

Teaching Vocabulary Through Visual Annotations to EFL Students

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Abstract: In ELT, the lexical competence is deemed to be at the heart of communicative competence. Research demonstrates that Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) make learning easier and long lasting, but the learners are required to be trained in the use of VLS. The lexical needs are unique to the learners, and hence the strategies too. Teaching English vocabulary to EFL students is a difficult and challenging process. Most of the foreign language teachers and learners ask which method is more effective but there is no fixed answer for this question, as in this era of multimedia and internet numerous methods are available at the fingertips of the learners as well as the teachers. But there are certainly many suggestions regarding this issue, like traditional method of making a note book, regularly reviewing and using them in proper context, or using multimedia technology which also includes many devices or techniques like audio sounds, movies, videos, graphics, pictures, animation, charts, colors, etc. The researcher in this case has tried to compare the effectiveness of teaching English vocabulary to EFL by two different annotations-first is 'traditional verbal method' (only text) and second is 'visual non verbal method' (through multimedia technology using animation and pictures) to the Preparatory year (level 1 and level 2) students of the university. This study analyzes that to what extent the two strategies are effective. The experiment demonstrates that the learning through visual technology is more effective as compared to that of textual one.

Index Terms: 'Beauty and the Beast', content words, function words, Prep year, visual technology, and VLS (Vocabulary Learning Strategies).

I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of learning and teaching English as foreign language is to enable the students communicate effectively their ideas, thoughts, emotions, details and facts. To communicate impressively, the students need to develop all the four skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing. In order to acquire expertise in all these skills, the students should possess good knowledge of vocabulary. Wilkins (1972) asserts that "without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". Moreover the wider is the knowledge of vocabulary the better is the comprehension. Many instances prove that acquiring vocabulary knowledge is more important than acquiring grammatical competency. Incidents quoted by

many EFL students have shown that during their foreign trip they had to suffer when they failed to recall some suitable words and could not communicate about their requirement. For example a student during her trip to New York forgot the word 'recharge' and had to struggle a lot to buy the same for her mobile sim. She could not contact her family, back home for a long time and at the end she had to remove the sim card and show it to the shopkeeper.

If the teacher brings innovative ideas in her teaching methodology, it would help the students to learn faster. There are many methods of teaching vocabulary to EFL learners. The most common and prevalent technique is to use the printed dictionaries. But now a days, students are inclined towards using e-dictionaries on their mobile phones. The other techniques to teach vocabulary include word banks, using computers, audios, speeches, movies, animated movies, cartoons, songs and rhymes, magazines, flash cards, writing short stories, essays, articles, group discussions, enacting skits etc. Although, all these are classic methods of vocabulary teaching but teachers can always modify them according to the needs of their students and produce an exciting and new activity out of them. For example, she can create a visual experience so as to enhance the comprehension.

In today's scenario the students are more of tech-savvy and they are familiar with the use of internet. So, in order to make the learning interesting for them, visual mode is more effective. The visual learning improves the comprehension, saves the time and enhances the retention capability. The picture of an object gets imprinted in the minds of the learner and when they listen to the word, it becomes easy for them to recall that object and when they listen or read that word repeatedly, they are able to memorize the word. Thus teaching vocabulary, using visuals is more effective and long lasting.

A study suggests that an effective way to improve learning of English vocabulary is to offer graphics that illustrate what the vocabulary means. (Kim & Gilman, 2008). It is concluded by many professionals that the visual strategies help the students to learn the vocabulary (M Philips; 2016) Goetz,Sadoski,Stricker,White and Wang (2007) report that the effects of visuals used for concrete imaginable terms results in better building of definitions. Another research concluded that the learning and retention of words was increased by use of visual materials. (Hashemi, 2013)

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Vocabulary learning is not an easy task for foreign language students. The students have exposure to native language most of the time and get little exposure to foreign language. They study all other subjects in native language. It's not easy for them to remember the vocabulary, in fact they often get confused in even identification of letters while reading. The Arabic language doesn't have 'p' sound so it's difficult for them to understand the difference between the pronunciation of letters p and b. They often get confused between c and s and also between a and e. So, the teachers have to find various interesting ways of teaching English so as to motivate them to learn a foreign language. In brief, the purpose of this study is to develop an interesting way of teaching vocabulary to EFL learners and to motivate them develop their English Language Skills.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before teaching vocabulary, the teacher should know the nature of vocabulary and the type of vocabulary, she should select.

Nature of Vocabulary

Understanding the nature of vocabulary is important to the process of investigating a better method of developing the students' vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary consists of Content words and Function words. The Function words are articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions etc. or all those words which contribute to the syntax of the sentence rather than to the meaning of a sentence, for example 'do' in I do not live here. Content words are nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives and certain adverbs also. They significantly contribute to the meaning of a sentence. Content words also comprise concrete words and abstract words. The concrete words are names of real objects or which can be taught showing pictures or real objects, but abstract words are those which cannot be shown for example anger, happiness, harmony etc. which can be explained only with the help of examples or situations. Finally words are also categorized into general vocabulary and technical vocabulary. The general vocabulary includes words like 'large' which is not associated with any particular content area or subject but technical vocabulary includes terms like 'photosynthesis' which is associated to particular content area, subject or topic.

