TEACHING THEMATICALLY RELATED VOCABULARY THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIAL

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ABSTRACT:

The present study is an experimental study in which the researchers hypothesized that use of authentic material in language classes can improve thematically related vocabulary of language learners. The experimental group was given treatment through independent variable that is teaching through authentic material whereas the other group was taken as control group and was given a usual type of training. After a six -week training both of the groups were given post tests and it was found that experimental group performed better than the control group.

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Introduction:

Vocabulary can be defined as words used in any language. The words and their meanings which are stored in our mental dictionaries can also be named as vocabulary items.Where vocabulary is important for the expression of one's ideas and thoughts, the selection of a person's vocabulary displays the level of his achievement in the learning of a foreign language. A person is can only express his ideas with brevity and conciseness if he has acquired a wide range of vocabulary items and gained enough ability to use them correctly in a variety of contexts according to the requirements.

Lexical semanticists believe that the learners of a language subconsciously fix the new vocabulary items in their mental lexicons according to their themes when exposed to some new vocabulary items. For example when we think of the concept 'frog', the words which come to our mind can be green, pond, hop, swim, slippery etc. Although these words belong to different parts of speech but they share the same thematic concept. Mc Kenna (2002, p70) asserts that if the vocabulary items are grouped according to their topics/themes or connecting ideas/concepts, they are easy to learn and retain. The approaches which focus on the cognitive aspect of vocabulary learning are more appropriate for the learner-centered language learning programs because they emphasize the mental rather than the linguistic aspects of language learning processes.

The printed, audio and video materials which are used in our real lives and are not specifically made for the teaching purpose are called authentic materials. Wajnryb

 quotes Widdowson in his book Classroom Observation Tasks:

> "It has been traditionally supposed that the language presented to learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. Nowadays there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic."   (1992. p45)

Authentic materials are successfully used by the language teachers as they serve as very affordable, effective and interesting tools in the language classes, especially for vocabulary teaching . As authentic materials bring the real world in the class and they also provide contexts to the learners, they are found very helpful in effective language teaching. They may include newspapers, magazines, wrappers of different food items, greeting cards, movies, songs ,etc.

Many researches have been conducted in order to know the effectiveness of different methods for teaching vocabulary and teachers frequently try to use better methods and materials to improve the vocabulary of their students. This paper provides the background of vocabulary teaching, briefly presents the difficulties in learning and choosing vocabulary items, outlines vocabulary teaching techniques presented by several researchers, and stresses the importance of teaching thematically related vocabulary with the help of newspapers / magazines which helps the EFL students in the choice of appropriate vocabulary for a better expression of their ideas.

English Vocabulary Teaching in Pakistan:

In Pakistan, vocabulary is mainly taught using traditional methods and techniques which, no doubt, make the learners cram a lot of new vocabulary items without giving them any idea of the usage. As a result, it just remains a part of their passive vocabulary and can never become active as the learners are unaware of its usage in their productive skills: writing and speaking. In Pakistani schools and other institutions, learners are usually provided with long lists of isolated and decontextualised vocabulary items with their English meanings (definitions) or Urdu translation, and they are supposed to cram the spelling and meanings of these words. After they have finished learning, they are asked to tell the spelling and meanings and sometimes they are guided to make sentences. This vocabulary is usually selected from the texts given in their text books. At the end of session or semester, they are evaluated in the same way as they are taught, i.e. by asking the English meanings or Urdu translation of those words and sometimes sentence formation is demanded. It is noticed that the learners find sentence formation a very hard task as they do not know the word form and its occurrence in different contexts as well as its collocations. The activities other than this sentence formation which are found in the text books are 'match the columns (synonyms/antonyms)', 'crossword puzzle', 'labeling the diagram', 'use of dictionaries to find the meanings', 'matching the words with pictures', etc. In some of these activities, instead of presenting unrelated vocabulary, thematically related vocabulary is given but it is very rare in the first place. Secondly, the teachers are unaware of the way that vocabulary is given in those activities, so they cannot help the learners to connect the vocabulary according to different themes. The learners are not taught the usage either. As a result, the effectiveness of this presentation remains doubtful.

