

The Effects of Co-Presenting English Articles and Nouns on EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning

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Although article errors from Korean learners are abundant, few studies have investigated how to teach articles to overcome the specific difficulties faced by Koreans. This study aims to examine the effects of co-presenting English indefinite articles with count nouns on Korean young learners' vocabulary learning. An experiment was conducted with 174 elementary school students divided into two groups: a present-article group and a non-present-article group. The groups were taught the same vocabulary items but with different materials; one received articles-nouns-combined materials and the other received nouns-only materials. The results showed that the co-presentation of indefinite articles with singular nouns during vocabulary teaching was more effective than the presentation of nouns without articles in terms of developing L2 sentence-completion ability in students. In addition, the co-presentation group was more successful in including indefinite articles when converting plural nouns to singular nouns. The study suggests that the co-presentation of indefinite articles with count nouns during vocabulary instruction can significantly improve elementary school students' ability to use indefinite articles.

**[indefinite article/article and noun co-presentation/vocabulary presentation/
/ /]**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Articles are one of the most difficult aspects of English for Korean L2 learners to acquire because the Korean language lacks an article system. Article errors typically persist until the very last stages of acquisition and make it challenging for learners to reach native-like proficiency (Crosthwaite, 2012). A number of studies have noted the tendency of Korean L2 learners to make article errors and have endeavored to clarify the reasons behind them (S. Baek & Sarker, 2013; Crosthwaite, 2011, 2012, 2014; Ekiert, 2007; Ionin, S. Baek, E. Kim, H. Ko, & Wexler, 2012; Ionin, 2006; J. Y. Kang, 2004; H. Ko, Ionin, & Wexler, 2010; Lydia, 2003; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2008, 2011). However, there has been little discussion about how to teach articles to prevent those errors.

Many researchers have attempted to establish a grammatical system that accounts for English article use and have focused on article distinction as the foundation for such a system, and some suggestions for the teaching of articles have come out of this work (Cowan, 2008; Master, 1990; McEldowney, 1977; Pica, 1983; Whitman, 1974). For example, studies often provide sample activities and teaching tips that target even beginning level learners. Implicit in many of these suggestions is a belief that English article learning can be undertaken by young learners, though the article teaching recommendations lack empirical support. As yet, it remains unclear whether teaching articles is effective or problematic for young EFL learners.

Korean students are currently taught English articles when they enter secondary school. In general, English articles are taught intensively in discrete lessons, as are other individual grammar elements. Although Korean students begin English education in elementary school, the teaching of grammatical morphemes is delayed due to the prevalence of communicative language teaching. However, recent research on form-focused instruction has shown that grammar teaching within meaning-focused lessons can be useful and may in fact be necessary (R. Ellis, 2006).

This paper aimed to investigate a unique method for teaching English articles to Korean young learners which is compatible with the current trend of meaning-focused instruction. The study was designed based on an activity suggested by Cowan (2008) for beginners: using indefinite articles with countable nouns. The original activity was slightly modified; instead of categorizing countable nouns and uncountable nouns by the addition of indefinite articles, in this study, indefinite articles were co-presented with countable nouns. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of co-presenting countable nouns and indefinite articles during vocabulary instruction and to provide empirical data upon which judgments about the efficacy of article teaching for elementary school students could be made and guidelines for teachers and materials developers could be generated.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Articles

Articles are considered determiners, which belong to a larger class of pronominal modifiers (Cowan, 2008). Determiners are function words that specify the reference of a noun and can be divided into three categories depending on their position: predeterminer, central determiner, and postdeterminer (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Rinegan, 1999). Articles are representative of central determiners.

1) Classification of Nouns

Because articles specify nouns, English article use is dependent on the English noun classification system (Celce-Murcia & Larson-Freeman, 1999). All nouns can be divided into common nouns and proper nouns. Common nouns can be further subdivided into count nouns and non-count nouns. Singular and plural forms exist for both count nouns and proper nouns.

Articles are matched according to the definiteness of each noun. Count nouns take different indefinite articles depending on the form: singular or plural. However, definite article use remains the same, regardless of the form taken by either count nouns or non-count nouns. Proper nouns are inherently definite, therefore, only definite articles can precede them.

2) Indefinite Articles

Indefinite articles are used with singular count nouns and often indicate a new specific entity in discourse (Biber et al., 1999). When the speaker and hearer do not share a unique identifiable referent, an indefinite article is used in the discourse (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). Moreover, indefinite articles, also known as unmarked articles, are used to refer to non-specific individuals or non-existent referents.

Indefinite articles can express two types of indefiniteness, quantitative and non-quantitative (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Quantitative *a* expresses one specific entity which exists as a single item. On the other hand, non-quantitative *a* refers to set membership; it is often used to describe a person's affiliation or occupation, for example.

Indefinite articles vary slightly according to the beginning sound of the noun they precede. If the noun begins with a vowel sound, the indefinite article *an* is used, whereas if it begins with a consonant sound, the indefinite article *a* is used.

In case of plural count nouns, the zero article is used instead of an indefinite article.

Moreover, unstressed *some* can also be used as the plural form of an indefinite article. The difference between the zero article and *some*, when used with plural count nouns, is the ambiguity of the referent: *some* is used with nonspecific referents and the zero article is used with specific referents (Celce-Murcia & Larson-Freeman, 1999). In addition, the singular indefinite article and the zero article can be used generically but *some* cannot.

3) The Definite Article

The definite article *the* is used to indicate a unique identifiable referent which is understood by both the speaker and hearer in discourse (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Use of the definite article presupposes the existence of the entity it identifies, even though it may be appearing in the discourse for the first time (Crosthwaite, 2014). As a result, use of the definite article depends on the preceding text and partly upon general pragmatic knowledge (Biber et al., 1999). The definite article can be used with any kind of noun phrase referent: a person, a group of people, an object, a group of objects, an abstraction, a group of abstractions, etc (Quirk et al., 1985). The definite article, when used before plural and non-count nouns, indicates totality.

