TEACHING VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT FOR A1 LEVEL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching vocabulary in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context is challenging. Incidental vocabulary learning is limited due to a lack of second language (L2) input, and most words are learned through classroom instruction. Overall, research has shown marginal L2 vocabulary growth in many EFL situations. Such research indicates a need for a more effective and efficient approach to teaching vocabulary in the EFL context. This chapter discusses how to optimize vocabulary learning in the EFL context. It touches on the following questions: Which words should be taught? How should vocabulary be taught? How many words do EFL learners need to know? What should a vocabulary-learning program include? How can vocabulary learning be fostered given limited classroom time? Which activities might be useful in indirect vocabulary learning?

KEYWORDS: *Vocabulary Size, Vocabulary Learning, Extensive Reading, Extensive Viewing, Vocabulary-Learning Program.*

INTRODUCTION

Hornby defines vocabulary as the total number of words in a language: "vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings"[1]. While Ur states as follows:

"Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up o two or three words but express a single idea. A Useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary "items"rather than "words"[2]

In addition, Burns defines vocabulary as the stock of words which is used by a person, class or profession[3]. According to Zimmerman in Coady and Huckinvocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learning[4]. Furthermore, Diamond and Gutlohn in www.readingrockets.org/article state that vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings[5]. From the definitions above, it can be concluded that vocabulary is the total number of words which are needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers means. That is the reason why it is important to learn vocabulary.

Kinds of Vocabulary

Some experts divide two types of vocabulary: active and passive vocabulary. Harmer distinguishes between these two kinds of vocabulary[6]. The first kind of vocabulary refers to the one that the students have been taught or learnt and which they are expected to be able to use. Meanwhile, the second term refers to the words which the students will recognize when they meet them, but which they will probably not be able to pronounce. Haycraft, quoted by Hatch and Brown, divides two kinds of vocabulary, namely receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary[7].

a. Receptive Vocabulary

Receptive vocabulary is words that the learners recognize and understand when they are used in the context, but which they cannot produce. It is vocabulary that the learners recognize when they see or meet in reading text but do not use it in speaking and writing.

b. Productive Vocabulary

Productive vocabulary is the words which the learners understand, can pronounce correctly and use constructively in speaking and writing. It involves what is needed for receptive vocabulary plus the ability to speak or write at the appropriate time. Therefore, productive vocabulary can be addressed as an active process, because the learners can produce the words to express their thoughts to others.

Vocabulary Mastery

In order to understand the language, vocabulary is crucial to be mastered by the learner. Vocabulary mastery is needed to express our ideas and to be able to understand other people's saying.

According to Webster mastery refers to (1) a. the authority of a master: dominion, b. the upper hand in a contest or competition; superiority, ascendancy and (2) a. possession or display or great skill or technique, b. skill or knowledge that makes one master of a subject comment[8]. While Hornby defines mastery as complete knowledge or complete skill. From that definition, mastery means complete knowledge or great skill that makes someone master in a certain subject[9].

The specificity of any individual's vocabulary knowledge depends on the person and his motivation, desires, and need for the words[10]. Vocabulary mastery refers to the great skill in processing words of a language. It is an individual achievement and possession[11]. For that reason, the biggest responsibility in increasing the knowledge is in the individual himself. The success in widening the vocabulary mastery requires their own motivation and interest on the words of a language.

From the definition above, we can conclude that vocabulary mastery is an individual's great skill in using words of a language which is acquired based on their own interest, need and motivation. Vocabulary mastery plays an important role in the four language skill and it has to be considered that vocabulary mastery is one of the needed components of language.

Teaching Vocabulary To Children

One of the factors bringing to the unsuccessful teaching of English could be the students lack of vocabulary. Vocabulary is one of the vital elements in constructing meaningful communication. Without knowing the words needed to convey their ideas and feeling the learners can't speak and write well. A student who masters a good structure seems to lose its function whenever it is not supported by the abundance of words. In other words, it can be said that no matter how well students learn grammar and sounds of words, without words to express wide range of meanings, communication will become meaningless. In teaching vocabulary, the significant point is the selection of words the teachers want to teach. In teaching children, it is quite easy to teach concrete words and then become more abstract. The frequency also must be considered by the teacher. The teacher can decide which words to teach on the basis of frequency, how often the words are used by the speaker of the language. The teacher should teach the words that young learners are familiar with. How often words are taught depend on the themes and topics. A lot of books provide vocabulary according to the themes. For example, when there is a theme "Animals", then we can find words like names of animals, where they live, what they eat, etcetera.

