

Leveraging the classroom environment as a source of vocabulary in EFL classes

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Abstract: *This article investigates the efficacy of integrating classroom-derived vocabulary into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The study examines the potential benefits of utilizing words encountered within the classroom environment for vocabulary teaching purposes. Through a systematic analysis, it explores various strategies for identifying, selecting, and incorporating these words into EFL curricula. Additionally, the article evaluates the impact of this approach on learners' vocabulary acquisition, retention, and usage. By synthesizing empirical findings and pedagogical insights, this research contributes to the enhancement of vocabulary instruction in EFL contexts.*

Keywords: EFL instruction, vocabulary acquisition, classroom-derived words, vocabulary teaching strategies, language learning, curriculum development.



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INTRODUCTION

In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes, leveraging the classroom environment as a source of vocabulary can be a powerful tool for language learning. Rather than relying solely on pre-selected vocabulary lists or external sources, teachers can incorporate words that naturally arise during classroom activities, discussions, and interactions. This approach capitalizes on the contextual relevance and authenticity of the language encountered in the classroom, making vocabulary learning more meaningful and memorable for students.

There are several ways to apply the classroom source of words in EFL classes: list, course books, vocabulary books, teacher and students. And these sources could be taught using various methods and activities. In teaching the topic games are more efficient such as: Hiding Words, Scrambled words, Domino and etc. Among the sources, “the student source words” is much more efficient than the others, students can easily influence on other students’ vocabulary; paying more attention to other learners’ sayings, a class’s shared lexicon, brainstorm each other etc.

The following methods can be more efficient for language teachers in teaching vocabulary in EFL classes.

Definition - a definition gives the meaning of words. The teacher may use phrases or statements to define something. The key words used to provide a definition are: “are/is known as”, “are /is described as”, “are/ is defined as”.

Examples - examples help learners to understand the meaning of new words. Key words- “such as”, “like”, “for example”, “for instance”, “is/ are”, are used by the author.

Surrounding words - words surrounding the new vocabulary might provide clues to the meaning of new words. *For example*- Children are too young to understand that **swallowing** gum can be **dangerous**.

Background knowledge - Experience and background knowledge about the text plays an important role in vocabulary comprehension. For that reason it is important for teachers to do schema-building before learners read the text.

Teaching lexical chunks. Peters suggests that the memorization of chunks of language might be productive and powerful. She states that the learning of lexical chunks can serve two objectives: it enables the student to have chunks of language available for immediate use and it also provides the student with information that can be analyzed at a later stage. The main advantage of the use of lexical chunks is that they build on the fluency of the English language learner. They can also be associated with certain communication rituals such as —To whom am I speaking? Lexical chunks are

related to typical functional language use. *For example* “Have you heard about.....?” is reserved for starting gossip or talking about an event. Lexical chunks like these are institutionalized as the most efficient and most familiar linguistic means to carry out language function.

Teaching collocations. Vocabulary knowledge doesn’t only involve just knowing the meaning of a word in isolation, but includes knowing the word that usually co-occurs with it. These words that co-occur with high frequency are called collocations, e.g. heavy rain, strong coffee but not powerful coffee, a brief discussion but a short man. Collocations help students to define the semantic area of a word such as: **Synonyms** - words with identical meaning; however warns that absolute substitutability is not possible, since factors such as register and style determines the usage of synonymous words. Examples of synonyms include commence/begin, end/ terminate. **Antonyms** - antonyms refers to a notion of semantic opposition or unrelatedness. Examples of antonyms include married/ single, buy/ sell, big/ small.

Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition (IVA) is a vocabulary learning Strategy, defined as the learning of new words as a by-product of a meaning-focused communicative activity, such as reading, listening and interaction. It occurs through multiple exposures to a word in different contexts. Learners are able to acquire vocabulary through extensive reading, communicative interactions and exposure to natural input such as movies and television. This strategy entails extensive comprehensible input and independent learning. IVA has many advantages: It is contextualized and gives the learner a richer sense of word use and meaning that can be provided in group activities. It also allows vocabulary learning and reading to happen at the same time. It is individualized and learner-centered because the vocabulary to be learned depends on the learner’s own selection of reading materials. Presentation, consolidation and lexical development occur at the same time. On the other hand; IVA also has a few disadvantages: It does not work for learning core vocabulary, since it is individualized and the vocabulary that is acquired is dependent on the learner’s own selection of reading material. There is no control over what learners learn, so learning might not even take place. Incorrect guessing might lead to incorrect understanding of vocabulary.

Teaching word family. Development in lexical semantics and the mental lexicon have prompted the development of the semantic field theory, semantic networks or semantic grid strategies, which present and organize words in terms of interrelated lexical meanings. The semantic field theory suggests that the lexical content of a language is best treated not as a mere aggregation of independent words or unstructured list of words but as a collection of interrelating networks of relations between words. The meaning of most words is governed, in part, by the presence in the language of other words whose semantic functions are related in one or more ways to the same area of situational environment or culture. A simple example of a semantic field is the set of kinship terms: father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, uncle, aunt or the various body parts learned as a subset. Words may be grouped together (related to each other) according to different criteria. Animals for example may be grouped in terms of physical or perceptual features such as pet, wild, food etc. According to How individual word meanings exist within systems of related meaning (kinship) and knowledge of the meaning relations among a set of words would seem to follow from knowledge of the constituent meaning. There is ample psychological evidence that supports this assumption. Adults are better at remembering words from a list that contain semantically related upsets than words from lists of unrelated words. Semantic interrelationships among words cannot be acquired incidentally through reading. They need direct systematic instruction, which enables the learner to recognize the semantic relatedness between words. This strategy also enhances retention of vocabulary learned in this manner.