4) Article Errors by Korean Learners

Articles are among the most difficult aspects of English for L2 learners to acquire. Article errors are consistently found in L2 learner production until advanced levels of proficiency are reached (Zdorenko & Paradis, 2011). According to Crosthwaite (2012), compared to L1 speakers of Mandarin, which has a similar article system, Korean learners produce more article errors at all levels of English proficiency. Types of article errors vary in form and occur for different reasons (Celce-Murcia & Larson-Freeman, 1999; Cowan, 2008; Crosthwaite, 2012; Ionin, 2006).

First, article errors may stem from incorrect noun classifications made by learners. In English, countability is a noun feature significant for determining indefinite article use. Unfortunately, the countability of nouns is somewhat arbitrary and differs from language to language (Amuzie & Spinner, 2013; Celce-Murcia & Larson-Freeman, 1999). For example, some non-count nouns, such as *furniture, chalk, paper, bread, luggage, evidence, stuff, homework, information, news, research, and equipment*, would be accepted as count nouns in Korean (Cowan, 2008). As a result, Korean speakers are more prone to errors involving indefinite article use before those non-count nouns. As opposed to using the zero article, they are more likely to mistakenly pluralize them, adding *-s* to the end of the nouns. Moreover, the importance of countability is often overlooked by Korean English learners because the Korean plural marker *-tul* is optional and usually omitted in discourse (Luk &

Shirai, 2009).

Second, Korean learners commonly make the error of omitting determiners (Cowan, 2008; Crosthwaite, 2011, 2012; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2011). The tendency to omit both indefinite and definite articles is pervasive. The reliance on bare noun use may be partially attributable to negative transfer from the L1 (Crosthwaite, 2012). Specifically, when topics are linked, Koreans make little use of morphology in their L1 to signal definiteness; this is known as Chinese style (Huang, 2000). On the contrary, there have been studies suggesting that errors of article omission are developmental in nature, rather than caused by L1 interference, because article omission errors are differently distributed across article-less countries and learners at different proficiency levels of English (Crosthwaite, 2014; J. Y. Kang, 2004; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2011).

Third, it has been shown that L2 learners commonly make errors with indefinite articles in particular. In other words, learners tend to use the definite article more accurately than indefinite and zero articles (Amuzie & Spinner, 2013; S. Baek & Sarker, 2013; Crosthwaite, 2011, 2012; Ekiert, 2007; Ionin, H. Ko, & Wexler, 2004; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2008, 2011). This is because definite articles take neither number nor count/mass distinction into account, thereby making their conditioning environment less complex than that of indefinites (Lardiere, 2008).

Finally, according to Ionin (2006), learners' article errors are tied to the concept of specificity. She insisted that the standard English article system considers only definiteness regardless of specificity: *the* is used for all definite and *a/an* is used for indefinite contexts (Ionin, H. Ko, & Wexler, 2003; H. Ko, Ionin, & Wexler, 2010).¹ If learners set the wrong article choice parameter by focusing on specificity, then errors are likely to occur in the form of overuse of *the* in specific indefinite contexts and overuse of *a/an* in non-specific definite contexts.

Although article errors from Korean learners are the result of many causal factors, few studies have considered how to teach articles to overcome the difficulties faced by Koreans. Instead, over the past 40 years, research has largely focused on building grammatical systems to account for English article use, with some teaching suggestions being made based on these systems (Master, 1990; McEldowney, 1977; Pica, 1983; Whitman, 1974).

¹ According to Ionin, H. Ko, & Wexler (2004), if a Determiner Phrase (DP) of the form [D NP] is: [+definite], then the speaker and hearer presuppose the existence of a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP.

[+specific], then the speaker intends to refer to a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP and considers this individual to possess some noteworthy property.

2. Previous Studies of Article Grammar Systems

Master (1990), following on the work of previous studies, developed a new binary schema for articles by collapsing the features of [\pm definite] and [\pm specific], the four traditional categories, into a single feature [\pm identified] which takes only [\pm definite] into consideration. According to his hypothesis, the term *classification* represents [-identified] and *identification* stands for [+identified]. Based on this work, he provided some pedagogical applications for his binary schema. He argued, for example, that classification could be introduced by categorizing students' possessions, situations, and definitions (which always require classification) through teachers' scaffolding questions. All responses to the questions would require \emptyset or *a* in the answer depending on the number and countability of the nouns. Master went on to say that the rules of use may be recognized by students on their own, otherwise they should be pointed out to them.

In an earlier study, Whitman (1974) suggested six steps for teaching articles based on his belief that the article system is "a sequence of quantification and determination rather than a choice between specified and unspecified" (p. 253). The six steps include teaching quantity, generic plurals, non-count nouns, determiners, quantity and determiners, and generic articles. Because the distinction between *a* and *the* appears during the generic articles stage, Whitman (1974) concluded that teaching articles should be delayed until the very last stage of language learning.

On the contrary, McEldowney (1977) asserted that the classification of *a* and *the* may proceed as a first step in the earliest stages of learning. She proposed a form/content approach for the teaching of articles based on questions of classification, plurality, mass or substance, and numbered specific/general. According to McEldowney (1977), stages of learning may lead to articles being understood according to three concepts: any *a* to mark choice, special *the* to mark specification, and general *-s* and later *a* and *the* to mark generalization.

Instructional notions regarding the treatment of articles have concretized since arguments against the naturalistic acquisition position have gained strength. Pica (1983) suggested that teaching articles may be tied to the development of communicative competence through the inclusion of discourse-related rules, such as those involved in giving directions and ordering food in a restaurant. She proposed some guidelines for the teaching of English articles, which include the following. First, articles should be practiced initially with easy activities "as a nonfrustrating lesson for beginning students" (p. 232). Second, since listener knowledge is not observable and can only be assumed, use of *the*, with a qualifying description, should be encouraged rather than a bare noun. Third, examples of article errors should be discussed in class to improve awareness of native usage. And fourth, she believed that real world experience would enhance the natural

acquisition of articles.

