

# EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR ELF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS TO INCREASE BEGINNER'S LEVEL VOCABULARY

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**Abstract.** *This study is conducted in order to provide EFL Learners and Teachers with a guideline to increase basic-level vocabulary with various ways of functional techniques and applications. Moreover, the introduction of this systemic way of learning vocabulary shall enable learners to write in English orthographically correctly and speak without pronunciation errors as well as structural inaccuracies. This study is carried out empirically while observing the sample population directly. Despite the level of one's knowledge of grammar and macro skills of the English language, possession of enough vocabulary plays the role undoubtedly crucial in the learning and teaching of the English language. Inappropriate teaching and learning techniques to increase vocabulary prevent learners from reaching advanced level and hence even after reaching the advanced level they tend to make spelling mistakes, collocational errors and structural inaccuracies. Developing vocabulary at the very beginning level of learning requires teachers and learners to pay attention to essential factors like the spelling of the word, pronunciation corresponding to the spelling, different parts of speech the word belongs to and meaning variation according to the word class changes and secondary factors that help learners increasing vocabulary through word family and word tree, acquiring thorough knowledge in collocation, synonyms, antonyms, homophones, word tree and so on and so forth. This article will enable learners to increase their vocabulary effectively as well as teachers to teach vocabulary effectively. The findings of this research have been greatly regarded as beneficial by both EFL/ESL teachers and learners.*

**Keywords:** *vocabulary, ESL Teaching, ESL Learning, vocabulary teaching.*

## Introduction to the importance of Vocabulary

Words in speaking relate with sounds which we know as phonemes likewise words in writing are known as morphemes. Thorough understanding of words as almost everyone knows what David Wilkins (1972) said, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". Although numerous studies have been conducted in the field of vocabulary learning and teaching, I could find very little work on the effective learning of vocabulary paying attention to important aspects every learner should pay attention to when learning a word likewise every teacher does when teaching. After every English language test, be it school level, after school, professional English or IELTS-like tests, I hear candidates say "I didn't have enough vocabulary to write, read and understand everything in the test well". Not only students but also teachers say, "Teaching vocabulary is the difficult part". The majority of the teachers teach and students learn only the meaning of a new word without considering the word class and other functions of the word. M Joseph (2011); and AKH Alghamdi (2018), introduced that Vocabulary teaching and learning is a constant challenge for both teachers and students. M Joseph (2011), further mentioned that "historically there has been minimal focus on vocabulary instruction in the ESL classroom. Due to this, an increased emphasis on vocabulary development is crucial for the English language learner in the process of language learning". Not only that, Jihyun Nam (2010), introduced that "students often find that lack of vocabulary knowledge is an

obstacle to learning”. Developing vocabulary among L2 learners needs every teacher and learner to pay their attention very well on multiple important aspects. We will discuss those important aspects and the usage of them individually in this paper. Besides, reading numerous articles on vocabulary development, I have put my personal teaching experience in this research.

