Enhancing Vocabulary Retention in the Reading Classroom:
Tips for Reading Teachers

تعزيز الاحتفاظ بالمفردات في دروس القراءة: بعض الإرشادات للمدرسين

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Abstract

Vocabulary recognition is an essential part of foreign language proficiency; it is key to comprehension and expression. At the university level, vocabulary instruction is done either directly and explicitly in courses especially designed for vocabulary development, or indirectly and implicitly in courses designed for developing other language aspects. Reading-skills courses, where learning the new words encountered in the reading texts is an end-of-term objective, are an example. The researcher, an instructor of these courses, noticed that students save new words in their short-term memory (intending to pass their exams) but do not generally retain them in their long-term memory in spite of the various vocabulary exercises provided in their reading books. This study aimed to investigate the vocabulary teaching and learning strategies and to select those that may promote vocabulary retention in this educational context without disrupting the class time allocation. Drawing on research, the study lists 15 strategies, which all emphasize the importance of developing students' interest and interaction in the process. The researcher highly recommends that reading instructors introduce students to a variety of vocabulary learning strategies. The researcher also recommends integrating technology into vocabulary instruction, i.e., allowing mobile phones in class in addition to making the most of the e-learning program, a systematic home online companion to every university course.

Keywords: Vocabulary Repertoire, Teaching Strategies, Brain-based Strategies, 'Evoc' Strategies

الملخّص

تشكل حصيلة الطالب من المفردات جزءا أساسيا من إتقان اللغة الأجنبية؛ فهي الطريق لفهم تلك اللغة والتعبير من خلالها. وفي المرحلة الجامعية، تدرس المفردات إما بشكل مباشر في مقررات مصممة خصيصا لهذا الغرض، أو بشكل غير مباشر في مقررات أخرى تهدف لتطوير الجوانب اللغوية الأخرى. ومن الأمثلة على ذلك مقررات مهارات القراءة والتي تهدف، إلى جانب تطوير مهارات القراءة، إلى تعلم الطالب المفردات الجديدة التي تتضمنها النصوص. ولكن الملحوظ هو أن تلك المفردات يتم تعلمها وحفظها في الذاكرة قصيرة المدى وبهدف اجتياز الاختبارات فقط، ولا يتم تخزينها في الذاكرة طويلة المدى بغرض استخدامها على المدى البعيد رغم توفر العديد من التمارين الهادفة إلى ذلك في كتب القراءة. لذا فقد هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى البحث عن استراتيجيات لتدريس المفردات من شأنها أن تعزز الاحتفاظ بالمفردات على المدى البعيد في هذا السياق التعليمي دون أن يؤثر ذلك سلبا على الوقت المخصص لتطوير مهارات القراءة. واستنادا إلى البحوث، تدرج الدراسة 15 استراتيجية، تؤكد جميعها على أهمية تنمية اهتمام الطلاب وتفاعلهم في عملية تعلم المفردات. وتوصي الدراسة بضرورة تعريف الطلبة بمجموعة متنوعة من استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات إلى جانب دمج التكنولوجيا في عملية تعلمها وتعليمها، أي السماح باستخدام الهواتف المحمولة في غرفة الصف إضافة إلى مضاعفة الاستفادة من برنامج التعلم الإلكتروني، وهو رفيق منزلي منهجي عبر الإنترنت لكل مقرر من مقررات الجامعة.

الكلمات الدالة: مخزون المفردات، استراتيجيات التعليم، الاستراتيجيات المبنية على التفكير، الاستراتيجيات المبنية على الإنترنت.

Introduction

Research has shown that vocabulary recognition is an essential part of foreign language proficiency. Apparently, Words are the very basic component of any foreign language skills of both comprehension and communication. Thus, recognition of vocabulary does not only enhance students' listening and reading comprehension ability, but also facilitates their speaking and writing communication ability.

Learning vocabulary goes beyond simply memorizing lists of words and their definitions or their native language equivalents. It involves a process that begins with encountering a word and ends when students can produce that word in speaking and in writing. Diamond and Gutlohn (2006) believe that "Rich and robust vocabulary instruction goes beyond definitional knowledge; it gets students actively engaged in using and thinking about word meanings and in creating relationships among words". According to Oxford University Press, "Students need to be able to do so much more than reel off lists of vocabulary. They need to be able to manipulate the language so that it can support their communicative needs" (cited by My Dominican Login (https://www. dominicancaonline.com/classroom-management/5-tips-improving-student-vocabulary). This means that for a vocabulary item to sink in the students' vocabulary repertoire, a combination of teaching learning techniques (i.e. reading the item in context, using the dictionary, memorizing, using the word in context in addition to some online activities) must be followed.