Recent suggestions from Cowan (2008) present the most delicate and specific model to date. He proposed seven activities and arranged them according to learner proficiency level (see Table 1). He added that although there was no particular order to the activities, the count/non-count distinction is usually made in the beginning levels.

TABLE 1
Suggested Activities for Specific Teaching Points

Proficiency level	Suggested activity
Beginning	Using indefinite articles with count nouns
Beginning - low intermediate	Articles with first and second mention
Low intermediate	Using zero article with names
Intermediate	Using zero article with non-count nouns(1)
High intermediate - advanced (1)	Using zero article with non-count nouns(2)
High intermediate - advanced (2)	Using the definite article
Intermediate - advanced	Making generic reference

Cowan (2008) also suggested a specific activity for beginners: using indefinite articles with count nouns. In this activity, the teacher is first instructed to list a set of count nouns and non-count nouns commonly seen in the classroom in two columns under the labels *Count* and *Can't Count*. Next, the teacher explains how to distinguish between the two categories, for example, count nouns have plural forms and can have a number in front of them. In addition, the teacher should explain that only count nouns can have an indefinite article in front of them. Students then practice making sentences using the words in the columns with structures such as *I want* or *Please give me*. When a student produces a sentence using an indefinite article with a non-count noun, the teacher and other students give feedback and correct the sentence together.

Prior approaches to the teaching of articles as a system have been based on researchers' own views of article parameters; however, they all lack empirical findings sufficient to support the efficacy of their pedagogical suggestions. As a result, it remains unclear as to which system of teaching articles may be applied to best effect in the classroom.

3. Analysis of Elementary School English Textbooks

Since the Korean Ministry of Education announced the 2009 revised version of the national curriculum, five authorized English textbooks have been modified and introduced into elementary schools: Chunjae by Yeo-Bum Yoon, Chunjae by Jae-Hee Lee, Chunjae by Sun-Ae Ham, YBM by Hae-Ri Kim, and Daekyo by Jae-Gun Lee. Most of them lack consistency in their presentation of articles and nouns in combination. This discrepancy illustrates that pedagogical criteria are lacking in terms of English article teaching for

young learners, even though some article teaching activities and stages have been proposed for beginners.

In Korea, articles are taught intensively in secondary school. A single grammar structure is typically presented in a single lesson, and much grammar is taught in a short period. In recent years, there has been increasing interest in extending form-focused approaches to elementary school, which opens the possibility of grammar teaching in the context of meaning-focused activities. To explore how this might work, one article teaching method was selected for this study and its effects were investigated. Cowan's (2008) first activity, which focuses on adding indefinite articles in front of count nouns, was selected. It was modified however, because of the difficulty of allocating additional time for grammar activities in class. A less time-consuming way was needed to apply the treatment; therefore, an indefinite article and noun vocabulary co-presentation format was designed to replace Cowan's (2008) matching activity, though the focus remained the same.

Thus, this study aimed to examine the effects of co-presenting English indefinite articles with count nouns on Korean young learners' vocabulary learning. The research questions were as follows:

- 1) Does co-presenting countable nouns with indefinite articles have a positive effect on improving the L2 sentence composition of Korean elementary school students?
- 2) Does co-presenting countable nouns with indefinite articles have a positive effect on the acquisition of English indefinite articles by Korean elementary school students?

III. METHOD

1. Participants

The study was conducted at an elementary school in Gyeonggi province. The participants were 93 fifth-grade students and 99 sixth-grade students (four classes from each grade). Due to absences and transfers to other schools, a total of 174 students completed the study. Participants had three English classes per week with a Korean teacher. School policy required two teachers to teach English, one for each of the grades. One teacher, who taught 5th graders, have been teaching English for five years and the other teacher, who taught 6th graders, have been teaching English for six years. They both had overseas training more than a year. All the participants were native Korean speakers, and the teachers used both English and Korean in English class. However, Korean was mostly used during lessons due to the low English proficiency of the students. For the treatment, the classes were divided into two groups: two present-article groups (henceforth PA) in

each grade and two non-present-article groups (henceforth NPA) in each grade. The data for the study were drawn from 88 participants in PA (43 5th graders and 45 6th graders) and 86 participants in NPA (42 5th graders and 44 6th graders). In PA, 42 were boys and 44 were girls, while 42 were boys and 46 were girls in NPA. The mean scores of school English mid-term were similar from each group, 82.88 for NPA and 83.87 for PA.

2. Materials

1) Selection of L2 Words

The lexical items used in the treatment were selected from the basic word list of the Korean national curriculum. The list includes 800 words recommended for elementary school instruction. Countable nouns were selected from this list because the indefinite article is used before singular countable nouns. Next, selected items deemed difficult to portray through line-drawings were eliminated because the treatment required pictures and words to be presented together to enhance the effectiveness of the vocabulary instruction (Carney & Levin, 2002; Mayer, 1984; Paivio, 1990; Peeck, 1993; Shahrokni, 2009). Countable nouns which were difficult to express without a background image, annotation, or colors were excluded. The resulting list comprised of 144 countable nouns. Lastly, a pre-knowledge test was conducted to insure final selection of both familiar and unfamiliar words. Because both the pre-test and post-test were writing tests, it was necessary to include some words familiar to the participants to avoid errors resulting from the misspelling of nouns, as the focus of the study was on article use not on the learning of the nouns themselves.