Vocabulary mastery in elementary school especially at the third grade students still in the level of receptive use. They able to iedentify the words when they meet them but they are not able to produce or use the words speaking or writing. ado (1979: 121-126) gives some steps in vocabulary learning, namely: (1) listening the words, (2) pronouncing the words, (3) understanding the meaning, (4) making illustration in the form of sentence, (5) doing practice in expressing the meaning, (6) pronouncing the words in loud voice, (7) spelling the words. Based on this theory, the third grade students are able to master vocabulary in listening the words, pronouncing the words and spelling the words. Another expert, Ur (1998: 60-63) states the learners need to be taught the form of the words, then grammar, collocations, meaning and word formation. In the form of words, pronunciation and spelling should be mentioned. Ur states "The learner has to know what word sound is like (its pronunciation) and what it looks like (its spelling)." The grammar of a new item needs to be taught but it depends on what level the learners are. For example young learner in earlier age will find it difficult and confuse to be taught past forms when teaching verbs. Ur adds that the meaning of a word is primarily what it refers to in the real world, its denotation. It is important to inform learners about the meaning of the word as well as their form and grammar. Learners find this sometimes very difficult and discouraging because some words do not have just one meaning. Context helps them to find the right meaning. In word formation, using prefixes and suffixes, using hyphenated words etcetera, is too difficult for young learners.

It can be summarized that knowing the word and understanding its meaning go hand in hand. It is also easier to remember concrete words like a chair or a dog than abstract words. Young learners often put words together with what they can see, hear or with what they can touch. But as said above they also need to know other aspects of the words they learn. The third grade

students able to master vocabularies in the form of listening the words, pronouncing the words and understanding the meaning of the words.

The Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary

To get the best result on language learning, it is important to choose good and appropriate technique in teaching vocabulary. Here are some techniques of teaching vocabulary as stated by Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (1992: 90-91):

a. Using Objects

Objects can be used to show meanings when the vocabulary consist of concrete nouns. Introducing a new word by showing the real object often helps pupils to memorize the word through visualization. Objects in the classroom can be used or things brought to the classroom.

b. Drawing

Objects can either be drawn on the blackboard or drawn on flash cards. The latter can be used again and again in different contexts if they are made with cards and covered in plastic.

c. Using Illustrations and Pictures

There are plenty of vocabularies that can be introduced by using illustrations or pictures. The teacher can use learning materials provided by school. They can also make their own visual aids, or using pictures from magazines. Visual support helps pupils understand the meaning and helps to make the world more memorable.

d. Contrast

Some words are easily explained to student by contrasting it with its opposite, like the word *good* contrasted with *bad.* But some words are not. It is almost impossible to contrast the words whose opposite is the gradable one. When the word *white* contrasted with *black,* there is an "in between" word *grey.*

e. Enumeration

We can use this to present meaning. We can say clothes and explain this by enumerating or listing various items.

f. Mime, Expressions and Gestures

Many words can be introduced through mime, expressions, and gestures. For example, adjectives: sad, happy; mime: taking a hat off your head to teach hat and so on.

g. Using Opposites

This technique allows pupils to associate words with a concept they already understand in their mother tongue and often pupils will learn two words instead of one. For example, long/short, big/little, straight/curly, town/country, ill/well, and so on. Meanings can also be conveyed using simple line drawings.

h. Guessing from Context

This technique encourages pupils to take risks and guess the meanings of words they don't know as much as possible. This will help them build up their self-confidence so that they can work out

the meanings of words when they are on their own. There are many clues pupils can use to establish meanings for themselves, such as illustrations, similarity of spelling or sound in the mother tongue, and general knowledge.

i. Eliciting

This technique is more motivating and memorable by simply giving pupils a list of words to learn.

j. Translation

There are always some words that need to be translated and this technique can save a lot of time.

Other techniques of introducing new vocabulary are suggested by Gairns and Redman (1986: 76) as follows:

a. Visuals

1) Visuals

Visual techniques can be in the form of flashcards, photograph, blackboard drawings, wall charts, and realia. All of these techniques are extensively used for conveying meaning concrete nouns like animals or fruits, and certain areas of vocabulary such as professions, places and description of people and activities.

