

Exploring Young English Learners' Perceptions of the Picture Word Inductive Model in China

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Abstract

The Picture-Word Inductive Model (PWIM) is one of the new teaching methods introduced in English Language Education (ELT) in China, in order to develop English learners' communicative competence. However, studies conducted on PWIM from the perspectives of English learners are underrepresented and no research has been done about using PWIM with English learners in China. Considering this gap, I attempted to answer the question: What are young English learners' perceptions of PWIM? I deployed observations, questionnaires, and interviews to explore what fourth and seventh graders perceived to be the strengths and drawbacks of PWIM. My findings suggest that many students listed and exemplified numerous strengths of PWIM, and a few mentioned its weaknesses. The students expressed that PWIM had a positive effect on their English learning.

Keywords: picture-word inductive model, perceptions, vocabulary, mixed methods, exploratory

Introduction

English has been taught as a core and compulsory subject in China for decades, making China the largest population of English learners and users: approximately 440 million English-learning and English-using people in China (Crystal, 2008, pp. 4-5). And for decades, English teaching in China promoted a strong linguistic focus on grammar, reading, and translation, with a method called "teacher-centered textbook-analysis-based grammar-translation" (Yang, 2000, p. 19). This traditional approach, however, is not the only English teaching approach implemented nowadays, because English learners in China need more skills (e.g., writing and speaking) and communicative competence. Communicative competence is defined as "a certain level of language proficiency, speech and social-cultural set of knowledge, skills and abilities that enable to vary acceptably and appropriately their communicative behavior in a communicative way" (Fahrutdinova, Yarmakeev, & Fakhrutdinov, 2014, p. 36). Picture-Word Inductive Model (PWIM), as a new English Language Teaching (ELT) approach that seemingly had never been used in China before, might be essential to the ongoing reformed English education, because PWIM potentially enables learners to manage the meaning and use of new words, empowers learners from passive to active learning by speaking and writing, and helps learners write paragraphs step by step from adding up words, phrases and sentences.

In terms of research studies, PWIM is not well represented. Until now, there have been only a few research studies of PWIM (Calhoun, 1999; Feng, 2011; Swartzendruber, 2007; Wong, 2009), and none of them have been conducted with any English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Mainland China. With the empirical and contextual gap mentioned above, the purpose of this study was to explore young EFL learners' perceptions of PWIM in China. The implication of this study included using this research piece as a mechanism to develop a

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view about PWIM as a newly-tried ELT method from learners' perspectives within a policy-driven framework, so that educational leaders and practitioners can consider PWIM as a new teaching approach being introduced and implemented widely in Mainland China. In addition, applying the findings and discussions of this paper to different contexts, English teachers may have better approaches to developing appropriate and effective ways of presenting and practicing PWIM with students, in order to help students develop their language skills and communicative competence.

Literature Review

English Teaching in China

English teaching in China has its peculiar cultural, social and political context; moreover, China has experienced its own history of English textbooks and syllabi changes. Historically, English has been taught as a compulsory subject with a strong emphasis on grammar, translation, and reading, mainly through direct instruction approaches (Yang, 2000). Such traditional teaching approaches are characterized by systematic study of grammar, extensive use of Chinese-English translation, and persistent memorization of syntactic patterns and vocabulary (Hu, 2002). The traditional approach, however, has failed to develop an adequate level of EFL learners' communicative competence (i.e. the ability to use English for authentic verbal and textual communications) in China. Millions of EFL learners taught by this traditional approach can read, but cannot speak or write well. As a result, new English teaching approaches including Communicative Language Teaching (Yang, 2014) and Task-based Learning and Teaching (Zheng & Borg, 2014), focusing on transforming learners from passive to active agents, have recently entered EFL classrooms in China.