A pre-knowledge test was administered that included a table consisting of two blanks beside each of the 144 selected English words. The first blank was for ticking (✓) whether the participants knew a word or not, and the second blank was for writing the Korean translation of the word. Data were collected from 94 students, randomly selected from two classes from each grade, and the answer rate for each word was calculated. Based on the results of the pre-knowledge test, 32 words were selected: 19 familiar words and 13 unfamiliar words. A word considered “familiar” was one with a correct answer rate above 50%; only accurate Korean translations were counted as correct answers.

The final vocabulary list included 21 singular nouns and 11 plural nouns. All singular nouns were presented with indefinite articles. The article *a* accompanied the 17 singular nouns starting with a consonant sound, and *an* accompanied the four singular nouns starting with a vowel sound. However, the ability to distinguish between *a* and *an* was irrelevant for this study because awareness of the existence of indefinite articles was the main issue, not their correct form.

The 11 plural nouns were divided into three categories: plural items (e.g., scissors, pants, glasses), pair items (e.g., shoes, gloves, socks), and intentional plural items (e.g., plates, hats, ants, books, erasers). Intentional plural items were originally singular in the pre-knowledge test; however, they were pluralized for the treatment.

In addition, verbs were needed to make a full sentence for each lesson. Sixteen transitive verbs were therefore selected from the basic word list. Transitive verbs were selected because they require nouns as objects to complete the sentence, and all target sentences had the structure of subject, verb, and object.

2) Instructional Materials

The two comparison groups, PA and NPA, were taught the same vocabulary items using different materials. The PA materials combined indefinite articles and nouns, and the NPA materials contained nouns only. Instructional materials were provided in two formats for every lesson: PowerPoint slides and worksheets. Lesson plans were provided, thereby restricting the teacher's role to following the PowerPoint slides and distributing the worksheets (see Appendix A). The PowerPoint slides for each lesson first introduced two words with pictures, then with the English text, and finally with the Korean translations (see Appendix B). The words were introduced differently on the slides according to the group, for example, *a leaf* for PA versus *leaf* for NPA. Students in both groups next repeated the teachers' pronunciation models several times and then completed a writing task on a worksheet. Writing the names of the items was an important step in helping the students to memorize the spelling of the words and in helping PA students to remember articles and nouns as chunks. Next, a sentence making activity was introduced on the screen. The subject was limited to *I* for all sentences in order to better direct participants' attention to the new vocabulary. The beginning phrase of the sentence, the subject and verb, was given on the screen with its Korean translation. The participants were then asked to complete the sentence using the vocabulary which they had learned in the lesson. After producing their own sentence, the answer was shown on the screen, and the students drilled it before writing it down on their worksheets. Identical sentences were shown to both groups. In other words, indefinite articles were presented with singular nouns, and zero articles were presented with the plural nouns during the answer checking session regardless of group. Consequently, NPA students were also exposed to sentences containing indefinite articles.

Every fourth lesson, both groups reviewed the vocabulary learned so far and practiced making sentences. Worksheets were used in the review sessions according to provided teacher instructions. On each worksheet, eight nouns were presented in a table along with pictures, Korean translations, and English text. The vocabulary presentation was different

depending on the group: articles with nouns for PA versus nouns alone for NPA. Sentence review took the form of a speaking activity.

3) Test Materials

Tests were administered twice to the participants: a before treatment pre-test and an after treatment post-test. The tests lasted approximately 40 minutes each and required students to complete 40 English sentences. Both Korean translations and pictures were used as stimuli for English sentence production. This sentence production format was regularly practiced in class on worksheets over the course of the treatment. For each test item, a subject and a verb were given, and based on the picture or Korean language prompt students were expected to supply the missing singular noun plus indefinite article or plural noun to complete the sentence (see Appendix C). However, the combinations of verbs and nouns in the sentences varied between the tests and the treatment. On each test, 32 words were used; however, eight plural nouns (three pair items and five intentional plural items) were reused as singular nouns. The eight plural items were presented as singular items in pictures and also in Korean translations. The items in the pre-test and post-test were identical, but their arrangements were different. Both groups (PA and NPA) took the test with the same test materials. The first 32 test items required students to provide the same vocabulary forms studied during the treatment. The required singular nouns had been taught as singular nouns, and the required plural nouns had been taught as plural nouns. Test items 33 to 40, however, required students to supply vocabulary forms which were not covered in the treatment. They required answers in singular form of nouns which had only been taught in plural form. After the treatment, a post-test was administered following the same format and procedure as the pre-test.

For each question on the tests, two points were awarded for the correct answer. Slight errors were overlooked and the answers were counted correct, e.g., confusing *a* and *an*, minor misspellings (one or two letters) of otherwise comprehensible words. One point was awarded for answers which included an indefinite article but were missing a singular noun, or which contained serious spelling errors but still seemed to target the correct answer. In addition, plural nouns with indefinite articles were given one point. Zero points were given for otherwise incorrect answers or no answer.

3. Procedure

The experiment was designed to be carried out over nine weeks and included a prior knowledge test, a pre-test, 24 mini-lessons, and a post-test. The experiment started from the first week of September, 2015. Due to school events and holidays, however, the actual

experiment lasted for eleven weeks. One week after checking the level of the participants, a pre-test was conducted in the form of a writing test. This same testing format was used for the post-test. The combinations of nouns and verbs were different from what the participants had learned in the mini-lessons. After the testing data were collected, the teachers were interviewed to investigate their perceptions in depth.

During the treatment, participants engaged in a five-minute mini-lesson before starting the main lesson for each class. First, “today’s words” were presented on PowerPoint slides which included pictures, English text, and Korean translations. These nouns were presented differently to the two groups; only nouns were presented to NPA, while indefinite articles were co-presented with nouns to PA. Teachers were allowed to answer questions and offer simple explanations about English articles only when participants asked. The concept of indefinite articles and the usage of *an* were expected to be learned along with vocabulary words as chunks. Students were encouraged to memorize the spellings of words by writing them down and making “today’s sentence.” The sentences consisted of subject, transitive verb, and object (article + noun). The range of possible errors on the tests was constrained by limiting the subjects to *I*, providing the verbs, and leaving only the target vocabulary out. Review sessions, which appeared every 4th mini-lesson, were designed to help participants to recover the words from memory and also to reinforce the sentences they had made. To facilitate participants’ understanding, one worksheet was allocated for each lesson. Extra self-study hours were discouraged by not allowing participants to remove worksheets from the classroom.