Statement of the Problem:

It has generally been observed that EFL learners who are taught vocabulary items with different traditional techniques and methods e.g. providing vocabulary lists or giving meaning of different words, etc. can only cram the new words but they are unable to use accurate words in different contexts with the same meanings. Furthermore, they do not get any idea to make proper use of learnt words according to their context-based meanings and that vocabulary knowledge remains passive. In this way the functional aspect of vocabulary teaching is totally ignored and the learners cannot develop native-like intuition of vocabulary usage. As the learners are taught un-related vocabulary items, they find it difficult to maintain their attention span. Likewise, it becomes very difficult for them to retain the words which are thematically isolated and scattered. The purpose of this study was to teach the thematically related vocabulary with the help of authentic material.

Objectives:

The objectives of the study were to:

1. teach the functional aspect of thematically related vocabulary.

2. highlight the importance of choosing accurate vocabulary in different contexts.

3. teach thematically related vocabulary to make the students able to use one word with different meanings in different contexts.

significance:

The present study is important because it is an attempt to teach English language in a different way. It is an important step towards language teaching by removing the barrier of strangeness so that the learners feel comfortable during the whole learning process. The use of nonnative literature for the sake of improving intrapersonal skills will surely make learners feel at home.

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Hypothesis:

If thematically related vocabulary is taught with the help of authentic material, it can help students in the choice of accurate vocabulary in different contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Learning the vocabulary of any language is not difficult only for the EFL students but it is a trouble for the natives as well. Vocabulary, in fact, is a wide area and a person keeps on increasing his vocabulary throughout his life. It is not possible for an English Language Teacher to teach a large stock of vocabulary of English to the learners within a specific period of time though students can be taught some functional lexical items in such a time. According to Mc Kenna

> "Mastery of the complete lexicon of English is beyond not only second language teachers but also native-speakers. Still the amount of vocabulary the average native speaker acquires is prodigious. This is shown by studies that have estimated that English speaking university graduates will have a vocabulary size about 20,00word families".

> (2002. P70).

If we keep in mind the lexical dexterity on the part of the native speakers, there is a logic to it. we all know that the native speakers are exposed to a wide range of contexts where they read, listen and then use different vocabulary items, and they do all this incidentally without putting much conscious effort, but the case is very different if we talk about the learners who are learning English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, teachers can create a native-like intuition in students' mind which can help them in learning and using vocabulary according to their needs.

As the beginners in L2 learning do not have much linguistic knowledge, so they resort to cram the vocabulary items with synonyms, definitions or sometimes with the equivalents in their L1. After that some of them venture into exploring the patterns and structures which lie within the lexical items including their pronunciation, spelling, morphology as well as their collocations

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etc. Visnja points out that

> "Language production is based on assembling ready-made chunks suitable for particular situations, and that language comprehension relies on the ability to predict the pattern that will appear in a given situation." (2008, p17)

Visnja believes that this is the ability which brings L2 learner closer to the native speaker and creates in him a native-like competence for using L2 vocabulary. When the L2 learners develop the ability to use the vocabulary of L2 making proper use of its idioms, collocations and phrases, then we can say that they have developed the sense which the native speakers possess and which helps them in using different vocabulary items accurately according to different situations with their correct context-based meanings.

> "It is the use of idiomatic, frequent and familiar units that reflects a native-like competence . Therefore, the task of the L2 learner is to acquire lexical sequences(collocations, phrases and idioms), as well as sequences within lexical units. A precondition for an automatic analysis of such information is sufficient exposure to language input or explicit teaching and awareness raising . (Visnja, 2008,p17.)

According to Visnja the learners are to be exposed to so many different contexts for the learning of their L2 vocabulary. It may be a difficult task for the beginners to comprehend the vocabulary items from the contexts, but it is a very useful method as far as the upper-intermediate and advanced learners are concerned as they already possess enough knowledge of L2 they are trying to learn. This exposure to different contexts helps the learners not only in guessing the meanings of the new vocabulary items but it is also quite supportive in getting the morphological, collocation -related as well as the contextual values of the new words. Jackson & Etienne(2000, p17) write that every word is involved in a network of associations which connects it with other terms in the language. Some of these associations are based on similarity of meaning; others are purely formal(i.e. based on forms); while others involve both form and meaning.

The vocabulary items of any language possess a very knitted structure and the words are associated with each other on account of their meanings. Jackson(2000, p16) quotes Crystal who

defines semantic field as a "named area of meaning in which lexemes interrelate and define each other in specific ways". The words which are part of a semantic field have meaning or sense relationships with each other. Brinton asserts that:

> "A semantic field denotes a segment of reality symbolized by a set of related words. The words in semantic field share a common semantic property. Most often, fields are defined by subject matter, such as body parts, landforms, disease, colors, foods or kinship relations." (2000, p 112.)

