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Title of Thesis: Depth and Breadth of Vocabulary Knowledge: Assessing their Roles in Reading Comprehension of High-School EFL Learners in the UAE

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. It was conducted through two phases, quantitative and qualitative. The first quantitative phase of the study, which included 93 high school participants, investigated the degree of correlations between two aspects of vocabulary knowledge, breadth (vocabulary size) and depth, and reading comprehension. Furthermore, it investigated whether breadth or depth was a stronger predictor of learners' reading comprehension. It adopted three language tests: two vocabulary tests and a reading comprehension test. The second qualitative phase, which involved four subjects (a subsample of the first phase), explored how these subjects used their vocabulary depth to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words in a written text. To achieve this purpose, semi-structured interviews were employed as a method of data collection. The study has empirically shown several findings. Moderate positive intercorrelations among the scores on the three language tests were obtained. Breadth proved to be a more powerful predictor of reading comprehension scores than depth. Students with greater depth of vocabulary knowledge were more successful in inferring the meaning of unknown words while reading than those with less depth. A positive association was found between students' vocabulary depth and their lexical inferencing ability. These results confirm the importance and the value of developing students' breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: breadth, depth, reading comprehension, intercorrelations