4. Data Analysis

The effects of two different types of vocabulary presentation (co-presenting indefinite articles with singular nouns and presenting nouns without articles) were examined by analyzing the results of pre-tests and post-tests using SPSS. The significance level was set at 0.05. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures was used to analyze the test scores. The within-subjects variable was Time (pre-test and post-test) and the between-subjects variable was Group (PA and NPA). The dependent variable was test scores of the pre-test and post-test. First, the data analysis was conducted based on total test scores from both tests. However, to more closely investigate the effects of the treatment, further analyses were conducted on test items 33 to 40.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research question asked whether significant improvement would be found in L2

sentence-composition test scores from the present-article group when compared to the non-present-article group over a given period of time.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the test scores. For an alpha level of 0.05, the results show a significant main effect for Time and Group (Table 3 and Figure 1). As can be seen in Table 3, both groups significantly improved their L2 sentence-completion ability over the course of the treatment. However, the interaction between Time and Group had to be taken into account to interpret the significance of the differences between those two factors. The results show that the interaction between Time and Group was statistically significant. Based on this finding, a pairwise comparison was implemented to examine the interaction between Time and Group.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Time	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Pre-test	NPA	86	14.23	15.50
	PA	88	18.63	20.24
	Total	174	16.45	18.13
Post-test	NPA	86	33.65	28.96
	PA	88	46.69	29.12
	Total	174	40.25	29.69

TABLE 3
Source Table: ANOVA with Repeated Measures for Test Scores by Time and Group

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Within subjects					
Time	49039.66	1	49039.66	179.01	.000**
Time×group	1627.02	1	1627.02	5.94	.016*
Error	47118.26	172	273.94		
Between subjects					
Intercept	278682.27	1	278682.27	311.30	.000**
Group	6610.27	1	6610.27	7.38	.007**
Error	153979.96	172	895.23		

**p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

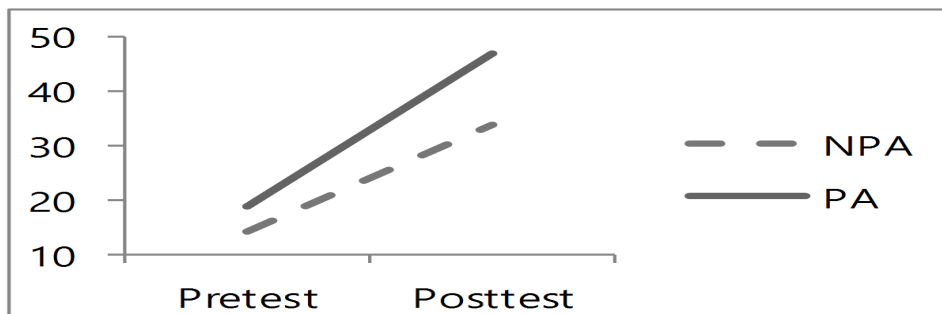


FIGURE 1 Estimated Marginal Means of Test Scores

TABLE 4
Pairwise Comparison for the Interaction Between Group and Time

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean difference
NPA	14.23	33.65	19.42*
PA	18.63	46.69	28.06*
Mean difference	4.40	13.04*	

* $p < .05$

Table 4 shows that there was no significant difference in the pre-test results between NPA and PA. However, a significant difference was found between NPA and PA on the post-test. This difference reveals that the scores of PA increased at a higher rate from the pre-test to the post-test compared to the scores of NPA. This indicates that the presentation of indefinite articles with singular nouns in vocabulary teaching is more effective than the presentation of nouns without articles for developing L2 sentence-completion ability in students.

The results of the comparison of total scores between pre-test and post-test were unsurprising because general memorization of vocabulary was expected to lead to higher scores. Therefore, the second research question asked whether there was significant difference between PA and NPA on ability to use the English indefinite article.

TABLE 5
Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Eight Questions

Time	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Pre-test	NPA	86	1.60	4.02
	PA	88	2.70	5.34
	Total	174	2.16	4.75
Post-test	NPA	86	5.79	6.75
	PA	88	9.16	6.59
	Total	174	7.49	6.86

TABLE 6
Source Table: ANOVA with Repeated Measures for Test Scores of Eight Questions
by Time and Group

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Within subjects					
Time	2462.26	1	2462.26	106.61	.000**
Time×group	111.91	1	111.91	4.85	.029*
Error	3972.42	172	23.10		
Between subjects					
Intercept	8066.19	1	8066.19	184.33	.000**
Group	434.19	1	434.19	9.92	.002**
Error	7526.46	172	43.76		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

To examine the article usage of the participants, data from the final eight questions of the tests were analyzed. These were the questions that required indefinite article and singular noun answers for nouns that had been taught in plural form with the zero article during the treatment. Table 5 shows the results of the pre-test and post-test scores for the final eight questions. As shown in Table 5, test scores for both groups improved for the final eight questions. However, interaction was again found between Time and Group, as shown in Table 6, and a pairwise comparison was implemented to further investigate the results.