These semantic relations between words connect them with each other and we can make clusters or maps of these semantically related words. For example, 'colors' is an umbrella term; the words semantically related to this term may be: green , blue, red, purple, yellow, black, white etc.

It is a general phenomenon that the things which are present in a scattered form are not easy to remember so, human mind has to classify the words or knowledge in certain groups or categories before storing them. For learning the vocabulary of any language, the learners have to first comprehend and then store the words by making their connection with some knowledge they already possess. Every human being owns a schema about world and if he is not a beginner then he also has schema of that language and its vocabulary. By making semantic connections it becomes easy for the learners to connect their previous knowledge with the new ideas and the vocabulary items taught using these semantic relations are found easily retentive. In this way, the learners develop an interrelated system of vocabulary which really helps them in their vocabulary development effectively. For example if a teacher wants to teach new vocabulary to the learners, he/she can exploit some reading material for that purpose. By making them recall their previous knowledge about some specific topic, new vocabulary can be taught. Before presenting the new vocabulary items, they can be asked to do brainstorming and make a map of the words they already have in their schemas.

After this brainstorming when they are exposed to new words related to the same semantic field, they find them easy to comprehend and are able to bridge the gap between their previous knowledge and the newly taught materials.

Thematic classification of vocabulary items is mainly based on the words which repeatedly occur in their specific contexts. In other words these thematically related vocabulary words do not always share the same meanings but they possess some mental association on the base of same theme. These vocabulary items are connected by contextual associations and connections. For example, Spring-flowers-plants- freshness-beauty-butterflies-greenery-birds-chirping,etc. are all thematically related words on 'Spring' theme. Collocations can also be dealt with in relation to this thematically related vocabulary because they are the co-occurring terms in different contexts.

It is a common observation that in English language books, the lessons/units are usually divided on the base of their themes although the term 'thematic' is rarely used, but these divisions usually made on the base of topics serve the same idea.

In his book "Vocabulary" Michael (1990, p 81) writes:

> "the use of topic as a framework for vocabulary presentation is very common in materials. We have seen how Thomas's (1986) Intermediate Vocabulary used 'Air Travel' as a topic heading to present a selection of connected words."

As vocabulary teaching has acquired a very prominent status in the teaching of a second language, different techniques and methodologies have been employed by the teachers to teach vocabulary items in effective ways. If we take in account the techniques used for the vocabulary instruction, we find two main strategies which are:

➢ Explicit Teaching of Vocabulary

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Explicit teaching (intentional teaching) of vocabulary includes the de-contextualized vocabulary instruction. According to Schmitt (2007,p3.):

> "For this explicit vocabulary instruction teachers need to build a large sight vocabulary, integrate new words with the old, provide a number of encounter with words .This approach can also be named as Direct Approach., promote a deep level of processing, facilitate imaging and correctness, use a variety of techniques and encourage independent learner strategies".

It becomes very difficult for the learners to retain the vocabulary items for a long time which are taught with out providing any context. Without contexts when vocabulary is presented, it does not provide the usage and occurrence of words to the learners which hinders their understanding.

On the other hand, implicit teaching (incidental teaching) of vocabulary is done mainly by providing a context to the learners, for example, presenting vocabulary items through reading materials, etc.

Many teachers teach vocabulary using top-down, naturalistic and communicative approaches which were in use in 1970s and 1980s. In these approaches, Grammar Translation Method is not employed, but the students are motivated to guess the meaning of different vocabulary items from the given context. This approach is also called Indirect Approach in which teachers do not directly teach vocabulary, but the learners are taught vocabulary items using different communicative activities or by providing them contexts e.g. listening to stories, group work, gaps-activities, etc.

Norbert Schmitt& Carthy (1997.p 237) point out some flaws of this implicit teaching in 'Vocabulary; Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy'. He asserts that:

> "Acquiring vocabulary mainly through guessing words in context is likely to be a very slow process. Considering that many L2 learners have a limited amount of time to learn a body of words, it is not perhaps the most efficient way to approach the task" .

