

Vocabulary Teaching Strategies for EFL Learners: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract—Vocabulary is normally learnt implicitly to attain proficiency in language. Nonetheless, there are methods and resources that have worked well for expanding one's vocabulary. This qualitative study has compiled ways and means through which English language vocabulary can be learnt skillfully and conveniently. The present paper has outlined and systematically surveyed the strategies, techniques and tips needed to achieve proficiency in English Language vocabulary. The analytical study presented in the paper has expounded useful resources, strategies, and advice for vocabulary instruction. These consist of etymology, synonyms, modelling, and context (connotation) explanation. Some helpful strategies include picking a word each week and utilizing games creatively. Explicit vocabulary is learned via regular practice and involvement in daily life. Developing these skills for vocabulary teaching can pave the way for learning in language, the arts, sciences, technology, and mathematics. Learners should constantly be provided with repeated opportunities, both implicitly and explicitly, to learn a new and sophisticated language.

Index Terms—EFL learners, exploratory study, vocabulary learning strategies, proficiency in vocabulary acquisition

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Vocabulary

Learning vocabulary is crucial to learning a second or foreign language. It is essential for both reading comprehension and language learning (Akbarian & Farrokhi, 2021). Reading accounts for a significant amount of vocabulary acquisition. Readers form assumptions about the meaning of words when they encounter them multiple times. They then look up the meaning of the words they have assumed in a dictionary to confirm their conclusions. Reading widely enhances the likelihood that a term will be understood and retained because students will come across the same words repeatedly in other texts. Reading can help students learn new words, but acquiring new words is not always simple. Students must pay attention to spelling, pronunciation, meaning, collocation, and other facets of word knowledge (Kaivapanah et al., 2021).

It is possible to learn vocabulary implicitly. This may happen through regular conversations and repetition. Throughout our daily lives, we pick up new words and expand our existing vocabulary. Vocabulary acquisition must flourish in the classroom and beyond. As Synonyms, or similar words, are not necessarily interchangeable, having a strong vocabulary is essential in order to stay current with information and utilize appropriate words in appropriate situations or context (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2010; Viera, 2018). According to Depraetere (2019), context is what English language learners need to know about the words they are using. Ellis and Laporte (1994) considered implicit learning as the process that occurs spontaneously, effortlessly, and without conscious effort to acquire information about the underlying structure of a complicated sensory environment.

B. The Tiers of Vocabulary

For teaching and assessing word knowledge, three levels of vocabulary, or more precisely, three categories or tiers of vocabulary terms are generally taken into consideration. The meaning, complexity, and frequency of use of a word decide which tier it belongs to. All these three tiers of words are understood and used by those with developed vocabularies and age-appropriate reading abilities (Hutton, 2008). The three tiers of vocabulary—Basic Vocabulary, High Frequency/Multiple Meaning words, and Subject Related terms—are covered in the following sections.

C. Tier 1

These are regarded as the foundational terms of common language (Ankucic, 2019), and the initial steps in acquiring basic vocabulary. The Tier 1 category contains families of around 8000 words and includes common terms and those parts of speech with which basic English language learners are familiar. For kids to comprehend these terms, not much explanation is necessary. Nonetheless, the instructor must give a thorough explanation of the set of homophones, like

'break' and 'brake'. This is necessary in order to teach students how to correctly employ words that have similar pronunciation, or sometimes, similar spelling but different meanings, like 'lie' (Ankucic, 2019).

D. Tier 2

Tier 2 words are high-frequency words utilized by experienced content consumers across numerous content categories. These words are most often used in an academic setting. Put more simply, these are terms that are used frequently enough for the majority of native speakers to understand what they mean, but they typically call for specific training (e.g., referring to a dictionary or using context). They can be tough for beginning vocabulary learners who can pronounce the words but find it difficult to read them since they are frequently spelled in ways that deviate from the basic principles of phonetic English grammar. Words that fall within Tier 2 include, *evident*, *sophisticated*, *rational*, *cite*, *autumn*, *evaluate*, etc. (Ankucic, 2019).