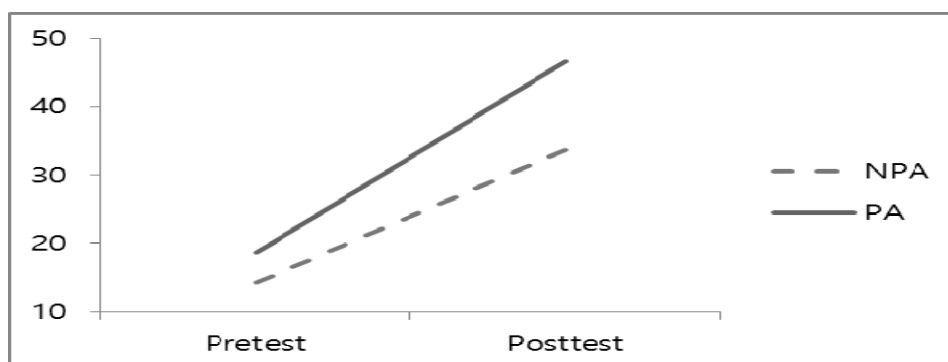


FIGURE 2 Estimated Marginal Means of Test Scores for Eight Questions

Table 7 shows that a significant difference was found between NPA and PA on the post-test, while there was no significant difference between the two groups on the pre-test. This finding indicates that PA was more successful than NPA in adding indefinite articles when converting plural nouns to singular nouns. The results suggest that learners may have acquired the ability to use the indefinite article through exposure to articles co-presented with vocabulary, without explicit instruction.

TABLE 7

Pairwise Comparison for the Interaction of Eight Questions Between Group and Time

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean difference
NPA	1.61	5.79	4.18*
PA	2.71	9.16	6.45*
Mean difference	1.10	3.37*	

* $p < .05$

The results showed that both manners of vocabulary presentation, nouns presented with articles and without articles, when combined with sentence-completion tasks seemed to facilitate understanding of the concept of English indefinite articles. However, PA significantly outperformed NPA on post-test English sentence-completion tasks requiring

use of the indefinite article. The study shows that elementary school students can improve their understanding of article usage through the co-presentation of nouns and articles during vocabulary instruction. Because vocabulary instruction is essential and omnipresent, the co-presentation method could be easily implemented in English classrooms without causing disruption or an undue sense of burden on learners.

Recent developments in the study of form-focused approaches to instruction have led to a renewed interest in grammar teaching. Even though communicative language teaching has largely prevailed in English classrooms and explicit grammar teaching has lost ground, most researchers and teachers agree that L2 learners still need knowledge of basic structures when they engage in meaning-focused activities. According to R. Ellis (2006), connectionists suggest that the key to learning language is through enhancing implicit learning based on massive exposure. The claim is that language learning can be explained by both implicit learning and explicit learning, and the results of this study can be interpreted from both sides.

The participants may have experienced implicit learning during the treatment and tests. In order to help learners develop implicit knowledge, Smith (1993) recommended that input be enhanced to facilitate noticing of grammatical features that learners might otherwise ignore. The worksheets used in this study included some features of interpretation tasks (R. Ellis, 1995) designed to increase noticing of grammatical features and facilitate implicit learning. R. Ellis (1995) suggested a three-step-input model useful for the learning of grammatical features: interpretation, integration, and production. In the interpretation step, specific linguistic features and their meanings are highlighted to encourage noticing and cognitive comparison in order to increase the potential for input to become intake. Participants in PA may have noticed the difference in the form of vocabulary presentation during treatment, which included indefinite articles, compared to their previous experience of vocabulary presentation, which had not included articles. They were exposed to the different cases of indefinite article usage through the presentation of singular nouns and plural nouns, and they may have noticed that indefinite articles indicate the meaning “one,” or at least that indefinite articles accompany singular nouns. Next, integration occurs when learners incorporate intake into their interlanguage system, thereby resulting in implicit knowledge gains. After PA students were exposed to vocabulary accompanied by articles, they participated in sentence-making activities. R. Ellis (1995) has stated that after learners have comprehended input, which induces them to attend to the meaning of a specific grammatical structure, a task should be given that requires learners to pay careful attention to the target feature and encourages the cognitive comparison that learners will have to perform on their output. Following this, learners should be asked to produce language based on their implicit knowledge.

N. Ellis (2005) claimed that learning commences with an explicit representation and

then develops through implicit learning. It may be the case that repeated exposure to indefinite articles during treatment contributed to the development of the indefinite article concept in PA participants. From this viewpoint, implicit learning may be better explained by the gradual accumulation of associations between frequently co-occurring features than by the unconscious induction of abstract grammar rule systems (Schmidt, 1990). Presenting articles with nouns during vocabulary learning increases exposure to articles and may lead learners to pay more conscious attention to them.

On the other hand, explicit knowledge seems to have played an important role in production activities, in the form of monitoring. N. Ellis (2005) asserted that the goal of SLA is a behavioral change in which explicit knowledge has an impact on implicit habits. When learners consciously relate some event to higher-level goals, their awareness is increased, as are their chances of successful adaptation. The PA students underwent a behavioral change memorizing article-vocabulary chunks while pursuing a higher-level goal: making a perfect sentence. Furthermore, they developed improved understanding of the meaning and proper use of indefinite articles. N. Ellis (2005) concluded that explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge interact at the interface of consciousness, influencing the processing of language forms and corresponding interpretations.

Although PA outperformed NPA on the post-test, it was shown that both groups increased their test scores following the treatment. There are two possible explanations for the surprising improvement in article use by NPA participants.

First, NPA participants could have learned article usage due to forced attention to indefinite articles. According to Schmidt (1990), learners can learn incidentally, without trying, when task demands force attention to be paid to specific information. The gap between learner resources, implicit knowledge, and forced output can call attention to form. This is called *noticing the gap* (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). Consequently, learners may pay closer attention to relevant forms in subsequent input. The NPA participants seemed to acquire some degree of article awareness from the sentence-completion activities during the treatment. They may have felt a gap when they were forced to make full sentences using given items. For example, participants could not produce a correct sentence with only *I*, *bring*, and *leaf*; the resulting sentence would lack the indefinite article before the singular noun. Consequently, NPA students may have noticed the use of indefinite articles when they compared their output with correct answers.