### **Literature Review**

The 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary defines the word ‘vocabulary’ into four different ways, the first is ‘all the words that a person knows or uses’, the second is ‘all the words in a particular language’ then says ‘the words that people use when they are talking about a particular subject’ finally, ‘a list of words with the meaning, especially in a book for learning a foreign language’. Pavicic (2008), quoted Oxford, 1990; Stoffer, 1995, cited in Schmitt, 1997, a list of 58 vocabulary learning strategies was compiled on the basis of relevant literature inspection, considering both learners’ retrospective descriptions of their own strategies and teachers’ experiences. According to McCartty (1990), it is not important to know how much an L2 learner knows the grammar and the sound of language, without vocabulary one cannot understand others neither can he express his own idea in the language. Jihyun Nam (2010) quoting Read (2004) distinguished incidental vocabulary learning and intentional learning, with the main focus on the former, giving particular attention to the extent to which students can learn vocabulary items incidentally while engaging in other language-learning activities. Furthermore, to support incidental vocabulary learning in the ESL classroom, it would be effective for teachers to provide students with target vocabulary items through tasks, as well as to ask them to read only the texts that include the target words. M Joseph (2011); AKH Alghamdi (2018), introduced that Vocabulary teaching and learning is a constant challenge for both teachers and students. M Joseph (2011), further mentioned that “historically there has been minimal focus on vocabulary instruction in the ESL classroom. Due to this, an increased emphasis on vocabulary development is crucial for the English language learner in the process of language learning”. Not only that, Jihyun Nam (2010), introduced that “students often find that lack of vocabulary knowledge is an obstacle to learning”. Laufer & Hill (2000), when it comes to the matter of learning a new word when reading, students can always stretch their hands to a dictionary with various options like pictorial and verb cues. Crow, J. T. (1986) productive knowledge of a word in speaking and writing is known as productive or active vocabulary while receptive knowledge of a word to understand reading and listening is known as receptive or passive words. AKH Alghamdi (2018), quoted two types of strategies such as direct as ‘mental strategy’ in which ESL learners develop vocabulary intentionally through cognition, memorization, and compensation and Indirect strategy comprises the use of metacognition, affective strategy and social strategies from Oxford R, Crookall D (1990). Besides receptive and productive vocabularies, T.A Belisle has further outlined ‘depth and breadth’ of vocabulary. In which T.A Belisle elaborated that these vocabulary learning strategies deal with morphology, phonology, syntax, sociolinguistic aspects, differences between written and spoken uses, and strategies for approaching unknown words while. Arundhathi Y (2018), outlined a clear necessity of vocabulary in tests such as the GRE, GMAT and SAT and English language proficiency tests such as the IELTS, TOEFL and PTE a great importance to vocabulary is sided

### **Purpose of the study:**

This paper describes the importance of increasing vocabulary in a way that is effective for learners and teachers. It further gives importance to the main factors and secondary factors that learners and teachers should specific attention to in the process of learning and teaching vocabulary. Henceforth, it intends to help learners to develop their vocabulary in a systemic way through which they can write without spelling errors and speak without pronunciation error.

### **Spelling and pronunciation:**

Nation, I. S. P. (2001), One aspect of gaining familiarity with the written form of words is spelling. Arundhati Y (2018), “Learning new words requires one to look at spelling because it affects the quality of writing, then follows meaning, pronunciation and usage”. Spelling and pronunciation of English words are strange and even funny in some instances. For example, words have ‘ow’ sound ‘aw’ and, words have ‘aw’ sound /ɔ:/; like ‘dawn’ is read as /dɔ:n/ while ‘ow’ in down sounds /aʊ/ and it is read as /daʊn/. Likewise, ‘on’ in Wonder is read as /'wʌndər/ while wander is read as /'wɒn.dər/. When we consider the word wonder has ‘on’ sounds /ʌn/ in contrast the word wander has ‘an’ sounds /ɒn/. It is crucial that teachers take these strange settings into consideration while teaching words by taking comparative examples to give learners explanations. Teaching spellings can be different according to the type of the word.

Spelling patterns of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and so on would slightly be different with exceptions. For example, singular nouns ending in ‘f, or fe’ would replace ‘f’ into ‘v’ and add ‘es’ like self becomes selves, however, both scarfs and scarves are correct yet belief does only get an ‘s’ like beliefs. A noun ‘practice’ becomes a verb ‘practise’ so does ‘advice’ to ‘advise’. Spelling variation does of course occur in Great Britain English and North American English like ‘neighbour – neighbor, centre – center, dialogue – dialog’ yet the number of words concerned seems negligible. J. Richard Gentry, in his Spelling Connections: Current Research on Spelling Instruction remarked that “Advanced research in cognitive science, including brain scan science, is demonstrating that spelling may be the missing link to reading success in America, where 66% of fourth graders read below proficiency levels”. Today than ever before that spelling is foundational for reading and is the missing link for reading success.

Phonemic patterns are all about understanding the relationship between letters and their corresponding sounds is an important stage in the development of learning the reading. skill for successful reading and spelling performance. Everyone knows, unfortunately, not all words in the English language can be spelt correctly using letter-sound correspondence. It is important that teachers explain this as and when there is a word brought to the teacher by learners. Letter ‘C’ followed by ‘a, o, u’ and other consonants in general sound /k/ therefore, ‘cat’ reads on its individual letter sounds as it corresponds; c = /k/, a = /æ/ and t = /t/ and ‘pin’ reads /pin/. However, this approach does not always work well when we consider the whole-word reading approach. Mountain is not read as /'maʊntən/ where there is no /eu/ or /ai/ likewise are some other words like friend /frend/, yacht /yɒt/, laugh /la:f/. These kinds of irregular spelling patterns should be taught differently with a well-set flow that enables students to understand and consider learning fun.

