

# INTEGRATING VOCABULARY BASED RETENTION STRATEGIES IN ESL CLASSROOMS.

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the vocabulary acquisition methods in a general English class. The curriculum is framed taking all the four skill (LSRW) into consideration. Students are taught to read text, speak in English and write sentences, but appropriate vocabulary required for communication is not given importance. In this study, 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate students were the subjects. After completing a lesson with different activities, they were asked to recall new words they have come across. The students could remember and recall only 40% to 50% of the words they were familiarized in course of the lesson. This shows that they understand words and their contextual meaning, but could not retain them for a longer period of time and put them to use in their day to day communication. In the second phase of the study, the researcher incorporated retention strategies in course of the lesson and while doing vocabulary based activities. The students were post-tested on their retention level and found to be greater than the prior results. The retention strategies incorporated were using graphic organizer, using context clues and developing story web. In the study, it was found that words which were made explicit in some way for learners and given attention during the lesson were retained and put to use in their day to day communication.

**Key words:** Retention, Vocabulary, ESL, LSRW.

## Introduction

In India English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) is taught in General English class room for a limited period of time each week with purposes. Students are exposed to plenty of words and grammatical rules. Language teachers have been teaching vocabulary as a core component of language proficiency by means of traditional methods such as repetition, notebook with list of vocabulary, dictionaries, synonyms, antonyms, etc. Learning words and how to use and how to retain them is quite challenging and students of General English cannot achieve their potential without retain their vocabulary.

## Literature Review

There are many methods of vocabulary instruction exist in the current day context of vocabulary acquisition. However, how well students can retain the new words they have encountered and apply them in the day to day communication is important. This is where the concept of retention comes into play. Understanding how students retain and then use new words is critical for teachers to recognize and then apply in student learning tasks. The level at which students understand, recall, and store words is an essential piece of teacher knowledge.

To retain the words there are different strategies for retention might be necessary, although the position could be taken that avoiding inferring and disrupting conditions and refreshing storage by appropriate reacquisition or review activities are the general strategies.

The study of human memory encounters instances in which estimates of retention may depend upon how it is measured. A common comparison is retention measured by recognition versus recall. For the typical recognition test a person is asked to identify items that he previously has been asked to learn from among a group of other items. As when relearning is the test of retention, a number of potential retrieval cues are presented in a recognition test.

Researchers and language teachers have been interested in vocabulary learning strategies for a long time (Levenston, 1979). Numerous studies have been conducted comparing the retention effects of different vocabulary presentation strategies. The basic objective of these strategies is to help the learners retain the vocabulary they have acquired.

According to Danesi (2003), in traditional language teaching only 4% of learners' brain is activated. One of the most commonly accepted views of vocabulary learning is that teaching language learning strategies leads to better vocabulary retention. Language learning strategies are "strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly" (Rubin, 1987, p. 22). According to Nemati (2009) since students forget much of what they learn, memory strategy instruction can result in long lasting knowledge without increasing study time. Based on the Depth of Processing Hypothesis (DPH), the more cognitively one is engaged in learning a word, the more likely it is to remember it later. Depth in this hypothesis refers to greater degree of semantic involvement. Remembering information depends not only on attention and rehearsal but also on the levels of processing. The implication is that the depth of processing is more important than the regency and length of exposure in remembering new words. Remembering the old information depends upon the nature of the cognitive process that is applied to process that information. So, teachers need to teach their students how to process new words deeply for better retention (Craik, 2002; Craik & Tulving, 1975; Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Martin-Chang, Levy, and O'Neil (2007) conducted an experiment comparing students' abilities to retain the words and transfer them in future tasks after two separate methods of vocabulary instruction.

Learners of English have to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary during their language acquisition. In order to learn and retain new words, learners should participate in different task-based activities in their classroom whether it is a guessing task, images and a describing exercise or conversation making. Such activities also include vocabulary games which especially focus on helping learners develop and use words in different contexts by making the lessons enjoyable. Therefore, it is necessary to explore whether students learn vocabulary effectively through vocabulary activities and how they learn it.

### **Research Design:**

This study followed experimental design in which the students of 1<sup>st</sup> Undergraduate the subjects were selected, and a pre-test was administered to capture the initial differences what they learnt during the class hours.

### **Subjects and Instruments:**

This study was carried out in St. Joseph's College Tiruchy, Tamilnadu, India. This is an arts and science college where English is offered as a mandatory course in the first four semesters of a six-semester undergraduate degree programme. The course focuses on four basic language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW). For the purpose of this research, 40 students of I year B.Com programme were used as subjects.

The Experiment was conducted during the regular class hours. 25 sessions were used (55 minutes each). During the experiment, students were administered with two questionnaires, one before the students were given activities on retention strategies to identify the problems they face in retaining words, and the other after the activities to measure the impact of the activities on the students in terms of improvement in retention capacity.

**Stages of the intervention process**

The following gives step by step progression of the intervention process adopted during the study.