The second potential explanation for the article use improvement shown by NPA on the post-test is related to feedback. The sentence-making activities given during the treatment were based on recasts. Recasts supply learners with fertile data and pave the way for acquisition because they provide immediate contrast between learners' erroneous utterances and correct forms (N. Ellis, 2005). They naturally highlight any forms missed or misused by learners and direct attention to language elements. After repeating and writing

corrected sentences, intake may be enhanced should learners carry out a second operation in which they compare between what they noticed in the input and what they are currently able to produce in their output. Through such cognitive comparisons, learners may more clearly identify what they still need to learn (R. Ellis, 1995).

V. CONCLUSION

The present study explored the effects of co-presentation of articles and nouns on young Korean EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The results showed that presenting articles and nouns together led to better English sentence-completion ability than presenting vocabulary without articles. Moreover, PA outperformed NPA in terms of applying their knowledge to new singular nouns.

1. Implications

The results of the study reveal that presentation of articles with nouns has positive effects on sentence composition. These findings suggest the need for English language teachers, materials developers, and curriculum designers to reconsider current methods of vocabulary presentation. To date, there are no guidelines from the Ministry of Education which address the teaching of articles to elementary school students. Consequently, current Korean elementary English textbooks are inconsistent in their presentation of articles in conjunction with other vocabulary, even though articles are continuously used by the books in sentences and activities. This does a great disservice to students who appear to be expected to produce something they might not yet know or even recognize. Accurate, target-like output cannot reasonably be expected unless appropriate input is given. According to N. Ellis (2005), under normal L1 circumstances, language use is reliant on input. However, learners might fossilize, or stabilize, under circumstances in which certain L2 forms are granted lower status. In such circumstances where the input needed to prevent fossilization is of a low status, extra input is rendered useless for the acquisition of those forms. Because many features of L2 input are infrequent, non-salient, or communicatively redundant, intentionally focused attention may be necessary for successful language learning (Schmidt, 2001). N. Ellis (2005) also emphasized the importance of attention and described sequential motives for learning. The first motive, implicit and explicit learning, begins for novice learners when external scaffolding is provided to support their attention. It is important for course designers and materials developers to consider how to provide English article input that is easy for young learners to notice and pay attention to.

The results of this study provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of combining a form of L2 grammar teaching with vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary learning is in many ways the core of studying an L2. Combining articles with vocabulary might lessen the burden of studying grammar in addition to vocabulary while enhancing article recognition and understanding and the ability to use articles. When articles are systematically presented with new words in textbooks or in the curriculum, learners are exposed to articles in every lesson. This frequent calling of attention to article presentation and exposure to different patterns of usage in different sentences could lead learners to process the input more efficiently and help them build implicit knowledge through the gradual accumulation of associations, as Schmidt (1990) emphasized. Teachers need to encourage students to focus on articles and their proper use, rather than solely attending to meaning at the expense of accuracy.

2. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

Some limitations need to be addressed before the results of the study can be more widely generalized. First, this study only dealt with the indefinite article and zero article. Moreover, participants were only required to judge article usage on the basis of quantity: singular versus plural nouns. Future studies need to consider other uses of the indefinite article and also consider vocabulary presentation that includes the definite article.

Second, long-term investigation is needed to verify the effects of the study; this study examined scores from tests administered immediately following the treatment. Teaching grammar could be a risk to beginners because their interlanguages are typically incomplete and agrammatical; beginners frequently rely on prefabricated chunks and memory-based systems of lexical sequences (R. Ellis, 2006). In certain types of discourse, correct article use can be a critical factor in successful conveyance of an intended message, and reckless use of the indefinite article where the definite article is required, or vice versa, could prove problematic for learners.

Furthermore, a detailed analysis of Korean learners' English article use errors should be undertaken in future research. Because the participants in this study were near beginners, an error analysis should also be conducted when they reach advanced levels of English proficiency.

Finally, future studies need to investigate the effects of teacher explanations of article usage when questions about article and noun chunks arise during vocabulary instruction. The treatment in this study was designed to investigate the possibility of young Korean EFL learners acquiring grammatical knowledge without receiving explicit grammar instruction. Teacher explanations of indefinite article usage were allowed only when requested by students; however, there were no questions from the participants during the

treatment in this study, as a result no extra grammatical explanations were given. Therefore, the effects of active teacher explanations of article usage combined with co-presented forms should be explored in future studies.

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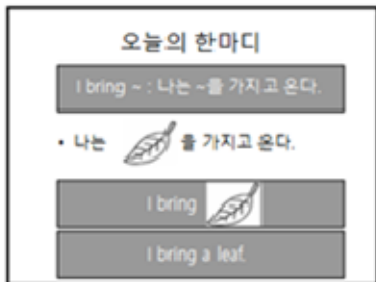
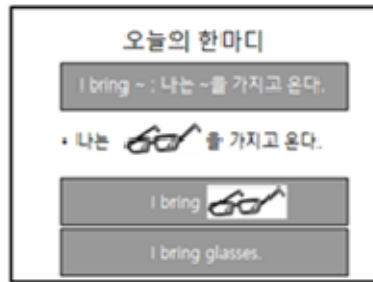
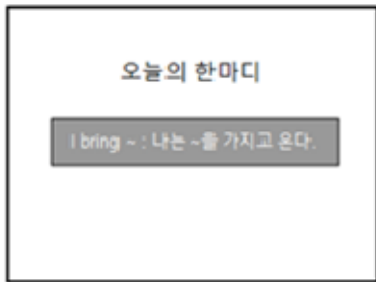
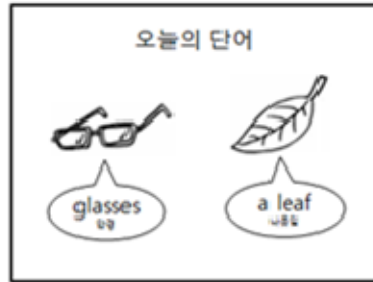
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APPENDIX A
Instructional Materials (Lesson Plan for PA Group)