Besides the phonemic pattern approach, teachers can also help learners improve their spelling and pronunciation using morphemic approach. If a student asks the teacher the meaning of the word ‘definitely’ the teacher explains the students the morphograph of the word by dividing the word into prefix, suffix and base or root word. Take the word ‘definitely’ as an example, it can be divided into (prefix) *de* + (base) *finite* + (suffix) *ly* becomes definitely. Pronunciation of morphemic expressions like *-tion*, *-sion*, *-cian* are added depending on the sound of the word. Students should listen to the pronunciation attentively to understand the difference between the spelling that *-tion* in words like action, option, emotion and so on sounds /ʃən/ similarly *-cian* in words like magician, technician, electrician does also sound the very same way as /ʃən/. On the other hand, *-sion* in words like vision, television, division, decision does sound /zən/.

Silent letters are also another important factor every teacher should pay attention to. There are both vowel and consonant letters that function in various places as silent. When explaining

words that have silent letters it is important that teachers mention the silent function of the letter in the word providing students with some more examples and comparison.

Learning words using etymology or origin of the word also helps learners understand the meaning well. Vocabulary related to technical, linguistic, grammar, field of study etc are easy to learn and remember using etymology. For example, 'conjunction' is a grammatical word of which the origin according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 9th edition, Oxford University Press, (2015), says *late Middle English: via Old French from Latin conjunctio(n-), from the verb conjungere, from con- 'together' + jungere 'to join'*; words we use to join two words or phrases together.

Pronunciation of word changes as the form of the word does, 'history' is pronounced /hɪstri/, while the adjective 'historic' of noun 'history' reads as /hɪstɒrɪk/, likewise, advertisement as noun sounds /əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/ while the verb advertise reads as /əd'vɜ:təɪz/

Teachers should be very well aware that spelling and pronunciation are tight knit while there are considerable differences too. When teaching a new word teachers should pay attention to the spelling and the pronunciation in a way that would make the learning easy for the student.

#### **Word class of the word and meaning or meanings of the word**

Knowing the word class of the word helps learning the multiple meanings of the word according to the word class. As we already have seen above, many teachers in general use grammar translation method to teach the meaning of words. It is imperative that teachers pay attention to the meaning or meanings of all words students ask them. In many cases when a student asks the teacher the meaning of 'pen', the spelling and pronunciation have very little to concentrate as the sounds corresponding to letters sound yet the meaning plays an important role. Almost all teachers either take a pen from the bag and show or draw a pen by chalk or marker, google an image of the pen to show. Whereas 'to write something' is also another meaning to 'pen' neither do teachers give any example sentence to the word 'pen' as a verb like *'He penned a letter to the local newspaper'*. There are some other words like 'help'. When a student asks the teacher the meaning of 'help' many teachers explain both noun and verb usage however many don't teach other situations like help means giving food/drink. *e.g.; If you want another drink, just help yourself. And, Can I help you to some more salad?* Help also means 'steal' for example: *He'd been helping himself to the money in the cash register.* So, help does not only mean make something easy or better but also means to serve food and steal something.

Let's now take the word 'fast' to understand the interconnection between the word class of the word and the meanings of the word.

Fast as noun means – a period during which you do not eat food, especially for religious or health reasons; *e.g.: to go on a fast or to break your fast.*

Fast as a verb means – to eat little or no food for a period of time, especially for religious or health reasons; *e.g.: Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan. During the month of Ramadan, we fast from dawn to sunset.*

Fast as an adjective means – 1) moving or able to move quickly. *e.g.: a fast car/horse / the world's fastest runner.* 2) happening in a short time or without delay. *e.g.: the fastest rate of increase for years. a fast response time.* 3) able to do something quickly. *e.g.: a fast learner and so on.*

Fast as an adverb means – 1) quickly. *e.g.: Don't drive so fast! How fast were you going? I can't go any faster.* 2) in a short time; *e.g.: without delay Children grow up so fast these days. Britain is fast becoming a nation of fatties.* 3) firmly; completely *Within a few minutes she was fast asleep (= sleeping deeply). The boat was stuck fast (= unable to move) in the mud.*

It should now be clear from aforementioned examples that we as teachers should be able to explain different meanings of the word that fit diverse situations and at least the main variations in meanings of the word according to the word class.

