

“TEACHING VOCABULARY IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM”

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Abstract

The word vocabulary always remains one of the most necessary words while learning a foreign language and perhaps the most articulated and required at all the times. Today a large part of the time is spent in the name of this word, that no matter how we get, we understand that it is never quite enough. Vocabulary is essential to English learning because without sufficient vocabulary items people cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Wilkins (1972) said that “... without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (pp.111-112). Peculiarly, when people develop greater fluency and expressions in a foreign language, it is central for them to develop more productive vocabulary knowledge and to acquire their own personal learning strategies. The present study investigates the importance of vocabulary in learning English language, and the importance of context in guessing the meaning of the vocabulary items in relation to the students’ language level. Over the past two decades vocabulary practices have appeared to be of great importance in that the acquisition of vocabulary among students plays a crucial role in the language classroom. However, the fact that the majority of students and teachers are oriented by traditional methods that pays insufficient attention to vocabulary practice, therefore vocabulary learning is neglected.

Key Words: *Traditional Methods, Contextual Vocabulary, Frequent Vocabulary, Implicit vocabulary, Explicit Vocabulary*

The Aim of the study

Thus, the present study attempts to elicit information about the importance of vocabulary in language learning, and to establish a new tradition by incorporating recent methods in learning a foreign language. The study also suggests that it should be raised a balance between the students needs and interests and the given syllabuses. This is a study which addresses this issue within the context of Albanian high schools. Therefore, this study could serve as a sample in order to encourage other teachers to improve their vocabulary teaching practices, which ultimate goal could affect English learners.

Research Questions;

The research questions raised in this study are;

1. Why it is important to teach/learn vocabulary in a foreign language?
2. What is the importance of contextual vocabulary as one of the most treated strategies nowadays?

1.1 Why it is important to teach/learn vocabulary in a foreign language?

“The more one considers the matter, the more reasonable it seems to suppose that lexis is where we need to start from, the syntax needs to be put to the service of words and not the other way round.” (Widdowson in Lewis, 1993: 115)

It is documented that vocabulary is a more complex process than it might appear in the first sight. Words does not stand in isolation, they are part of a complex system that needs to work properly in order to produce the entire communication. It is a process that starts since from the moment of our birth and it develops through time until our last moment.

Vocabulary is a good store of words that is crucial for understanding and communication. It is one of the most crucial elements of language, which makes it very reasonable to at least acquire the most frequent words of language in order to be able to communicate. Vocabulary teaching and learning has constantly been challenging both teachers and learners, because traditionally there has been no focus on appropriate vocabulary instruction in English language classrooms.

Thus, a great emphasis on the development of contextual vocabulary is essential for the learners of English. Due to this, it is teachers' responsibility to make sure that students have acquired the appropriate vocabulary in class, by using various teaching techniques. However, many teachers in high schools do not seem to give too much attention to this aspect, because they tend to think that vocabulary will be acquired in an implicit way, for instance, through working with dictionaries at home.

The fact is that learning of vocabulary through dictionaries has only a minor role in expanding learners' vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, many teachers complain that students do not use dictionaries effectively, because they find it as a very difficult matter to cope with. Thus, students' confusion and frustration is something I have noticed in the school at which I taught, and I have heard teachers' complains, who despite being unsuccessful, keep on going in a similar vein. It is obvious that many English teachers in high school do not expose students to the most effective tool for realizing communication in a language, which is vocabulary.

As an English teacher, I have frequently noticed that many of the students are unable to understand simple sentences which contain frequent words of everyday language, despite the fact that some of them have been learning English for several years. Therefore, it can be assumed that the low level of students may be partially as a result of vocabulary techniques being used in schools. This can be a very reasonable description, when we understand that a great number of studies suggest that good vocabulary knowledge is the cornerstone of the entire process of language acquisition.

It is supposed that the way or the method that teachers use to explain vocabulary in their English classes, effects on the students' learning of new words. The importance of vocabulary is treated by many scholars and researchers. Words are always considered as building stones in a language, so if we understand words we start to develop knowledge about the target language. The researchers founded at least five reasons why to teach vocabulary;

- To increase reading comprehension,
- To develop knowledge of new concepts,
- To improve vocabulary in writing
- To help students communicate more effectively,
- And to develop deeper understanding of words and concepts they didn't know before.

Therefore, vocabulary is an essential element to reach academic awareness and to develop further knowledge in different areas because without comprehension no message is conveyed and no information is obtained.