Eliciting. The learner calls out or writes the target word. This can be in the form of definition, antonyms or synonyms. This activity enables the learner to express meaning and explore knowledge of the target vocabulary deeply.

Contextualization. The learners learn to use the word in sentences through gap filling activity, story-building or role-play activity.

Labeling. Learners label various parts or objects in class. This activity can be extended at home or immediate environment.

Personalization. This process is also known as deep-processing. The learners visualize themselves doing a specific activity relating to the target vocabulary, e.g. learners imagine themselves rowing a boat.

Target vocabulary = row. Students can also be asked to think and express what freedom means to them individually.

Learning vocabulary by identifying productive pre-fixes and post-fixes.

Learning the most common productive pre-fixes and post-fixes can enable learners to understand a thousand other academic words, which uses one or more of those word parts. Word part clues are highly memorable because they are simple to understand e.g. bi- means 2, anti- means against. Once learners have mastered the word part, they can create their own words.

Association. Learners learn to associate the new vocabulary or target word with something they already know or something that is meaningful to them.

Semantic mapping. This method is used to motivate and involve students in thinking, reading and writing. It enhances vocabulary development by helping students to link new information with previous experience. This is done by making an arrangement of words into a picture, which has a key concept at the centre and related words and concepts linked with the key concept.

Learning vocabulary via analogy. An analogy is an implied (unstated) relationship between two pairs of objects. Analogies require students to identify a similar relationship between dissimilar objects. Understanding analogies requires the use of higher thinking skills. The major forms of vocabulary via analogy are: synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, word and word structure, part to whole, whole to part and characterization. An example of an analogy is: which one does not belong to the group:

1. flood 2. debris 3. facility 4. rain 5. current (answer: facility)

Using Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) to teach vocabulary. This teaching strategy is used to build language proficiency in the use of grammatical structures and vocabulary. This is done by the presentation of target vocabulary structures. Gestures can also be taught and practiced with the new vocabulary to help students remember the target vocabulary. Three steps are involved in TPRS:

Step1 – Teacher establishes meaning by presentation of target vocabulary.

Step2- Teacher asks students to tell a story with a general outline by using the target vocabulary. The teacher then asks students to provide specific details.

Step3 – Teacher discusses story with students and ask questions about the story and how it relates to students' lives.

Learning vocabulary through story innovation. The learning vocabulary through story innovation strategy was introduced by Martin and Brogan. It is a procedure for innovating sentence patterns by using the structure of a sentence to create a semantically new one through word substitutions. Story innovation is a way for learners to enjoy writing and reading and learn vocabulary in a scaffolded format. The finished product is a new text that is easy for learners to read because they are familiar with the patterns in the original story and with the new vocabulary used to create the innovation.

Vocabulary finder. These are problem-solving activities that involve a list of words that the learners try to locate in a square or rectangular maze of letters. The difficulty of these puzzles is determined by the number of lexical items to be located and the quantity of the unrelated alphabetic distracters (random letters).

Tic-tac-toe. This is a structure that features three rows with three columns each. Students are asked to discover a relationship in three *lexical items* in a diagonal, vertical or horizontal row.

Scrambled format. Students are asked to unscramble the letters which belong to the domain of kingship terminology.

Use of bilingual dictionaries. According to Baxter the continuous and extended use of bilingual dictionaries slows down a student's vocabulary development. However, Summer argues that dictionaries can be valuable tools in vocabulary acquisition when properly used. Garner suggested the following ways of helping learners to remember previously learned words. Spend time on a word by dealing with two or three aspects of the word, such as its spelling, pronunciation, parts, related derived forms, its meaning, its collocations, its grammar, or restrictions on its use. Get learners to do graded reading and listening to stories at the appropriate level.

Presentation. The teacher provides a description, explanation or example of a new term. Students are asked to restate the description, explanation or example of the new term. Students then construct a picture, symbol or graphic design of the term. The teacher engages students in activities that will help in mastering the new concepts. Students are asked to discuss the new terms often in class.

Lexical and Semantic Development. Teacher employs extensive reading activities in and out of the classroom and facilitates communicative activities such as role-play and debates to enhance fluency and confidence in speech.

Domino. It is a such kind activity the teacher will prepare the cards divided into boxes where the first box illustrates the picture of an animal and second box contains the definition of another animal. The aim of the activity is to find appropriate definition to the picture and it goes on.

In conclusion, leveraging the classroom environment as a primary source of vocabulary in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes proves to be a highly effective strategy for language learning. By moving away from traditional methods reliant on pre-selected lists or external resources, educators can harness the natural language that emerges during classroom activities, discussions, and interactions. This approach taps into the contextual relevance and authenticity of the language encountered in real-time, leading to more meaningful and memorable vocabulary acquisition experiences for students.

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