Using picturebooks in early EFL

Rak, Tea

University of Zagreb
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of English
TEFL section

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Student: Tea Rak

Supervisor: dr. Stela Letica Krevelj

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Studentica: Tea Rak

Mentorica: dr. Stela Letica Krevelj

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Committee:

1. Associate Professor Renata Geld, PhD
2. Assistant Professor Stela Letica Krevelj, PhD
3. Jasenka Čengić, MEd.

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Abstract

Picturebooks are commonly used in early language learning for children around the world. They can also be used as a tool for foreign language learning, especially with (very) young learners. This paper gives an overview of the topic and shows the use of picturebooks in a foreign language classroom in a primary school in Croatia. The study focuses on two classes of thirteen-year-old students who have been learning English as their foreign language since the first grade. Two classes of students were selected, one as an intervention group and one as the comparison group. One class was presented with a story only in its written form, while the other was presented with the same story but in the form of a picturebook, in other words relying both on the visual and written aspect of the story. The study aims to compare vocabulary recall in these two cases and show the possible advantage of using a picturebook as a visual aid to support the story as opposed to using only the written form of the story. The main research question of the study is whether the pictures in the picturebook can make a difference in vocabulary recall. While the visual aspect did not make a significant contribution to vocabulary learning in the present study, the story itself does prove to be a successful learning tool, inviting more research about the topic.

Keywords: picturebooks, vocabulary acquisition, incidental vocabulary learning, intentional vocabulary learning, vocabulary recall

1. Introduction

Picturebooks make an important part of our childhood. They introduce us to literacy and literature, they teach us language, but also important life lessons in a fun and comprehensible way. Even though we use them in our first language (L1) and during our Croatian lessons during the early school years, they are less common in our second language (L2). Despite the plethora of available picturebooks, as teachers we are more often than not overwhelmed by our curriculum and textbooks, that is, our educational standard which often excludes authentic texts and leans more towards the adapted literature and standardized textbooks. With limited time in the classroom and standardized books and materials, we struggle to fit all of the required content into our classes, leaving less time for authentic texts. Whether it is the limited time, the overwhelming curriculum goals and expectations, or simply being overwhelmed by both, we often choose the path of less resistance and make it work with what we have got, leaving out the authentic literature and the challenges of introducing the said literature into our classrooms. There are however many benefits of authentic literature for very young learners (VYLs) and young learners (YLs) as well as interest on their behalf in engaging with authentic texts. This paper includes a study conducted in one Croatian primary school with seventh grade students, where vocabulary recall was researched during a story/picturebook reading session and the results of which aim to contribute to the research on the use of picturebooks in the formal setting of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and the inclusion of authentic English texts in Croatian primary schools.

2. Picturebooks in EFL

2.1. Vocabulary teaching and learning

In language teaching there are numerous approaches to the process of language acquisition. Different theories put the emphasis on different methods and approaches while trying to obtain the same goals. Through history language teaching has switched between more structured approaches like the grammar-translation method, usually focusing on grammar and vocabulary as crucial aspects of language acquisition, and less structured, *natural* approaches, mimicking L1 acquisition. In practice, this means that in language classrooms teachers focus on different aspects and methods of language teaching, depending on their own education, beliefs or preferences. School programs and curriculums, along with the textbooks used in classrooms will also differ and influence the type of instruction learners will get in the classroom. However, even with more natural and communication-based approaches that focus more on different language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing, grammar and vocabulary are a crucial aspect of language instruction because they are the crucial part of language that is being taught. Even if we put less stress on grammar rules and vocabulary lists and opt for less explicit approaches, learners will still have to acquire both vocabulary and grammar in order to understand and use the language successfully. This also means that "learners with a larger vocabulary size tend to understand reading and listening texts better than learners with a smaller vocabulary size" (Peters & Webb, 2018, p.556), as they have less gaps to fill during the task and can guess the meaning of sentences from the vocabulary they understand. Vocabulary by itself is of great value not only to proficient speakers of a language but also to students during the learning process which is why it should be the crucial part of language instruction, especially in the early stages. Still, in language teaching, "vocabulary teaching has been largely neglected" (Laufer & Nation, 2012, p.163) at the expense of grammar, topics and tasks. There are several reasons why this is so, for example grammar and various tasks more often than not require direct and explicit instruction or cooperation with other students during class, while vocabulary instruction often boils down to reading definitions and writing down words into notebooks or dictionaries, which is time consuming and at certain levels could be done individually by learners at home instead of in class where it takes up valuable instruction time. Peters & Webb mention this in their paper on Incidental vocabulary acquisition, saying how only a limited amount of time in

a classroom can be spent on vocabulary instruction, which is why researchers have been recommending extensive reading as an additional tool for vocabulary acquisition (2018, p.551). At the end of the day, during the planning and execution stages of language classes teachers will have to prioritize certain activities that will benefit the students more and vocabulary instruction will often get cut, because while grammar is straight-forward and finite, vocabulary is an ever-changing and ever-expanding aspect of language, which makes it that much harder to teach and learn. It is a vast and complex list of items learners need to acquire, but it is a necessary aspect nevertheless. There is one more reason why vocabulary often gets side-lined by grammar instruction, and it is the belief that words are acquired as by-products of exposure to language and activities in class, hence there is no need to explicitly teach it. Nation & Laufer disagree saying it would require frequent exposure which the learners are not likely to receive, even the more motivated ones, let alone the average primary or secondary school student (2012, p.167). Words simply do not appear in texts and activities often enough for the learners to acquire them spontaneously. Another reason why spontaneous reading is not enough, mentioned in a paper by authors Chen & Truscott, is that learners have to know "at least 95% of the running words to infer the meaning of the unknown words" (2010, p.698), which is both a high percentage of familiar words that are needed in order for students to infer new meaning, and also a small gain in new vocabulary since it leaves us with only about 5% of words which could be acquired. Elgort & Warren also state that readers are less likely to notice new words if they understand the text without those words (2014, p.369), which leads us to conclude that some sort of intervention is needed, new vocabulary needs to be highlighted beforehand and for successful acquisition some form of instruction is necessary,

In their chapter on vocabulary in the Routledge Handbook of SLA, Laufer & Nation point out two aspects of vocabulary that make it hard to teach – the quantity and the quality (2012, p.63). The problem of a quantity refers to the fact that unlike grammar which consists of a limited and finite number of rules, "vocabulary is an open set of many thousands of items" (2012, p.163). The vastness of vocabulary a language consists of comes with other problems for teaching like choosing vocabulary items for the lessons – which items will learners at a certain level need, and which may be optional, will the items be too difficult or not challenging enough, will learners have a use for the items or will they rarely use them after they leave the classroom. These problems expand into the other aspect of vocabulary Laufer & Nation mention – quality, because "word knowledge entails the mastery of

numerous features of the word in question and of the pattern it can form with other words" (2012, p.163). Teaching a word in a foreign language (FL) is more than making a list of L1 equivalents – most words have multiple meanings and change meaning depending on context, some have no equivalents in other languages and need to be explained with phrases or definitions. Each item also has its own collocations and situations in which it can be used, all of which need to be learned and take time and practice to acquire. Many authors talk about the complexity of vocabulary acquisition, like Zimmerman who also quotes Nation to explain what it means to know a word, and lists numerous aspects of a word that are needed in order for the learner to have mastery over a word – meaning(s), written form, spoken form, grammatical behaviour, collocations, register, associations and frequency (2014, p.288). Zimmerman refers to this as *vocabulary depth*, whilst referring to the large number of vocabulary items that need to be acquired as the *vocabulary breadth*, covering the same two problems with vocabulary acquisition as the aforementioned authors.