E. Tier 3

Tier 3 words are extremely specific, low frequency, need explicit teaching, and are typically restricted to a certain content area, such as technical or medical terminology. They usually consist of foreign language roots that have prefixes and suffixes added to them. These terms can be *misappropriation*, *igneous*, *respiration*, etc. These are words are not used often and are mainly used in subject-specific contexts. Such words include *morphology* and *etymology* in language studies or *radius*, *circumference*, and *integer* in mathematics (Ankucic, 2019).

Foreign language learners usually come across new vocabulary and expressions, which may bear upon their overall language proficiency. Language ineptitude puts many students in situations that make it difficult for them to express themselves and communicate effectively (Afzal, 2019; Al-khresheh, 2020).

While there are several factors that influence language acquisition, experts believe that vocabulary performance has the biggest influence on a person's capacity for language understanding. Language and vocabulary play corresponding roles that complement one another. Regular language use, whether by reading or listening, increases vocabulary, and having a good vocabulary helps one communicate well both in writing and speech. Although a person's ability to grasp language is influenced by a variety of circumstances, researchers feel that vocabulary performance is the most impactful (Altyari, 2017).

After careful consideration of the needs and desires of both teachers and students, it is evident from the aforementioned contentions that vocabulary acquisition practices are essential for helping students grow their vocabulary. Effective vocabulary teaching strategies can also help teachers fulfill their duties more effectively and assist students in becoming independent, and self-sufficient learners. The study presented here clearly shows how important it is for educators to understand vocabulary learning strategies. By giving instructors and students a variety of strategies to address the abovementioned concerns in an efficient manner, this study can accomplish its objective effectively. If the findings show that pupils are not familiar with different methods for learning vocabulary, they can be taught the methods that work best.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the processes involved in learning and mastering vocabulary in the English language. The methods, approaches, and pointers needed to understand vocabulary in the English language were examined thoroughly to arrive at an empirical understanding of ways and means through which successful vocabulary teaching strategies could be implemented in language classrooms. Acquiring and mastering the English language is impossible without a sufficient vocabulary due to the language's utility in social, political, economic, and educational spheres.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Effective Vocabulary

The stimulation, imitation, acquisition, amplification, and maintenance of vocabulary knowledge are all components of effective vocabulary education. Relevant feedback is also required to help direct the learning process (Shanahan, 2019; Nielsen, 2003). Language learners need to understand the benefits of having a big vocabulary. Students must be made aware of the benefits of acquiring a broad and fresh vocabulary in order for them to comprehend the value of having a strong vocabulary knowledge in a foreign language. Integrating word-discovery into the classroom's ethos is crucial for successful language acquisition (Rousoulioti & Mouti, 2016). It also helps when a word-rich environment is created. To encourage word studies, teachers also have to ask students to use words in fun learning tools like jokes and puns to engage them in the learning process (Geikhman, 2015).

During vocabulary teaching classes, it is often discovered that language learners lose their interest and suffer from a conspicuous lack of motivation, which distracts them away from the task at hand throughout the class period. To meet this challenging situation, teachers need to select engaging lesson plans and instructional aids. Understanding the requirements and preferences of the students and involving them more in the learning process would help the teacher overcome this problem (Sari, 2022). The way students are being taught is fairly one-dimensional, which causes

monotony and stagnation in their English skills, as seen by their hesitation to answer questions on particular subjects. Language teachers would be exceptionally delighted to use words when they find themselves recording some success with this challenge. They should also try to choose a word-of-the-week, each week for students and encourage them to apply it creatively in their work for the week (Fauziningrum et al., 2023).

Because teachers can focus on providing students with effective and purposeful instruction to help them extend their range of vocabulary as needed to communicate successfully, the vocabulary teaching process emphasizes and influences students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the process of acquiring vocabulary is not often the primary emphasis of instruction (Akramy et al., 2022). Vocabulary is learnt more often than not through daily conversations, independent reading, and processing texts. Visual aids are another useful tool for language instruction. One effective method for explicitly teaching vocabulary to pupils is through the use of visual aids. Different forms of intelligences, like visual, logical, and musical etc., were offered by the Multiple Intelligence Theories. Visual or spatial intelligence is one of the most important forms. Students with this level of intelligence are capable of mentally learning objects and are fairly adept at envisioning things (Oktaviani & Wahyudin, 2022).