2) Mime and Gesture

These are often used to supplement other ways of conveying meaning. When teaching an item such as *to chew*, a teacher might build situation to illustrate it, make use of the blackboard and gesture to reinforce the concept.

b. Verbal Techniques

1) Use of Illustrative Situations (Oral or Written)

This could be the most helpful ways when the items become more abstract. The teacher often uses more than one situation or context to check that learners have grasped the concept.

2) Use of Synonymy and Definition

Teacher often use synonymy with low level students, where inevitably they have to compromise and restrict the length and complexity of their explanation.

3) Contrasts and Opposites

A new item like *big* is easily illustrated by contrasting it with *small* which is already known by the students. In this case, the teacher must have known exactly which vocabulary has been mastered by the students and which has not.

4) Scales

After the students have learnt two contrasted or related gradable items, this can be a useful way of revising and feeding in the new items.

5) Examples of the Type

To illustrate the meaning of subordinates, such as *flower, vegetables,* and *foods*, it is a common procedure to exemplify them e.g. rose, jasmine, and orchid are all *flower*. But the technique cannot be applied in delivering the words that belong to more than one ordinate.

c. Translation

This technique can be a very effective way to convey the meaning because it is not time consuming that might otherwise be spent on a complicated and largely unsuccessful explanation in English, and it can be a very quick way to dispose of low frequency items that may worry the students but do not warrant significant attention. The teacher give the meaning directly, so the students did not need to get involve in the process in finding the meaning.

Schmitt and McCarthy (1997: 11) propose strategies to learn vocabulary as follows: (1) guessing from context, (2) using word parts and mnemonic techniques to remember words, and (3) using vocabulary cards to remember foreign language-first language word pairs. It is supported by Decarrico in Murcia (2001: 290) who also propose three strategies to learn vocabularies. The first is guessing meaning from context; she says that a context is rich enough to adequate clues to guess word's meaning. The second is mnemonic devices: she proposes keyword technique. When seeing or hearing the target word, the learner is reminded of the keyword. The third is vocabulary notebooks; she suggests a memory aid in independent learning by setting up vocabulary notebooks. Based on the techniques used for presenting new vocabulary, the experts suggest lots more of techniques that are claimed to be helpful for students to learn vocabulary in an easier way. What the researcher sees as the better way to teach vocabulary is by learning in rich contexts.

CONCLUSION

The research has made some findings. It had been found that before the action the students' vocabulary mastery was low. As identified from the result of pre-observation and pre-test. The pre-research showed that the teacher did not use appropriate method in presenting the materials. She taught the students by translating the vocabulary. This method did not give an opportunity for the students to show their ability and potential. There was also no media used in teaching and learning process. It made the students easily get bored and pay poor attention to the lesson.

From the research, teaching vocabulary using contextual teaching and learning can improve the students' vocabulary mastery and change the students' behavior. The improvement after CTL is applied in the teaching and learning process could be seen in the increasing students' participation in learning English.

Those improvements are as follows:

1. The improvement of students' participation in attending the lesson. The students participate well in following all the procedures of the teaching learning process. They love to take part in every single activity held in teaching and learning process. They are able to make a discussion with their group. They are also good in pair and individual activity. The better participation from the students is also indicated by their willingness in asking and answering questions.

2. The improvement of learning situation. The students learn in an enjoyable situation. They find that contextual teaching and learning is not boring. They could collaborate well with other students. Contextual teaching and learning is not always held by sitting in the chair and listening

teachers' explanation for a long time, but the students have wider space to learn and this method creates a non-threatening situation which automatically made them consider that English is not a difficult subject.

3. The improvement of the students' spelling. Since the poorest component of vocabulary in the result of the first post test is spelling, the researcher and the teacher gave more spelling activities. As the result, the students could practice to write the English word and had courage to speak up in English.

4. The improvement of students' score. One of the indicators that the action is successful is the improvement of the students' mean-score.

Before using CTL, the students tend to be passive. When the teacher asked some questions, nobody wanted to answer the questions. But after CTL was applied in the class, almost all of the students raised their hands as a sign for willing to answer the questions. The students were interested and motivated in learning English. Since CTL was done in group work activity, there was no problem of shy students. The students did not feel reluctant to ask to their own friends. They worked together as a team and there was also no domination of some students. The students were more enthusiastic and active in joining the lesson. Besides, their achievement also improved, as shown by the mean score of post-test an increase of the students' achievement from pre-test.Based on the research finding above, the researcher conclude that teaching vocabulary using CTL can improve the students' vocabulary.

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