Laufer & Nation mention one more problem with vocabulary learning – environmental or situational, which refers to the fact that not all words in a FL classroom will be encountered with the same frequency resulting in less support for the vocabulary encountered in the classroom as opposed to the grammatical structures which are present in each sentence learners are exposed to (2012, p.163). Frequency of occurrence or the number of encounters for each vocabulary item is a common factor considered within the research of vocabulary acquisition. Research has shown varied results when it comes to frequency with the number of necessary encounters varying from one occurrence for meaning recognition (Peters & Webb, 2018, p.556; Zimmerman, 2014, p.292) and seven for productive knowledge (Chen & Truscott, 2010, p.694), to more than ten encounters in some studies or even up to twenty encounters (Webb, 2008, p.232). Higher number of encounters leading to better recall results may seem as a logical conclusion, however the context of those encounters is equally important as the encounter itself because meaningful encounters can lead to higher success rates even when the mere number of encounters is lower. Feng & Webb also state that there is "not a threshold of frequency of word occurrence that can ensure vocabulary learning" because one word can be easily learnt after a few encounters while others may not get acquired even after numerous encounters (2020, p.6). Still, Feng & Webb do point out that the more we encounter the word the greater the chance that the word will get acquired (2020, p.6). In the end, vocabulary acquisition is a complex process and like any one of the factors that influence this process, frequency of occurrence is also dependent on the other factors,

from context to the word itself, because synonyms and concepts familiar to learners from their L1 are again easier to acquire than new concepts. Context on its own can lead to varying results in acquisition, as some sentences give more context and make acquisition easier, while others may lead to acquisition of wrong meaning (Webb, 2008, p.232), or ascribing fringe meaning to the general use of a word. Webb does point out that context has a significant effect on *meaning* acquisition, while the number of encounters has a bigger effect on *form* acquisition. All in all, vocabulary and language learning in general are too complex to be limited to individual factors, hence giving too much importance to frequency can lead to oversimplification of the learning process and focusing more on the quantity of the vocabulary taught rather than the quality of instruction. Chen & Truscott also state that due to the numerous mediating variables it is virtually impossible to isolate one of them from the others and study it on its own, which is why we shouldn't be focusing on finding the magical number of occurrences that would guarantee acquisition but rather focus on the complex process of acquisition and strive to better understand the process (2010, p.693).

In the Routledge Handbook of SLA, Laufer & Nation do also say that there are benefits of partial vocabulary knowledge for future learning (2012, p.172), meaning that familiarisation with the words and partial acquisition of vocabulary is still useful for learners as it can lead to more vocabulary acquisition in the future, helping learners understand the text and extract new meaning more easily, giving them (partial) context when encountering new words, or helping them solidify or add to the knowledge they have previously acquired. This is also helpful with learning multiple meanings of the same word when combined with different vocabulary items in collocations or different contexts. The authors question the notion that word knowledge is defined as knowledge of all aspects of a word, because we know different words to varying degrees (Laufer & Nation, 2012, p.170). Answering to criticism of giving learners opportunities to express the knowledge of a word in any way they can, the authors ask if one can really prove *not* to know a word. It cannot be done; hence it cannot be assumed that a lack of proof equals to a lack of knowledge. Instead, the focus should be on word meaning as the goal as opposed to trying to check all the boxes on the list of aspects needed in order for a word to be considered as acquired. In his chapter on developing engaged readers in SLA settings, Anderson makes an interesting point regarding vocabulary learning, when he states that teachers do not teach vocabulary, but rather it is the students who learn vocabulary (2014, p.178). This refers to the fact that each student has different capabilities, but also different needs, thus we cannot teach students the vocabulary

itself, we can only give them learning strategies they can use to learn vocabulary on their own. Considering the complexity of the learning process that encompasses a range of sub-knowledge to word knowledge such as morphology, word meaning, collocations, written and spoken forms etc. it becomes clear that both the teacher and the learner have challenging tasks before them.

2.2. Incidental and intentional vocabulary learning

Language learning encompasses several learning processes. Formal settings usually involve more explicit instruction and intentional learning (learners committing to the learning process), while more natural settings usually involve more implicit and incidental learning (*picking up* vocabulary and structures in everyday settings). As the teaching techniques and philosophies change over time, they include these learning varieties in different degrees. Discussing vocabulary acquisition in the previously cited article, Feng & Webb (2020) also mention the concept of incidental learning, while Hulstijn describes it as "picking up words and structures by engaging in a variety of communicative activities" (Hulstijn, 2008, p.349), especially in reading and listening activities. In other words, incidental learning can be described as spontaneous acquisition of language that occurs when we are involved in activities in the target language, similar to the acquisition of our L1. This would mean that the learner does not engage in the activities primarily to acquire new vocabulary or language structures, rather the acquisition comes as a by-product of engagement in different activities such as reading or listening. Hulstijn (2008) also talks about intentional learning, which would then be described as engaging in the activities in order to acquire vocabulary. Hulstijn however, sees intentional learning as a complementary view to incidental learning, one of the poles on a continuum, rather than seeing them as different learning processes. He also points out the differences between implicit and incidental learning, as well as between explicit and intentional learning, stating that though they may seem similar, they are actually different. While explicit learning is characterized by the awareness of the learning process on the part of the learner, which can be seen as similar to intentional learning, implicit learning actually entails incidental learning and so much more, meaning that implicit and incidental learning cannot be the same. To add to that, intentional learning is also different to explicit learning because it entails deliberate attempts to commit new information to memory (Hulstijn, 2008, p.360), while explicit learning can merely mean that the learners are aware that they are being taught, but not necessarily committing to learning new language. Ideally, during our language

learning experience we would use all these approaches in different situations because they all benefit the learning process. Anderson states in his paper that word learning includes both intentional and incidental learning, because each has its benefits for the overall acquisition and they complement each other (2014, p.291). What incidental and intentional learning have in common is that they both include attention and noticing (Hulstijn, 2008, p.361), which are crucial for learning. Regarding vocabulary learning specifically, Hulstijn states that these two concepts are seen as two distinct categories, because intentional learning includes or implies "the use of deliberate retention techniques", while incidental does not (2008, p.361). This still means they both require attention, but with intentional learning the attention is "deliberately directed to committing new information to memory" (2008, p.361).

In their article on incidental vocabulary acquisition Peters & Webb mention the abundance of research on the topic through exposure to L2 texts, listing more than a few and concluding that vocabulary can indeed be acquired through reading due to "robust evidence that repeated encounters with unknown words in written input contribute to vocabulary learning" (2018, p.554). Feng & Webb point out in their article that incidental learning occurs when words are encountered in meaningful contexts repeatedly which is why large amounts of content would be needed for learning to take place, as confirmed by numerous studies, some of which the authors list in their article (2020, p.504). The same authors continue to say that graded readers, as examined by Nation & Wang in their study of 42 readers, have a great potential to contribute to vocabulary learning (2020, p.504). Many authors, including Krashen as one of the proponents, see reading as beneficial or even crucial to vocabulary gain, since "relatively few words are explicitly taught", both in L1 and L2, hence they must have been acquired incidentally through reading (Hulstijn, 2008, p.362). In other words, as learners don't encounter new words often in everyday life, especially in meaningful contexts that would facilitate acquisition, reading is the best way to get more exposure to L2 vocabulary. This is what Pitts, White & Krashen find in their Clockwork Orange replication paper, writing in the conclusion that "reading for meaning" can in fact "result in a small but reliable increase in word knowledge" (1989, p.275), just as suggested by other authors mentioned in their paper. Elgort & Warren wrote an article on L2 vocabulary learning from reading and list several studies on the topic, citing also Pulido on the importance of several factors that affect language learning while reading – the learner and the text which can both affect the learning process in many ways, but also various word variables (Elgort & Warren, 2014, p.365). What Feng & Webb (2020) conclude in their article, however, is that although

incidental learning is good for language acquisition, it is not best suited for classroom learning because of the large amount of content needed for learning to take place. This is why the authors point out that incidental learning outside the classroom would be more beneficial as it would fuel lexical development (Feng & Webb, 2020, p.521), functioning in a way as an addition to explicit language teaching taking place in the classroom. That being said, research has shown that this form of learning gives the best results with from-meaning acquisition, rather than grammar or collocations (Feng & Webb, 2020, p.533), which is also an important factor when deciding to incorporate this type of learning into the students' routine. Anderson says that there is more to reading comprehension than just word knowledge and that understanding vocabulary in a text does not always equate to understanding the text itself in its entirety (2014, p.178). He proceeds to list several skills beyond decoding words and decoding word meaning that readers will need for successful reading comprehension, including inference making, using world knowledge to make connections, making predictions and building knowledge (2014, p.178). This is why extensive reading outside the classroom is not enough for vocabulary and language acquisition, learners need tools to help them navigate the reading material, extract meaning and retain knowledge.