He further mentions that students usually do not guess the correct meaning because of lack of their knowledge and guessing ability. There is also a possibility that the vocabulary items whose meanings are guessed from the context may not be retained by the learners for a long time because the learners just guess the meanings and are not exposed to the clear and exact definitions. Whatever strategy a teacher adopts, there is a strong need of proper planning and selection of appropriate and useful materials to attain the required results in vocabulary learning. In present study the researchers planned to use authentic material to improve thematically related vocabulary of the learners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This current study used the quantitative research design which makes use of numbers and statistical data to analyze and present the results. The researchers investigated how the cause which was an independent variable(in this study the use of thematically related vocabulary taken from authentic materials) affected the dependent variable (the learning of vocabulary items). Experimental design was used because the researchers had to draw the cause-effect relationship between the dependent and independent variables.
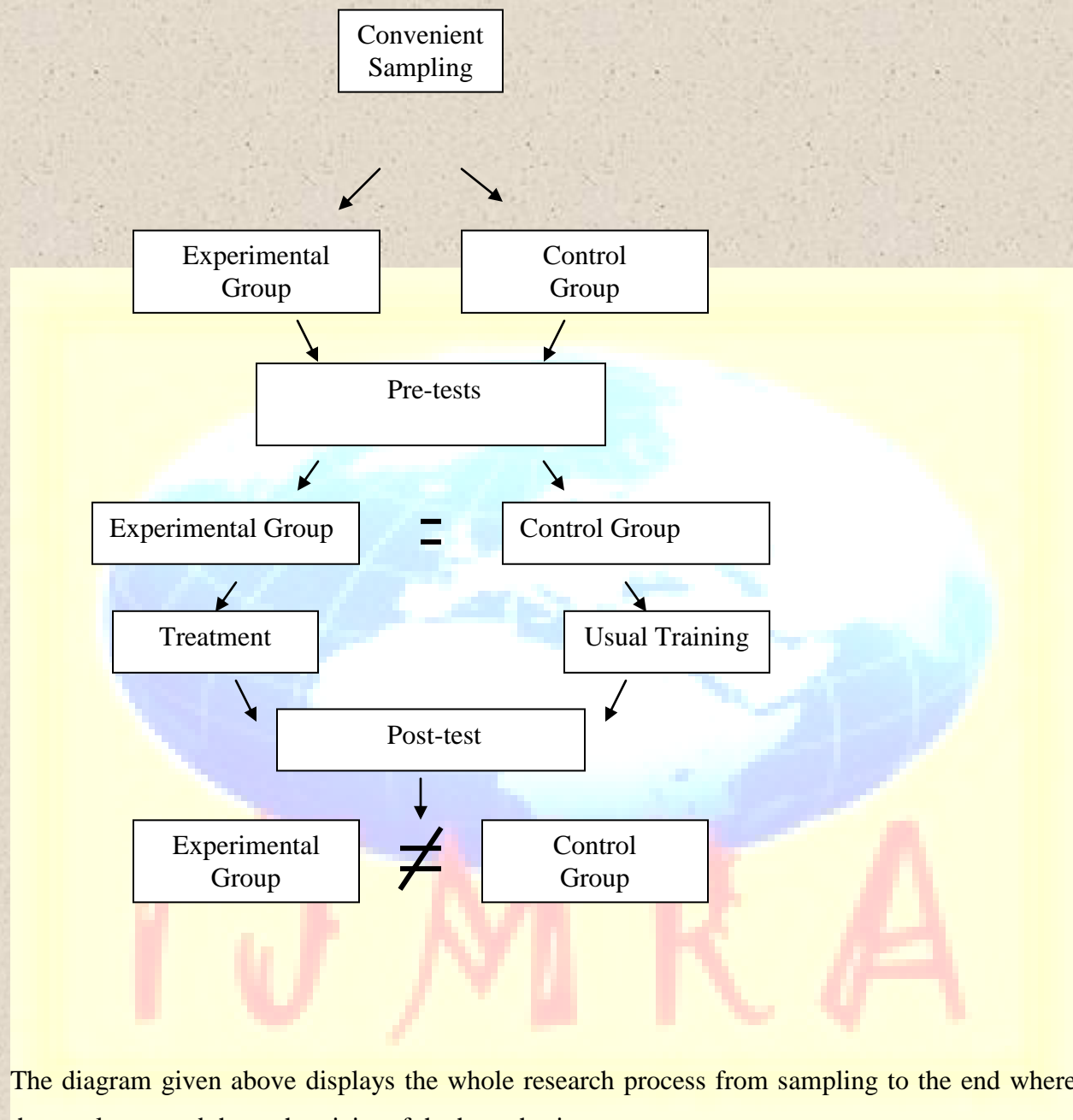
This experiment tested the hypothesis using two groups which were control and experimental groups. These groups which served as samples were selected on the basis of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. Researchers selected 40 male students of English Diploma studying at National University of Modern Languages(NUML). They were divided into two groups. There were 20 students in each group. During the experiment, the researchers kept in mind the three basic principles of experimental design which were :

