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# The Principles of Teaching and Learning Vocabulary Effectively

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**Abstract:** Vocabulary is words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning. It represents one of the most important skills necessary for teaching and learning a second or a foreign language. It is considered to be essential to improve skills such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, writing, spelling and pronunciation. Vocabulary is classified into two major categories; expressive vocabulary, such as speaking and writing; and receptive vocabulary, such as reading and listening. Vocabulary plays a crucial role in writing skill; as it is considered to be as a magical tool that a good writer utilizes it to power up any piece of writing, as it allows him to convey a particular meaning in more than one style. Learning vocabulary could be easy for some learners; however, others may find it difficult. In order to help learners who have difficulty in learning vocabularies, there are some techniques that they could utilize to make learning vocabulary easy and effective; such as repetition, practicing words in real life, linking the vocabularies to the pictures; and finally, writing down new vocabularies more than one time could be helpful. Teaching vocabulary could be hard for both teachers and learners; however, there are some ways that could make this operation easy. Using previous techniques and the following tips could fix the problem; playing games through the class such as puzzles; illustrating the meaning of the word; giving multiple meanings; creating an interesting story about it; using realia substances, presenting synonyms and antonyms; using the new word in context; using the root of the word, suffix, prefix to guess the meaning. In brief, teaching vocabulary could be effective if both teacher and the learner are interested and try to use different techniques and follow tips to success teaching/learning process.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Learning, Vocabulary, Techniques

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## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the most important skills necessary for learning and teaching a foreign language. Learning new vocabularies could enhance all other skills such as listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking, pronunciation, writing and spelling. It is considered to be essential to talk or use a foreign language; that learners aim to study such as English language, effectively [15]. It is clearly obvious that learning too much vocabulary enables people to confront with a native English speaker, understand people on TV without subtitle, realize what that English song says, get the full meaning of a text, or write a letter to a friend. It is believed that without a sufficient understanding of words; people or to be more specific students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Vocabulary is

important across the curriculum from social studies and language arts to science and mathematics. It is intimately connected to both writing skills and effective reading [5].

Across this paper, vocabulary will be clarified according to its meaning, types, importance in writing, the strategies that could be used to learn it and how it could be educated.

## 2. What Is Vocabulary

Alfaki [6] defined vocabulary as “the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning.” In other words, vocabulary is a set of familiar words within a person's language. Vocabularies usually developed with age, as a person grows up, the usage of vocabulary improved, as it serves as a useful and essential tool for communication and

acquiring knowledge. Arousing an extensive vocabulary is one of the largest challenges in learning a foreign language. Whether in one's native language or a second language, the acquisition of new vocabulary is an ongoing process [15].

### 3. Types of Vocabulary

Vocabulary could be classified into two major categories:

- 1) Expressive Vocabulary: refers to the words that are used to express ideas and thoughts; for example, Speaking and writing.

Speaking vocabulary is all the words that used in speech. It is likely to be a subset of the listening vocabulary. Due to the spontaneous nature of speech, words are often misused. This misuse, though slight and unintentional, may be compensated by tone of voice and facial expressions.

Writing vocabulary is words that are used in various forms of writing from formal essays to social media feeds. Most of written words do not commonly appear in speech. Writers generally use unlimited set of words when communicating ideas, feelings, describing subjects specially for story writers [20].

- 2) Receptive vocabulary refers to all the words that could be understand while reading books or listening to someone's speech.

Reading vocabulary is all the words they can recognize when reading. This is generally the largest type of vocabulary simply because a reader tends to read more words by reading than by listening.

Listening vocabulary is all the words that can be recognized when listening to someone speaks. People may still understand words they were not exposed to before using cues such as gestures tone, the topic of discussion and the social context of the conversation [2].

### 4. The Importance of Vocabulary in Writing

The good mechanic has a toolbox that is felled of tools. Some tools are used more than others; however, everyone has a specific purpose. Similarly, writers have a toolbox [18]. This toolbox is filled with several items such as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization rules; figurative language; rhyme; rhythm; and vocabulary [19]. Just as really good mechanics can pull out the right tools to make a good engine even more powerful, good writers can pull out the right tools at the right time to make good writing even more powerful [21]. One tool that can power up any piece of writing is a strong vocabulary; in other words, the breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary will have a direct influence upon the descriptiveness, accuracy, and quality of his or her writing [11].