Students' ability to understand through listening, speaking, reading, and writing will most certainly improve as their vocabulary grows. They will add additional words to their mastery of vocabulary as they listen more. Furthermore, many types of media, such as music, video, and movies, may be utilized to test students' abilities nowadays. Listening to English movies may be an excellent way for pupils to acquire English vocabulary. Questionnaires and interviews were utilized as tools to measure the thesis presented in this paper. The results demonstrated that by viewing an English movie, people may add some vocabulary to their memory by listening to and observing the scenario (Simamora et al., 2020).

Bauer (2020) believes that dictionaries and thesauruses are not the solution to vocabulary acquisition. The vocabulary provided should match students' experiences and their existing vocabulary knowledge. It is important to give a student-friendly definition of words in a language classroom. To aid comprehension, teachers are required to give meaningful examples. It is also necessary to use the words in sentences based on actual situations. Using Bauer's suggestion will help clear out misconceptions with similar words.

Vocabulary teaching has progressed through several phases. They include grammar-translation, communicative, and audio-lingual teaching approaches. Researchers have been working on strategies to improve language education. Language begins with words, and the creation of new words continues, as does their acquisition. Language learners must study a large number of words in order to properly utilize a language (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2010).

Based on an overview of the previously published studies on English vocabulary teaching, it can be concluded that the teacher must choose the right learning method which is believed to be able to motivate young students and help them in achieving the desired learning goals (Wulandari et al., 2020). This research, however, breaks new ground by examining, contrasting, and comparing the application of contemporary methods for teaching English vocabulary with those explored in earlier studies. This study will evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of different vocabulary teaching approaches (e.g., communicative vs. grammar-based methods) for EFL students in the classroom setting. The present paper also highlights the teacher's crucial role in selecting the optimal teaching strategy that not only ignites young students' enthusiasm but also equips them to achieve their learning objectives (Asipi et al., 2023).

B. How Vocabulary Was Taught in the Past: Semantic Field Theory

The 1920s and 1930s saw the earliest proposals for the Semantic Field hypothesis. The German linguist JotTrier's introduction of Semantic Field Theory in 1931, marked the start of a new chapter in the history of semantics (Nerlich, 2000). He maintained that the links between words in the same word field are what give words their meaning. A list of terms related to items in a particular class makes up Trier's field. According to the Semantic Field theory, a language's vocabulary is not a collection of discrete entities but rather a system of connected lexical networks. Lexical field theory is another name for semantic field theory. To illustrate the concept of semantic field, it is interesting to consider how terms related to automobiles (engine, tire, wheel), colors (red, blue, green), and body parts (arm, leg, head) form distinct yet interconnected clusters of meaning. The fundamental tenet of the semantic field theory is that words do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they form various semantic fields. For example, a vegetable field might contain words like spinach, cauliflower, cabbage, pepper, eggplant, onion, tomato, and cucumber, among many other words that indicate vegetables. Words and specific phrases are broken down in lexical semantics. This includes comprehending specific nouns, phrases, verbs, and adjectives. Base words, suffixes, prefixes, phrases, and idioms could also be used in this context (Boran, 2018).

The phases of vocabulary instruction growth were listed by Munro et al. (2012), who also stressed the need of understanding that vocabulary development is a continuum in learners' development. Students frequently use nouns and proper nouns as their first words. Activity verbs follow, and then colloquial social phrases like "please," "no," "pardon me," and so on. Nonetheless, when teaching language lessons, one should include the issue of the semantic field. If language learners are not aware of the problems and difficulties brought on by these differences, they may utilize words in sentences wrongly due to semantic field differences between the target language's culture and their own.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. *Teaching Vocabulary*

A crucial component in learning vocabulary learning is Modeling which allows language instructors to let the learners imitate her words while she speaks (Zou et al., 2020). This has an advantage that is comparable to the lessons or advantages that students gain from viewing films in the language of instruction. When they initially start out, it is recommended that they watch movies using the subtitles listed below. Students are required to not only learn the word by heart in writing, but also to mimic the actors' speech patterns by paying attention to how they talk and pronounce the word just as a native speaker would (Roslim et al., 2021).