Reading is one of the most effective ways to learn vocabulary and "research indicates that students with well-developed vocabulary learn many more words indirectly through reading than from instruction" (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001; Nagy & Herman, 1985 cited by Dalton & Grisham, 2011). Kamil and Hiebert (2005) believe that "vocabulary instruction should make sense in the context of the reading lesson" and that words that are related to the content or the theme of reading text "have instructional potential". All university reading courses study plans highlight the importance of giving students the opportunity to understand and use the words they encounter in their reading texts in conjunction with practicing successful critical reading of those texts.. Strategies that may help to achieve that objective can "include actively searching for new words during reading and then reflecting on what was learned after reading" (https://www.dominicancaonline.com/classroom-management/5-tips-improving-student-vocabulary) in the follow-up stage.

Based on both general and personal observation in the field of university instruction, it can be concluded that technology has proved to be extremely beneficial in extending students' learning opportunities beyond the classroom environment. The academic-related applications and programs, in addition to the web-based tools, can greatly enhance students' learning both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, both teachers and students of foreign languages may greatly benefit from the use of these tools and devices in their teaching-learning activities. Vocabulary building is one area where digital tools and internet resources are readily available for the use of capturing students' interest in vocabulary learning by providing them with contexts in which they can easily learn words and usefully manipulate them in fulfilling their communicative needs. Yafei & Osman (2016) say: "Mobile learning has been found to enhance the learning and retention of L2 vocabulary. This is due to the features of mobile devices that can allow learners to easily access learning materials at any time and place, overcoming many problems such as the limited language practice and the lack of language exposure."

Statement of the Problem

The researcher, a university English language instructor has noticed that students struggle to find the appropriate vocabulary items when trying to speak or write in English, which reflects an insufficient vocabulary repertoire. The researcher assumes that, in addition to the explicit vocabulary-instruction classes, reading teachers can make the most of their intensive reading classes to help students expand their vocabulary repertoire by making them actively interested in the words they encounter in their reading texts as a natural component of language learning.

Research Objective

This study intends to highlight some of the strategies that reading teachers can use to develop students' interest in words in an attempt to evoke the potential for vocabulary learning and retention when technology (e.g. mobile phones and E-learning) is part of the instruction mix. "Since students encounter so many unfamiliar words in their reading, any help provided by such strategies can be useful (Diamond and Gutlohn, 2006).

Literature Review

Cunningham & Stanovich (2001), as cited by Dalton & Grisham (2011), believe that "direct vocabulary instruction is essential, but research indicates that students with well-developed vocabulary learn many more words indirectly through reading than from instruction". Research studies have also consistently proven the high correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension (Pearson et al, 2007). These findings support the basic assumption of this study about the importance of vocabulary instruction in the reading class. According to Dalton & Grisham (2011), although many books and articles about teaching vocabulary are available, research on vocabulary instruction is "enjoying renewed attention".

Research indicates that students will not need to use every word they learn; some words will just need to be recognized. Students' mastery of vocabulary is usually assessed in terms of two levels of vocabulary knowledge: the receptive level and the productive level. Receptive knowledge refers to words that learners can recognize and understand and for which they can assign meanings when encountered in a text, while productive knowledge relates to words learners do not only understand, but also correctly pronounce and frequently use in speaking and writing (Asiyah, 2017) (Kamil and Hiebert, 2005). Thus, being aware of what students need to know about an item and, hence, "selecting what to teach, based on frequency and usefulness to the needs of your particular students" is very essential as it will definitely affect our ways of presenting that item (https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/presenting-vocabulary).

