

## SOME EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES OF TEACHING VOCABULARY

Nguyen Thi Kim Anh

Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry

\*Email [nguyenthikimanh7270@gmail.com](mailto:nguyenthikimanh7270@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

English is widely used as the international language. It is considered the second language of many countries around the world. English is one of the languages with a rich vocabulary which is one of the most important parts of language. Most teachers consider vocabulary to be a center in their teaching foreign language. Some of them find it problematic and they are confused about the best practice in the teaching and how to start forming an instructional emphasis on the vocabulary learning (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). In order to become good at English, we need a relatively large vocabulary which cannot be enriched in a short time. It requires long-term learning, preparation and accumulation process. Nevertheless EFL students encounter many difficulties learning and memorizing vocabulary. They lack of motivation for learning new words, expressions, idioms etc. Consequently, their use of words is still poor: misspellings, mispronouncements, using inaccurate words and inconsistent with context. Through this article, the writer indicates the importance of vocabulary, suggests a number of strategies of teaching vocabulary, as well as writer's personal view of the issues and uses three methods to examine their effectiveness.

*Keywords:* teaching, vocabulary, strategies, encourage, memorize.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays English is widely used as the international language. It is considered the second language of many countries around the world. Thanks to English, people around the world know each other, understand each other better. English is one of the languages with a rich vocabulary so learners face many difficulties. Learning and speaking English fluently is not easy at all, because we do not fully understand the pronunciation and the stress of words. Our students do not have the necessary vocabulary to use in their daily learning and communication.

Vocabulary is one of the most important parts of language. If you want to be good at English, even in any ability: listening, speaking, reading or writing, we also need a relatively large vocabulary. The vocabulary cannot be enriched in a short time. It requires a long-term learning, preparation and accumulation process. However, students don't like learning new words. The use of words is still poor: misspellings, mispronouncements, inaccurate words and inconsistent words with context. Most of them are used to learning the meaning of single word not knowing how to use the word. Many students try to memorize all the new words in the text, which make them think there are too many new words to learn. Consequently, they do not know how to learn vocabulary. As a teacher with a long teaching practice, I understand the difficulties they often face in learning and using English vocabulary. I want to find out the ways help them overcome these difficulties.

In this article, I'd like to suggest some methods of learning English vocabulary which hopefully help students improve their vocabulary. That's why I choose this topic.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary is considered one of most important skills which is necessary for teaching and learning a foreign language. It is the basis for the development of all the other skills: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, writing, spelling and pronunciation. Vocabulary is the main tool for the students in their attempt to use English effectively. When they confront a native English speaker, watch a movie without subtitle or listen to a favorite English song, read a text or write a letter to a friend, students will always need a number of words.

The linguist David Wilkins stated: "without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." In fact, people need to use words in order to express themselves in any language. Most learners also acknowledge the importance of vocabulary acquisition. As a teacher, I notice the fact that students usually find it difficult to speak English fluently. They usually consider speaking and writing activities exhausting, tedious because they don't have enough words to express their ideas and they have to use the same expressions and words and the way they show their ideas is boring and poor. They are too shy to communicate due to the lack of vocabulary. Other students confronted with the problem of forgetting the words immediately after the teacher has elicited their meaning or after they have looked them in the dictionary, and this is a cause of the lack of vocabulary. The more words students learn, the easier they memorize them.

The teacher's role is extremely essential in helping students to improve their vocabulary. Nevertheless, teachers have not recognized the tremendous importance of helping their students to develop an extensive vocabulary and they are not fully equipped with vocabulary teaching methods. There was an approach which emphasized the primary importance of teaching grammatical structures. So few words were introduced in such courses and most often, they were limited and related to the grammar structures taught.

Today the teaching of vocabulary has been given more attention. However, learning and memorizing vocabulary for students is still extremely difficult because of a number of issues as homophones, homonyms, homographs, pronunciation of a certain word etc.

Students find it not only difficult to learn new words or phrases but also easy to forget them. A research shows that there are two leading reasons to easy forgetting vocabulary. New other vocabulary is added, but insufficient recycling. The introduction of new words especially makes students easily forget them. Simultaneously, insufficient recycling of the vocabulary also leads to forgetting them.

Therefore it is necessary for teachers to find out and use the appropriate teaching methods of vocabulary that help students easily learn new words and frequently use them. If so, students can improve their vocabulary.

This research is an attempt to introduce the teachers with these strategies.

