

DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH VOCABULARY USING TBLT

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to facilitate vocabulary-learning strategies in the classroom environment and to invoke students' interest in vocabulary-learning. Since two decades, vocabulary learning strategies came into lime light as there was a high demand for the repertoire of lexical words. In fact, most of the learners of second language learners are conventionally taught vocabulary with the aid of dictionary and language skills in a conventional method. But very few acquire vocabulary through this type of teaching methodology where more preference is given to memorize the difficult or unfamiliar words using dictionary in order to understand the text. The conventional methodology doesn't give them enough opportunity to think, understand the word better thus resulting in inappropriate usage and poor retention of words. This paper discusses on the experimental study done on the first year engineering graduates to enhance their technical vocabulary based on Task Based Approach. The students were taught technical vocabulary using Reading and Listening Skills whereas Writing and Speaking Skills were treated as sub skills. This study emphasizes on the visual exposure given through Reading and Listening Skills and their impact on the minds of the learners in the acquisition of learning vocabulary resulting in longer retention of words and their appropriate usage. It is obvious from the observations and findings that the new strategies adopted to teach technical vocabulary has the drastic impact on the experimental group students than that of the controlled group students.

Key words: Lexical Words, Dictionary and Language Skills, Inappropriate Usage, Poor Retention of Words, Technical Vocabulary, Visual Impact, Task - Based Approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

Words are things, and a small drop of ink falling like dew upon a thought produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.

- Lord Byron

Words are not just sounds that we make, or inanimate objects to toss around, but words carry emotions, memories and evoke feelings, whereas vocabulary refers to the knowledge of words and word meanings. Vocabulary is the study of the meanings of words and its usage, knowing root words, prefixes, suffixes and analogies. Steven Stahl (2005) asserts: 'Vocabulary knowledge is the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the word'. Vocabulary knowledge is not something that can ever be fully mastered; it is something that expands and deepens over the course of one's lifetime. It is one of the five pillars [phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency] of reading comprehension. Reading comprehension depends upon the meaning readers give to words. "Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner" (Zimmerman 1997:5). Lack of vocabulary knowledge will result in lack of meaningful communication. The more vocabulary words students know, the better they are able to comprehend. A large vocabulary opens students up to a wider range of reading materials. A rich vocabulary also improves students' ability to communicate through speaking, listening, and writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ON VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

Vocabulary Learning Strategies can be considered as a subset of general learning strategies in second language acquisition. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) interested in learning strategies and characteristics of good language learner defined learning strategies as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information" (O'Malley and Chamot 1990:1). This very broad definition is echoed by Schmitt in defining vocabulary learning strategies. Citing Rubin (1987), Schmitt (1997) claims learning is "the process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved and used..... Therefore vocabulary learning strategies could be of any which affect this broadly defined process" Rubin 1987 cited in Schmitt 1997:203). Nation (2001), instead of providing a clear-cut definition of vocabulary learning strategies, has opted for listing their characteristics. According to Nation (2001:217), a strategy must:

- ✓ involve choice, i.e. there should be several strategies to choose from
- ✓ be complex, i.e. there should be several steps to learn
- ✓ require knowledge and benefit from training
- ✓ increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use

Nation (2001) states that Gu and Johnson's comprehensive study reveals some messages for teachers and learners, three of which are as follows:

1. Some of the strongest correlations in the study involved learners making decisions about what vocabulary was important for them. Relating learning to personal needs and goals is at the centre of taking responsibility for learning.
2. Memorization is only useful if it is one of a wide range of actively used strategies. It should not be the major means of learning.

3. There is a wide range of strategy options to draw on, and learners draw on these with varied success and skill. Learners could benefit from being made aware of these strategies, how to use them well, and how to choose between them. (Nation 2001, p.227)

However, these two strategies did not correlate high with English proficiency or Vocabulary size in Gu and Johnson's (1996) study, suggesting that learners could benefit from training on strategy option and use (Nation 2001). Bilingual dictionary use also came first in the helpfulness evaluation results. The other five helpful strategies overlapping with the top ten most-used ones were 'written repetition', 'verbal repetition', 'say a new word aloud', 'study a word's spelling', and 'take notes in class'.

The strategies designed discussed in this paper have almost all the characteristic as Nation (2001:217) stated that there should be choice in selecting the strategies. The strategies mentioned in this paper has an option, it depends on the learners interest as to how he/she learns vocabulary using integrated skills or stressing on any two skills. The steps mentioned here are more that provides knowledge at every stage thus enhancing the efficiency of learning vocabulary.