As mentioned earlier, some innovative teaching approaches have recently been introduced into English education in China. However, school principals and teachers may feel uncomfortable and unsafe when they are informed of change. This feeling occurs when "change...upsets the pattern" people are accustomed to, thereby thrusting people into new perceptions and challenging people's way of dealing with life (Evans, 1996, p. 27). Such feelings are more likely to register with those educational practitioners who are already satisfied with the situation they are in (Feng, 2011).

Students may similarly be accustomed to the traditional teaching methods and resistant to change. Their resistance to change may also be rooted in Chinese culture which has been largely influenced by Confucius (Jiang, 2011), and Confucian philosophy has led to the teacher-centred approach. It has also, as Scollon (1999) pointed out, correspondingly exerted an ideological impact on students' ways of thinking, teachers' and students' roles, objectives of education, and behaviours of teachers and students. Under the influence of the Confucian education philosophy, what teachers say is authoritative and true, and these truths should be repeated and remembered instead of being questioned by students. Values including "docility, passivity, and conformity" are what education demands of its students in this Confucian heritage culture (Yen, 1987, p. 52). Students under the influence of Confucian heritage culture for years are more likely to be passive thinkers without any consciousness of inductive reasoning (Scollon, 1999). Scollon (1999) undertook a case study to identify the cultural constructs that underlie the participants' viewpoints on the purposes of education in Chinese classrooms and that influence the behaviors of students and teachers. She observed that the cultural notions stemming from Confucius affect learning processes tacitly (Scollon, 1999). Chinese EFL learners influenced by historically dominant Confucian traditions tend to be disabled from using rhetorical reasoning (Jiang, 2011). Nevertheless, it deserves exploring and experimenting whether and how these learners can be transformed with rhetorical reasoning after certain instructional practices, such as PWIM.

Picture-Word Inductive Method

PWIM is a teaching approach based on Calhoun's (1999) research on early literacy. The fundamental tenet of PWIM is its use of "pictures as a stimulus for language experience activities" in classrooms to teach young beginners learning to read and write (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2009, p. 130). Calhoun suggested that PWIM be

used to teach several skills as an integrated whole simultaneously, beginning with the phonetic and structural components of language, for example, the pronunciation and the spelling of a word. Students using PWIM see the item, listen to the teacher's pronunciation, and then pronounce the word to reinforce word recognition. PWIM also covers explicit instruction and induction, as well as an immediate assessment of students' needs and comprehension. Calhoun suggested that a teacher can arrange any individual activity, as well as small-group and large-group activities, with a PWIM format. She also suggested that PWIM can be modified and applied to older beginners (Calhoun, 1999).

PWIM has many successful examples of applications in classrooms (Calhoun, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Joyce et al., 2009). Calhoun claims that its successful applications are closely related to prescribed and detailed steps for implementation, an instructional sequence incorporating cycling and recycling through the following 10 steps (Calhoun, 1999):

1. Select a picture.
2. Ask students to identify what they see in the picture.
3. Label the picture parts identified. (Draw a line from the identified object or area, say the word, write the word; ask students to spell the word aloud and then to pronounce it.)
4. Read and review the picture word chart aloud.
5. Ask students to read the words (using the lines on the chart if necessary) and to classify the words into a variety of groups. Identify common concepts (e.g., beginning consonants, rhyming words) to emphasize with the whole class.
6. Read and review the picture word chart (say the word, spell it, say it again).
7. Add words, if desired, to the picture word chart and to the word banks.
8. Lead students into creating a title for the picture word chart. Ask students to think about the information on the chart and what they want to say about it.
9. Ask students to generate a sentence, sentences, or a paragraph about the picture word chart. Ask students to classify sentences; model putting the sentences into a good paragraph.
10. Read and review the sentences and paragraphs (p. 23).