### **Secondary factors**

Differ according to which part of speech does the word belong to. When teachers teach a word that belongs to noun the student first be imparted if the word is a count or uncount noun therefore, he won't be wrong in the use of the word. For example, in general we use the word 'accommodation' as an uncount noun for we cannot say 'do you want me to arrange an accommodation' instead 'do you want me to arrange accommodation' however in formal English we use this to mean an agreement or arrangement between people or groups with different opinions which is acceptable to everyone; the process of reaching this agreement. *e.g.:* 1) They were forced to reach an accommodation with the rebels. 2) The two countries should be persuaded to work towards some sort of mutual accommodation. This knowledge helps learners to use modifiers and the articles accurately.

Pluralisation of a noun word and its pronunciation after pluralisation are some added crucial factors every teacher should pay attention to when teaching a noun. There are regular pluralisation and irregular pluralisation and every teacher should explain how the word in question becomes plural. Some nouns like 'trousers, jeans, socks, sunglasses, scissors' only have a plural form. They cannot be used with numbers, including the names of certain tools, instruments and articles of clothing which have two parts. Following are some uncountable nouns often used wrongly *accommodation, advice, chewing gum, feedback, furniture, equipment, information, luggage, news, progress, software.*

### **Verbs:**

When a teacher is approached by a student regarding a verb, the teacher should pay attention to the use of the verb. It is more important for the teacher to explain the use of the verb than translating the verb into the first language. If we take the verb 'discuss' as an example, both Tamil and Sinhala speakers use this verb in L1 with a preposition 'about' while discuss in English never collocates with 'about'. Therefore, it is crucial that the teacher explains the usage of every verb and the nature of the verb. Then the teacher should impart the nature of transitive and intransitive, ditransitive verbs to students. The definition of transitive and intransitive verbs, the way they're mentioned in both printed dictionaries and online dictionaries. And ways that go wrong when we don't understand the nature of transitive and intransitive verbs. The use of formal and informal verbs as well as slangs are also important things – as teachers, we ourselves should be thorough about formal, informal and slang use of verbs and explain to students correctly. For example, when a boy reaches the teacher asking the meaning of 'What's up? Or What's up'. We should first explain to the boy that this is an informal expression. Either we can use it to ask how someone is or what someone has been doing: "Hi, Roy, what's up?" "Nothing much." Or used to ask someone what the problem is: "What's up - why does everyone look so serious?" or "What's up with Terry?". It is not good to use this expression with elderly or officers like principal and so on for this is an informal expression.

Verbs' spelling patterns in different verb forms is another vitally important factor every learner and teacher should pay attention to. To explain this, I have taken the following four verbs 'read, write, talk and go'. Verbs can be mainly classified as base, third person singular, past, present participle, past participle,

When changing a base verb to third person singular, the verb gets 's/es/ies' added to it; read – reads, write – writes, talk – talks and go – goes.

Base verb to past is a wide area that has both regular and irregular verbs with multiple changing patterns; read – read (only pronunciation changes), write – wrote (it is an irregular verb), talk – talked (regular verb) and go – went.

Base verb to present participle is again has number irregularity in spelling and so on. Read – reading, write – writing, talk – talking, go – going. Teachers should also be able to explain the irregularity in present participle verbs like sit – sitting, begin – beginning, submit – submitting. The rule of CVC type verbs and final syllable stress are two main reasons for this ending; consonant doubling should also be explained to students.

Base verb to past participle has also regular or irregular link between past verb. Some past participle verbs are similar to base verbs, some are like past verbs and some are different from both base and past verbs; read – read – read, write – wrote – written, talk – talked – talked, go – went – gone.

Adjectives is another type of word class which also has considerable importance every teacher should pay attention to? Ability to distinguish adjectives in a sentence alone is an important practice to comprehend the meaning of the sentence accurately. Forming adjectives from nouns and verbs is another important knowledge every teacher should be in possession of.