III. BENEFITS OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

The main benefit that can be obtained from all learning strategies is autonomy; students can take charge of their own learning (Nation, 2001:222) and gain independence and self-direction. Nation (2001:222) believes that a large amount of vocabulary can be acquired with the help of vocabulary learning strategies and that the strategies prove useful for students of different language levels. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001:107-108) also acknowledges the role of learning strategies (study skills).

IV. VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGY THROUGH READING AND WRITING SKILLS

The importance of the role of wide and varied reading in the development of vocabulary knowledge has long been recognized and is well documented (e.g. see Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991). However, engaging in reading alone is not always sufficient to improve word knowledge, especially with regard to vocabulary learning in students with reading difficulties (Jenkins, Stein, & Wysocki, 1984). Growth in vocabulary for these students seems to require that reading be followed by other activities that extend their understanding, such as discussion of what has been read (Stahl & Clark, 1987). In particular, the greatest gains seem to occur when learners have opportunities to engage in activities that promote their understanding and elaboration of contextual use of meanings (Anderson & Nagy, 1996). Learners also seem to retain meanings of new vocabulary best when they are encouraged to generate their own elaborations of context (Curtis & Longo, 2001). Once meanings have been introduced, students should be provided with multiple opportunities (via discussion and writing activities) to apply the new word meanings. In this way, vocabulary instruction is always occurring in context, but the emphasis is laid on helping the learner make inferences about contexts.

The author strongly supports the view of other researchers as she believes that interaction in the classroom by means of activities would stimulate learning, retention and usage of new vocabulary in general and technical contexts. The author is also of the view that extensive visual exposure to words has a lasting impact on the readers mind and improves their retention power. To prove this the researcher has attempted to experiment a strategy on the L2 learners to expand the size of their technical vocabulary using the language skills viz. reading and writing through a task called 'Word Expo'.

IV.I Activity: 1 - 'Word Expo'

Material Design:

Technical vocabulary 30 words were taken as target words. For each activity 15 words were assigned. The words which are of use in day-to-day activities were selected from Corpus of Contemporary American English [COCA].

A text passage on 'Solar Energy' was taken from the book entitled: English for Engineers and Technologists Vol. 1 & 2 Combined Edition, Course Authors: Department of Humanities and Sciences, Anna University, Chennai, Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd. was administered to the experimental group students for teaching technical vocabulary using both old and new strategies. They were tested on three parameters viz., Vocabulary Enrichment (technical); Usage; and Word Retention.

Tools Used: Dictionary, Text Passage, Flash Cards and Bulletin Boards.

Duration: Eight classes of fifty minutes duration.

No. Of words: 15 Technical Words

Procedure:

The students were divided in 6 equal groups and a text passage was distributed to them. They were asked to go through the text passage silently and subsequently writing the unfamiliar words and the familiar words for which they don't know the meanings in flash cards. Then, the groups were asked to guess the appropriate synonyms to the words mentioned with the help of the contextual clues and also to write the appropriate synonyms adjacent to them. Then, their cards were returned to the groups and asked to display them on their table. The teacher revealed the answers. The wrong answer cards were asked to turn upside down. Marks were awarded based on the right answers to each group. They were also asked to write down the words that they have entered earlier in the previous set of flash cards. Besides, they were instructed to refer the dictionary for the range of meanings and to enter the same on the flash cards against the words. The students were also asked to draw pictures related to the word or its synonym by discussing in groups. At the end of this activity quiz was conducted to test their comprehension.

The students actively participated in this activity. They enjoyed this type of learning as they commented and criticized on others picture drawings. Repeated exposure to the words through dictionary, printed text and flash cards were of great help to them. They were confident to use the words whenever the situation demands.

V. VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGY THROUGH LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS

V.I. Activity: 'EAVES DROPPING'

Listening is deemed as one of the most important skills. It plays a significant role in learning a language effectively especially vocabulary. Active listening skills lead to better understanding and help in gathering lot of information thus enriching communication skills and vocabulary development. On this basis, the researcher carried out an experiment on the above mentioned set of 30 students (experimental group) in the language laboratory to enrich the vocabulary of the students.

This experiment is based on learner centered approach. Here, the experimental group students were taken to the Conference Hall as it required a spacious and compact room to teach technical vocabulary through Listening & Speaking Skills by means of a task based activity called 'Eaves Dropping'.