1.2 Why it is important to teach contextual vocabulary?

Usually English words have several meanings and definitions given in the dictionary. To understand the uses of a certain word we have to understand it in context and the meaning it conveys in this context. One way to ensure the success of language learning is by placing words in different contexts and guessing its meaning.

Context is considered as the best model of a dictionary, because you can notice a word in different aspects and understand numerous meanings of the word. The role of context is treated by different scholars and researchers and their contribution accentuated the essential role of context in language learning. Learning vocabulary in context means that students learn new words in real passages of reading rather than separate lessons.

Learning language in context can allow students to identify the meaning of unknown words from the given information. (*Nagy, 1988; Beck et al., 2002*). Despite the successful sides of contextual vocabulary, it is also treated even in another point of view. One of the problems when asking students to use context is that context clues are not as natural as they should be in order to direct students to the appropriate meaning of an unknown word.

Because of this incredibility of context clues, it is suggested that instructions should be presented as a process of finding the meaning of a word within an individual context, rather than focusing on outcome of the words meaning. Thus, it is important to start asking what is going on in the given text and then to continue with the meaning of individual words, which may be different in another context.

In spite of the limitations in using context to figure out the meaning of new words, it would be better if the teacher chooses natural texts and contexts from everyday life situations. In addition to increasing student's vocabulary, this approach has several advantages.

1. It helps readers not only to learn words but also how to use them in context, because it requires a deep understanding of other semantic properties, register and collocation. The

context determines the meaning of words because it makes readers aware of one important feature of vocabulary.

2. Directing students to infer meaning from context gives them a powerful aid to comprehension and will speed up their reading and academic success.
3. This approach allows students to make intelligent, meaningful guesses. This will make the process of learning more active and challenging than direct explanation of words. It fosters students toward problem-solving and challenges them to make use of their intelligence to a degree that is not common in language classes.
4. It helps students to develop a holistic approach toward reading because the context of a new word may be drawn from a group of sentences, a paragraph or even the entire text.

Teaching students to learn the meaning of new words in context is an enjoyable and attractive method that fosters students to learn the meaning of new words at any moment when they encounter a new word. In this way they become independent and autonomous on their learning. Using context clues to derive the meaning of unknown words is an effective approach to develop vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Teachers should be careful to guide students toward appropriate strategies of using context in an effective way. Sometimes context may provide unnatural settings for the reader which makes it difficult for them to guess the meaning of unknown words. Context clues should be guided by the teacher and then further developed by the students themselves.

As a matter of fact there are highlighted by different various other strategies which are considered useful in the classroom, but it should be emphasized the fact that these strategies may be effective in a certain situation, with a certain group of people and with certain words; the ideal would be a combination of all effective techniques to get the desired product. Besides focusing on meaning, it is also essential to consider the form of the word and when it is used. Students need to be aware of the possible situations a word may be used and its limitations. It is frequently suggested the idea of using fun as a way of learning, so games and songs would be perfect for the students. After presenting the new word to them, it should be created the opportunity to use it, so practice in exercises and different situations is always required and it is essential for word remembering.

Eventually, the use of a word in several contexts from everyday life is the most difficult process, but it gives the students a full understanding of a word and its limitations. A teacher of a foreign language should always consider itself as a changing agent in the class, in the sense of adapting all kinds of methods to reveal the exact meaning of a word to the students. It is also assumed the fact that the teacher has the job and the responsibility of managing the learning and the students can do some or all the things with the target vocabulary that is meant to be learnt.

Conclusions;

As a summary, it should be clarified that vocabulary is a meaningful indicator of progress in other skills such as reading, writing and speaking. It is essential to remember that vocabulary should not be left to chance, but it should be considered as a very important element in the whole process of language learning. It is strongly recommended that teachers' help and facilitation is a great indicator to the students, as far as the skills of vocabulary learning are gained through life

and learning experience. The students are becoming aware of the difficulty of the vocabulary and they are frequently looking for other ways of learning vocabulary and to avoid working with the stressful work of dictionaries, thus teachers' responsibilities are to seek new methods for students, without getting them bored. It should be considered that one important way of teaching vocabulary is to choose basic vocabulary items, the kind of vocabulary that is easily accessible by the students and frequently used in everyday situations. Actually, teachers of foreign languages should be very careful in the appropriate number of vocabulary items, otherwise the process of language learning may encounter in different problems. This topic may be conducted in another research.

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