



Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition For Tertiary Level Learners: Strategies For Effective Second Language Learning

Dr. M. Naga Raja Kumar

Assistant Professor of English

Department of Humanities and Sciences

Annamacharya University, Rajampet

P. Vijaya Kumar

Assistant Professor of English

Department of Humanities and Sciences

Annamacharya University, Rajampet

Dr. Sagili Satyam

Assistant Professor of English

Department of Humanities and Sciences

Annamacharya University, Rajampet

Abstract:

This study investigates the challenges faced by Tertiary level learners in acquiring vocabulary in a second language and explores effective strategies to overcome these challenges. Despite the importance of vocabulary in language learning, many Tertiary level learners struggle to remember and integrate new words into their reading and writing. This research aims to identify the essential vocabulary needed for Tertiary level learners and develop practical exercises and activities to enhance vocabulary acquisition and retention. A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for language educators, policymakers, and researchers, and inform the development of effective language learning programs for Tertiary level learners.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition, second language learning, Tertiary level learners, language education, mixed-methods research.

Introduction

The traditional method of mastering a foreign language, which focuses on acquiring Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) skills, has yielded limited success for learners from rural areas. This suggests that the prevailing teaching and learning methodologies may be inadequate. Consequently, there is a pressing need for innovative and straightforward approaches to second language acquisition.

In response to this challenge, it is imperative that we adopt creative and engaging methods for second language learning, developing strategies that make the learning process more interactive, enjoyable, and effective.

The process of language learning typically begins with listening, followed by speaking, reading, and writing. The human mind is biologically equipped to subconsciously acquire language by focusing on meaning rather

than form. However, when it comes to speaking a second language, learners often experience anxiety and self-doubt about their competence.

This inconsistency can lead learners to believe that it is challenging to simultaneously learn a language and subject matter. This article aims to demonstrate that it is feasible to improve language skills while studying academic subject matter in one's own discipline.

Content Integrated Language Learning (CILL)

By integrating language learning with academic content, learners can develop their language skills in a more practical and applied way. This approach, known as Content Integrated Language Learning (CILL), was first formulated by David Marsh, Professor at the University of Finland. CILL involves teaching specific subjects through a foreign language, promoting a more effective and substantial improvement in language proficiency.

The human brain does not possess a separate neural system for processing different languages. Consequently, the methods employed to learn one's mother tongue can also be effective for acquiring a second language. However, second language learners often struggle to attain proficiency without a deep understanding of the language's structural components.

To achieve proficiency in a second language, it is essential to recognize the importance of all language properties, including alphabet, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence patterns. These properties collectively contribute to the language's overall efficiency, and familiarity with them is crucial for developing language proficiency.

Among these language properties, vocabulary acquisition plays a vital role in language learning, regardless of whether the language is the first, second, or foreign (Decarrico, 2001, p. 285). Insufficient vocabulary knowledge can significantly impede learners' ability to comprehend and express themselves effectively (Decarrico, 2001; Nation, 2001).

The properties of language are interconnected and relational, rather than existing in isolation. This complexity, which involves navigating original meanings, contextual interpretations, and intended meanings, can make the process of learning vocabulary in a target language overwhelming and confusing.

As a result, vocabulary pedagogy is often overlooked, despite its crucial importance. The adage "without grammar, very little can be explained, but without vocabulary, nothing can be explained" underscores the significance of vocabulary in language learning.

Ultimately, the success of mastering a target language depends largely on one's vocabulary strength. Having a solid foundation in vocabulary is essential for effortless language learning. Acquiring an adequate knowledge of vocabulary is a fundamental requirement for learners to navigate the target language with ease.

This highlights the need for effective vocabulary instruction and learning strategies that can help learners develop a robust vocabulary base, facilitating their overall language proficiency.

Vocabulary is essential for effective communication

A robust vocabulary is essential for effective communication in a target language. It enables learners to express themselves confidently and accurately, both in speaking and writing. In today's academic landscape, vocabulary mastery is crucial not only for language learning but also for academic success, as it facilitates understanding and navigation of subject-specific terminology.

Insufficient vocabulary knowledge can lead to comprehension difficulties and misinterpretation of intended meanings. To address this, learners should focus on acquiring essential words and phrases, such as those listed on (link unavailable). These basic words serve as the foundation for fluent language use and should be practiced in an experimental and engaging manner.