Acquiring much more vocabulary is fundamental in the process of writing. Firstly, it increases the ways that someone could use to convey a particular meaning. Expressing one idea in more than one style make a piece of writing better;

especially while writing essays as an introduction and a conclusion are closely related to each other, and express the same introduction in another way could make writing a conclusion much easier [1]. Relying on one or two words to articulate an idea or thought will be repetitive and not as persuasive, as relying on a vocabulary of 10-15 similarly describe terms. With a rich vocabulary, you will not sound repetitive and boring [21]. You will be able to choose the appropriate words and express your ideas with maximum impact. At the same time, you will also be able to receive and process information in a better way. In addition, having much more vocabulary bolsters the ability to grasp ideas and think more logically, consequently it helps to interpret ideas from others, and express it in your own words, which could help in avoiding plagiarism while quoting in indirect way. Another advantage of a good vocabulary is that you will be able to create a good impression. When you articulate well, the other person will naturally be more inclined to understand your ideas [17].

### 5. Using Vocabulary to Improve Writing Skills

While improved vocabulary can enhance students' writing skills, there is no guarantee that it will do so automatically [16]. Improvement in vocabulary will result in improved writing skills only if the teacher is able to create a classroom that takes writing seriously. Hamouda and Al-Talib [8] acknowledged that the teachers' way in dealing with writing process affects the way students' interaction, too. If the teacher is interested in writing and deals seriously with the whole writing process, the students' perceptions and interest in the writing would be changed. The following are techniques teachers can use to create a writing-centered classroom:

- 1) Sharing vocabulary-rich literature. In order to help students to become good writers, using best source for teaching good writing; for instance, good books, poems, and stories that contain interesting vocabulary, teachers can both introduce new words and provide a forum for discussing them [4].
- 2) Helping students become aware and look for interesting words. There are many different forms to achieve this. For example, teacher could ask students to pair up and look for the words that attract their attention in the book, article or essay and learn how the author used it; the structure of the sentence. As a result, this would help students in their academic writing, as the structure of the sentence is important as well as vocabulary [4].
- 3) Offering a variety of writing opportunities. Writing is not easily could be learnt; much you practice much improvement could be noticed in your writing. To do so, teacher may ask students to assignments and give them choice such as journal or diary entries, weekly logs, summarizing journal entries, book reports, outlines, poetry, autobiographies, short stories, or any number of

variations on the above [16].

- 4) Providing ample time for students to fully experience the writing process. The teaching of writing should be approached as a process that must be studied in depth, and substantial blocks of time should be devoted to writing [16].
- 5) Setting up conferences between teachers and fellow students. During writing process, topics are chosen, students should meet with their teacher to discuss ideas and answer questions. The teacher's role is to encourage, build on existing strengths, and help the students to expand their abilities. Conferencing with fellow students gives the budding writer the opportunity to share ideas, brainstorm, and rework his or her project [16].

## 6. Types of Memory

Learners are different in terms of how easily they memorize vocabulary; it could be easy and difficult at the same time. What makes it easy is the ability of remember the word in few moments and what makes it difficult is remembering the same word after length of time. In terms of memory, there are three types of it: short-term store, working memory, and long-term memory, each of them has its own purpose and simply will be explained apart in next paragraphs.

Firstly, the short-term store is which is defined as the brain's capacity to hold a limited number of information, items for periods of time up to a few seconds. Thus, this kind of memory does not help students in their attempt to learn vocabulary as vocabulary is needed to be remembered always not just for few seconds [20].

The second type is the working memory that focuses on holding words long enough in your memory so that to be able to operate with them. It is the kind of memory that relies on reasoning and logic. Thus, if a student comes across a new word such as "to acknowledge" which means "to admit the knowledge of", he will be able to easily memorize it by comparing it with another word from his long-term memory, for example, "knowledge" meaning "the fact of knowing something." Using such an association will certainly help students keeping words in their memory for longer periods of time [3].

Finally, the long-term store is the most trustworthy kind of memory. Unlike the working memory which has a limited capacity of holding words in the brain, the long term memory has a tremendous capacity and its contents are durable over time. However, the fact that students forget vocabulary from one lesson to another, supports the fact that having long-term memory is not enough. Also, it affected by students' efforts and teachers' witty techniques when learning and teaching vocabulary.

The great challenge for language teacher and learners is to transform staved vocabulary from quickly forgotten to the never forgotten [20].

## 7. Techniques for Memorizing Vocabulary

In order to have a rich vocabulary, students do not only need to learn as many words as possible, but they also need to remember them; because in fact, learning is remembering. Unlike grammar learning which is based on a system of rules, learning vocabulary relies primarily on memory [20]. Consequently, it has been designed a number of techniques that meant to help learners efficiently to memorize words and help teachers as well to make the process of learning easier for their students [13].

