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Թեմա՝ *Teaching Vocabulary*

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Introduction

Vocabulary is commonly defined as all the words known and used by a particular person in simple terms; it refers to the familiar words used in a language. New words are constantly being added to the vocabulary. It's a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. It's acquired by listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary is defined as a collection of words and their definitions. A person's vocabulary is the sum total of words that they know and can use appropriately. Learners have both a receptive vocabulary (words they can understand) and an expressive vocabulary (words they can use). Individuals interact with language in four ways: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Experts identify three tiers of vocabulary:

1. **Tier One:** Tier One vocabulary consists of general words that most people learn, know, and use without effort in their first language. Basic conversational components are considered Tier One vocabulary, from everyday objects, people, places, and actions to simple descriptors. Examples of Tier One vocabulary include words like child, ball, run, cold, and hungry.
2. **Tier Two:** Tier Two includes high-frequency words that can be found across multiple subjects and may have multiple meanings. Tier Two also includes specific and targeted descriptive language. Learners are less likely to use Tier Two words in conversation but may find the words in written text. Sometimes, Tier Two vocabulary is called academic vocabulary. Examples of Tier Two vocabulary include words like generous, invite, negative, and investigate.
3. **Tier Three:** Tier Three vocabulary is context-specific vocabulary necessary for understanding a specific hobby or discipline. Tier Three words are low frequency. Examples of Tier Three words include exponent, photosynthesis, purl, and longitude.

Teaching vocabulary is important at every grade level and in every subject. Early elementary students need to learn academic vocabulary that provides the building blocks for later learning experiences. Each year, students build on previously learned vocabulary and deepen their understanding of each topic of study. For example,

elementary students learn to define plot, character, and setting. Later, middle and high school students expand their understanding to terms like protagonist and denouement. Science students learn vocabulary related to each topic, such as the elements in chemistry. Students also improve their reading comprehension when they are taught words that provide nuance and depth of meaning. For example, students learn to replace the word "eat" with synonyms that show shades of meaning such as graze, devour, consume, and gobble.

English language learners often require additional support in their vocabulary development. All students benefit from explicit, cross-curricular vocabulary instruction.

What are some useful approaches to teaching vocabulary?

A good place to start is by using some simple but effective ideas suggested by Paul Nation, a widely respected expert on the subject of vocabulary teaching. Below, he suggests some useful vocabulary learning exercises that require little or no preparation. Before using these exercises, he offers some advice on how to select target words for these exercises.

Choosing the words

1. On a rotational basis, appoint a special vocabulary secretary whose job is to identify difficult words encountered in class for future attention.
2. Select words that have appeared in classwork and materials in the last week or two.
3. Select words that you believe are important for students to know.

Once target words have been identified, employ a combination of the exercises below which are grouped according to some of the key criteria for what it means to 'know' a word.

Exercises that focus on word meaning

Find the fundamental meaning: Students read through dictionary entries and find the common meaning of the different uses of the word.

Word card testing: In pairs, students give their cards to their partner who tests them on their recall of the meaning by saying the word and asking for a translation of the word in return. This process can also be done in reverse i.e., saying the word in the first language and asking for it in the target language in return.

Using the dictionary: When a target word occurs in a text, the teacher trains students in the correct use of a dictionary to locate the meaning of that specific usage.

Guessing meaning from context: Whenever a guessable word occurs in a reading text, the teacher trains the students to employ the various strategies of inferring the meaning from context.

Exercises that focus on word form

Spelling dictation: The teacher calls out words or phrases for students to write down as accurately as possible.

Pronunciation: The teacher writes words on the board and asks students to choose a word and attempt the correct pronunciation. The teacher then gives feedback and/or models the correct pronunciation.

Word parts: The teacher writes words on pieces of paper and students cut them into parts and give the meanings of the parts. This is obviously useful for teaching prefixes and suffixes.

Exercises that focus on word use

Suggest collocations: The students work together in pairs or small groups to list collocations for a given word.

Word detectives: A student reports on an unfamiliar word they have found in their reading. They then give a mini-presentation about the meaning, spelling, pronunciation, word parts, origin, collocations, and grammar of the word.

Now that you have been presented with some simple and practical ideas for teaching vocabulary, it may be useful to delve a little deeper into vocabulary learning and teaching.

It is not always the case that students need to resort to specific vocabulary study books to learn new words. Many people who possess an extended vocabulary do not report having acquired it through direct learning activities and commercial coursebooks.