PWIM embraces the development of visual perceptions, which is vital to children's literacy acquisition (Astorga, 1999; Clay, 2001; Joyce, Calhoun, & Hopkins, 2002). During instruction with the PWIM, students are shown a picture and are asked to identify items in the picture or "shake out" the words of the picture. The picture as a visual image has a significant role in PWIM to develop children's literacy. Joyce and Weil (2004) showed how pictures may serve as important stimuli for connecting learners' life experiences to their language learning in the classroom. The teacher writes each identified word on chart paper outside the picture and draws a line from the word to the item in the picture, essentially creating a picture-word dictionary which the students can employ to connect words with corresponding pictures. Joyce and Weil (2004) claim that such a kind of connection contributes to developing new ideas and learning vocabulary.

Wong (2009) demonstrated that vocabulary learning is also achieved through connections via dual channels of speaking and writing. 'Shaking out' the words and spelling the words, she says, brings "awareness to the letters in the word and connection between the spoken words onto written text" (Wong, 2009, p. 9). Reading out, spelling out, and writing down these words on the picture-word dictionary is the first step for children to know the phonetic and morphological form of the words. After they become more familiar with this mode of instruction, they start to write phrases, short sentences and later long ones about the pictures independently or with the assistance of teachers and more competent peers. This writing process involves learning form, meaning and use of those words. Gradually, these vocabularies should be stored, as Calhoun (1999) suggests, in students' long-term memory and eventually become a part of their prior knowledge, which will be used to learn new words.

Inquiry-oriented induction is another key feature of PWIM. Inductive thinking or induction promotes learners' awareness of language development (Astorga, 1999; Clay, 2001; Joyce et al., 2002). Induction in PWIM refers to developing new ideas through building parallelism among unrelated information, ideas, and artifacts (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004). This type of thinking assists students noticing and inferring with patterns and relationships within the language—elements which should enable them to apply and transfer such learning to novel words. Joyce, et. al (2004) also suggest that such induction empowers students to generalize language rules, for example, how to structure sentences as in building up the sentence. Students may draw generalizations after numerous PWIM activities, and then cycling and recycling the sequences mentioned above.

There is only one quantitative research study (Swartzendruber, 2007) found in the literature review. Swartzendruber (2007) conducted a quasi-experiment study with 35 second graders in a Midwestern U.S. city with both English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and native English speakers (NESs). Results indicated that the experimental group was statistically significant better than the control group on the final assessment. Scaffolding and explicit connections to concepts and words appeared to be beneficial to both ESLs and NESs, with respect to vocabulary acquisition. The only qualitative research was Feng's (2011), in which the participant teachers reported that their fourth to sixth grade students had increased English vocabulary through PWIM and cooperative learning.

PWIM has more space to develop in terms of research studies. First, there are only a few research articles and books about PWIM studies since Calhoun's (1999) research, most of which are written or co-written by Calhoun or Joyce. Evidently, Calhoun and Joyce are the two major proponents of this model, thus PWIM narrated and evaluated by them cannot avoid possible biases.

Second, PWIM is not the only intervention in the learners' language development in those research studies, so it cannot be inferred from the results that PWIM alone contributes to the learners' language development. For example, parents also seem to play a role in the scenario, who “need to read at least five books each week to their children” in English as their native language (Joyce et al., 2009, p. 137). Third, research studies of PWIM are even fewer when the studies are narrowed down to ESL or EFL learners. There is only one quantitative research study (Swartzendruber, 2007) found in the literature review. The only qualitative research found was in Feng's (2011) dissertation. Thus, one might infer that ESL and EFL research studies of PWIM are underrepresented.

Research Question

The focus of this study was to explore young EFL learners' perceptions of PWIM in China EFL classrooms. The primary research question was: What are young English learners' perceptions of PWIM's strengths and weaknesses?

Methodology

To explore the learners' perceptions, I observed, conducted open-ended questionnaires and interviewed 18 fourth graders in an elementary school and 30 seventh graders in a secondary school to examine how they understood and perceived PWIM. I designed interview questions based on the observation and questionnaire answers. The interview data were the main source to answer the primary and secondary research questions.