In an article about vocabulary acquisition from teacher instruction and listening to stories, authors Penno, Wilkinson & Moore mention that there is "growing evidence that young children are able to learn vocabulary from context and that listening to stories is associated with growth in both the receptive and expressive vocabulary of children in the early and middle years of school" (2002, p.31). In their article they also list different ways of vocabulary growth, including direct instruction, incidental learning from context and the combination of both (2002, p.23). Authors also state that incidental learning from context is thought to have the biggest contribution to vocabulary gain. A different article describes effective vocabulary instruction as explicit, using a careful selection of teachable target words, intentionally designed to include teaching for depth of understanding, active responding and repeated exposure, extensive practice, and finally linked to assessment (Spencer, Goldstein & Kaminski, 2012). These authors state that vocabulary acquisition is better with explicit instruction and also talk about teachable words, that is, easily defined and understandable words, which improve understanding. Effective vocabulary development is a complex process that requires a combination of instruction and encouragement of learning strategies use (Griva, Kamaroudis & Geladari, 2009). Authors Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt agree, saying that combining both incidental and intentional learning would lead to better

results with Schmitt suggesting “explicit post-reading tasks to consolidate and enhance the vocabulary initially met reading” (2010, p.43).

2.3. Multimodal reading with picturebooks

Picturebooks as reading material are different from stories and texts in that they encompass two modes of input – the textual and the visual, in the form of pictures. They are widely used as a learning tool during early language learning with the L1, but also with FLs, be it in the form of authentic material or graded readers. The multimodality makes picturebooks an excellent learning tool for YLs, because they engage the learners both visually and verbally, giving them visual aid during the early stages of learning, i.e., visual representation for the language they are hearing and/or reading. Both the written text and the visual aspect of the picturebooks are equally important components of this learning tool (Mourão, p.27). Mourão mentions that “in ELT contexts, picturebooks are selected that contain a simple picture-word relationship, with illustrations that synchronize with the text providing a secure, supportive learning context” (2016, p.28). Different relationships between the written word and the visuals of the picturebooks can create gaps in understanding and encourage the learners to search for the meaning and negotiate – thus also encouraging communication and engagement (Mourão, 2016, p.28). The exact value of the two modes is hard to pinpoint. While there is a plethora of research done on language acquisition via reading, there is little research on different modes of input for L2 acquisition apart from reading, which is why the efficacy of different modalities is still unclear. There are indications that reading is more successful when it comes to incidental learning than other modes of input, however research on the topic is scarce and the effects of other modes of input on L2 acquisition understudied, which is why no definite conclusions can be made (Feng & Webb, 2020, p.234).

In their paper about vocabulary learning through reading, listening and viewing, Feng and Webb remind us about the plethora of studies and evidence about “the value of reading for L2 vocabulary acquisition”, naming numerous authors and papers that have dealt with the topic. They also point out the lack of insight into the “efficacy of other modes of input for L2 vocabulary” (2020, p.500). Feng & Webb mention two theories dealing with language acquisition through viewing, citing three authors who have previously dealt with the topics. The first theory is the Multimedia Learning Theory, which is “based on the idea that there are separate channels in working memory to process words and pictures” (Feng & Webb, 2020,

p.500). In other words, we process the same information using different channels depending on the form of the information, which means that activating both of those channels simultaneously can contribute to information processing and retention. The other theory is the Dual Coding Theory which "indicates that human cognition consists of two coding systems, a verbal system that processes objects encoded in verbal modality, and an imagery system that processes objects encoded in nonverbal modality" (Feng & Webb, 2020, p.500-501). Both of these theories "suggest that presenting information in verbal and pictorial forms together can improve learning", suggesting even that "learning through viewing might be superior to reading and listening" (Feng & Webb, 2020, p.501), which can then be easily adapted and used in language learning settings, especially with YLs. Although the specific study by Feng & Webb referenced in this paper concludes that the audio-visual input did not in fact lead to greater gains in vocabulary acquisition, disproving in a way the MLT, other research has shown that the multimodal input does lead to larger L2 gains in vocabulary, as mentioned in a paper by De Wilde, Brysbaert & Eyckmans (2019). One paper (1998) mentions a discrepancy in their research when two words with high acquisition scores are not also high-frequency words in that study. The authors of the paper comment on the discrepancy by mentioning the fact that the two words actually appear in the book in the form of pictures as well as in textual form, which, according to the authors, "may have made them salient for learning" (Horst, Cobb & Meara, 1998, p.217). It is impossible to claim any evidence on the success of the multimodal aspect of picturebooks as it is scarce and inconclusive. However, it is undeniable that the medium has great potential, as well as a long history of use in the language learning environment. More research is thus needed to give us more insight into the matter.

Picturebooks are useful tools for early language learning, be it the child's mother tongue or a second language (L2) or maybe third language. We use them to teach children the language, to tell stories and teach them about the world that surrounds them. In an article that discusses alternatives to coursebooks in classrooms with VYLs, one author lists picturebooks as "excellent language teaching medium in the young learner classes" (Ghosn, 2016, p.11). Except for the multimodality aspect mentioned above, there are many other benefits to using picturebooks and stories in language learning settings, from those closely connected to language acquisition such as introduction of new vocabulary and grammar structures, to those relating to literature, like introduction to books and also learning how to follow a story. Picturebooks are usually targeted at (very) young children not only because they include pictures which help convey the meaning, but also because the language is carefully

constructed to accommodate the age of the target audience. They are a great way to introduce literature into children's lives because they are designed to convey meaning so that children will be able to understand it. As laics or parents, we presume and believe that there are benefits to reading stories and picturebooks with children, but as educators we need to understand the benefits and use them to our best advantage in classrooms with different groups of children. Using a certain picturebook or a story depends not only on the age, but also on the comprehension and reading levels of students, their cultural background, the society they live in. Picturebooks and stories are more than just words and pictures, they convey messages, meanings, beliefs. In an article published in 2019, Davies et. al highlight the link between inferencing and general language ability (Davies et. al., 2019, p.16). They also talk about how beneficial shared book reading can be for the development of narrative and conversational skills, complex syntax, vocabulary, literacy practices and print and phonological awareness (2019, p.5). The aims of shared book reading thus expand beyond the development of various language components, from vocabulary introduction to the development of sentence structures and complex syntax. These activities also promote the development of literary practices, as they aim to introduce children to books and develop their ability to follow a story (Reilly & Ward, 1997, p.21).

Even though reading itself carries many benefits to the children's development of both language structures and literary practices, activities associated with the stories "are as significant as the content of the stories themselves" (Wright, 1995, p.3). In his book "Storytelling with children" Wright states that due to their advantages, stories "should be a central part of the work of all primary teachers" (1995, p.4). Wright argues that children love and need stories and that storytelling adds to their willingness to listen or read, hence the first advantage he mentions is motivation (1995, p.4). Shared book reading and picturebook reading from an early age contributes to the creation of reading habits and boosts children's motivation for language learning as it gives them authentic language in context which is easier and more interesting to follow than isolated language structures and vocabulary. This is connected to the second advantage according to Wright which is meaning, i.e., listening with a purpose. Wright states that during storytelling children "want to find meaning in stories", so they listen with a purpose (1995, p.4). This way children are more likely to follow the story and try to understand what the story is about. Next, Wright talks about fluency, that is – the benefits of storytelling on listening and reading fluency, as well as speaking and writing. During shared book reading we are encouraging and practising "understanding a sustained

flow of FL with new words" (1995, p.4). Taking part in a shared book reading in an FL that the children still have a limited knowledge of will help develop very important skills they will surely need in their language learning process, such as searching for meaning, predicting and guessing (1995, p.4). These activities will also help create a "positive attitude in spite of not understanding everything" (1995, p.4) and this kind of positive attitude towards language learning, as well as reading and listening in an FL (despite limited understanding) is very important for language learners and will help with their motivation and willingness to engage in conversation. Therefore, storytelling also encourages the development of speaking and writing skills and fluency in those aspects of language. It helps with building confidence and with constructing meaning with limited language (1995, p.4).