- Replication   • Randomization   • Local control

Firstly, there was a repetition of tests in order to draw accurate results. Secondly, the extraneous factors were avoided. Thirdly, the researchers estimated the effects of any possible extraneous factors and eliminated them from the experiment. The tools which were used were pre-test and post-test.

Both groups were tested using pre-test before the conduction of the experiment and both were found identical in their knowledge of vocabulary and their skill of using vocabulary in different contexts. The control group was taught general vocabulary items using different traditional ways. On the other hand, the experimental group was taught thematically related vocabulary items using authentic materials. They were treated for 6 weeks. Then they were given a post-test to know the differences that treatment had caused. Finally, the results were drawn on the basis of their performance.

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Research Process:

The diagram given above displays the whole research process from sampling to the end where the results proved the authenticity of the hypothesis.

Delimitations of the Study

The researchers conducted the research at Diploma Level of English Language course at NUML(National University Of Modern Languages), Islamabad to know the effectiveness of teaching thematically related vocabulary with the help of newspapers / magazines.

For this purpose, 40 students studying at Diploma level were picked randomly as the study

sample out of approximately 500 population.

DATA ANALYSIS:

This part gives a detailed view of what was done to collect the data and the analysis of the collected data. For analyzing data the pre-test and post-test were used as tools. Tables show the results drawn from pre-test and post-test. The researchers taught thematically related vocabulary using authentic materials to the experimental group for six weeks, then compared the results of experimental group with the control group in order to draw the findings and conclusion.

4.1 Pre-tests: Control and Experimental Groups

A pre-test was designed for both of the groups in order to judge that both the groups had same level of vocabulary knowledge. They were given one hour to attempt the pre-tests. The first question was given to check their choice of vocabulary which makes one's expression impressive when he speaks or writes on a specific topic. Second question checked their comprehension of different vocabulary items which have different context-based meanings. Third question was given to judge their ability to choose concise expressions instead of using definitions while choosing vocabulary in language production. Fourth question made them think of the themes and activated their mental dictionaries to suggest one theme/topic to the given thematically related vocabulary. Fifth question checked their knowledge of various thematically related terms and their ability to fit them under different themes. Sixth question made them do brainstorming and recalling all the possible vocabulary items they had in their minds related to one specific topic/theme.

The researcher checked all the questions given in the pre-tests keeping in mind specific unbiased criteria and the result is presented in form of the table for comparison.

4.1.2 Comparison between the Pre-test of Control Group and

Pre-test of Experimental Group

For the comparison between results pre-tests of both of the groups T-Test is applied and for that the following null hypothesis is established.

Ho, µ1 = µ2 (both of the groups are same)

H1, µ1 ≠ µ2 (both of the groups are not same)

19.75-20.3

T= _____ = -0.322

5.3997(.3162)

Mean(Control Group)	19.75
S.D (Control Group)	5.003945811
Mean(Experimental group)	20.3
S.D(Experimental group)	5.768334613
T-value	-0.322

As the t-value -0.322, given in row five column two of the table given above, does not fall in the critical region which is either more than 0.5 or less than -0.5, we cannot reject our null hypothesis (Ho, µ1 = µ2). In other words the result of the pre-test of control and the pre-test of experimental group shows that both of the groups are same. If manipulation of independent group during the treatment phase of experimental group makes the difference in post test, the researcher's hypothesis is justified.

4.2 Post-tests: Control and Experimental Groups

After six weeks of treatment given to experimental group in which the researchers manipulated independent variable, that is, use of authentic material, both the groups were given post-tests in order to judge the differences which were expected in the performance of the participants of the groups. A comparison is presented in form of a table in coming section.

4.2.1 Comparison between Post-tests of Control and Experimental Groups

This comparison between the post-tests of control and experimental group is required to justify our hypothesis. As the experimental group was given proper treatment for six weeks and the control group was not exposed to any special treatment, so this comparison will now clearly show the effectiveness of the treatment given to the experimental group. Before the analysis of the table the following null hypothesis is established.

