that allows the overall development of children's cognitive ability, which can be highly related to their success in schools. It is envisaged that the function of words development is the most challenging process when it comes to all the phases of development. The best indicator of the absence or presence of intellectual development disorder is decided by the language function and the development function of visio-motor. When combined, these two functions can contribute to the further development the intellectual disorders. More imperatively, words development requires receptive and expressive functions (Tsao, Liu, and Kuhl, 2004).

Subsequently, receptive function under words development defines the ability of children to recognise and react accordingly to others in the surrounding in which they live by fathoming the meaning of the sound speeches heard and making sense of it. On the other hand, expressive function investigates children's ability to express their thoughts and ideas through preverbal or non-verbal communication through means of facial expressions, hand gestures, body movements, and so forth (Newman, Ratner, Jusczyk, and Dow, 2006). Equally imperative, some of the factors that internally affect

children's words development are as follows: Firstly, it is the history of childbirth that affects the child at the age of two years. According to the research that was conducted by Jansson *et. al.*, (2004), children with exceptionally low birth weight achieved much lower scores in the language test. The issue of nutritional intake serves as the second factor towards words development. Indeed, there is a relationship between nutritional intake and language development.

Again, the third factor that inhibits words development in children is the narrating of stories, which influences the length of the child's sentence formation (Goundar, 2023). The amount of information received and thought by children influences the longest utterance taken as an index of children's expressive language abilities (Niles, Reynolds, and Roe-Sepowitz, 2008). Phonological working memory skills are indexed by memory ranges and the ability to repeat words makes a significant contribution to variations in children's speech (Anne-Marie Adams, 1996). The fourth factor that contributes toward child's inability to advance his/her words development is the school ambiance. As claimed by Mashburn *et al.*, (2008), the school environment should be conducive enough to allow learners to feel belonging and participate actively in the classroom activities. Interactions and emotions between the teachers and children should work out on a mutual understanding, so that there are minimal glitches towards effective classroom teaching (Hadley and Dickinson, 2020) and the learners find a sense of belongingness to be part of the daily classroom learning.

4. Adoption of Research Methodologies in Words Development

As acclaimed by Lust and Blume (2016), vocabulary learning in language acquisition research is challenging as well as demanding. The intricacy of behavioural and cognitive foundations of words development is difficult to measure objectively. However, the audible component of speech is quantifiable, thus providing crucial data. The research in this area of applied linguistics synthesizes many researchers' decades of experience into a comprehensive set of new data that would allow novice researchers in this field to design and conduct innovative research to produce more reliable and authentic data (Kasper and Wagner, 2011). The researchers have thoroughly reviewed specific techniques towards obtaining qualitative and quantitative data that have included tailored testing environments for optimal results. Some of the researchers have also explored observational tasks by means of conducting natural experiment tasks to elicit specific types of speeches (Narayan, 2017). Many have reviewed language comprehension tasks so that they can study participants' understanding of words structure and conceptualisation of grammar. Almost all the research that was conducted was oriented towards children (Plonsky, 2013).

According to the article titled, '*Children's First Language Acquisition at age 1-3 years old in Balata*' written by Hutauruk (2015), the author has adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to find out the children's problems in first language acquisition. Furthermore, this research has used a cross-sectional approach because it has selected a group of

children who are less than five years old. The author has used a video recorder as a reach tool and applied the observation method to record the conversation. On the other hand, in the paper titled, *'Language Development in Children'* by Yildirim (2020), the author has analysed the data by adopting to qualitative research method by examining children with ages ranging from five to seven years. Interestingly, the author collected this data through the uploaded video on YouTube and made the observations from there. Moreover, according to the paper titled, *'Parents Role in Fostering Young Children's Language Development'*, the author has applied a phenomenological qualitative approach to develop an understanding of the forms of involvement that need to be performed by parents towards early childhood literacy development. It has used the descriptive data analysis inductive method. The main data-collecting tools that were used in this study were direct interviews and an observation approach (Siregar, 2017).

Meanwhile, in the article written by the author Safitri (2020) named *'Children Language Acquisition Process'*, the writer has used the research methodology of descriptive qualitative approach, which has focused on how the children have been learning a language in their real life. In the process of data collection, the researcher used observation methods and video recordings of a conversation that took place between the child and parents (Safitri, 2020). The final article that has been reviewed for this paper is titled, *'First Language Acquisition by Infants'*, which was written by Narafshan, Sadighi, Bagheri, Shokrpour, and Branch, (2013). In this article, the authors have adopted the research methodology of a developmental descriptive approach that consisted of interviews and observations, which were recorded mainly through audio and video recordings including notes and reports (Narafhsan *et al.*, 2013). Subsequently, all the papers that have been reviewed have tightly knitted similarities in terms of the methods that were used to conduct the research. Almost all the papers have adopted qualitative research methods with descriptive and phenomenological approaches in common. Not only this, the research tools that were common in all the articles were interviews and video recording, while the paper by Yildirim (2020), *'Language Development in Children'* got the response for the data from using YouTube as a means of data collection. Generally, all the research methods made sense with each other including the tools that were used to conduct the research.

5. Concluding Remarks

Overall, acquiring a language by means of words development is the natural way of applying the usage of it as the child grows into adulthood. Simply put, the development of words grows organically in a child's mind instead of artificially being constructed in the process of learning. Metaphorically, the difference between acquisition and learning is the same difference between a tree that develops naturally in nature and a building that is manmade and foisted into the environment. In other words, childhood is the best age to increase the words development and the ideal age is from one to seven years old. Practically, a child who has a strong ability to keep enhancing his/her words development

is always more fluent than the one who learns it. The acquisition of a second language is what the learner aims to enhance.

However, acquiring the language after the critical period becomes an incredibly difficult and conscious endeavour because of the constant interference from the first language with which the learner is more competent and comfortable than the target language. Also, other factors such as the history of the child's birth, nutritional intake, narrating of stories and speeches, and the school environment all affect the words development in a child. As claimed, children's language acquisition devices are highly active during the early days of their life, therefore, childhood years are the best time to advance their development of words as much as possible. More imperatively, the acquiring of syntactical, morphological, semantical, phonological, and pragmatism aspects in words development would see the child having greater enhancement in all of these and improves tremendously as the second or foreign language is being used to communicate with adults.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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