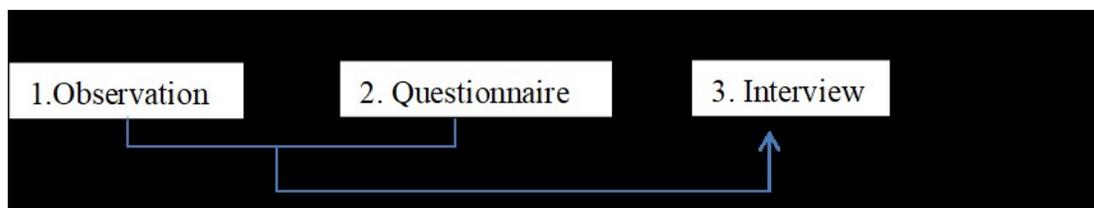


Figure 1. Procedures of data collection

Participants

In the current study, I chose participants who were early elementary pupils at the stage of learning to read and early adolescents in middle schools who already knew how to read and read to learn in two public schools in a coastal city in Mainland China. They were all Chinese. All participants had already received a year or four years of English education. The fourth graders received four 40-minute English classes per week. The seventh graders received five 45-minute English lessons every week.

After my in-class observation during the PWIM trial period for seven weeks, I used nested sampling. I asked the seventh-grade English teacher to hand out a letter to parents about my research, one parental consent form and one child consent form in both Chinese and English to each student, so the students could send them home for parents' approval. The students submitted the signed forms to their English teacher and then I had 30 participants. For the fourth graders, I agreed with the class headmaster's suggestion by introducing my research study in a parents' meeting. I handed out the parent's letter about my research, one parental consent form and one child consent form in Chinese, introduced myself and my research project and I then answered the parents' questions. They had questions with respect to the reward, the timing of interviews with their children, and what I would ask in the interviews. I answered each query one by one. In return, I asked the parents to discuss the project with their kids after the meeting and to hand in the two consent forms with their signatures if their children indeed wanted to participate with the questionnaire and the interview. Later, I collected signed forms from the fourth graders and ultimately had 18 fourth graders for the questionnaires and interviews.

Procedures

Observation

I observed the two PWIM-trial groups during most of their practice and testing sessions, for approximately 25 hours. I took field notes when I observed each of the two classes during the 7-week-long trial. I did not electronically record anything during the observations. I noted down some moments of students' facial expressions and body language, as well as their interaction with peers and teachers, in case I could ask them in the subsequent interviews. In addition to the reason stated above, observations also provided more relevant and personalized questions for the following interviews. For instance, I asked a student's feeling about PWIM after I saw he raised his hands actively during PWIM lessons.

Questionnaires

After I received parents' and children's permission, I handed out the pre-designed hardcopy PWIM questionnaires to the 18 fourth graders and 30 seventh graders, using language that is understandable to them. I gave each of them a coded ID to be put on their answer sheets. Students wrote down the coded ID that I gave, instead of their names.

Interviews

Immediately after collecting and preliminarily analyzing their answers on the questionnaires, I interviewed the 48 participants in Chinese one-to-one and digitally recorded them. The questions asked were based on what I had observed and their answers on their questionnaires. I could only interview them for a maximum of 10 minutes during class breaks, self-learning classes, and minor classes (i.e., geography, history, music, fine arts, physical exercise, and other classes apart from Chinese, Math or English). Seventh graders were pulled out one by one for maximum 10 minutes each. Fourth graders were pulled out in small clusters of three to five, in an attempt to keep the classrooms as uninterrupted as possible. The observations and questionnaire responses helped me with the interview questions. Due to the design of my research questions, the interviews was the main data source.

Data Analysis

I did data analysis during and after data collection to explore the participants' perceptions of PWIM. According to Merriam (2002, p. 14), qualitatively, "data analysis is simultaneous with data collection." I started preliminary

data analysis after collecting data from the observations, so that I could decide to keep or modify my questions asked on questionnaires. After collecting the data from the questionnaires, I analyzed the data from their answers for generating interview questions. As Stake (2005) stated, analysis refers to giving meaning to first impressions of those texts. I wrote down my first impressions on the margin of the questionnaires. I did preliminary analysis by studying and coding answers on the questionnaires, which gave me a clearer direction about what to ask for the future interviews.