- Identifying the students for the experiment.
- Identifying the problems in retaining words based on the responses of the students
- Designing and using three different activities to address the identified problems based on retention
- Classroom observation to study the feasibility of the activities underwent by the students
- Analyzing the performance of the students in each activity

**Procedure:**



For the study, three activities focusing on retention of vocabulary were designed and taught to students to verify the effectiveness of the idea of incorporating activities to retain vocabulary. The following procedure was involved in teaching the strategies:

- The current level of the students in terms of vocabulary learning and retention was identified by administering a pre-test. Additionally questionnaire was administered to identify the methods students were using for learning and retaining vocabulary.
- Based on the performance of the students, activities to help them retain words were designed. These activities were conducted in two phases:
  - Phase I: students were familiarized with the activities, and they were made to do the activities with the help of a teacher. Teacher explained the activities step by step to the students.
  - Phase II: students were administered with the activities, and they were made to do the activities by collaborating with the peers and some of them were individual activities. In this phase, teacher was merely moderating the sessions and interfering only when students got stuck in course of the activities.

**Activity-1**

**Using Image Cues:**

Match the words in ‘Target words’ column with ‘meaning’ column and identify the appropriate images in ‘Answer’ column.

 		
<b>(A)</b>	<b>(B)</b>	
Target words	Meanings	Answers
Fraternity	a person known to one, but usually not a close friend.	
Acquaintance	a group of people who have the same job, interest	

Activity -2 Frame a Story

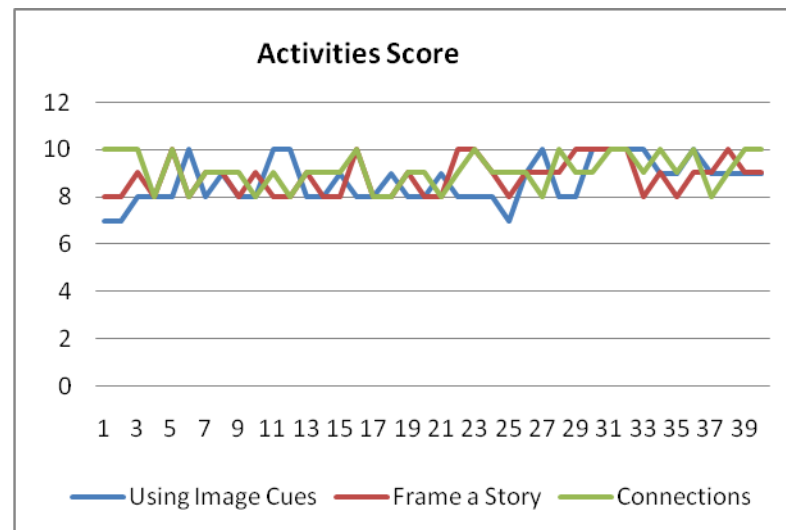
<p><b>Frame a simple story using the given list of words. The story should include all the words and only in the given order:</b></p> <p>1. bio-data 2. optimistic 3. patience 4. mediocre 5. ceiling 6. mansion                  7. Placement 8. utilize 9. promotion 10. experience 11. university                  12. happiness 13. marriage 14. successful 15. Communication</p> <p>e.g., A boy took a copy of his <b>bio-data</b> to a person who was <b>optimistic</b>...</p>
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Activity-3

Connect the following picture and get a meaningful word

S.No	Pictures			Word
1				
2				
3				

- The time taken by students in completing each of the activity differed. Activities like role play, developing stories and draw a word picture consumed more time compared to other activities.
- After each activity, students were given a clear feedback on their performance and they were made to explain how the activity helped them in retaining words.
- After the completion of all the three activities, the scores were tabulated and analysed to verify the effectiveness of the activities.

**Result Analysis:**

Activity-1 Using Image Cues, the scores range from 7 to 10 which show that the performance of the students is significant. It could be inferred from the graph that the performance of the students in this activity is considerable and all the 40 students have scored above 70%. There were ten questions given to the students and the average score in this activity is 8.65.

Activity-2 Frame a story, this was another activity where students' participation was effective. The performance of the students reflected their creativity. Based on the words given to them, they had written interesting stories. The average score of the students is 8.82.

Activity-3 Connection, this was another activity in which the performance of the students is considerable. The marks range between 8 and 10, and the average score in the activity is 9.12. Students could better relate with the activity as this was modelled based on a popular TV reality show named similarly. Another interesting element of this activity which was noticed during the sessions was peer learning. The students who could not identify the words were helped by their peers.

**Findings:**

The following are the major findings of this study:

- In the vocabulary acquisition sessions, the focus is on learning new vocabulary and not on retaining those words. Therefore, the results of this study prove the importance of retention strategies in vocabulary acquisition.
- The incorporation of these vocabulary based retention strategies is effective and students willingly participate when they are in the form of activities.
- In this study, three activities were designed by the researcher. All these activities focus on helping students retain the new words they come across in the textbook. These activities were designed to facilitate students to work individually and also in groups. Based on the analysis it became evident that student participation and outcome are effective in the activities based on images.
- Apart from the activities dealing with images, students also showed interest in the activity of relating the new words in their mother tongue.
- This set of activities consisted of an activity where students had to develop a story based on the given set of vocabulary from the text. Students showed interest in this activity and their performance revealed that they had also improved their writing skill in this activity.

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