In every English class, there must be an "introduction of vocabulary" step. In order to make the lesson highly effective, students must know how to pronounce and how to use words. Consequently, a teacher has to choose the suitable methods so that students easily understand, remember and use the words. Through the teaching practice and consultancy of my colleagues, I would like to offer some methods of teaching and learning common English vocabulary in which students are interested.

## The strategies of introducing vocabulary

### *1. Using visual aids*

Teachers can use available objects. When students learn a word that is related to real things in our lives, the teacher can instruct students to go home use the objects to revise them.

### *2. Having students make sentences with words*

After teaching some words, teachers ask students to make sentences with these words. With this method, students can remember and use the words and phrases correctly. I can take an example for this method. After teaching words such as a book, a table etc., a teacher asks students make simple sentences like:

This is a table.

The book is new.

### *3. Using pictures, photos*

In order to introduce the words related to the unavailable things, teachers can use pictures or photos.

### *4. Having students give antonyms*

The teacher asks a student in a group give a word and the one of the other group has to give the opposite word to the word (this antonym is learned in the previous lesson. ). This method helps students recall the words they have learned before, through which students can recall the word again and more deeply.

Ex: big > < small

short > < long

### *5. Having students give synonyms*

Students can recall the words they have previously learned by giving synonyms to the words they have just learned. If there are words that students do not remember, the teacher will support. With this method, students also remember and review the words they have learned before.

Ex.: football = soccer

a bike = a bicycle

### *6. Teaching students to learn how to spell and pronounce words*

Students learn not only the meaning of words but also how to spell and pronounce words, which helps them pronounce them correctly. Pronunciation plays a very important role in learning foreign. It is the foundation of two learners' speaking and listening skills. Good pronunciation helps learners speak confidently and listen better, which makes students use the word more effectively in their own learning process.

### *7. Providing groups of vocabulary*

With the help of this method students can systemize the words they have learned, thereby helping students to consolidate and remember deeper, longer. It also makes it easy to practice speaking and writing

Ex. Food: fish, meat, beef, cheese, butter, vegetable...

School: class, classroom, table, desk, board, book, notebook...

#### *8. Having students translate articles, stories*

Translating is one of the very important skills in learning English. Therefore, vocabulary is an essential tool for translating lessons. Students can memorize vocabulary longer, using previously learned words. With this method, students know how to use grammar more effectively and remember vocabulary longer.

#### *9. Introducing the family of a new word*

When introducing new words to students, teachers should provide their relative words (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) so students can know, understand and put simple sentences with those words. Thanks to this method students develop basic vocabulary.

Ex.

a. teacher (n)

→teach (v)

b. drive (v)

→driver (n)

c. difference (n)

→different (adj.)

→differently (adv.)

→differ from (v)

#### *10. Requiring a regular study of vocabulary from students*

Teachers recommend that students spend a little time every day, about 30 minutes on vocabulary. They would rather learn a little each day than much time occasionally. Students will find it easier to learn words following this way.

#### *11. Asking students to use word cards*

Teachers can instruct students to make a set of word cards which is an easy way to revise vocabulary. These are 4 steps of making word cards:

- Write a word, its stress, pronunciation, part of speech etc. on one side.
- Write the word's definition or illustration or translation on the other side.
- Always carry the cards along with you and use them whenever you have free time, e.g. on the bus, on the train, waiting for someone.
- Get a card, look at one side and try to remember the content on the other side.

If you don't like using cards, there are a number of applications available for you to download. They work well.

#### *12. Speaking to students with rich vocabulary*

Teachers should take full advantage of classroom time by using rich vocabulary in everyday instruction and interactions with students about which students always complain at beginning. They want their teacher communicate with them as usually as possible in their native language. However, surely they get accustomed to listening to every word you say and replying easily.

#### *13. Having students play Vocabulary games*

Allowing students many opportunities to practice new vocabulary through games and classroom activities brings a lot of fun, making them are excited about studying. They become attentive.

#### *14. Having students sing a song*

Students are always eager for songs at top of the world rankings often presented by the singers from countries where English is the first or second language. They are ready to sing the song again and again, They can memorize the song unexpectedly quickly. Both teachers and students feel relaxed and comfortable at the lesson. In addition music integrated lessons encourage student autonomy. After school they will learn more about the songs, the singers performing them, even their country and culture. Autonomy is extremely essential in a student-centered classroom with communicative approach.

Teachers should select songs with catchy tunes which are rich in vocabulary and common English expressions. For university students teachers can find the song lyrics online, add images for key words, display the lyrics on a large screen as you play the song on a CD and sing along.

The above are some strategies of teaching vocabulary I have applied during my teaching practice and they are very effective ways.