Another important benefit of reading picturebooks is language awareness, that is – getting the general "feel" and sound of the language (Wright, 1995, p.5). Stories are a great way to introduce language items and sentence structures, for example introducing a new tense that the children are unfamiliar with. This will make the structures more "natural sounding" for children once they are ready to learn about them and use them actively. Wright also notes that reading encourages responses, hence another benefit of storytelling – it is a stimulus for speaking and writing. This means that storytelling and shared book reading encourages communication, it encourages responses to stories through speaking and writing, but also drama, music and arts (1995, p.5). Finally, the author lists numerous other benefits gathered under a collective category – general development of abilities. Wright says storytelling can help children: "develop awareness of the variety of ways of being human, (…) reflect on the story and its meanings, predict what might come next, (…) infer or guess what is meant, but not said, (…) imagine how the protagonist might feel/think, (…) empathise with other people and views, (…) evaluate behaviour, (…) learn how to learn" (1995, p.6), among numerous other benefits. Finally, one last benefit we will mention is the matter of personal development. By choosing stories that are relevant to the target age group and developmental level of the students, we can share and discuss important topics and ideas in a way that is more natural and familiar to our students. Stories can offer a wide range of values, perceptions and behaviours. They offer a plethora of different experiences and examples drawn from real life situations, ideas and topics that are relevant to the child's development. Wright argues that as educators we should choose stories that are rich in valuable messages rather than those that are not (1995, p.145). Some of the target values listed by Wright are

initiative, adaptability, inventiveness, responsibility, empathy, respect, cooperation etc. (1995, p.145)

Having listed the benefits from various authors we should also name some of the disadvantages or difficulties to using picturebooks in class. They surely demand additional engagement from both the teacher and the students, especially when the picturebook reading itself is not the only activity but should be followed by activities which will enhance the intake of language. The teacher should also prepare introductory activities to motivate students and introduce the vocabulary or language needed for the students to be able to follow the story. This is all time consuming, and so is choosing the right picturebook for a certain group of children. However, the numerous benefits are surely worth the trouble and as educators we should introduce our learners to authentic text from the young age, familiarize them with the natural structure of the language and enrich their vocabulary and literary knowledge. With all this in mind, we should also discuss different ways of language learning and vocabulary learning specifically, which is the focus of this study.

We have listed various benefits of storytelling and there are surely many more, but in this paper, we would like to focus on the visual aid they provide for the learners – do the visuals in picturebooks help with comprehension and vocabulary acquisition? In the aforementioned paper about vocabulary learning through reading, listening and viewing by Feng & Webb, the authors talk about two theories which both suggest that presenting information in pictorial form along with the verbal can improve learning and could even be "superior to reading and listening" (2020, p.501), which can be explained if we consider that during reading and listening activities we are simultaneously decoding two modes of verbal information – the written and the spoken word. It can be hard to decode the meaning of these two modes simultaneously because we would have to receive input in both modes at the same time, which is hard to achieve. Thus, the written and the spoken input may interfere with each other and obstruct the comprehension for the learner, especially with unexperienced learners. On the other hand, with reading and viewing or listening and viewing activities, we are using two different channels – one for the visual and one for the verbal input, which are processed differently and are thus less likely to interfere with each other. This leads us to assume that the visual input would be a beneficial addition to reading and listening activities and would help learners with comprehension. These theories are still understudied and there is no

empirical evidence comparing different modes of input in the context of comprehension or acquisition.

Though much research has focused on vocabulary acquisition through reading and less on other modes of input such as audio or visual input, there is one type of literature which combines reading and visual input and is often used in education and those are picturebooks. Picturebooks offer us written input with a visual aid for our learners, but also enable us to include reading-while-listening activities due to their format and sectioning of written material. In this way, we can combine three modes of input – written, spoken and visual, all whilst giving our learners authentic language, communication opportunities, new vocabulary or language structures and much more. The same paper by Feng & Webb (2020) also mentions surveys of EFL learners' out-of-class exposure to English which showed that "L2 learners watch L2 television much more than they read books", which as educators we can also apply to many of our students, especially the younger ones whose language proficiency is still not high enough for them to be reading (authentic) L2 literature, but are often exposed to English language via cartoons and videos – especially in the time of the Internet, social media etc. On the other hand, there is also very little encouragement for the learners to read authentic literature, and if they wanted to read more in their L2, they would also need guidance and book recommendations due to the lack of said information in their formal educational setting. When given the opportunity to read texts outside the prescribed books mandated by the national curriculum, we can witness positive response from students and more engagement than we would get from textbook and workbook activities. Young students respond well to stories and enjoy shared reading activities, but also individual reading sessions. Using picturebooks in formal education brings forth several issues – from ways of introducing the authentic texts and finding time within the prescribed curriculum to the selection of the material and the accompanying activities. In this paper we will however focus on the actual use of the picturebook in the classroom setting and the acquisition of vocabulary during the session to demonstrate and test this approach and its efficacy.

Though the benefits of incidental learning through reading or listening are significant and can have a big impact on vocabulary growth, in formal settings as teachers we are limited by time, dealing with a big number of learners at the same time and also have to make sure they do acquire the vocabulary and actually understand it. Hence, we are more likely to use explicit instruction in some form, whether beforehand or during the reading session as the

vocabulary appears in the story. In this study we will present the target vocabulary before reading the story explaining the meaning of the target words. We will also read the story two times to give students more exposure to the material, even though several authors have made the point that repeated reading is not crucial for acquisition. Hulstijn does state that "long-term retention of factual knowledge will almost always require frequent exposure or rehearsal" (2008, p.372), however other authors like the study by Penno, Wilkinson & Moore "suggests that repeated readings might not be necessary for vocabulary acquisition if new words were explained as they occur in the story" (2002, p.31). The study will not focus on the frequency of occurrence of the target words because most of them occur in the text only once, hence the frequency is not a factor of interest in this case. The learners were also allowed to express their knowledge of the target words in any form they like, that is, in any form they find easiest. Since word knowledge is a complex phenomenon which entails many categories of knowledge, we decided not to put any restrictions on how the students can express their understanding of the target words, hoping that this strategy will prevent them from skipping tasks when not able to recall the specific type of knowledge asked (for example a definition rather than a synonym, a translation rather than an explanation etc.). Receiving any form of information about the target words was a bigger priority for the study than getting a specific type of information.

3. The study on vocabulary recall using picturebooks

3. 1. Aim and structure of the study

The focus of this study is vocabulary recall after a reading session in a formal setting with primary school children in Croatia. The study compared two reading sessions, one using only the written form of the story and the other using a picturebook. The aim of the study was to compare vocabulary recall between the two sessions and identify possible advantages of the picturebook session compared to reading only the story in written form without the visual aid. The main question of the study was whether the visual aid in the form of a picturebook makes a difference in vocabulary recall or not, that is – would the students exposed to the picturebook remember more words from the story than students exposed only to the text of the story without the pictures.