Ho, $\mu1 = \mu2$ (there is no significant difference between the results of post-test of control group and post- test of experimental group)

H1, $\mu1 \neq \mu2$ (there is a significant difference between the results of the post-test of control group and post- test of experimental group)

$$T= \frac{26.95-35.85}{4.10\ (0.3162)} = -6.862$$

Mean(Control Group)	26.95
S.D (Control Group)	4.01
Mean(Experimental group)	35.85
S.D(Experimental group)	4.196
T-value	-6.862

The t-value, that is, -6.862, as given in row five column two of the table given above, falls in the critical region which is either more than 0.5 or less than -0.5 so as a result, we can reject our null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis .In other words, the result of control group and experimental group in the post test is not same. Moreover, this difference in the performance

justifies the researcher's hypothesis as well. If the mean of both of the groups is taken into consideration, it is found that experimental group has shown better performance in the post test. Mean of control group is 26.95 and experimental group is 35.85.As before the treatment both the groups were the same, it is concluded that the improvement is brought about by the treatment given through independent variable. Moreover, this improvement justifies our hypothesis as well.

Findings:

Summing up the results drawn from the experiment conducted by the researcher, the findings are as follows:

- The independent variable (that was treatment) affected the dependent variable (which was improvement). As it is already discussed that after the pre-test control group was not given any special treatment and after six months of usual training, it was given a post-test to find any improvements or differences which had occurred. After making the comparison between the results of the pre-test and post-test of the control group, the researcher came to know that the average mean of the pre-test and the post-test had some slight differences. The average mean of the pre-test of control group was 19.75, but it was 26.95 in the post-test of the same group.

- Taking in consideration the experimental group which took a pre-test followed by a special treatment which it received for six weeks also took a post-test. When the researcher made a comparison between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group, she found a very significant difference between the results of the two tests. The average mean of the pre-test of experimental group was 20.3 but it was 35.85 in the post-test. This clear and obvious difference showed the effectiveness of the treatment given to the experimental group.

- The researcher's hypothesis that teaching thematically related vocabulary using authentic materials at diploma level can show better learning and improvement was proved when a comparison was made between the results of the post-tests of experimental and control groups. According to the hypothesis, the independent variable (way of teaching) was supposed to affect the dependent variable (improvement). When the comparison was drawn between the post-tests of both the groups, the researcher found that the average mean of the post-test of control group was 26.95, but in the case of experimental group, it was 35.85. This obvious difference proved

the hypothesis that the treatment given to the experimental group managed to bring significant improvement in the learning of the experimental group, but the usual treatment which was given to the control group could not show much improvement. However, it showed a very little improvement.

- Wrapping up all the points, the researcher found her hypothesis proved, i.e. if thematically related vocabulary is taught using authentic materials at diploma level, it can help students in the choice of accurate vocabulary in different contexts.

CONCLUSION:

This research aimed at finding the effectiveness of teaching thematically related vocabulary using authentic material at diploma level. After evaluating the performance of experimental and control groups in the post-tests, it was discovered that the treatment which was given to the experimental group brought more improvement than the usual training which was given to the control group.

5.2 Recommendations and Suggestions

After completing this research process, the researcher has discovered that it would be beneficial and interesting to discover some other relevant aspects and areas concerning thematically related vocabulary.

- The future researchers can investigate in detail the cognitive systems which work to make humans learn and retain the vocabulary items related to different themes; our mental dictionaries which store these thematically related vocabulary items; and the way these cognitive systems work, etc.

- Furthermore, in this current study the researcher has explored the output of thematically related vocabulary without exploring in detail any of the productive skills, so the future researchers can discover in detail the effects of teaching thematically related vocabulary on writing or speaking skills.

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- Moreover, the course designers can improve the design of their courses keeping in view the effectiveness of thematically related vocabulary and the usefulness of authentic materials in this regard.

- In addition, the text-books and syllabi can be developed considering the importance of thematically related vocabulary and presenting lessons / units/ chapters according to various topics based on various themes and providing thematically related vocabulary using authentic materials.

- EFL teachers can make their students aware of knowing thematically related vocabulary and recalling it when needed to be used in their productive skills and making the learners realize the context-based meanings of different vocabulary items which frequently show different meanings under different themes.

- Since the researcher in this research carried out the research at diploma level and selected all the participants from National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, in future, the same research can be conducted at some different level, e.g. intermediate, etc. and the participants can be selected from some other institutions and schools, etc.

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