The technological revolution is here, and today's students are no longer the people who the paper-based dictionaries were designed for. In addition, more and more educational institutions are moving toward using electronic devices that offer portability and ease of use in the classroom such as netbooks, iPads, and cell phones. This is having a profound effect on the ways in which our students learn. Wylie (2012), a certified educator and author of *The Education Technology Blog*, believes that students "are more engaged in learning when using the latest technological gadgets, because it is what they are most used to interacting with. Our students do not just want mobile learning, they need it." Qun Wu (2014) conducted a research to explore the effectiveness of using smartphones in learning English vocabulary. The research revealed that the students who were using smartphones in the experimental group outperformed

those in the control group significantly. According to Segaran et al (2013), the overall outcome of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is English Pronunciation and Vocabulary Enrichment for Non-native Speakers.

Kruse (2017b), who believes that retention is "the ultimate goal of vocabulary instruction", places a lot of emphasis on the teacher's role in the process of learning and the retention of new vocabulary items. She suggests that teachers should vary their teaching activities and styles, "which includes adding variety through learning styles and critical thinking levels," when addressing different types of learners, She explores some brain-based "creative avenues that teachers can incorporate into their curriculums." These strategies are engaging; they help students to do the thinking and put them in charge of what they are doing.

Sanusi (2009) citing (Nagy and Anderson, 1985) lists three views about the relationship between vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension: the first suggests that direct instruction is not fruitful in vocabulary development, whereas the second suggests that direct instruction in specific words is extremely beneficial. The third view states that vocabulary development can be enhanced if students learn to relate the new concepts to the concepts existing in their background knowledge.

In short, vocabulary instruction in the reading class, directly or indirectly done, is essential since it does not only enhance comprehension of the reading text, but is also an integral part of the students' overall language development, which aims to enable these students both to understand the meaning of words in context and to use words to communicate with others.

Some Vocabulary Teaching Strategies for the Reading Classroom

Frost (2019), in his article about presenting vocabulary, highlights what learners need to know about an item: meaning, form (part of speech: noun, verb, adjective, adverb), pronunciation, spelling, any unpredictable grammatical pattern (e.g. irregular, uncountable), connotations of meaning (positive or negative) , collocations, register (formal, informal, colloquial, written, etc.), synonyms & antonyms, and analysis of word parts (roots, prefixes & suffixes). He also points out "which of these areas you choose to highlight will depend on the item you are teaching and the level of your students" (www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/ presenting-vocabulary).

Looking up the dictionary definition or the translation equivalent of an unfamiliar word is a common practice among EFL learners. Diamond and Gutlohn (2006) state "Dictionary use teaches students about multiple word meanings, as well as the importance of choosing the appropriate definition to fit the particular context". Furthermore, some reading books (e.g. Hartmann & Kirn, 2007) provide students with vocabulary exercises that require looking up the correct definition of the word from a dictionary entry in addition to the other parts of speech related to that word.

Using the surrounding contextual clues (i.e. words, phrases, and definitions) to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word students come across in the reading text is another common practice usually emphasized in research (Diamond & Gutlohn, 2006) as well as in reading books (Hartmann & Kirn, 2007). Diamond & Gutlohn (2006), who define contextual analysis as "inferring the meaning of an unfamiliar word by scrutinizing the text surrounding it", recommend teaching "five types of context clues: definition, synonym, antonym, example, and general to enhance contextual analysis instruction in any reading program".

However, adding other techniques can help keep the vocabulary learning process fresh and engaging. The technique to be chosen depends on the item to be presented, and a combination

of techniques can be both helpful and memorable. Following are some brain-based techniques to teach vocabulary that will probably increase students' interest in the learning and the retention of the words they encounter in their reading texts:

1. **Have a Section of your Board** for the items that come up while teaching reading. "Use different colours for the word / the phonemics / the prepositions/ the part of speech" (https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/presenting-vocabulary)

2. **Put Students in Charge**: students select a word from their list and then use that word in sentences taking into consideration the word's part of speech, definitions, synonyms and antonyms, and its connotations if any (Kruse, 2017a).

3. **Take a systematic approach to vocabulary practice:** for the words to sink into their long-term memory, students should be encouraged to learn new vocabulary on daily basis, but in short spurts, i.e.15 minutes of focused practice. "Hours a day – too much at one time — means most of it will be lost in the long term" (dominicancaonline.com/ classroom-management/5-tips-improving-student-vocabulary/).

4. **Word of the Day:** Teachers who want to encourage students to use their new vocabulary can choose one word as the word of the day. Teachers can remind students of the word's definition and let students use it (The Room 241 Team, 2013).