Due to the tight schedule of interviews with both fourth and seventh graders, I did not analyze collected interview data deeply and thoroughly during data collection. However, I framed “new questions” for the following interviews as a result of what had been found (Seidman, 2006, p. 113). By adding new questions to the original ones and modifying some old questions for the next interview, I “made adjustments along the way” (Merriam, 2002, p. 14). It should be noted that I avoided “in-depth analysis of the interview data” until I finished all the interviews, because I tried not to “impose meaning from one participant’s interview on the next” (Seidman, 2006, p. 113). Thereafter I minimized “imposing on the generative” and inductive process of the interviews (Seidman, 2006, p. 113).

After I interviewed all assented participants, I transcribed those interviews via listening to the recording and typing every single word. Then I translated their answers from Chinese into English. Following this transcription, I conducted the coding by writing my first thoughts on the margins of the transcript to read through literal words. After that, I used different color highlights to categorize the coding. The coding categories were words and phrases which represented the regularities, patterns and topics my data covered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I categorized coding to find concepts and patterns and developed them into themes through thematic analysis to help answer the three secondary research questions. Themes are “the relationship between two or more concepts” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 194). The relationship includes “why something happened, what something means, or how the interviewee feels about the matter” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 194). For instance, I develop one theme as “linguistic acquisition” by grouping seven concepts together, including “to summarize the words by unit”, “to memorize those words deeply,” “to build up paragraphs from words,” “connecting pictures and words,” “emphasizing how to use these words,” “acquiring more words” and “good for writing.” By building up themes, I threaded my draft with themes, categorized answers and evidence from those analyzed data.

Results

The findings start with developed common themes from interviews seventh and fourth graders, covering the topics of pictures, connections of pictures and words, affective enjoyments, and practical issues of implementing PWIM in a class of over 55 students. Following this is the topic of fourth graders’ reliance on their Chinese language to learn English.

Associable Pictures

PWIM uses “pictures containing familiar objects and actions” (Calhoun, 1999, p. 21), which was counted as one of its strengths, revealed from the interview answers. One seventh grade girl (pseudonym Zhou) preferred PWIM pictures to one-to-one word-picture cards because PWIM pictures could prompt more words and connections.

It was interesting that when asked to choose pictures of local culture and western culture, the seventh graders did not mind pictures of western cultures. One student (pseudonym Huang) thought of English as a “carrier,” as a vehicle to carry foreign cultures, so that she could learn more about English-speaking cultures, knowledge, and the world from pictures of English-speaking countries. As revealed from the interviews, there was little resistance from the seventh graders to pictures of foreign culture, and vocabulary and the PWIM pictures may be not necessarily culturally mapped for those EFL participants.

Fourth graders had similar opinions. The characters and stories in the pictures were suitable to their age, so students could easily associate with them. One interviewee (pseudonym Yuan) compared pictures in her textbooks with pictures in PWIM, saying that “Pictures in textbook are a little interesting, and boring with the

same style; the new method [PWIM] has extra-curriculum pictures which are greatly interesting and totally fresh to me.” Comparing PWIM pictures and word cards, another fourth-grade interviewee (pseudonym Tang) stated that many words can be found in one PWIM picture versus only one word found in word cards, and a paragraph or story can be developed from one PWIM picture versus one word found in word cards. Seen from both, PWIM pictures are more informative, connective with words and inductive as a source.

A PWIM picture has a theme with multiple backgrounds and characters to explore and create a scenario; a word card has one item in the picture and a word along with it. AS shown in Figure 2, compared to conventional pictures, PWIM pictures are more informative and connective with words and inductive as a source.