To start with, repetition is an important technique in learning vocabulary. In order for the words to be kept as long as possible in the memory, it is necessary that they be repeated at frequent periods of time. However, repetition alone will not be effective. It must be accompanied with understanding of the meaning of words and make a correlation with other similar already learnt words [13].

Another important technique is using the newly learnt words. In this case, the teachers' role is also valuable. In the classroom, teachers should insist on practicing the news vocabulary by encouraging students to speak as much as possible and by designing vocabulary-centered activities and games. At home, students need to be motivated to individually keep on using the new words until they are stored in the long term memory [13].

Moreover, practicing vocabulary is strongly connected to applying vocabulary to students' real-life events. Learners will acquire vocabulary easily if they practice it by associating words with events from their daily life. Considering that students are presented a new word list related to the topic entitled "travelling." Learners will successfully memorize the word list by creating a real-life event, for instance "going to Italy" and then performing a situation in which all the words can be included. This can be done in classroom as well as at home and will certainly entertain students and have positive results [13].

Following up with imaging by associating words to pictures should be take into consideration of both teachers and learners. If, for example, students associate "car agency" with the image of the particular building where we go to look for cars to buy, they are for sure keep that word in their mind for longer time. Thus, it is extremely advised for the students to visualize the words they learn. This will help the learning process and will keep the words in the long-term memory [13].

In addition to the previous techniques, writing down new vocabulary more than one time into a paper could help students to memorize them. This technique does not only keep the word in the long-term memory but also assist the students to recognize the right spelling form. Also, performing new vocabulary within a sentence increase the ability of remember it. Despite that this could take some time to be done but the result of doing so is precious. As a student, I used to do so and found that this is very effective way to memorize anything whether it is vocabulary or whatever.

## 8. How to Teach Vocabulary

Looking for methods to teach students is endless job. When teacher faces problems according to teach vocabulary, he would immediately start looking for ways to enhance their vocabulary. Moreover, he would start asking fellows teachers, experts, or looking on websites and consult professionals. There are many ways used in order to teach students vocabulary. Those ways will not work if the students do not have a desire to learn or practice. Motivation plays crucial role in teaching-learning process [14].

When students are motivated, teaching process becomes easier. The ways that teacher could be used to teach vocabulary are as following:

- 1) While teaching new vocabulary, do not ever go through all words, select words that you think students do not understand and let students guess the meaning through the context. This affect the way the word goes into their memory and gives you time to finish the lesson.
- 2) In order to teach vocabulary, Robert Marzano tresses that in all content areas, direct vocabulary instruction is essential and suggests six steps:  
 Step one: The teacher explains a new word, going beyond reciting its definition (tap into prior knowledge of students, use imagery).  
 Step two: Students restate or explain the new word in their own words (verbally and/or in writing).  
 Step three: Ask students to create a non-linguistic representation of the word (a picture, or symbolic representation).  
 Step four: Students engage in activities to deepen their knowledge of the new word (compare words, classify terms, write their own analogies and metaphors).  
 Step five: Students discuss the new word (pair-share, elbow partners).  
 Step six: Students periodically play games to review new vocabulary (Pyramid, Jeopardy, Telephone) [15].
- 3) During teaching new words, create a context around words you teach. Generate contextual experience; for example, an interesting story, a series of images and a dialogue, which leaves a deep impression in students' memory. Thus, when the time comes for your class to recall a particular list of words, they'll be able to access these words with only some trouble [10].
- 4) To present new vocabulary, try always to show drawings or images. Because drawings and photos are fairly universal and understood by many students. The Internet is chockfull of photos and pictures, and there are a variety of photo-stock websites to choose from. You can make your own pictures by drawing on board or create your own characters, if you have a knack for drawing but make sure that these are large enough for everyone to see clearly if you don't have access to a smartboard. Keep the composition of your photos or drawings simple, as too many things happening at once can confuse students [10].
- 5) Present vocabulary with realia. Using more than one

sense is effective in teaching learning process; especially, teaching vocabulary. To illustrate, when teaching a lesson on how to describe the flavors of different foods; there is nothing better than to have students taste a variety of foods, condiments, herbs, and spices. As you give your class a taste of each ingredient, announce what it is and give them the accompanying statement that incorporates the vocabulary you are teaching [10].