5. **Word Parts: Morphology (derivation & Compounding)**: students learn to derive other parts of speech of the word correctly through practice or by studying the rules of how to form nouns, adjectives, adverbs, using roots, prefixes and suffixes (Kustaryo, 1988 cited in Sanusi, 2009). For example, the teacher asks students to form other derivatives of '*migrate'* (*migration*, *migrant*, *immigration*, *immigrant*, *migrating*, and *migratory)*. Another example is having students brainstorm all the words or phrases related to '*play' (player*, *playful*, *playpen*, *ballplayer*, and *playing field)*. *Students* then discuss the meaning of each word and its relation to the root (readingrockets.org/teaching/reading101-course/modules/vocabulary/vocabulary-practice).

6. **Word Pairs**: Give students words in pairs and have them think about how the words are related. They evaluate if the words are the same, opposite, go together, or are unrelated (**ReadingWise team,** 2017). Here is an example: (students - learners: **same**), (humid - dry: **opposite**), (bread - cheese: **go together**), (casual - individual: **unrelated**).

7. **Bumper Words**: When you put the words into groups (of 3 to 5 is best), all of the words should relate except for one. Students figure out which word is not related, and they bump it (cross it out or move it to the next word group in a chain effect) (Kruse, 2017b). For example, the word *undergraduates* is the word to be crossed out in the following group: (*teachers, instructors, undergraduates, professors)*.

8. **Eye Spy:** this is a pre-reading activity in which students are asked to find unfamiliar words in the text, or they are given a list of words to search for in the text (Gemert, 2017).

9. **Word Detective:** Cox (2019) states that teachers who want to increase students' vocabulary should encourage them to read because "wide reading is the main pathway for word acquisition". This activity, she believes, enables students to see words in different contexts, and therefore, deepens their knowledge. It starts with the teacher giving students a list of keywords to look for in the reading text. Students write each

target word and its sentence on a notebook. At the end of each reading unit, the teacher discusses students' notes with them (Cox, 2019).

10. **Semantic Mapping and Word Association**: students associate the terms with the topic taught "making an arrangement of words into a graphic organizer which has a key concept at the centre or at the top, and related words and concepts linked with the key concept by means of lines of arrow" (Oxford, 1994 cited in Sanusi, 2009). Students circle any words on their vocabulary list, they choose one word they want to study more intentionally, and then think of words that come to mind when they see that word. A list is created of all of the words that come to mind, and then those words are categorized and the semantic map assignment introduced. Sematic mapping can be used as a pre-reading activity to introduce key words, or as a post-reading activity to enhance understanding by adding new concepts to the map (Kruse, 2017b). For example, if the word 'transportation' is chosen, the following is a good semantic map:

https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=examples+semantic+map+of+transportation

11. **Brainstorming and Word Association:** students associate new words with words they already know well. One method of associating vocabulary words with familiar words is to brainstorm with students. The teacher explains the new word and its definition, writes the word on the board and asks students to say words that go along with that word. For example, if the word is "mare," students might say "horse," "barn" and "hay". By writing the words down together, the teacher creates a visual reference for students, which will help them with long-term retention (The Room 241 Team, 2013).

12. **Embedding Vocabulary in Writing:** students incorporate all their vocabulary words correctly into a text (a summary or an answer to a critical question related to the topic of the reading passage), students get the opportunity to learn proper spelling and definitions, and how to use the words in context (The Room 241 Team, 2013).

13. **eVoc Strategy:** using smart phones in the classroom is an "interactive type of technology-based learning in which learners are actively involved in interesting and useful learning activities by interacting and collaborating via a mobile device like a cell phone or a personal digital assistant" (Soleimania et al, 2014). Mobile phones, which are portable and immediate mini-computers and which are almost all the time switched on, are useful online word reference tools that allow students to learn anytime and anywhere they prefer. Dalton & Grisham (2011) define an eVoc strategy as "an electronic or technology-based strategy that teachers can use to develop students' vocabulary learning and interest in words". One eVoc strategy, they suggest, is taking advantage of "online word reference tools" such as online dictionaries and thesauri, which are free mobile-phone applications, to improve reading comprehension. In

addition, research has shown that these mobile applications are also helpful in improving the pronunciation skills of English among non-native speakers (Segaran et al, 2013). However, it is worth mentioning that although students, who are always on the move, should be allowed to use technology in the classroom, teachers need to sparingly allow it in their classes because technology can never replace a good competent teacher. In that direction, Lynch (2015) points out that "Competent, engaged teachers are more necessary than ever in the Information Age, and balancing mobile educational advantages with healthy teaching interaction is the key to maximizing the worth of both".