### **3 AND METHODOLOGY**

In general, this section describes how the study was conducted. The subject matter of this section are: (1) the study design; (2) the sample population (targeted research); (3) data collection techniques and instrument development; (4) and data analysis techniques.

#### *Qualitative methodology*

I was conducting my research following qualitative methodology because Hinchey (2008) stated that the quantitative perspective claimed there is a unique truth existing independent of subjective human desire and being waited to be explored while the qualitative one argued that there are many various realities which depend on our senses and background that the knowledge human acquires is indeed the individual perception.

Qualitative methodology helps me have a deep look inside the issue and understand how my students make their progresses in improving their vocabulary. (Different Kinds of Qualitative data collection methods/ Maria Smith and Tamsin Bowers-Brown/112).

In order to collect data for my research, I used three following methods: semi-structured interview, open class observation and open-ended questionnaire the knowledge from which is subjective and it includes bias, a feature of qualitative research. (Lena Dahlberg and Colin McCaig, 2010). Yet it could provide deep insight into the issue.

#### **3.1 Data collection**

##### ***3.1.1 Semi-structured Focus group Interview***

I employ semi-structured focus group interviews to learn students' the ways students use to learn vocabulary, their attitude toward the importance of vocabulary. Using this method, I could encourage my shy students who rarely dared to express criticism of their teachers or their teaching methods to talk more freely about their wishes (Lena Dahlberg and Colin McCaig, 2010, p. 23) because of traditional rules in Vietnam. Hinchey (2008, p. 82) pointed out that strengths of semi-structured interview make them feel more confident and evokes "a kind of creative synergy".

The duration for conducting semi-structure interviews is a week. Each focus group interview is scheduled to last about 20 minutes. I randomly chose five students from each piloted class whose order in their class are 3, 8, 15, 21, and 46. The total number of interviewed groups was 3. Such a

way of selection as Baker's (2011, pp. 269-273) stated could supply various data to the interviewer and give sample students more explanation if necessary (Lena Dahlberg and Colin McCaig, 2010, p. 119). All interview were recorded on audiotape and taken notes by the researcher.

### **3.1.2 Open class observation**

Open class observation was chosen because of its popularity and effectiveness in school setting as Maria Smith and Tamsin Bowers-Brown stated in Different kinds of qualitative data collection methods/122. Using this method, I could be involved in activities as a teacher and adjust materials or method of teaching.

During the process of research, I observed both student activities and attitude inside classroom and during the 15-minute break time after the innovated lesson and simultaneously ticked in the checklist. The checklist had 2 parts. The first section included information about the class, the strategy of teaching, and the date of lesson. The second one was divided into such 3 columns as contents I wanted to investigate, extents of frequency with 3 sub-columns (yes, somewhat, not at all), and the last was note and comment. All 5 innovated lessons in each sample class were observed. The total number of observed lessons was 15. Carrying out class oobservations for periods confirmed stability of student behavior and attitude in reaction to the innovation.

### **3.1.3 Open-ended questionnaire**

An open-ended questionnaire which Hinchey (2008, p. 83) rated as the most effective method to collect large data for a short time was used to support the knowledge withdrawn from the methods above.

In order to determine students' interest and attitude toward to strategies used in the classroom, English Roszainora Setia et al. (2012) used a questionnaire. O'Neill (2009) also used it to explore facets of pedagogy for English as a Foreign Language while Pangsapa (2006) employed this method to investigate how students evaluated benefits from the new methods. The questionnaires were delivered to all students in the three sample classes. The questionnaire had to be completed within 15 minutes and given back to the researcher shortly thereafter. Discussion was not allowed in order to avoid identical questionnaires

## **3.2 Triangulation**

Using three methods meets triangulation which helps a reseacher decrease ambiguity and increase his/her confidence in the research findings. (Patricia H. Hinchey Action Research /76). The duration for data collection is limited and same size is small, so triangulation is required to ensure data validity as Lena Dahl 35 explained.

## **3.3 Data analysis**

All data collected by three methods were analyzed after being read many times, described with comments. While reading data, I identified the patterns which took shape in the behavior, relationship and emotion categories. The next step was coding the identified categories. After coding categories, it was easy to formulate key findings. The findings were Student attitude toward the importance of vocabulary and effective ways of studying new words, phrases or expressions etc.

### **3.3.1 Focus group interview:**

Recording and video tapes from interviews are transcribed verbatim immediately at the of the interview day, which helped me to recall every detail of the interviews. After multiple reading, transcripts were described, coded and compared in order to withdraw findings.