Selecting the Vocabulary

Before taking up the task of teaching vocabulary to the students, the teacher should select a passage according to the level of students. The passage can be a article or a short story or an extract from a long story, but it should have vocabulary which the students can comprehend by relating it to their previous knowledge. Some guiding points to help in such decision making are enumerated below:

- ❖ Select words that students will encounter frequently, and that therefore, represent common knowledge (Marinak, Moore, Henk, & Keepers, 1997).
- ❖ Identify words that are essential for understanding a reading selection. (Marinak, et al. 1997, p. 1).

General Guidelines for Teaching Vocabulary

- ❖ Teach new words in the context of a meaningful subject-matter lesson and facilitate student discussion that requires students to use the new word (Ellis & Farmer, 1996- 2000).
- ❖ Ensure that students hear the correct pronunciation of the word and practice saying it aloud. Hearing the syllable structure and stress pattern of the word facilitates its storage in memory (Fay & Culter, 1977).
- ❖ Teach word parts – root words, base words, prefixes, and suffixes that students will encounter frequently (Jones, 1999).
- ❖ Teach words in related clusters to help students understand how words are related and interrelated (Marinak, et al., 1997).
- ❖ Identify examples/applications and non examples/nonapplications related to the meaning of the new word (Ellis & Farmer, 1996-2000).
- ❖ Help students connect new vocabulary to something with which they are already familiar (Ellis & Farmer, 1996-2000).
- ❖ Create opportunities for students to paraphrase the definition of a new term so that they can identify the main idea associated with the term and recognize specific bits of information that clarify its broader, more general core idea (Ellis & Farmer, 1996- 2000).
- ❖ Offer students the opportunity to acquire new vocabulary using a variety of learning modalities or formats that actively engage them in the learning process (Ellis & Farmer, 1996-2000).

IV. METHODOLOGY

Participants

The students of Preparatory year level 1 agreed to be a part of this research and they were only ten, for it was the second semester and at Northern Border University the pattern is such that only failure students of first semester or the students who couldn't appear for the exam during the first semester, and the foreign students (from Arabic speaking countries like Syria, Jordan etc.) are allowed to register themselves for the second semester. So, the strength is very low during second semester, hence a limitation to this study was that the sample size was very small.

Instruments for evaluation

Two questionnaires were used as instruments for evaluation. Both of them consisted of multiple choice questions and one question paper was to assess the learning of vocabulary taught in the traditional manner and the second questionnaire was to assess the vocabulary learning through visuals and pictures.

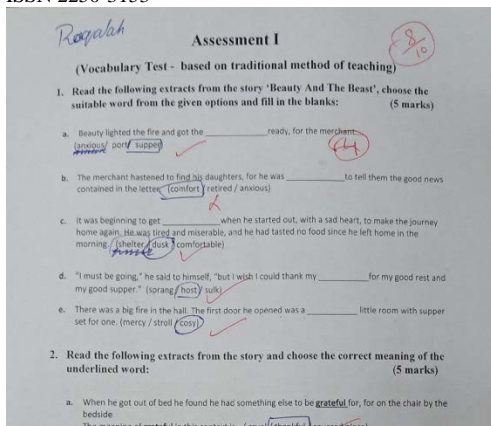


Figure 3 Assessment based on traditional method of teaching

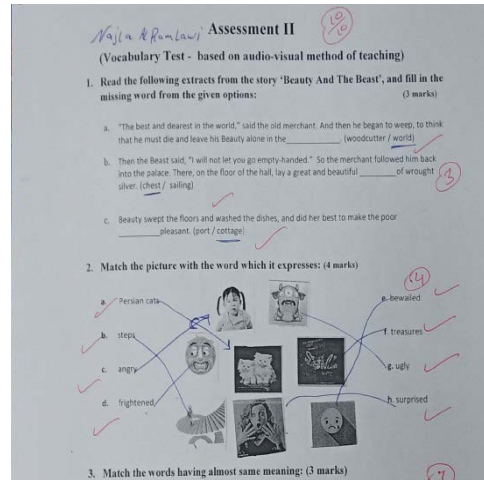


Figure 4 Assessment based on visual method of teaching

VI. CONCLUSION

It was concluded from the above study that the learning of vocabulary through pictures is faster and

long lasting as compared to that learnt through traditional method. Also, they are seemed to be more interested and enthusiastic when they get chance to watch videos and pictures and they are able to form a definition of the word easily and effectively.

VII. References

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