Research emphasizes the importance of vocabulary learning in achieving proficient communicative competence (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001). Mastering the lexis of the target language and understanding the connections between word meanings and contextual usage are critical components of effective language learning.

Therefore, educators should prioritize vocabulary instruction and develop innovative strategies to support learners in improving their vocabulary skills. By doing so, learners can develop a strong foundation in the target language, enabling them to communicate confidently and accurately in various academic and professional contexts.

When encountering unknown words, readers can often infer partial meanings without relying on dictionaries. This highlights the value of pleasurable free reading in enhancing vocabulary comprehension. By engaging in enjoyable reading activities, learners can develop a reading habit that fosters language proficiency and familiarity with linguistic properties.

Ultimately, this process enables learners to become autonomous language learners, which is the ultimate goal of language learning. In this context, Content Integrated Language Learning (CILL) emerges as a highly suitable approach. Originally designed for foreign language instruction, CILL allows learners to master both the core subject matter and the target language (L2) simultaneously.

By integrating language and content learning, CILL promotes a more holistic and effective learning experience. This approach enables learners to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter while improving their language proficiency, ultimately leading to enhanced academic and professional outcomes.

Key Strategies for Vocabulary Learning

Research has identified several essential components of vocabulary learning that educators can integrate into their teaching practices. These include:

1. **Building background knowledge:** Activating learners' prior knowledge to facilitate understanding of new vocabulary.
2. **Analyzing words from known to unknown:** Guiding learners to recognize relationships between familiar and unfamiliar words.
3. **Using new vocabulary in conversation:** Encouraging learners to apply newly acquired vocabulary in meaningful contexts.
4. **Exposure to diverse situations:** Providing learners with opportunities to encounter new words in various settings.
5. **Compiling essential vocabulary lists:** Helping learners prepare lists of critical vocabulary relevant to specific situations.(Allen, 1999; Carr & Wixson, 1996)

Leveraging Mother Tongue Knowledge in Second Language Learning

Second language learning can be facilitated by drawing on learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge of their mother tongue. The language skills used to master the mother tongue can be extended to understand the target language, making vocabulary acquisition more accessible. When learners use their mother tongue as a foundation for learning the second language, they can tap into their existing knowledge and past experiences, which are imprinted in their memory.

Two Essential Strategies for Vocabulary Development

To develop vocabulary and contextualize word meanings, two crucial strategies can be employed:

1. **Authenticating proper usage:** Focus on functional words, such as:
 - Articles (a, an, the)
 - Demonstratives (this, that)
 - Quantifiers (many, a few, a lot of)
 - Prepositions (without, through, across)
 - Qualifiers (really, quite, much)

2. **Exposing learners to different contexts:** Emphasize content words with specific meanings, such as:

- Nouns (elephant, giraffe, gnu)
- Adjectives (sly, brown, active)
- Adverbs (thematically)

By implementing these strategies, learners can develop a deeper understanding of word meanings and apply them effectively in speaking and writing.

Moving Beyond Traditional Methods

To enhance vocabulary learning, tutors should shift from traditional methods, such as relying on worksheets and dictionaries, to more engaging and interactive approaches, including:

- Word play
- Grouping words into families (domains)
- Designing interdisciplinary dictations

These innovative strategies can facilitate more effective vocabulary acquisition and encourage learners to reuse words in their everyday conversations. By practicing discussions and incorporating vocabulary into daily routines, learners can become more comfortable and confident in their language use.

Conclusion

Content Integrated Language Learning (CILL) provides students with contextual learning of the target language, enabling them to acquire standard vocabulary and become sufficiently competent. By employing active strategies tailored to learners' levels, educators can help students develop reliable competency and improve their ability to recall vocabulary.

Mastery of the target language can also boost students' confidence in their profession. While our students are capable of quickly mastering a second language (L2), they often lack constant exposure to the language and the compelling need to speak and write it.

Given the diverse social backgrounds and communities our students come from, they may struggle to comprehend complex vocabulary. As second language educators, it is our responsibility to train them according to their level of understanding and application.

Creating an artificial, compelling situation where learners cannot avoid listening and responding can be an effective strategy. Teachers can provide learners with exposure to categorization activities, Concept Circles, and Concept of Definition.

As Vacca and Vacca (1996) emphasize, word mapping is crucial, particularly through Concept of Definition instruction, which supports vocabulary and concept learning by helping students internalize a strategy for defining and clarifying unknown words.

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