Figure 2. Samples of a PWIM picture and a word card

Connections between Pictures and Words

With PWIM pictures, most of the interviewees mentioned that they learned, memorized and retrieved those previously learned and newly learned words more quickly, easily, conveniently and efficiently, “not one by one, not by rote” (interviewee pseudonym Xu), possibly due to “connections and imaginations” (interviewee pseudonym Zhu). They could not tell which jumped out of their mind first, pictures or words. Most respondents thought that pictures and words appeared simultaneously. Interviewees also thought that with pictures, the impression of word was much deeper, because words to be considered were associated with the relevant pictures.

Enjoyment

All of the interviewees liked and welcomed PWIM very much. Most of them expected their English teacher to continue using PWIM in the future to consolidate their vocabulary. One student in seventh grade (pseudonym Xu) said, “I was learning in a happy and easy atmosphere, which reduced my psychological burden and pressure,” so he anticipated the next opportunity of his English class with PWIM and would listen to the English teacher attentively. Nevertheless, there were a few students who were indifferent to whether they would have PWIM in the future or not. Some students (e.g., pseudonym Li) thought they already had the strategy or technique of having an image when meeting new vocabulary or writing topics, so there was no need for teachers to implement PWIM any longer.

In sum, PWIM, indeed for numerous interviewees, made the class alive, interesting, engaging and motivating. Students wanted the teacher to write down what they contributed during the word brainstorming and category stages. Students also expected to be picked to read what they had written at the end of each PWIM cycle, that is, the writing stage. PWIM was also welcoming and friendly to those students of unlikely risk-takers or/and with small vocabulary (revealed from the interviews with pseudonym Zhao, Xu, & Gao), because they had a lot of easy words to contribute (e.g., breakfast and lunch for Unit 4).

Practical Issues

Apart from all the merits of PWIM mentioned above, a few students talked about practical issues of PWIM. One student (pseudonym Zhou) thought of long physical distance for the near-sighted peers sitting far away from PWIM pictures. In such a large room using PWIM, those neglected groups were more likely to be distracted and

even left behind. However, the other interviewees showed disagreement of attributing distraction to PWIM, saying much as one interviewee (pseudonym Wu) that “being distracted is an individual phenomenon, not a method weakness.” A few interviewees (e.g., pseudonym Guo) listed noise as one of PWIM’s weaknesses. However, some interviewees showed disagreement in terms of noise being a disadvantage. “Being noisy is not the weakness,” said one interviewee (pseudonym Huang), “It’s students’ personality weakness.”

For the three PWIM cycles, there were many repeated words (words of body parts, color, background—*sky*, *cloud*, etc.) brainstormed. A couple of the interviewees saw such repetition as a weakness and a redundancy (causing cognitive overload). One interviewee (pseudonym Zhang) said that too many repetitious words kept her slightly from thinking of more words from PWIM pictures, and from easily finding newly learned words in the word bank on her category and writing module papers. She also mentioned that if her English teacher could break the table of word bank into two parts, one with high frequency words and one with newly met words, then such a problem would be solved.

Importance of the Chinese Language to the English Language Learning

Fourth graders’ native language played a vital role in their English language learning. They had not developed phonetic awareness yet, nor any linguistic, cognitive or metacognitive strategies in learning English from my observation. That is to say, the Chinese language was the only existing previous knowledge they could rely on in terms of vocabulary learning. Similar to other interviewees, one student (pseudonym Xie) could think of unknown words in the Chinese language first in the brainstorming stage of PWIM and then memorize the English version told by other students and their fourth-grade English teacher.

Participants’ Perceptions of PWIM as to its Strengths and Weaknesses in Summary

In reference to the question asked of the seventh graders about the strengths of PWIM, there were 15 reported concepts from the questionnaire and interview responses: interesting, to study more quickly, to memorize easily, connecting pictures and words, emphasizing how to use these words, acquiring more words, knowing more knowledge, to learn happily, to make the atmosphere lively, to summarize the words by unit, to memorize those words deeply, to build up paragraphs from words, motivating, directly visible, good for writing, and peer learning. The 15 concepts were further categorized into five themes: linguistic acquisition, knowledge acquisition, cognitive development/advancement, emotional/psychological enjoyment, and peer learning.