The study consisted of three parts, the pilot study and the main study conducted with two groups of students, one using a picturebook (intervention group) and one using only the

text of that same picturebook (comparison group). Three classes of students were selected for the three parts of the study, all seventh-grade students in one Croatian primary school. This specific age group was selected based on the assessment of the researcher who had been teaching the classes for approximately two months prior to the study. The aim was to select an age group that was mature enough to self-reflect and complete a post-study questionnaire regarding the study itself and language learning in general, yet young enough to find picturebooks interesting and engaging. Another reason for selecting this age group was the language of the chosen picturebook. The picturebook was written in the past tense, which the younger students (fifth or sixth grade students) at the time of the study had not yet mastered. To ensure that the tense of the verbs would not interfere with vocabulary recall, the researcher decided to do the study with students who have mastered the past tense. The two main parts of the study had the exact same procedure except for using either a picturebook or the text of the picturebook only. The pilot study did not include the reading part as the main parts of the study did, rather it served a different purpose – selecting target words for the main studies, hence it only included a vocabulary test which was the same test used in intervention and comparison groups, but conducted online rather than in class.

The picturebook selected for the study was *Extra Yarn* by Mac Barnett (2012). The picturebook was regarded by the researcher as a good choice for the groups of students taking part in the study for several reasons. The book contained a good number of *teachable* words, that is words that could easily be explained prior to reading, including nouns, verbs and adjectives. The pictures of the picturebook also accurately followed the story, making it easier for the learners to visualize the meaning of the words they had been presented beforehand and enabling the researcher to draw conclusions on whether the pictures helped with vocabulary learning or not. Lastly, the text of the picturebook contained enough context and the story could be understood even without the pictures in the picturebook, which was crucial for the comparison group, which only got to hear and read the story and not see the pictures. There was only one instance where a description of a picture was inserted replacing a page of the picturebook that contained only a picture and no text, because the picture itself was crucial for the plot of the story (the page showing the empty box).

3.2. Methodology and research instrument

The sample for the study were seventh grade students (on average aged 13). All of the participants for both the pilot and the main study attended the same primary school and had

had the same English teachers throughout their education. Each of the three parts of the study was conducted in a different class to ensure that the students were hearing/reading/seeing the target words and/or the story for the first time during the study. The pilot study included twelve participants and was conducted online via Microsoft Forms quiz constructed by the researcher. The pilot was conducted online due to restrictions in place at the time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions in place were lifted in time for the main study to be conducted live in classrooms by the researcher, abiding nonetheless to all prescribed measures. The intervention group included twenty participants, while the comparison group included fourteen.

The pilot study and the main studies differed in procedure, because the pilot study did not include the reading of the story. The instrument of the study was the same in the pilot and in both groups of the main study, the only difference being the number of words in the test, because the main study only included the target and comparison words selected in the pilot study. The questions in the pilot study and the pre-test of the main study were constructed in the following manner:

1. ARCHDUKE
    a. I don't recognise the word
    b. I recognise the word, but I don't know what it means
    c. I recognise the word and I know what it means:

        _____

        i. I don't remember where I learned this word
        ii. I remember where I learned this word

        _____

The questions and answers were all written in Croatian to make students more comfortable and avoid any misunderstandings. Since the purpose of the post-tests in the main study was to assess vocabulary recall after the picturebook reading, the post-tests did not include the second part of the question (*I remember or don't remember where I learned this word)*.

3.3. The pilot study and the selection of target words

The purpose of the pilot study was to select target words for the main study out of all the words from the selected picturebook. The words were first divided into categories based on the assessment of the researcher: words students are likely, less likely and unlikely

familiar with. Based on the familiarity with the vocabulary range of the students, the researcher selected for the pilot 24 potential target words from the picturebook and constructed an online quiz using Microsoft Forms. Words selected for the pilot study can be seen in Table 1. The list consisted of three-word groups: nouns, verbs and adjectives, appearing in the quiz in the same order as they do in the selected picturebook. Words selected were teachable content words, that is – words that can be *easily* explained and taught, which is important for successful acquisition as mentioned earlier. Based on the results of the pilot test, the actual target words for the main study were selected.

Table 1 Word list for the pilot study

yarn	miraculous
soot	pick-up truck
knit – knitted – knitting	moustache
ridiculous	twitch – twitched
jealous	hire – hired
distraction	lid
remarkable	set off
run out of – ran out of	quiver – quivered
turn out – turned out	shiver – shivered
archduke	tremble – trembled
be fond of	hurl – hurled
demand - demanded	curse

For each of the words in the pilot, students were asked whether they recognised the word in English and were offered three possible answers: *I don't recognise the word*; *I recognise the word, but I don't know what it means*; and *I recognise the word and I know what it means*. After selecting the first or the second option students were given the next word. If they chose option three, they were asked to type in the meaning of the word (according to them) and then asked if they remembered where they had learned the word (and again type that in). The online format of the pilot study enabled the researcher to only show the participant one question at a time and even one part of the question at a time: the participant first had to mark whether he/she recognized the word and only saw the next part (write down what you think it means) after submitting the previous answer. If they typed in the wrong definition, description or translation of the word, their answer was analysed as option two (*I recognise the word, but I don't know what it means).*

Having analysed the results of the pilot, ten words that students were least familiar with were selected as target words for the main study, with *archduke* and *quiver* being at the top of the list as none of the students from the pilot study knew the meaning of these words. Six words students were most familiar with were also selected as control words for the main study with *moustache* being the *easiest* word for the students as only two students did not know the meaning of the word. Both the target words and the control words for the main study can be seen in Table 2. Control words were used to motivate students during the pre-test and post-test so they would not be discouraged by the unfamiliar words and to motivate them to continue with the test.

Table 2 Target and control words for the main study

TARGET WORDS	CONTROL WORDS
archduke	moustache
quiver	jealous
tremble – trembled	distraction
soot	ridiculous
set off	knit – knitted - knitting
hurl - hurled	curse
turn out – turned out	
yarn	
remarkable	
be fond of	

3.4. The main study – procedure

The main study consisted of two parts with two different classes of students, one being the comparison group and the other the intervention group. Both groups were given the same pre-tests to test their knowledge of the target words and post-tests to check their vocabulary recall. The pre-test and the post-test consisted of the same target and control words in the same order, the only difference being that the post-test did not include the question of whether they remembered where they learned the words. Pre-test is shown in Appendix A and the post-test in Appendix B. Both groups were also given questionnaires at the end of the session to get information about the participants' expectations about the session and their vocabulary learning habits. They were asked whether they expected the vocabulary assessment after the story reading activity, if and how they tried memorising the vocabulary presented in the story and also what their usual vocabulary learning habits and techniques are. The questionnaire used is seen in Appendix C.

Before the study, the participants' parents and guardians were asked to send their consent via e-mail if they agreed to their child's participation in the study. During the study all of the students from the class participated in the activities, but only the tests from the students whose parents had given their consent for the participation were used in the study. To make sure of that, the researcher first gave the tests to students whose parents had given the consent based on the list made beforehand, and only then gave the tests to other students. Each test was also marked with a number in order for the researcher to be able to keep track of the tests and compare the pre-tests with the post-test from the same students. The final number of participants in the main study was 14 for the comparison group and 20 for the intervention group (one of the students in the comparison group skipped an entire page of the post-test, hence there are only 13 results for the last three target words).

The first part of the study was done the same way in both groups, students were given the pre-test and asked to do the test individually. The researcher told the students that the point of the task was to see if they knew any of the words in the test and asked them to give the explanation, translation or definition of the word if possible. Before the test, students were also informed several times that their participation in the research would in no way affect their grade in the subject and that none of the tests done as part of the study would be graded nor would their results be tracked back to them as none of the tests were marked with their names, but rather with random numbers. Having completed the pre-test, students were shown each of the target words from the test one by one on a PowerPoint presentation with definitions and examples of words used in sentences. For each of the words, students were first asked to try and give their explanation or translation if they knew the words, but in most cases the researcher was the one to give the explanation of words and examples. The researcher and the students discussed the meaning of each target word and students were given opportunities to ask for further explanation when needed, which they often took as they were quite familiar with the researcher and acted as relaxed as they would during a regular English lesson.