- 6) Using opposites and synonyms to teach new vocabulary gives students the opportunity to learn twice; two instead of one. To enrich your students vocabulary, use pictures to clarify sentences, or put words into short sentences that tell a story. For example, day is the opposite of night, surely is a synonym for definitely [10].
- 7) During a lesson, always try to use open-ended questions as this could help students to use vocabulary and sometimes ask for a vocabulary that they intend to use to express their thoughts. Avoid yes/no questions and short answers.
- 8) Follow a organic and logical order when teaching new vocabulary and put words into useful phrases, sentences as often as possible. Try to review what you have taught from one lesson to the next, then engage your students to talk and make small conversation with them. Remember to encourage your students to ask you about the meanings of words and how these can be applied to their lives outside of the classroom [7].
- 9) Teaching and learning vocabulary through games are fundamental in the ESL and TEFL classrooms. They allow students to think outside the box, put what they have learnt to immediate use, create experiences with their fellows, and break boring that usually occurs during lessons. Bingo, hangman and puzzle are most popular games and activities that used to teach vocabulary [10].
- 10) Music is a fun way to teach new vocabulary as well as right pronunciation and grammar. There are many songs that could be used to teach parts of the body, days of week, months of the year and go on. The tune is catchy and has a great impact on students' minds as it and quickly saved. I used to do so with my students when teach Tamazight language [7].
- 11) Students need to understand the benefits and importance of a rich vocabulary knowledge during the studying life and further in their working life. As happens always during teaching process, some students may be naturally curious, while others need to be coaxed to show interest in the lessons. This issue could solved by finding jokes, puns and some other comedic devices to add fun to vocabulary studies [12].
- 12) Pronunciation is crucial to help students make strong connections between spoken and written language. Syllabification could be used to assist in articulating each part of the word [12].
- 13) In order to enhance writing skill, students should write

down new vocabulary that they have learnt, as there is a strong correlation between spelling and vocabulary. This helps students to access their vocabulary in both passive and active contexts [12].

- 14) Try to simplify the meaning of new vocabulary by making it close to the students' experiences, existing knowledge. However, providing students access to thesauruses and dictionaries will not always give them the information they need to understand the meaning of the word [12].
- 15) Give multiple or triple meaningful examples. Always focus on using words in contexts and sentences that are meaningful to students. But do not stop at one! Provide a wide range of examples to allow each student to connect and relate to the word [12].
- 16) Use collocation (Showing what words occur); for example, it is why we say 'see the big picture' instead of 'see the tall picture' or 10 apples is fewer than 15 apples rather than less. Collocation must occur in context, so shared reading is an excellent forum for this sort of word study [12].
- 17) Teaching the root of the word instead of teaching the definition of a word. Through this way, students can take these root words and use them to decipher words they do not know in the future [12].
- 18) Teaching vocabulary through using Context Clues in reading passages or sentences, help students to guess the definition of new words that embedded in them. This encourages critical thinking skills and helps students make connections to the word, simultaneously will help them remember its meaning [12].
- 19) Free apps like Quizlet, word up, a word a day, and many more others [9], are great for learning new vocabulary; the platform has several practice modes beyond simple flashcards, including testing, matching, and listening. You can also check out Kahoot to create fun classroom games for your students.
- 20) Depend on a single vocabulary instruction method will not create a successful learning process, besides, it could destroy the effort that the teachers provide. This is where copying answers from the dictionary is not optimal for teaching vocabulary. As a teacher, you need to use many ways, instruments, and techniques to teach vocabulary. Moreover, teachers should think about developing engaging vocabulary instructions, including through speaking, writing, and inquiry assignments.

## 9. Conclusion

Vocabulary is the most required skill when learning a foreign or second language. Vocabulary is defined as a set of familiar words within a person's language. Learning more vocabulary would affect positively on the four skills such as reading, listening, writing and speaking. In writing, vocabulary plays significant role, as the writer could express one idea in more than one style. There are some ways that

could help teachers to teach their students how to use vocabulary to improve their writing skill, such as sharing vocabulary-rich literature, assist students to be aware and look for interesting words, ask students to write several types of writings, such as diaries, summaries, and researchers, and finally, setting up conferences between teachers and fellow students.

Learning vocabulary could be difficult and could be easy, in terms of students' ability to remember the word after short time and after a length of time. However, the memory is classified into three types: the short-term store, the working memory and the long-term store. In order to learn and remember the vocabularies after a length of time, you need to repeat the word, connect it to realia, imaging, practice, use the word in real life, and finally, write the new words down more than one time.

Teaching vocabulary is challenging for teachers. However, there are many ways that could help teachers to do so, you can separate the words; in that, teach students word by word; follow Marzano's instructions as mentioned previously; create a context; show drawings or images; introduce vocabulary with realia; use antonyms and synonyms, use open-ended questions, follow organic and logical order; use music and games.

In brief, developing a strong vocabulary is not that hard when teachers and students do their effort and follow the techniques mentioned across this paper. Rich vocabulary prepares students for academic success in literature and even the sciences, where speech and writing continue to play an important role further in their working life.

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