Similar to the seventh graders, the fourth-graders spoke highly of PWIM because of the interesting pictures, strong connections of pictures and words as an efficient way to manage new words, linkage to their tests, affective enjoyments and strategic development. When it comes to weaknesses of PWIM, a few of the seventh graders wrote in their questionnaires: noisy classroom without order, hard to hear clearly, think attentively or write down all of the words, more time for teachers to prepare for the class, time consuming as to the reading, spelling and writing down of the upcoming words, extra work for teachers, and unorganized handwriting on the PWIM sheets. Figure 3 shows the six concepts and three themes in three different colors.

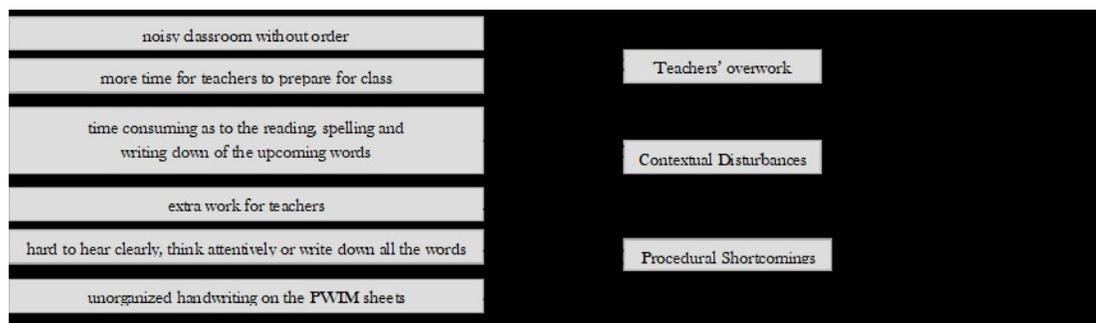


Figure 3. Weaknesses of PWIM reported by the seventh graders

However, during the interview when asked about these weaknesses, student participants stated they would prefer to keep using PWIM by avoiding or improving these weaknesses, as opposed to not using PWIM at all. The fourth graders gave a shorter list of PWIM weaknesses: noisy classroom, too many new words at one time, too many writing examples to think of their own, and so on. The respondents interviewed confessed that they experienced some difficulty in learning, but they felt they would overcome it. They thought that they can process the information and manage them subsequently, which is seen as normal process learning to them.

All the interviewees greatly welcomed PWIM and would use PWIM as English learners and English teachers if possible. Some of them mentioned that they had a habit of connecting pictures and words automatically after experiencing PWIM. Some seventh graders even developed a mind-set to seek a picture to consolidate their unit vocabulary autonomously, but they would love to receive some kind of scaffolding or guidance of using pictures from their English teacher.

Discussion

Similar to the fourth to sixth graders in Feng's (2011) study, the participating fourth and seventh graders (i.e., at the stage of learning to read and of reading to learn in English) spoke highly of PWIM. Their perceived strengths of PWIM included increasing English vocabulary, improving descriptive writing, emphasizing word use, peer learning, and so on. These perceptive merits echo with Calhoun's (1999) descriptions about PWIM and are outcomes beyond systematic study of grammar translation, and rote of syntactic patterns and vocabulary (Hu, 2002).

Moreover, the participants' welcoming disposition about PWIM was able to inspire educators to reflect on Chinese Confucius culture in this modern era. With this historical heritage of Confucian, students can be trained with new ways of thinking, new roles in classroom, and new behaviours in a new student-centred classroom environment, which differ from Scollon's (1999) findings to a certain extent. Such a difference might be due to generational differences born before and after China's Open Door Policy in 1985. Reconciling cultural heritage and modern approaches in ELT is possible, seen from the participants' responses about PWIM.