After going through all of the words, students were told that they would then read a story or a picturebook depending on the group and that later on they would discuss the story. Students were not told about the post-test, but were rather told to listen to the story and try and understand as much as possible because the goal was to understand the story. Students were therefore not told about the main purpose of the study – vocabulary recall, in order to

study acquisition in a more *natural*, incidental way. Since the study was taking place in a classroom setting, it is likely that at least some students would try and remember the vocabulary from the story based on their learning habits and expectations during an English lesson. Because of that *true* incidental learning is unlikely achievable and hence not the goal of the study. However, the study is interested in vocabulary recall after activities in which the focus is not put primarily on vocabulary recall, but rather on meaning and literary texts.

The story/picturebook itself was also presented to students via PowerPoint. The comparison group was shown the text from the picturebook, while the intervention group was shown pictures of the pages from the picturebook. To make the reading experience as similar as possible for both groups, the text shown to the comparison group was organized in the same way as it is in the picturebook (same number of words and lines per page/slide). In both groups the story was read twice to amplify exposure to the target words and give students more chances in hearing the target words and the story. After the second reading, students were given a post-test and finally the questionnaire. Collected data was categorised and analysed by the researcher and the results are described and discussed in the following part of the paper.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results of the main study

Comparing the pre-test to the post-test both the intervention and comparison group showed vocabulary recall with all of the target words with varying success rates. The most successful words across both groups were *archduke*, *turn out* and *yarn*, which were the only target words that appear in the story more than once (*archduke* appears eight times, *turn out* four times and *yarn* ten times). It is also interesting that more students remembered the meaning of the word *archduke* in the comparison group then in the intervention group. Percentagewise, only half of the words actually had higher scores in the intervention group than the comparison group – *set off*, *turn out*, *yarn*, *remarkable* and *be fond of*, with some of the percentages being very close in both groups. The results of the main study can be seen in Table 3. The table shows the numbers of students that picked each of the options in both the pre-test and the post-test, across both groups.

Table 3 Main study results – target words

TARGET WORD	COMPARISON GROUP						INTERVENTION GROUP					
	PRE-TEST			POST-TEST			PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
archduke	10	4	-	1	1	**12**	14	6	-	2	7	**11**
quiver	10	2	**2**	2	2	**10**	18	2	-	8	7	**5**
tremble	9	3	**2**	3	4	**7**	13	7	-	6	9	**5**
soot	10	4	-	2	3	**9**	9	11	-	6	7	**7**
set off	2	11	**1**	4	4	**6**	2	18	-	2	7	**11**
hurl	10	4	-	5	5	**4**	14	6	-	4	7	**9**
turn out	1	10	**3**	1	5	**8**	-	15	**5**	-	6	**14**
yarn	8	6	-	3	3	**7**	14	4	**2**	2	3	**15**
remarkable	5	7	**2**	2	5	**6**	6	14	-	2	7	**11**
be fond of	7	7	-	5	4	**4**	7	13	-	1	10	**9**
ANSWER	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*

Words with the best scores in the intervention group were *yarn* and *turn out*, which in the post-test (over) 70% of students did know the meaning of. Three more words were correctly defined or translated by 55% of the students from the intervention group – *archduke*, *set off* and *remarkable*. There were, however, two words that only 25% of students correctly explained in the post-test – *quiver* and *tremble*, with *hurl* doing only slightly better with 30%. Even though the phrasal verbs did good among the intervention group, other verbs had the lowest scores among all target words.

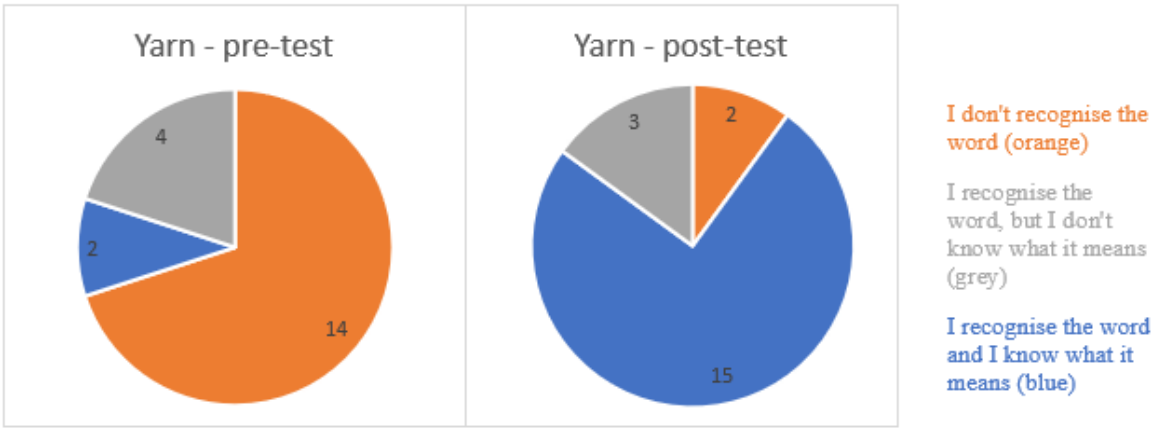

Figure 1 Yarn results - intervention group

Even though a lot of students recognized some words like *turn out* and *set off* during the pre-test, but didn't know the meaning, this only partly explains why these words had the best results in the post-test, since words like *yarn* and *archduke* were mostly marked with *I don't recognize the word* in the pre-test, but still had great results in the post-test.

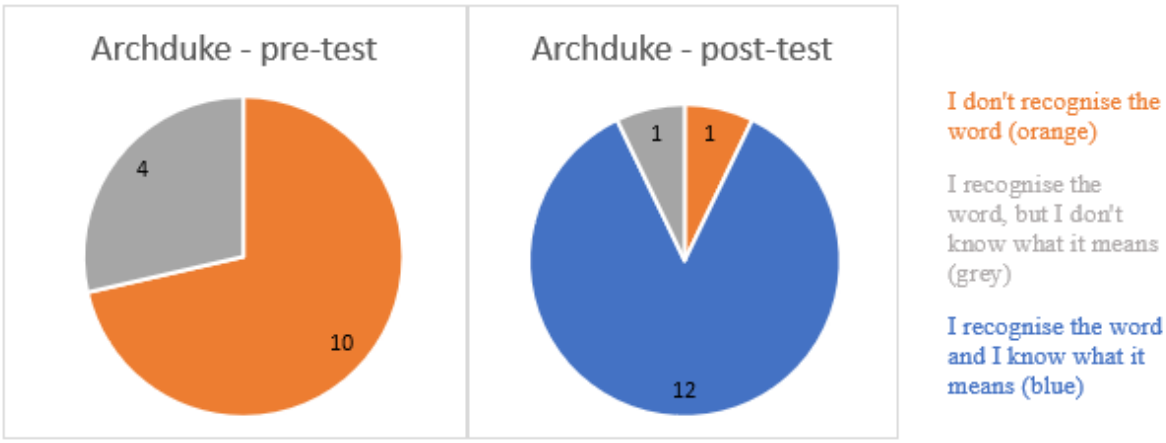

Figure 2 Archduke results – comparison group

The comparison group had different words with highest scores – *archduke* with 85% of students knowing the meaning of the word in the post-test, and surprisingly *quiver* and *soot* with 71% and 64% respectively. All of these words had lower scores in the intervention group. Interestingly, none of the words in the comparison group had a score lower than 29%. This would indicate that more students learned the target words in the comparison group than the intervention group.

It is also important to take into account that there were three possible answers students could choose between, one indicating that they knew the meaning of the word, one indicating that they didn't know the meaning and one saying they didn't recognize the word at all. If we

only look at the number of students who picked the answer *I don't recognize the word*, the relation between the comparison and intervention groups is a little different, because in the intervention group seven out of ten words had lower percentage of students choosing the option *I don't recognize the word* than the comparison group, and six words had only 10% of students or less who did not recognize the target words in the post-test. For comparison, in the comparison group only two words had less than 10% of students choosing the option *I don't recognize the* word and only half of them had less than 20%. This shows that the students did notice the words but didn't remember the meaning, hence were not able to recall it. This problem would be easily solved with additional activities with the target words, which would likely lead to better recall results as it is a recommended and often practiced way of vocabulary teaching. In this study, however, additional activities were not part of the procedure as the purpose was to only study recall after picturebook reading itself.

