



## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING VOCABULARY IN LANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is about the importance of teaching vocabulary while teaching foreign language to students. Vocabulary is an important part of the English teaching process. It is supposed to be a very effective communicative device as it carries the highest level of importance within peoples' verbal interaction.*

Vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical tool for foreign language learners because a limited vocabulary in a foreign language impedes successful communication. Underscoring the importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt emphasizes that "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language". Nation further describes the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. The importance of vocabulary is demonstrated daily in and out the school. In classroom, the achieving students possess the most sufficient vocabulary. Researchers such as Laufer and Nation, Maximo and others have realized that the acquisition of vocabulary is essential for successful foreign language use and plays an important role in the formation of complete spoken and written

texts. In English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) learning vocabulary items plays a vital role in all language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Rivers and Nunan, furthermore, argue that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, we will be unable to use the structures and functions we may have learned for comprehensible communication. Wilkins states that: "There is not much value in being able to produce grammatical sentences if one has not got the vocabulary that is needed to convey what one wishes to say ... While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed'.

Teaching vocabulary may be problematic because many teachers are not confident about the best practice in vocabulary teaching and at times do not know where to begin to form an



instructional emphasis on word learning. Teaching words is a crucial aspect in learning a language as languages are based on words. It is almost impossible to learn a language without words; even communication between human beings is based on words. Both teachers and students agree that acquisition of the vocabulary is a central factor in teaching a language. Teaching vocabulary is one of the most discussed parts of teaching English as a foreign language. When the teaching and learning process takes place, problems would appear to the teachers. They have problems of how to teach students in order to gain satisfying results. The teacher should prepare and find out the appropriate techniques, which will be implemented to the students. A good teacher should prepare himself or herself with various and up-to-date techniques. Teachers need to be able to master the material in order to be understood by students, and make them interested and happy in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. The teachers should be concerned that teaching vocabulary is something new and different from student's native language. They also have to take into account that teaching English for young learners is different from adults. The teachers have to know the characteristics of his/her learners. Moreover they need to prepare good techniques and suitable material in order to gain the target of language teaching.

## **The Description of Vocabulary**

### **1. The Definition of Vocabulary**

Vocabulary can be defined as " words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary). Hornby defines vocabulary as "the total number of words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings". While Ur states: "Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than

just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. A useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary "items" rather than "words." In addition, Burns defines vocabulary as " the stock of words which is used by a person, class or profession. According to Zimmerman cited in Coady and Huckin 'vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learning. Furthermore, Diamond and Gutlohn in [www.readingrockets.org/article](http://www.readingrockets.org/article) state that vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings." From the definitions above, it can be concluded that vocabulary is the total number of words that are needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers' meaning. That is the reason why it is important to learn vocabulary.

### **2. Kinds of Vocabulary**

Some experts divide vocabulary into two types: active and passive vocabulary. Harmer distinguishes between these two types of vocabulary. The first type of vocabulary refers to the one that the students have been taught and that they are expected to be able to use. Meanwhile, the second one refers to the words which the students will recognize when they meet them, but which they will probably not be able to pronounce. Haycraft, quoted by Hatch and Brown, indicate two kinds of vocabulary, namely receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary.

#### **A. Receptive Vocabulary**

Receptive vocabulary is words that learners recognize and understand when they are used in context, but which they cannot produce. It is vocabulary that learners recognize when they see or meet in reading text but do not use it in speaking and writing.

#### **B. Productive Vocabulary**

Productive vocabulary is the words that the learners understand and can pronounce correctly and use constructively in speaking and writing. It involves what is



needed for receptive vocabulary plus the ability to speak or write at the appropriate time. Therefore, productive vocabulary can be addressed as an active process, because the learners can produce the words to express their thoughts to others.

### 3. Vocabulary Mastery

In order to understand the language, vocabulary is crucial to be mastered by the learner. Vocabulary mastery is needed to express our ideas and to be able to understand other people's sayings. According to Webster mastery refers to: a. the authority of a master; dominion, b. the upper hand in a contest or competition; superiority, ascendancy and a. possession or display of great skill or technique, b. skill or knowledge that makes one master of a subject comment. While Hornby defines mastery as complete knowledge or complete skill. From that definition, mastery means complete knowledge or great skill that makes someone a master in a certain subject. The specificity of any individual's vocabulary knowledge depends on the person and his motivation, desires, and need for the words. Vocabulary mastery refers to the great skill in processing words of a language. It is an individual achievement and possession. For that reason, the biggest

responsibility in increasing the knowledge is in the individual himself. The success in widening the vocabulary mastery requires their own motivation and interest on the words of a language. From the definition above, we can conclude that vocabulary mastery is an individual's great skill in using words of a language, which is acquired based on their own interests needs and motivation. Vocabulary mastery plays an important role in the four language skills and it has to be considered that vocabulary mastery is one of the needed components of language.

The main aim of teaching vocabulary is assimilation of the meaning, form of the words and its usage in oral and written speech – that is formation of lexical habits. People can have many aptitudes, but without a large and precise English vocabulary to express them, they cannot take full advantage of these abilities. Unlike aptitudes, vocabulary is not a natural ability; it can be improved if one is willing to make the effort to do so.

Thus, vocabulary is an important part of the English teaching process. It is supposed to be a very effective communicative device as it carries the highest level of importance within peoples' verbal interaction.

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