I can imagine that Calhoun never considered implementing PWIM in such a crowded classroom with such a large number of students. From my observations and the following interviews, I noticed that students sitting far back away from the pictures could not see the pictures and words clearly. The seventh graders could go to see them after class because the pictures were put on the back blackboard, but the fourth graders did not have access after class.

Moreover, noise from peers kept students from hearing clearly. Even with classroom management, neither teacher was able to grant quiet moments for one specific respondent to make him/herself heard. Thus, students were more likely to be distracted and lost. This factor can be a rationale for any unsuccessful implementation of teaching methods, but it plays a more important role in student-centered activities, such as PWIM. With a PWIM format, a teacher can arrange any individual activity, as well as small-group and large-group activities (Calhoun, 1999). However, her concept of large groups may not be as large as a group of over 55 students.

Aside from findings of this research study, there are at least two main limitations which need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, there was no protocol for PWIM for students in secondary schools. Calhoun (1999), as PWIM founder, suggested that PWIM with modification can be used for older language beginners, though she didn't state how. In the current study, I trained two English teachers (one from an elementary school and one from a secondary school), and gave them the 10 steps of PWIM practice in a classroom (Calhoun, 1999, p.43), videos of PWIM demonstrations from YouTube and an implementation log (Calhoun, 1999, p.23) instead of a protocol. Such introductory one-on-one training gave the two teachers conceptual understandings, but not enough instructional strategies or practical preparations.

Secondly, PWIM was used in a crowded classroom with over 55 students, not individually or in small groups. The class size in this research study was larger than many in previous research, so the effectiveness of using PWIM to teach Chinese students English vocabulary may be reflected in the findings. The classes were so

large that the experimental intervention of PWIM may have had different effects to what Calhoun and other researchers have found. Those contextual factors may influence the effectiveness of PWIM.

This research study spanned a three-month period, so the data only reflected such a time period. For the current study, I only observed the group who had PWIM. Even for the two trial groups in Grade 4 and 7, I did not observe all of the PWIM sessions, because of schedule conflicts. For further research studies, it would be better to observe both the trial and non-trial groups, to see whether trial and non-trial classes have the same instructional conditions, the teachers have the same teaching style and the students in two groups play similar roles in teacher-student interactive communications. In that way, it may be further inferred which matters more, using the intervention or how the intervention is used.

In the current study, I interviewed students only instead of involved classroom teachers, in order to understand students' needs and opinions about PWIM. For future research studies about PWIM, both students and teachers should be interviewed, for the sake of understanding the other side in the two-way classroom interactions. Also, data from interviews with teachers, who are educational practitioners facing students every day, may reveal teachers' professional openness and personal dispositions toward new instructional methods, both of which might influence the effectiveness of the intervention. Teachers' voices from bottom up should be noticed and considered by education policymakers.

In the current study, qualitative data were collected from 18 fourth graders and 30 seventh graders, to answer the research question. The 18 fourth graders did not give much information as the 30 seventh grader did in all. One of the reasons might lie in the developmental differences between the age of 9 and 12, specifically, the ability of judging, evaluating and critiquing. The other reason was the fourth graders were pulled out to be interviewed as a cluster of three to five, based on the head teacher's request; thus, they were easily distracted by their peers at the time of interviews, and the seventh graders were pulled out and interviewed individually.

Conclusion

This study has investigated participants' self-perception of PWIM as a newly-tried ELT approach. Via observations, questionnaires and mainly interviews, I found that many participants spoke highly of PWIM and only a few mentioned its weaknesses, some of which were not considered as the method's inherent issues. All of the interviewees expressed the positive (either greatly positive or slightly positive) influence of PWIM on their English learning, with many rationales interfacing with the merits of PWIM.

ELT reformers and policymakers in China may consider the role of English teachers' professional development (to build up their constant exposure to, awareness of and strategic readiness for new teaching approaches) and contextualization (including contextual factors) when introducing new ELT methods. This being said, I hope that findings of this research study will contribute to the existing handful of research studies of PWIM in both ESL and EFL contexts.

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