When analysing these answers, we could also rightfully assume that not all of the answers were truthful. We could easily see if the students really knew the word by the definition or translation they provided in the test and during the analysis all the wrong definitions and explanations were added to the option *I recognise the word, but I don't know what it means*, because the words in those cases did sound familiar to students and they tried to remember the meaning, but failed. It is somewhat harder to determine if the other two categories were as truthfully marked because there was no way to prove that the students did not in fact know the meaning of the word or that they didn't recognise it. There was therefore room for error and students could have easily chosen the answer that would make them *look good*, rather than choosing *I don't recognise the word*. There was, however, also the possibility that the students were not interested in the study or the test and did not care about their image before the researcher, the teacher or their peers, which would then lead to students choosing option *I don't recognise the word* because it was easier and asked for less engagement. These were unfortunately factors we couldn't eliminate completely.

One possible reason for come words getting better results in the comparison group and why the intervention group did not outperform the comparison group with every word might have been precisely the picturebook itself because the comparison group did not have any pictures to help them follow the story so they had to pay attention to the words more and try to recall the meaning of the target words from the presentation they saw beforehand. This

would mean that even though the picturebook helped as it gave context to the story, it also asked for less effort from the learner because of that same aid.

Lastly, one interesting result was also one of the comparison words which were chosen because students in the pilot were most familiar with them, and that was the word *knit*. Even though more than 60% of students in the pilot knew the meaning of this word, only three students from the main study knew the meaning of the word (all from the comparison group), which was less than 9% across both groups. The results for the comparison words can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 Main study results - comparison words

CONTROL WORD	COMPARISON GROUP						INTERVENTION GROUP					
	PRE-TEST			POST-TEST			PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
distraction	-	5	**9**	1	3	**10**	2	8	**10**	4	5	**11**
ridiculous	1	6	**7**	1	2	**11**	3	8	**9**	2	8	**10**
moustache	4	2	**8**	2	2	**10**	2	11	**7**	2	5	**13**
knit	**8**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**4**	**8**	**12**	**8**	**-**	**7**	**7**	**6**
jealous	2	2	**10**	1	3	**10**	-	8	**12**	2	4	**14**
curse	3	2	**9**	2	3	**8**	1	12	**7**	5	6	**9**
ANSWER	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*	*I don' t recognise the word*	*I recognise the word, but I don' t know what it means*	*I recognise the word, and I know what it means*

One of the limitations of this study is that no additional activities were done after the reading activity to further consolidate the vocabulary, since the goal of the study was to study the reading activity itself and its contributions to vocabulary recall. Yet, even with that in mind, students still did recall a good number of words and progress can still be seen

when comparing the pre-tests and post-tests, albeit a temporary result as no postponed testing was done to check for long-term retention. Postponed tests were not done precisely because the study only included a reading session and no other activities, which is why long-term retention is unlikely and not to be expected. This would also mean that the results of the main study and vocabulary recall is valid considering the time and effort invested in the vocabulary learning process.

Even though the intervention group did not perform better than the comparison group as they only outperformed the comparison group with half of the target words, the study does show the benefits of reading for vocabulary acquisition because both groups did in fact show vocabulary recall after the reading activity without any additional post-activities. This suggests that reading stories does help with vocabulary acquisition whether it's a picturebook or just a story, which is in line with numerous studies that have previously shown that language, and more specifically, vocabulary can in fact be acquired through reading. As mentioned earlier, Hulstijn (2008) has explained incidental learning as spontaneous acquisition through engagement in communicative activities, especially reading and listening, as well as pointed out that in these activities learners do not engage in order to acquire new vocabulary. Acquisition in this way would then be incidental or implicit, as the students are still aware of their participation in the learning activities, but are not actively trying to commit new information to memory. When talking about reading activities done in a formal setting as with this study, it is impossible to talk about completely incidental learning where learners would not be aware of the learning aspect of the activities, since them being in school and participating in activities during their English lessons clearly makes them aware that they are in a way expected to learn, or at least that the activities done in class are meant to teach them certain content. Since the participants of this study were told beforehand that the purpose of the study was to see how much they understood the story, we would argue that by doing this we have at least partly directed the learners' attention towards the content of the story, rather than the vocabulary itself, hoping to create at least in part a more naturalistic setting where incidental learning could take place during the reading session. Ideally, the reading session would be followed by meaningful activities to solidify newly-encountered vocabulary, which due to time limitations were not done in this study, but could surely produce better results in a longer study featuring more reading material and activities over a longer period of time. True extensive reading with fruitful results in vocabulary acquisition would, due to time limitations in formal classrooms, have to be done outside of the formal

environment, in learners' free time. This is in line with what Feng & Webb (2020) have stated about incidental learning not being best suited for classrooms, as it requires too much content and time, as well as activities to follow the reading material itself. At that point, it is important to note that learners would need tools to help them navigate through these extensive texts (Anderson, 2014), which would require prior instruction on how to approach extensive texts in FLs and extract meaning and knowledge from them. Considering the time limitations of this study and the absence of post-reading activities, it is impressive that the learners did show vocabulary recall, even if no postponed tests were done and the long-term retention is unclear. The study still shows the potential of the reading activities for the learners, which would only be amplified with proper instruction on reading activities before the reading sessions, meaningful post-reading activities and regular reading practices over a longer time period. We have mentioned earlier that the mastery of a word requires many aspects of a word, which is impossible to achieve after just one reading session (Zimmerman, 2014), but also that there is a benefit to knowing words partially as it helps with future learning, solidifying knowledge or acquiring additional aspects of knowledge for a particular word (Laufer & Nation, 2012). As Penno, Wilkinson & Moore (2002) said, children have an ability to learn from context, and reading and listening to stories leads to vocabulary growth with children in early and middle years of school. This is also in line with the results of the questionnaire done in this study, which will be presented in the following paragraphs and shows that the students liked the picturebook used in the study, which is a big factor in motivation and thus the learning process.

4.2. Questionnaire results

One important difference between the groups were their feelings towards the story expressed in the questionnaire done at the end of the study. Among the comparison group, 57% of students liked the story (eight out of 14), but in the intervention group all of the students stated that they liked the story. We can thus say that the students did like the picturebook more than just the story and that it could have contributed to their engagement and interest during the reading activity. The reasons listed by students from the comparison group that did not like the story were that the story was boring or they did not like it, and one student wrote that he/she did not understand it (*I could not translate the story…*), that is his/her English was not on the level where he/she would be able to keep up. Both of these problems could have been avoided if the group was also shown the picturebook and it

possibly or even probably was, since none of the students from the intervention group said that they disliked the story.

The main reasons why students liked the story/picturebook across both groups were that the story was interesting and fun, and also that the story had a lot of pictures, a good message, was well written and also "because it was in English" and "it is fun reading in English". All these answers show us that the students were interested and invested in the authentic text and found it both interesting and entertaining which is great for engagement and motivation.

Regarding the question of whether the students expected the post-test, only half of the intervention group said they did not expect the post-test, and more than 60% of the comparison group. The main reason why they did not expect the post-test was that they already had one test before the reading, while the reasons why they did expect the post-test were less clear with two students saying that that is just how English lessons are. Ten out of fourteen students from the comparison group said that the vocabulary tests were not hard and only one student out of 20 from the intervention group. Only one student (from the intervention group) marked that he did not notice the target words introduced prior to the story in the story itself, while all the other students marked that they did notice them.

Across both groups only four students said that they did not try to memorise the words (only one from the intervention group) and the only reasons listed were "I don't know (why)", "I will learn them (eventually)" and "I already knew them". Reasons listed by students who marked that they were trying to memorise the words were mainly "to learn and know more words" and while the students from the comparison group often wrote that they wanted to learn the words because they did not know them in the pre-test and to do better in a possible post-test, none of the students in the intervention group mentioned those reasons and only wrote that they wanted to learn the words because they might need them in the future and that they wanted to enrich their vocabularies. This speaks volumes about the students' motivations and different attitudes towards vocabulary learning between the two classes of students as well as their attitudes towards language learning in general. It also shows us that the learning that did take place was not truly incidental, which was to be expected because despite directing the students' attention towards the story itself, the study was still done during their regular English lesson when learning (vocabulary) is expected of them.