A common approach to vocabulary teaching starts with a list of words found in a reading or listening activity accompanied by translations in the students' first language and vocabulary exercises. Often, not much attention is given to approaches that ask students to build vocabulary from reading and listening through context, which presents a missed opportunity.

How does successful vocabulary acquisition take place?

For successful vocabulary acquisition to occur, students require a considerable amount of exposure to new words. The process of acquisition should follow a similar path to first language vocabulary acquisition: through context, associations, and constant exposure.

Students must be provided with opportunities for using vocabulary in memorable and meaningful situations. Selecting vocabulary learning activities should be guided by key factors such as how often the words are likely to be encountered and how necessary they are for producing effective communication.

Learning new words involves building up vocabulary from repertoire - that is, relating new words to previously acquired language. Try to imagine building blocks and stacking one layer over the other to consolidate vocabulary and build a strong foundation for future communication.

Teaching vocabulary should also take flexibility and creativity into account. The teacher should avoid approaching words as isolated and independent objects and preferably expose students to the way they are used in sentences and how they can

group with other words to form collocations. As an example, apart from simply working out the meaning of the word 'go', it would also be effective to associate it with the preposition 'to' and present it as 'go to' - preferably in a sentence.

With lessons that focus on the receptive skills of reading and listening, it is useful to identify which words are most likely to be unfamiliar to students and do some pre-teaching. The idea is to make sure the students find the activity not only interesting but also meaningful and comprehensible. After students have read or listened to a text, the new vocabulary can be reinforced in other ways such as using flashcards or asking students to use the words in short writing or speaking activities.

Vocabulary learning needs according to proficiency level

Students' level of proficiency is another key consideration when approaching vocabulary learning activities.

Beginners benefit through direct vocabulary teaching as it fosters quick expansion in the number of words they know. Relevant activities might include using flashcards and illustrated handouts along with other memorisation strategies. This is a stage of early development, so it is important that the teacher also focuses on building confidence and a sense of self-accomplishment.

The approach with intermediate students should focus on expanding on already acquired vocabulary. For instance, students can explore the fact that the same word can have multiple meanings. This might involve students discovering how many different contexts they can use words like 'head' or 'park' for example. In addition, it is also valuable for intermediate students to work with affixes such as in-, un-, -less, -ly, and word families as in 'beauty, 'beautiful' and 'beautifully' as a way of expanding vocabulary range.

To build learner autonomy, encourage students to use their imagination so they can come up with their own ways of memorizing words based on their repertoire to consolidate the way they link new words to familiar ones.

Advanced students sometimes become frustrated because they feel that their vocabulary learning has plateaued. This often happens because they may already be familiar with the most frequent general words in the language. Therefore, consider increasing their exposure to academic vocabulary, which is likely to be far less familiar, but more likely to be encountered in future academic and professional life.

Learning vocabulary through context

Regardless of the level, activities requiring students to guess the meaning of a word from context are useful. This invites them to develop their self-sufficiency in contrast to a dependency on the teacher or dictionaries.

It is not only through reading that students can guess meaning from context but also through listening to stories, music, podcasts, and also from watching TV series, and films. Using the same principle of building vocabulary through repertoire, they provide audio and visual context clues.

An example activity would be to choose a story that students are familiar with in their first language such as the story of "The Three Little Pigs". This will make it easier for them to guess the meaning of keywords as they should be able to relate them to an already known context. Students would likely already be familiar with many of the words in the story from their mother tongue. They would also be very familiar with the plot, so there is a rich and accessible context for them to guess the meaning of vocabulary.

Teaching strategies that can help students understand the meaning of unfamiliar words from context is important for their development as independent learners. To do this, they should be looking for context clues such as synonyms, antonyms, definitions, examples, and explanations.

For example, students should become aware that when encountering an unfamiliar word in a text, they should look for words in the sentence or surrounding sentences that help them deduce what the unknown word is. In the example below, we can see

that the second sentence offers an 'antonym' that should if the student is aware of the strategy, help them decipher the meaning of 'distraught'.

*The English supporters were **distraught** after losing the final. They were not happy losing another penalty shootout.*

Let's use 'definition' as another example. Below, we can see that the second sentence essentially defines the word synthesise. Students should be made aware that phrases such as 'in other words' often signal the clarification of a key term or concept.