차시	1(포)	단어	glasses, a leaf	문장	I bring	시간	5분
교수학습 활동							자료 및 유의점
<p>■오늘의 단어 소개하기</p> <p>T: 오늘 배울 단어는 안경과 나뭇잎입니다. 영어로 어떻게 말할까요?</p> <p>T: 안경은 glasses, 나뭇잎은 a leaf입니다.</p> <p>T: 선생님을 따라 두 번씩 따라 읽어봅시다.</p> <p>T: 학습지 왼쪽 부분에 영어단어를 손으로 가리고 오른쪽 빈칸에 영어로 단어를 써봅시다. 잘 모르겠는 친구는 손을 떼서 보고 써도 좋습니다.</p>		<p>S1: glasses, leaf입니다. S2: 잘 모르겠습니다.</p> <p>(glasses, a leaf를 두 번씩 따라 읽는다.)</p>					<p>*glasses가 복수형인 것은 인정원이 두 개이기 때문임을 알려준다.</p>
<p>■오늘의 문장 소개하기</p> <p>T: 오늘 배울 문장은 I bring입니다. '나는 무엇을 가지고 온다' 라는 뜻입니다. 앞의 두 단어를 이용하여 문장을 만들어 봅시다. 먼저, 나는 안경을 가지고 온다는 영어로 어떻게 말할까요?</p> <p>(I bring glasses 두 번씩 읽는다.)</p> <p>T: 나는 나뭇잎을 가지고 온다는 영어로 어떻게 말할까요?</p> <p>(I bring a leaf 두 번씩 읽는다.)</p>		<p>Sn: I bring glasses입니다.</p> <p>(I bring glasses 두 번씩 따라 읽는다.) Sn: I bring a leaf.</p> <p>(I bring a leaf 두 번씩 따라 읽는다.)</p>					
<p>■문장 쓰기</p> <p>T: 학습지에 있는 두 문장을 바른 글씨로 따라 써봅시다.</p>							
<p>■배운내용 복습하기</p> <p>T: 오늘 배운 단어는 안경과 나뭇잎입니다. 영어로 어떻게 말합니까?</p> <p>T: 나는 안경을 가지고 온다는 영어로 어떻게 말합니까?</p> <p>T: 나는 나뭇잎을 가지고 온다는 영어로 어떻게 말합니까?</p> <p>T: 수고하셨습니다.</p>		<p>Sn: glasses, a leaf입니다. Sn: I bring glasses입니다. Sn: I bring a leaf입니다.</p>		<p>*복습할 때는 학습지를 지정이 놓고 대답한다.</p>			

APPENDIX B

Instructional Materials (PowerPoint Slides for PA Group)



APPENDIX C

Pre-Test Material

Pretest ()학년 ()반 ()번 이름 ()

이 평가지는 영어단어를 활용한 영어문장 만들기를 평가합니다. 결과는 영어 성적에 반영되지 않으나, 아는 만큼 성실하게 문제를 풀어주세요.



6. 나는 (시계)를 만진다.

I touch

♥ 뜻에 알맞게 영어문장을 이어서 완성하십시오.



1. 나는 (양말 한 켤레)를 가지고 온다.

I bring



7. 나는 (치마)를 찾는다.

I find



2. 나는 (달력)이 필요하다.

I need



8. 나는 (자)를 색칠한다.

I paint



3. 나는 (신발 한 켤레)를 씻는다.

I wash



9. 나는 (병)을 나른다.

I carry



4. 나는 (장갑 한 켤레)를 고른다.

I choose



10. 나는 (깃발)을 사용한다.

I use



5. 나는 (가위)를 잡는다.

I catch



11. 나는 (풍선)을 보낸다.

I send

Pretest ()학년 ()반 ()번 이름 ()

12. 나는  (비행기)를 환영한다.

I welcome

19. 나는  (칼)을 씻는다.

I wash

13. 나는  (삼각형)을 잡는다.

I catch

20. 나는  (바지)를 색깔한다.

I paint

14. 나는  (안경)을 만진다.

I touch

21. 나는  (거울)이 필요하다.

I need

15. 나는  (나뭇잎)을 보낸다.

I send

22. 나는  (기차)를 사용한다.

I use

16. 나는  (복숭아)를 나른다.

I carry

23. 나는  (우산)을 가지고 온다.

I bring

17. 나는  (암탉)을 환영한다.

I welcome


24. 나는  (어린 양)을 찾는다.


I find

18. 나는  (계란)을 고른다.


I choose


Pretest ()학년 ()반 ()번 이름 ()

25. 나는  (모자들(2개 이상))을 셸다.
I count


32. 나는  (겹시들(2개 이상))을 셸다.
I count

26. 나는  (코끼리)를 잊어버린다.
I forget

33. 나는  (신발(한 짝))을 찾는다.
I find

27. 나는  (원)을 숨긴다.
I hide


34. 나는  (장갑(한 짝))이 필요하다.
I need

28. 나는  (개미들(2마리 이상))을 그린다.
I draw


35. 나는  (양말(한 짝))을 잡는다.
I catch

29. 나는  (벨트)를 숨긴다.
I hide

36. 나는  (책)을 사용한다.
I use

30. 나는  (책들(2권 이상))을 잊어버린다.
I forget

37. 나는  (모자)를 고른다.
I choose

31. 나는  (지우개들(2개 이상))을 그린다.
I draw

Pretest ()학년 ()반 ()번 이름 ()

38. 나는  (개미)를 가져온다.

I bring

39. 나는  (접시)를 색칠한다.

I paint

40. 나는  (지우개)를 보낸다.

I send

♥ 수고했습니다.

Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Levels: Elementary

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