

Abstract

People learn information they are curious about more effectively and are more likely to remember such information in the long term. Recent evidence further suggests that this benefit of curiosity extends to the learning of other information that is presented adjacently with the curiosity-invoking information. To assess the potential educational implications of these findings, in the present study we examined whether they extend to the learning of foreign-language vocabulary. Focusing on the effect of curiosity on learning, we examined three research questions: 1. Does state curiosity improve memory for information one is curious about?

. 2. Does state curiosity improve memory for unrelated information that is presented along with the information one is curious about? 3. Does trait curiosity improve memory?

To examine these questions, we conducted a study in which participants rated their curiosity to learn the answers to a series of trivia questions, and then learned new vocabulary in Swahili for a memory test, before being presented with the answers to the trivia questions. Memory for the vocabulary and for the trivia answers was examined in memory tests that were administered either immediately after the learning phase or a week later. In addition, participants completed a trait curiosity questionnaire.

The results suggested that curiosity for the trivia answers improved memory for these answers on both the immediate and the delayed tests. However, curiosity for the trivia answers did not affect memory for the adjacently presented Swahili words. Further, there was no substantial evidence for a relationship between trait curiosity and memory. Our results suggest that being curious about specific material enhances learning of that material, but that non-specific curiosity, in terms of either curiosity states elicited by adjacently-presented unrelated materials or trait curiosity, is ineffective for learning.