

Testing Supportive Feedback Strategies in Second/Foreign Language Vocabulary Acquisition between Typically Developing Children and Children with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract : Learning an L2 is a demanding process for all students and in particular for those with learning disabilities (LD) who demonstrate an inability to catch up with their classmates' progress in a given period of time. This area of study, i.e. examining children with learning disabilities in L2 has not (yet) attracted the growing interest that is registered in L1 and thus remains comparatively neglected. It is this scientific field that this study wishes to contribute to. The longitudinal purpose of this study is to locate effective Supportive Feedback Strategies (SFS) and add to the quality of learning in second language vocabulary in both typically developing (TD) and LD children. Specifically, this study aims at investigating and comparing the performance of TD with LD children on two different types of SFSs related to vocabulary short and long-term retention. In this study two different SFSs have been examined to a total of ten (10) unknown vocabulary items. Both strategies provided morphosyntactic clarifications upon new contextualized vocabulary items. The traditional SFS (direct) provided the information only in one hypertext page with a selection on the relevant item. The experimental SFS (engaging) provided the exact same split information in three successive hypertext pages in the form of a hybrid dialogue asking from the subjects to move on to the next page by selecting the relevant link. It was hypothesized that this way the subjects would engage in their own learning process by actively asking for more information which would further lead to their better retention. The participants were fifty-two (52) foreign language learners (33 TD and 19 LD) aged from 9 to 12, attending an English language school at the level of A1 (CEFR). The design of the study followed a typical pre-post-post test procedure after an hour and after a week. The results indicated statistically significant group differences with TD children performing significantly better than the LD group in both short and long-term memory measurements and in both SFSs. As regards the effectiveness of one SFS over another the initial hypothesis was not supported by the evidence as the traditional SFS was more effective compared to the experimental one in both TD and LD children. This difference proved to be statistically significant only in the long-term memory measurement and only in the TD group. It may be concluded that the human brain seems to adapt to different SFS although it shows a small preference when information is provided in a direct manner.

Keywords : learning disabilities, memory, second/foreign language acquisition, supportive feedback

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