14. **Providing choice assignments:** According to Kruse (2017a) student-directed homework assignments increase chances of "investing students in the learning process as well as in the end-result". She believes that students must be given the opportunity to select the words that "will work best for them", the ones "they feel least familiar with", or those" they feel they need to practice the most". Students also choose how to review them; they might choose to use them in example sentences or in a writing assignment, or they might use a graphic organizer that prompts them to think about analogies, roots, and derivatives of the words. They might even choose to teach the words to their friends, parents or siblings.

15. **Making Assessments Meaningful**: Kruse (2017a) states that vocabulary quizzes and tests should be "authentic to how we expect students to use the words in life, should reflect the way we teach vocabulary and practice the words in class, should not be easy to pass for students who have given little to no thought to the words."

Conclusions

The above discussion indicates that the development of EFL students' vocabulary is especially important in the reading class and that new words can be learnt indirectly and implicitly from reading texts as well as from direct and explicit instruction. Thus, students' awareness of the different strategies they can employ in learning new encountered in reading texts is critical as it helps them to choose the strategies most appealing to them.

As is evident in the discussion, adding variety through learning styles and thinking levels is likely critical in the educational settings. Thus, new practices and innovative instructional strategies need to be implemented "intentionally and strategically for groups of students who are consistently failing to attain the high literacy levels required for full participation in the digital age" (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005).

Students' active involvement in the learning process is also important. Students must be responsible not only for what they learn, but also for how they want to learn it. If students are engaged in the learning process, the chances for vocabulary retention are greater.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, the following recommendations are relevant:
• Poor vocabulary is a serious problem in the reading classroom as it decreases chances of comprehending texts. Therefore, instruction in specific unfamiliar words is essential to enhance comprehension of texts containing those words.

- EFL teachers are advised to vary their vocabulary teaching strategies to keep students actively interested in expanding their vocabulary repertoire.

- It is highly recommended that EFL students know what is expected of them in a vocabulary task to help them learn it rapidly. It is equally important that they become aware of the various strategies to learn vocabulary, so they can decide on the most appealing to them and on the most effective for their vocabulary growth.

- Teachers generally agree that passive learning is not an effective strategy. Learning vocabulary entails active engagement in the learning tasks; students should be actively involved in the teaching learning process.

- Students must be encouraged to take more responsibility for their own vocabulary learning and retention; they must be given the power to decide which words they need to practice the most and how to practice them.

- Students must learn how to use dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauri (the paper-based and the online ones) to look up the meaning of a word. The most helpful dictionaries include example sentences of the word used in context.

- For better vocabulary retention, EFL students should be encouraged to practice the vocabulary extensively in their daily communication in both written and spoken language.

- Students need to learn new words in context by reading. The more texts they read, the more vocabulary items they will learn. Teachers should encourage students to read choosing what interests them. This increased exposure will help the vocabulary to sink into the students' long-term memory.

- Mobile and computer technology can be effective tools to use in vocabulary teaching and learning. Today's students like to go digital; they love to interact with word meanings in digital contexts. Teachers are also highly recommended to go digital and integrate technology into vocabulary instruction and, hence, improve their students' vocabulary and reading comprehension.

- The E-learning program is a great transition from working in the classroom to working at home easily, as long as students have access to a phone or computer. This e-learning program allows teachers to send homework assignments or vocabulary and reading test questions to students, and then ask for responses. This saves class time and improves students' personal and organizational skills.

- Vocabulary quizzes and tests in general, and those that are part of the reading courses assessment in particular, must be challenging, authentic and varied. The questions must reflect real life contexts, and shouldn't all be multiple choice, for example, with alternatives that are too easy to choose from.

- It is highly recommended that students in the reading courses be given- as a homework assignment- one or two critical-thinking questions relating to the topic discussed in the reading passage. Each student prepares an answer giving his opinion or talking about his personal experience using some of the words learnt in the unit. Each student then presents his answer in class. Teachers can reward students by giving them bonus marks, which will maintain a high level of interest and interaction.

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