Adverbs do also play an adjective-like role in vocabulary development however thorough knowledge in adverb types shall enhance the comprehension level of a sentence considerably well. In terms of Adjectives and Adverbs, teachers should be able to distinguish them imparting students with the right spelling pattern and meaning changes. Prepositions, Conjunctions and Interjections are also words with sound importance every teacher should be able to give detailed explanations about to students. It is further important for a teacher to explain the role of similar words function as prepositions and adverbs as well.

### **Collocations:**

Manfu Duan (2012), The idea of collocation was first put forward by J. R. Firth in 1957. Ages ago in Sri Lankan context teacher showed less interest in teaching collocation in contrast modern technology and availability of online learning facilities have shown modern teachers the importance of teaching collocation to score well in international English language tests like IELTS. It is unfortunate that there are still people, even academics, who say ‘you did this mistake’ instead ‘you made this mistake’ which is a miscollocation.

Both ‘fast’ and ‘quick’ function equally as adjectives and adverbs. Yet, we don’t call fast meal but fast food and not quick food but quick meal. Teachers should treat collocations as single units of language. Train students to think of collocational components as individual blocks or chunks, for example; the word ‘work’ functions as both noun and verb. When it comes to the matter of learning verb all collocational patterns should be learnt as one unit and separately.

*work at something: I've been working at my assignment all day.*

*work on something: He is working on a new novel.*

*work for somebody/something: She works for an engineering company.*

*work in something: I've always worked in education.*

*work with somebody/something: Do you enjoy working with children?*

*work as something: My son is working as a teacher.*

*work on somebody/something: His charm doesn't work on me (= doesn't affect/impress me)*

*work for something: She dedicated her life to working for peace.*

*work to do something: The committee is working to get the prisoners freed.*

Teachers should be able to elaborate the differentiation among each collocational pattern like ‘work at’ gives more emphasis on the specific end goal they’re working towards. If we take

our aforementioned example sentence, *I've been working at my assignment all day*. It means the speaking working on the submission of the assignment as the end goal of the work while 'work on' places emphasis on what the person is doing at present, *He is working on a new novel*. Means the person is writing his novel bit by bit. Similarly, 'work for' means the employer or the company gave employment and so on and so forth should in detail be discussed with students.

Many among us, as the influence of first language intend to use prepositions after or before some words which are actually miscollocations in English. For example, people say 'Peter discussed about his future plan.' And 'Anne helped to her brother' are two example sentences in which the use of 'about' after discuss and 'to' after help are purely an influence of the mother tongue. Whereas in English they don't collocate in this way. There are also some words, people tend to miss the preposition which is part of collocation. For example; 'Look the sky' is incorrect but it should be 'look at the sky'. There are some other circumstances that use incorrect preposition for example; 'we participated at the meeting' is incorrect hence it should be 'we participated in the meeting'. Moreover, 'She was discharged from hospital.' doesn't collocate but it is 'She was released from hospital.'

So, proper explanation of collocation for students is vital and teaching the use of dictionary's collocational patterns like *help sb (somebody) do sth (something)*, *help with sth*, *help sb with sth*, *help sb in doing sth* and *kind of usages* shall definitely make the learning about collocation of students from dictionary easier and fun. *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* is indeed an excellent guide for teachers and learners also there are some online resources help teachers and learners improve their collocation 1) <https://dev.ozdic.com/> 2) <https://www.freecollocation.com/>

Idioms do picturise the level of one's language proficiency comparatively higher. Yet, personal interest in the usage of idioms differ. Teachers should best utilise all the opportunities to explain idioms with the word learning at the moment. For example, if teaching is discussing the word 'moon' it is good to teach students with the meaning of moon explained by showing the image or drawing it on board, explaining to students that 'be over the moon' is an idiom which we use to express our extreme happiness. For example, if you say 'Kosala passed the test and she is over the mean.' It means she is extremely happy as she passed the test. In this similar pattern teachers can also explain phrasal verbs. When we discuss the word 'moon' we can say 'moon around / moon about' means *to spend time doing nothing or walking around with no particular purpose, especially because you are unhappy*.