### **3.3.2 Open class observation**

All open class observation checklists and notes as well as comment were described and coded into categories, thanks to which the patterns emerged. Interesting stories, infrequent or unique event happening during observation were taken note of in order to illustrate the themes. Student reactions both inside and outside the classroom were grouped into “student attitudes towards innovated material”, “effective ways of learning vocabulary”, “effects of innovation on student autonomy”

### **3.3.3 Open-ended questionnaire**

I used Excel Software spreadsheet to analyze the data from questionnaires which took me a week.

## **4 RESULTS**

Data analysis has revealed the following important findings:

### **4.1 Student attitude toward traditional lessons**

Most of them say YES answering the question "Do you like learning English?", adding they don't like learning vocabulary. It is easy for them to forget it. They are scared and lazy to learn English vocabulary. They don't have autonomy in learning.

### **4.2 Student attitude toward the innovated lessons**

Students are excited in the innovated lessons. They want to show themselves by giving their knowledge about the words, phrases or expressions. The applied strategies attract students' attention till the end of class.

### **4.3 Effects of the strategies on student autonomy**

Students talked about the words both before and after learning them. They could share information or pictures they found on the Internet with the teacher.

### **4.4 Effects of the lesson with the strategies on student**

At the end of the innovation, approximately 77% of students said that it was easier for them to memorize and use learned vocabulary during studying and in a real life.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, vocabulary is the most required skill when learning a foreign language. It is on vocabulary that all the other skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are based and developed. This research has shown why it is important to learn new words and why English vocabulary is difficult to memorize. And finally, it has suggested methods and techniques that help to understand the new vocabulary by using the working memory and to transfer it in the long-term memory.

## REFERENCE

- [1] Atta-Alla, M. N. (2012). Developing Adult English Language Learners' Vocabulary Skills through Children's Rhymes and Songs. *English Language Teaching*, 79-90.
- [2] Baker, A. A. (2011). Discourse Prosody and Teachers' Stated Beliefs and Practices. *TESOL Journal*, 269.
- [3] Hinchey, P. H. (2008). *Action Research*. New York, New York, USA: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- [4] Jasone Cenoz & Ma Luisa Garcia Lecumber . (1999). The acquisition of English pronunciation: Learners' views. *International journal of applied linguistic*, 9.
- [5] Kawulich, B. B. (2005). Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6.
- [6] Kim, O. V. (2011). Upper-Intermediate-Level ESL Students' Summarizing in English. *TESOL Journal*, 337.
- [7] Lecumber, J. C. (1999). The acquisition of English pronunciation: Learners' views. *International journal of applied linguistic*, 9.
- [8] Lena Dahlberg and Colin McCaig. (2010). *Practical research and evaluation*. London: SAGE Publication Ltd.
- [9] Melanie Pickens & Charles J. Eick. (2009). Studying Motivational Strategies Used by Two Teachers in Differently Tracked Science Courses. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 353.
- [10] Murphey, T. (1990). The Song stuck in my head phenomenon: a melodic Din in the LAD?'. *System*, 53-64.
- [11] O'Neill, S. (2009). EFL Proficiency Level and Differences in Japanese Secondary School. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 49–71.
- [12] Roszainora Setia, R. A. (2012). English Songs as Means of Aiding Students' Proficiency Development. *Asian Social Science*, 271-272.
- [13] Roszainora Setia, Rozlan Abdul Rahim, Gopala Krishnan Sekharan Nair, Aileen Farida binti Mohd Adam,. (2012). English Songs as Means of Aiding Students' Proficiency Development. *Asian Social Science*, 271-272.
- [14] Topkaya, E. Z. (2012). A Contrastive Qualitative Evaluation of Two Different Sequential Program Launched at the School of Foreign Languages of a Turkish University. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 86-87.
- [15] Walker, R. (2012). *Pronunciation for Young Learners*. Oxford University Press, 1.
- [16] Xiangming Li Brand, M. (2009). Effectiveness of Music on Vocabulary Acquisition, Language Usage, and Meaning for Mainland Chinese ESL learners. *Contributions to Music Education*, 73-84.
- [17] John Hughes, Helen Stephenson, Paul Dummet. (2017) *National Geographic A1-A2*
- [18] John Hughes, Helen Stephenson, Paul Dummet. (2017) *National Geographic A2-B1*
- [19] *English Vocabulary in use* – Oxford University Press, 2001
- [20] *Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary* - Cambridge University Press, 1987
- [21] *Teaching English* – Becky Tarver Chase, 1987
- [22] *New English Files* - Oxford University Press, 2005