*Academic writing often requires students to **synthesize** the ideas of multiple authors. In other words, take key ideas from texts and combine them to produce an original text.*

It is important to realize that these context clues may not always be so obvious. Hence, teachers need to carefully evaluate if the activity is suited to students' proficiency level and current vocabulary range.

Learning vocabulary from context is effective, but it should not exclude direct teaching, especially if used as a way of increasing students' awareness and speeding up the development of specific language. By using context, it encourages students to identify and acquire new vocabulary independently because they are equipped with practical strategies. In addition, this approach should be directed to useful vocabulary which will not only enhance their comprehension of listening and reading texts but boost their ability to communicate in spoken and written English.

Word lists for vocabulary learning and teaching

Just as important as understanding what constitutes effective vocabulary teaching, it is also important to be clear on which vocabulary to target. It may not always be obvious for teachers to decide which vocabulary to teach. A good starting point is to consider established and recognized word lists such as the New General Service List (NGSL).

What is the NGSL?

The NGSL is a list comprised of words considered to be the most common and frequently occurring in English - roughly 2,000 headwords. These headwords define word families, for example: 'with: within, without', or 'day: daily, daylight'. It is estimated that the list covers 80% of all words found in general reading texts and 90% of the words used in spoken English.

As previously mentioned, advanced students should already be familiar with a wide range of general words so working with the NGSL might not be a priority for them. Instead, the Academic Word List (AWL) is a better alternative as it focuses on academic vocabulary. Students at this level are often entering universities where English is the medium of instruction, so the AWL provides not only a more challenging and rewarding set of target vocabulary but also one that is highly relevant.

What is the AWL?

The AWL consists of 570 word families of which 90% are not found in the NGSL. They cover 10% of words in academic texts and are often the most challenging. The list is divided into 10 sub-lists in line with the frequency they appear in academic texts, with sub-list 1 being the most frequent and sub-list 10 the least frequent.

For advanced students, both lists are important as when combined, they are estimated to cover 90% of the words found in academic texts.

How can wordlists be used in vocabulary teaching?

Teachers must consider a variety of ways and approaches when selecting vocabulary learning activities, especially regarding students' proficiency level. While beginners can benefit more from direct teaching and activities such as flashcards, intermediate students would be suited to more challenging activities such as guessing meaning from familiar and rich contexts.

Advanced students with a greater familiarity with words in the NGSL can take advantage of the sub-lists in the AWL, especially through reading activities. But it is important to keep in mind that it can be a rather tedious activity if planned for the duration of a whole class. At this level, students are most likely expecting practice in improving their speaking skills in more dynamic tasks such as peer and group interactions.

Therefore, it is better to approach the AWL as a self-study exercise through activities such as reading, matching, and writing exercises. These can be assigned as homework and later checked during class. This way both teacher and students can optimize class time by focusing on the practiced use of specific vocabulary rather than in direct learning.

To illustrate, the teacher could highlight AWL words in a reading passage. Students could then be asked to match these words with their correct definitions or work out their meanings from context, or even use a dictionary (if needed). After working with definitions, students could then match the target words with synonyms. Additionally, students could complete a chart of word families as a way of increasing exposure to their corresponding variations.

Best Practices for Teaching Vocabulary

According to research, such as the research collated by the National Reading Panel, there are numerous elements involved in effective vocabulary teaching.

- Direct, explicit instruction: While students are proven to pick up a certain quantity of vocabulary through implicit measures, such as reading, listening, and inferring meaning from context, the process of developing a rich vocabulary requires direct, explicit instruction in vocabulary. Teachers must take the time to teach words and explore their meanings with students.

- Repetition and multiple exposures: In order to learn and retain new vocabulary, students need to be exposed to the words repeatedly. Given multiple exposures to the same word used in a meaningful context, students are more likely to retain and use the word.
- Rich contexts for vocabulary learning: Vocabulary words should not be presented in isolation. Rather, teachers should work with students to place new words in contexts that are motivating and relevant to the students. In addition, multi-sensory instructional materials, such as visual aids, help students to build connections and increase understanding, making words more memorable.
- Task restructuring: Research suggests that some student failure on vocabulary tasks is related to the nature of the task rather than the students' understanding of the vocabulary. Teachers should provide multiple types of activities for each set of words and assess vocabulary learning in more than one way.
- Active engagement: As with other school subjects, students benefit from active engagement in the learning process. Students need to participate and have some choices in their methods of vocabulary learning.
- Word selection: Much of vocabulary instruction should focus on Tier Two words, those words that give students the potential for broader, richer communication. Tier Two words are nuanced but generalizable across various contexts. Vocabulary words should also be valuable to student understanding of class texts. If a text contains many potential vocabulary words, teachers should select words that are essential to deeper reading comprehension. Choosing words that are both relatable and functional for students is key to vocabulary instruction.