Strategies like Modeling are imperative in the sense that they make students understand the benefits of having a diverse vocabulary. Some students will need to be prodded along, while others are naturally curious. As a result, in order to teach vocabulary, the teacher must make sure the pupils understand the importance of having a wide vocabulary and investigate words they are not yet familiar with. This would assist them in creating a word-rich atmosphere where they are exposed to words on a regular basis.

In English language vocabulary classrooms, it is advisable that learners adhere to the teacher's related vocabulary instructions. Teachers should demonstrate the abilities and impart to their pupils the knowledge and skills needed to become word masters. Speaking up is also crucial (Zhang, 2012). This is comparable to often encountering unfamiliar terms when reading texts. It is not always the case that someone who reads a word aloud understands how to pronounce it correctly. That is why spelling and pronunciation are taught by teachers, which makes vocabulary acquisition more enduring and effective.

B. *Keynotes*

For students, having a vast vocabulary is essential. This can be accomplished by associating the word with a concrete item or with an abstract concept. As a result, students give the word greater attention and contemplation. Explaining the vocabulary helps students grasp the word better (Ankucic, 2019; Pathan et al., 2014).

Khoirina and Rini (2021) are in favour of reinforcing new words by repeated practice which would help students master them. In addition to that, old and often-used activities like fill-in-the-blank or *word bingo* can help students make a connection with the vocabulary. Creating a chart similar to the below can also go a long way towards English vocabulary acquisition.

TABLE 1
AN EXAMPLE OF A WORD FACT CARD THAT STUDENTS CAN LEARN WITH

Word Fact Card	
Word – Doctor	
Part of speech	Definition
An interesting fact	My sentence

Here students are expected to fill in each block the Word associated vocabulary that they have learnt in their language classroom.

C. *Understanding Words in Better Detail*

Yamsani (2018) believes that Etymology gives a far deeper appreciation of the world. It shows how a word has changed in structure and meaning throughout time, rather than just trying to learn lists of roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Root words serve as the foundation for word families. Words having similar etymologies include, for example:

Aquarium: Small tank for housing aquatic animals.

Aquatic: Growing or living in water.

Both words contain the same source word: Aqua. The perceived meaning of words with the same etymology can be predicted based on the root word it contains.

It is, moreover, inevitable to explain the connotative meaning of words because meanings are given to words based on the feeling and emotion they portend. This could be a positive feeling, negative feeling, or neutral feeling. Understanding the connotative meaning of words ensures that students are better able to use them with precision (Rao, 2017). For this, students can try compiling a word scale.

Vocabulary knowledge can also be sufficiently enhanced through engaging learners with synonyms. Since synonyms are a useful tool for examining real-world language patterns and raising students' understanding of their own ability to objectively function outside the language system and to objectify language awareness, teaching vocabulary through synonyms is an effective way to learn the language and has a significant impact on the domains of English language instruction (Boontam, 2022).

Better understanding could be created by explaining when or when not to use a word. This can be in relation to formal or informal circumstances, or even social or antisocial functions. It is not as a matter of propriety correct to say that one wants to go to the *'toilet'* in a public space. *'Restroom'* is a more proper word to use in that situation. Navigating language learners through these words would help them improve their lexical stores. Soon enough, they can be able to figure out which synonym to use, where and when, and in what circumstance (Alanazi, 2017).

English language learners should also be taught how affixes change the meaning of words. The meaning of words can be changed by adding suffixes and prefixes. It also helps students develop a good understanding of vocabulary. Language instructor can select a root word and explain the prefix and suffix, for example, social - socialize, socially anti-social, and so on.