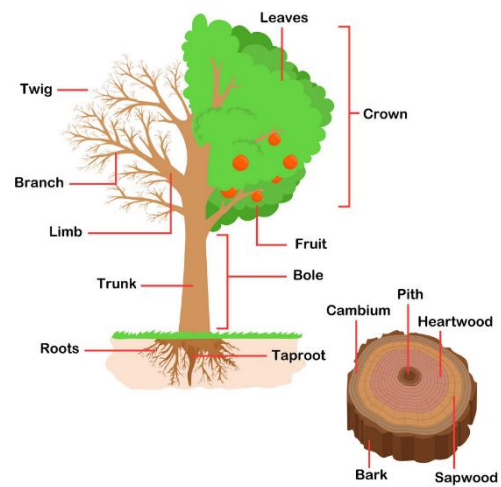
Word family is one of the important techniques to increase one's vocabulary. Efficient use of morphemic components and its influence in the meaning of a word as prefix and suffix would enhance the understanding of vocabulary and increase it. If we take the word 'appreciate' as an example; when teachers teach the word appreciate, they can also explain students of the word family that *appreciate*, *appreciable*, *appreciably*, *appreciated*, *appreciates*, *appreciating*, *appreciation*, *unappreciated* are all words belong to one family and have a relationship in meaning. If we take the word 'nation' it relates to words like *national*, *nationalise*, *nationality*, *international*, *internationalise*, *internationally*, and so on. So, when a student understands the concept of the word family well can understand the meaning of a new word by linking the relationship with the base or root word.

#### Word tree

Is another essential practice to increase one's vocabulary? When a teacher tends to teach a learner the word tree, it could be the best time for the teacher to also introduce some words that are related to the word. A tree has roots, trunk, limb, branch, twig, foliage, leaf/leaves, blossom,

fruit and so on. Also, we can learn words like plant a tree, water trees, cut tree, deforestation. To learn vocabulary through word tree it is always better to have a picture like the one given.

Word family and Word tree are two different approaches to increase vocabulary. Word family deals with morphemic variation and consequent changes unlike word tree deals with vocabulary related to different views of the student. Word tree can be different from learner to learner and teacher to teacher from the way to intend to learn from the word. For instance, Age matters in the details like young learners won't be much interested in learning the word bole but trunk. Another different group of learners would look at plant, stalk, sapling, shrub, bush and so on. Therefore, word tree depends upon the interest of the learner and learner's individual variations.



#### Synonyms and Antonyms;

Learning the similar and opposite meaning of word does also help increase the vocabulary of a learner to a considerably high level. It is better for teachers and learners to try explaining a word using similar or opposite words instead teachers use grammar translation method to teach vocabulary. When a teacher attempts to teach the word 'prove' can use the word 'give' and explain the verb. More importantly, synonyms and antonyms help well when teaching phrasal and idiomatic expressions; for example; when a student asks the teacher the meaning of 'get back' – this can easily be explained using the verb 'return – especially to your home'.

Homophones are words have different spellings but similar sounds. It is vital to know difference between the spelling and pronunciation at the onset of learning the word. People in general confuse the spelling of it's and its, right – write, air – heir and so on.

#### Recommendation and conclusion:

Considering the above list of essential and secondary factors contribute to the learning vocabulary. EFL/ESL teachers should be well-aware of the importance of vocabulary. Every teacher should help learners prepare a vocab diary according to their age and language requirement. Teachers should use or prepare different methods and techniques to teach vocabularies. Instead of explaining the meaning of the word in the first language, teachers should try explaining the word by providing students with example sentences, showing images, telling stories and so on. Teachers can make the classroom fun by using tongue twisters to teach pronunciation.

There're some other games also available to teach children vocabulary like scrabble, Pictionary and so on. Unlike traditional way of teaching new words using grammar translation method, it is crucial important that teachers try using new and innovative methods involve activities to teach vocabulary. This study provides teachers and learners with essential and secondary factors that are significant for increasing the vocabulary. I have only discussed the factors that should be paid attention to in the teaching and learning vocabulary but not method, approach and techniques to teach vocabulary.

Learners' individual differences might differ over the requirements or usefulness of certain factors given above. It is teachers who decide which components of the learning factors are important for the age group or proficiency level of the learners choosing the right way of teaching the vocabulary.



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