Given these components of vocabulary instruction, vocabulary should be included at all grade levels and across all curricular areas. This gives students the opportunity to acquire the necessary vocabulary for every aspect of school success.

Vocabulary Strategies

Teachers at all grade levels can employ a variety of vocabulary strategies in the classroom. Using different strategies at different times increases student engagement and addresses the needs of learners with different learning styles. The following are examples of how to teach vocabulary.

Morphemic Analysis

Teaching vocabulary strategies equips students to infer the meaning of new words on their own. Morphemic analysis is an excellent vocabulary strategy. Morphemic analysis refers to the analysis of a word's parts, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes. After learning the meaning of common roots, prefixes, and suffixes, students can find words for each word part. Once students are familiar with the parts of words, they can learn how to use the parts of an unfamiliar vocabulary word to infer the word's meaning. In addition, knowledge of roots and affixes can make it easier to remember the word's meaning.

Vocabulary Journals

A vocabulary journal is a notebook where a student collects vocabulary words and their meanings. Vocabulary journals can be set up in different formats. Following are a few examples.

- The teacher assigns a new word each day or week, and the student creates a sentence and illustration.
- The student records unknown words found in independent reading. Later, the student looks up the definition and adds it to the notebook. Students might also record the book where they found the word or draw a picture related to the word.
- Students write topical vocabulary related to class study and include example sentences.

Vocabulary journals allow students to easily reference the vocabulary they learn throughout the year and to track their progress in vocabulary learning.

Foldables

Like the vocabulary journal, a vocabulary foldable is a method for a student to record and remember the meanings of new vocabulary words. A foldable is a single sheet of paper folded in half lengthwise. The top fold is cut into five flaps. On the outside of each flap, students write a word and draw a picture related to the word's meaning. When the flap is opened, it reveals the word's definition and a sentence containing the word. Students create foldable and use them for word practice. Vocabulary foldables are useful in all subject areas.

Word Walls

Word walls are used in classrooms in a variety of ways. In the most basic sense, a word wall is a group of words hanging in a visible location in the classroom, such as a wall or bulletin board. Words on a word wall may be arranged alphabetically or topically. Examples of word wall themes include a collection of sight words, a set of vocabulary related to a science or social studies unit, or a selection of words related to a targeted writing skill.

Some word walls are constructed by teachers and intended to display targeted vocabulary. Students can consult the word walls when discussing or writing about a relevant topic. Other word walls are constructed cooperatively, with teacher and students contributing words of interest. An example would be a teacher challenging students to identify descriptive language in their independent reading and add new words to a descriptive language word wall.

Semantic Mapping

Semantic mapping is creating a visual representation of the connections between words based on word meanings. A basic semantic map can be started with one

student or teacher writing a word in the center of the whiteboard or paper. Other students then surround the word with related words. Semantic maps can be extremely simple or they can include complex connections.

Activities

How do teachers teach vocabulary?

Research into vocabulary learning indicates that teachers need to teach vocabulary in all subjects and at all grade levels. Words should be selected carefully to ensure that the words will enhance students' academic understanding and be relevant to the student. Instruction should be direct and explicit and occur in a rich, meaningful context. Teachers should involve students in active learning activities to enhance comprehension and memory, and tasks should be restructured when students struggle to increase the opportunity for student success.

What are some strategies to teach vocabulary?

Vocabulary teaching strategies include a variety of activities intended to engage students in actively understanding a word's definition and in using the word repeatedly. Some examples include:

Word walls

Vocabulary journals

Frayer method

Word games
Morphemic analysis

Conclusion

In summary, teachers need to deal with vocabulary as a long-term goal and be constantly aware that vocabulary acquisition can be a slow process that requires repetition. Simply presenting new words to students and expecting them to memorize their meaning is an ineffective practice. It is important to link vocabulary to previously acquired language. Meaningful, continuous, and thoughtful exposure to vocabulary is the key. Ultimately, teachers should not only seek to employ effective vocabulary learning activities, but also remember to be patient, attentive, and empathic.

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