Based on the five parameters – pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, frequency and appropriate usage a detailed lesson plans were designed. The autonomy to select the words of their choice was given to the samples to make their learning simple, self - motivating and interesting. The samples started collecting few video clippings from you tube, which had more number of technical words.

Methodology

Samples were taught Technical vocabulary based on social, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategy with the aid of CALL [Computer Assisted Language Learning] and other Technological Aids Tests were administered before and after the implementation of the Techniques and the data collected were recorded to analyze the outcome.

Tools Used

A video on "The German Car Factory" [downloaded video from you tube] was played for the students of both experimental and controlled group to test them on three parameters namely – Vocabulary Enrichment; Usage; and Word Retention.

Duration: Ten classes of 50 minutes

No. of Words: 15

Procedure:

In the first class the students were divided in 6 equal groups. A video that lasted for 7 minute on 'The German Car Factory' was played minimizing the window so that the students can hear only the audio for the first time to get the gist of it. When it was played for the second time without video they were instructed to note down the difficult words or the new words. The Third time the audio with video was played with video and each group was asked to stop the video when the encounter the noted words for example 'Retalios' and 'Chassis'. At this juncture the teacher with the help of the video still explained the meaning and discussed the words in detail. The same procedure was adopted for the various groups. This session of discussing the words in detail with different groups took 6 classes to complete. The teacher noted all the words that were discussed and prepared a power point slides that consist of words and their range of meanings. In the seventh class video was played but the audio was kept in mute mode and the any one representative of the groups were asked to give a presentation by looking at the video and assuming the role of the speaker using the words they have learnt. To motivate the students the teacher awarded the marks for the group that presented well using the words they have noted.

VI. Result & Findings

4.1. Findings and Inference

A table and bar chart is given to understand that in the pre-tests both the groups were at the same level and scored less than 40% as their English proficiency level was similar and they were not acquainted with the words and their usage.

In the first activity, experimental group students (15) secured more than 60%, 12 students secured between 41-60% and 3 students secured less than 40%. The students actively participated in this activity. They enjoyed this type of learning as they commented and criticized on others picture drawings. Repeated exposure to the words through dictionary, printed text and flash cards were of great help to them. They were confident to use the words whenever the situation demands.

This was due to the more exposure given to words and the liberty to use as they like in the context until they became familiar with the words and using them aptly after acquiring the knowledge of the words.

In the second activity, 3 students from experimental group scored above 60%, 20 students secured between 41-60% and 7 students secured less than 40% in the post tests. The students interestingly participated in the activity as they were shown a video. They were motivated by awarding marks for using the words they have noted.

From this it is given to understand that experimental group students were given multiple exposures to words when compared to controlled group students. The performance of experimental group students was better than controlled group students as the modified techniques used on them proved to be of great help in understanding the word and using them in the right context which not only gained their confidence but also helped them in longer retention.

VII. CONCLUSION

Teaching language skills is a herculean task to the teachers of rural and suburban areas where students are not exposed to English language and who lack interest in learning a language being in the professional colleges. Though the demand for communication skills is at the apex, the students lack awareness and still haven't realized its importance. Hence, it becomes mandatory on teachers to repeatedly insist on the merits of learning an English language and also emphasizing on the skill of speaking a language i. e. the presentation skill. In order to present their views, one would definitely require a repertoire of words that can be used in different situations appropriately seeking a positive and an effective response from the opposite end. Once the realization and interest creeps in learning takes place effectively and to make this learning process easier and lasting forever the above mentioned tasks would be helpful for the students to learn and revive vocabulary. The teachers can design the task based on the students' interest, material and students' involvement to achieve the desired results.

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Table no.1

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE PERCENTAGE OF MARKS IN PRE & POST TESTS USING MANN-WHITNEY TEST							
TESTS	GROUPS	LESS THAN 40%	41% TO 61%	ABOVE 60%	MANN-WHITNEY TEST	P-VALUE	SIG
PRE 1	EXPERIMENTAL	30	NIL	NIL	1.734	0.83	NS
	CONTROL	30	NIL	NIL			
POST 1	EXPERIMENTAL	3	12	15	3.82	0	S**
	CONTROL	7	21	2			
PRE 2	EXPERIMENTAL	29	1	NIL	1.937	0.053	NS
	CONTROL	30	NIL	NIL			
POST 2	EXPERIMENTAL	7	20	3	2.937	0.001	S*
	CONTROL	16	12	2			