Regarding the question about the learning techniques, most students wrote they used the context (from both the presentation and the story itself) to remember the words or they repeated the words several times to memorise them. The intervention group did have longer and more precise and elaborate answers to this question, while the comparison group had short and unspecified answers like "by using my brain and memory". This could also indicate more dedication to learning in general and a more mature approach to language learning by the students from this class.

Some of the most common sources for vocabulary acquisition both in the questionnaire and during the pre-tests across all groups were (video) games, the Internet, YouTube, films and TV shows and school/textbooks. Only one student across all three groups (including the pilot) mentioned reading in English apart from school and their English textbook. If the students are only learning their English from video games, YouTube, TikTok and movies, we should at least be giving them some authentic texts in school and try and motivate them to read more in English even when they are not being tested. The main vocabulary learning techniques listed in the questionnaire were repetition and spontaneous acquisition from context (video games, YouTube, films…), but some of the students from the intervention group also mentioned several additional techniques like looking words up in dictionaries, coming up with sentences to put the words in context, translating them or writing them down on cards.

The questionnaire did give us important insight into students' attitudes towards the story and the picturebook reading activities, as well as into their learning habits and attitudes towards language learning. One important finding was certainly that the vast majority of all students in the main study liked the story and all students from the intervention group liked the picturebook even though they were all seventh-grade students and we usually tend to use picturebooks with YLs. This means authentic stories and text do have a place in the English classroom and could contribute to students' motivation during language learning all while bringing a change in the standardised curriculum and even motivating students to read more outside the classroom as well. As Laufer & Nation (2012) mentioned, vocabulary is often neglected in the classroom on account of grammar and skill development, hence extensive reading is a great tool to add to the regular language instruction to give students more chances to encounter the vocabulary in different contexts (Peters & Webb, 2018).

The main limitation of the study is that it was a short study done during a sole language session which limited the time spent on pre-reading and post-reading activities, as well as on reading itself. Using more meaningful activities to solidify the vocabulary and even spending some time to discuss the story with the students would be beneficial to their acquisition as it would give them more opportunities to see and hear the target words. Given that the students still showed a certain level of vocabulary recall, as well as positive attitudes towards the picturebook as the learning material, this study adds to the already known benefits of stories and picturebooks for the language learners. More research is certainly needed in order to better understand the use and benefits of this learning tool for wider application in language instruction, as it would be a pity not to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits it can bring. Another limitation of the study is that the extent of vocabulary retrieval could have also depended on the instructions given to students prior to the reading task. Had they known that they would be tested on the words, the results would have possibly been different.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to compare vocabulary recall between two reading sessions with seventh-grade students in a formal setting, with one reading session being done with a picturebook and the other with just the story of the same picturebook, but without the pictures to support the story. The goal was to identify possible advantages of the picturebook session compared to reading only the story in written form without the visual aid. The main question of the study was whether the visual aid in the form of a picturebook makes a difference in vocabulary recall after reading or not.

The results of this study give us a negative answer to the research question, as the intervention group did not achieve better results than the comparison group across all or even the majority of target words. The study did still show vocabulary recall after the reading activity and so did the comparison group, with some words with even better results than the intervention group. This means that the picturebook did not make a big difference with vocabulary recall when compared to the story itself without the pictures, but reading both the story and the picturebook did lead to vocabulary recall. As mentioned in the first part of this paper, many theorists and researchers have explored and researched vocabulary acquisition through stories and picturebooks with positive results indicating and demonstrating the benefits of stories and picturebooks on vocabulary and language acquisition, learner

motivation and engagement, reading habits, etc. This study shows us the need for further research on the use of stories and picturebooks in language learning settings, as they are not only important for our personal development, but also our language learning process.

The questionnaire designed as part of the main study showed us that a large majority of students in the comparison group of this study liked the story and all of the students from the intervention group liked the picturebook. This tells us that there is interest and potential for the inclusion of authentic stories and texts into our FL classrooms, that these texts can motivate and engage students and also teach them vocabulary and language at the same time, all whilst developing their reading habits as well. This is certainly an option worth pursuing especially in this day in age when the Internet and the (social) media is taking over our lives from the young age and is becoming our main means of language learning apart from the formal setting. While these are all useful language learning tools, actual authentic texts and literature are crucial for our literary and cultural development, as well our language development, showing us unique language often not available via other sources such as video games or YouTube. In the age of technology and fast development we may need to slow down and get back to the basics and show our YLs the world of stories and literature in English, just as we do in Croatian. The curriculum and the schedule may seem overwhelming as is, but with good planning and reading habits established early in school, we can accomplish a lot in the long run. The starting point may be using picturebooks, but the goal is not only unassisted reading but also motivation and engagement which we can never have too much of. Picturebooks can seem as a simple tool and at the same time as a demanding task for us educators, but their benefits certainly outweigh the downsides and they can bear fruit much longer than we initially assume, creating life-long habits and benefits that go beyond our classrooms and foreign language learning alone.

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List of abbreviations

EFL – English as a foreign language

FL – foreign language

L1 – first language

L2 – second language

SLA – second language acquisition

YL – young learner

VYL – very young learner

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Appendix A – Pre-test for the main study (both groups)

Prepoznaješ li sljedeće riječi?

Ako znaš što znače ove riječi – upiši što misliš da znače na praznu crtu.

1. ARCHDUKE
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

    _____

        i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
        ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

        _____

2. DISTRACTION
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

    _____

        i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
        ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

        _____

3. QUIVER
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

    _____

        i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
        ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

        _____

4. RIDICULOUS

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

5. TREMBLE
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

6. MOUSTACHE
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

7. SOOT
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ

ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

8. SET OFF
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

    _____

        i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
        ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

        _____

9. KNIT
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

    _____

        i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
        ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

        _____

10. HURL
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

    _____

        i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
        ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

        _____

11. JEALOUS
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači

c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

12. TURN OUT

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

13. YARN

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

14. CURSE

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

15. REMARKABLE

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

16. BE FOND OF

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

i. ne sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ
ii. sjećam se gdje sam naučio/la ovu riječ:

_____

Appendix B – Post-test for the main study (both groups)

Prepoznaješ li sljedeće riječi?

Ako znaš što znače ove riječi – upiši što misliš da znače na praznu crtu.

1. ARCHDUKE
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

        _____

2. DISTRACTION
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

        _____

3. QUIVER
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

        _____

4. RIDICULOUS
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

        _____

5. TREMBLE
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači

c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

6. MOUSTACHE
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

7. SOOT
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

8. SET OFF
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

9. KNIT
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

10. HURL
    a. ne prepoznajem riječ
    b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
    c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

11. JEALOUS

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

12. TURN OUT

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

13. YARN

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

14. CURSE

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

15. REMARKABLE

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

16. BE FOND OF

a. ne prepoznajem riječ
b. prepoznajem riječ, ali ne znam što znači
c. prepoznajem riječ i znam što znači:

_____

Appendix C – Questionnaire for the main study (both groups)

1. Je li ti se svidjela priča?
    a. da
    b. ne
2. Zašto? _____

3. Jesi li očekivao/očekivala da ćete nakon priče imati provjeru vokabulara iz priče?
    a. da
    b. ne
4. Zašto? _____

5. Je li provjera vokabulara bila teška?
    a. da
    b. ne

6. Jesi li u priči primijetio/primijetila riječi koje ste dobili u provjeri prije i nakon čitanja?
    a. da
    b. ne

7. Jesi li pokušao/pokušala zapamtiti ili naučiti riječi iz priče?
    a. da
    b. ne
8. Zašto? _____

9. Na koji način si pokušao/pokušala zapamtiti riječi iz priče?

    _____

    _____

10. Na koji način inače učiš riječi iz engleskog?

    _____

    _____