It's crucial to use game concepts to assist learners in reintroducing words. One beneficial activity that students might play is selecting a word every week that the teacher thinks is appropriate. They explain the definition of the term; they then use their imagination to interpret it in a picturesque manner, in the manner of the board game "Pictionary" (Khoirina & Rini, 2021). Teachers can also hand out a creative writing assignment to the students when they have gone through a list of words. This will help them to understand the usage of vocabulary in the right context. Ultimately, each student will be able to create his/her own glossary, complete with meaning, pronunciation, sentence example, and an image or picture where applicable (Oxford & Crookall, 1990).

D. Vocabulary and Concept Development

Conceptual development deals with the meaning of words as it involves circumstances (Depraetere, 2019). The use of a word in a particular sentence also influences the meaning.

Example: Amara's singing voice is velvety.

Velvety: Having a smooth, soft appearance, feel or taste. Velvety is a characteristic.

The denotative meaning of 'Velvety' is the 'Dictionary meaning'. 'Velvety', in the above sentence has a connotative meaning. It means that the singer's voice is sonorous. A connotative meaning of a word is derived when emotions, thoughts, and feelings are added to it. 'Group', 'Clique', 'Gang,' and 'Club,' for example, are words that carry connotative meaning with them. Which of these can be used in a sentence to make it carry the intended meaning depends on the context. The four words must be selected on the basis of what kind of group each of them consists of. Is it a group of friends, colleagues, strangers, or teens?

The word 'Group' has a neutral connotation. It simply describes a number of people and does not reflect either a positive or negative emotion.

'Clique' also means a group of people, but it carries a negative connotation. This is because 'clique' is typically used in circumstances where the group is synonymous with seeing others as unworthy of being a part of the said group.

The term 'Gang' is defined as an organized group. It has a connotative negative meaning which suggests criminal activity.

'Club' however, is a group of people. It has a positive connotation. It signifies a group of people who come together, to assist each other for a positive goal.

So, while the words, 'Group', 'Clique', 'Gang' and 'Club' are the same, that is they have the same denotative meaning; they are different in that they have varying connotative meanings. As such, they may not be used interchangeably.

Connotation describes a meaning that is inferred or suggested by a word's use in addition to its literal (denotative) meaning. The meaning that a writer intends to convey to readers can be influenced by connotation. Word meanings are established over a lengthy period of time based on their typical usage. This interpretation could be neutral, negative, or favorable. It is crucial to assist pupils in realizing that words can have both connotative and denotative meanings. This would guarantee that they do not run the risk of misusing language (Rao, 2017).

A learner needs to practice often in order to understand both the denotation and the connotation of a new term, which will also increase their fluency in the language. Using a word in sentences is the most effective approach to become familiar with its meaning. This will assist a student in understanding how to use it correctly. Students who practice their synonyms may also benefit more. The learner gradually understands the meaning of words with negative, positive, and neutral connotations.

V. CONCLUSION

Prior research indicates that English language learners achieve fluency more easily when they engage in meaningful interactions and are exposed to higher-quality and more varied vocabulary. Researchers have continually demonstrated the value of engaging with learners and exposing them to a variety of high-quality language acquisition scenarios. Previous studies have also concluded that working with more advanced vocabularies is linked to greater academic success. Teachers' and instructors' continued involvement is critical for vocabulary development (Weisleder & Fernald, 2013).

Learners need to have a large and varied vocabulary that continues to grow. Vocabulary is a key component of language learning. Developing these skills can pave the way for learning language, the arts, sciences, technology, and mathematics.

Vocabulary development goes on forever throughout a person's lifespan. Learners grasp vocabulary through the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learners should constantly be provided with repeated opportunities, both implicitly and explicitly, to learn a new and sophisticated language.

Vocabulary knowledge influences both how effectively students understand and think through complicated ideas and textual content (Sinatra et al., 2012). Learners who are constantly exposed to more sophisticated language are better

able to engage with new topics. These are critical for their other learning goals - academic, work and profession. It also helps the articulation of their own ideas as well as other people's opinions. Consequently, learners' cognitive skills develop, and they acquire language and vocabulary better. Higher value is achieved when students are placed in practice experiences. It is also useful that they are exposed to a variety of text types that are appropriate to their discipline.

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