

# Pair Work and Group Work: A way to Enhance English Vocabulary

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## ABSTRACT

*When students are asked to speak on a given topic, they try to speak, but they may not express their views effectively due to lack of vocabulary. Owing to this, they lose confidence and hesitate to speak. Even to write a piece of composition they need to generate ideas. So they try either to escape from it or postpone it due to scarcity of appropriate words. Though it is difficult to grasp words, it has become unavoidable to the students of vernacular background to build up communicative competence. Moreover, they show reluctance to learn vocabulary in English as there is no coordination between spelling and pronunciation in many of the words. After several experiments the author felt that pair or group work was the best way to motivate the students of a heterogeneous group to enhance their communicative competence. The present article focuses on teaching vocabulary (synonyms, antonyms and one-word substitutes in particular) through either pair or group work.*

## Introduction

When learners are asked to and attempt to speak on a given topic, they are not able to express their views effectively due to lack of lack of vocabulary. Owing to this, they lose confidence and hesitate to speak. Vocabulary is the knowledge of words to communicate in different contexts. As Stahl (2005) says, "Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world." Vocabulary is crucial even for writing (Leki & Carson, 1994; Polio & Glew, 1996). To write a piece of composition, learners need to generate ideas. So they either try to escape from the task or postpone it due to lack of appropriate words. Though it is difficult to grasp words,

it has become unavoidable to the learners of vernacular background to build their communicative competence. Moreover, they show reluctance to learn vocabulary in English as there is no coordination between spelling and pronunciation in many of the words. Fuente (2002) stresses the point that learner's interaction and negotiation plays a vital role in acquisition of vocabulary, so pair or group work seems to be the best way to motivate learners to learn new words.

Learners of a heterogeneous class who come from the vernacular background have little exposure to the target language. They are expected to speak or write on a given topic without proper training. They hesitate to speak due to lack of ideas and fear. "Ignorance coupled with fear and inhibition

obstruct the students' thinking capacity" (Lowernica, 2011). Hence they fail to reach the target. The present article focuses on teaching vocabulary (synonyms, antonyms and one-word substitutes in particular) through either pair or group work to enhance their vocabulary.

### **Background of the study**

Some learners have fluency, but when they are asked to write they make blunders because they are not aware of the spelling of the words they use. So, they hesitate to write. Some learners have subject knowledge, but they are unable to express their ideas due to lack of minimum vocabulary. Lack of exposure to English (L2) is the reason for their inability. To get rid of the fear from their mind, it is necessary to facilitate the learners to learn in their classroom. It is very difficult to learn vocabulary through formal instruction; in fact, it depends on various factors like learners' mood and understanding capacity, and also the teacher's approach to vocabulary teaching. "Vocabulary instructions should be based on a variety of teaching techniques and activities in order to cater for individual learning styles and to break the classroom routines" (Takac, 2008, p.23). Pair work with a little motivation promotes readiness to interact and learn.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Learners from the vernacular background have fear of learning vocabulary in English due to lack of consistency between spelling

and pronunciation of many of the words. Moreover, lack of exposure to the language makes them feel it is impossible to master a foreign language like English. They do not show interest to learn. So it is the teacher's responsibility to make them feel comfortable in learning new vocabulary. Pair work or group work is found easier to make them learn and memorise new words. Furthermore, they need to know synonyms and antonyms to avoid monotonous speech. Besides this, they have to learn one-word substitutes to make their speech clear and concise. They need to have good vocabulary to meet the challenges of the competitive world.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The first objective of the study is to make learners learn new words from the known words. Later, with group or pair work they learn a number of new words with their spelling, pronunciation, meaning and usage. The second objective is to make them analyze the multiple meanings of new words in different situations. The third objective is to make even the advanced learners practise the learnt words in both speech and writing.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Learning English vocabulary is difficult for L2 learners as there is no coordination between spelling and pronunciation in most of the words. So, they show reluctance towards learning. Pair work or group work is found as the best way to make the learners participate actively and learn with interest.

## Methodology

### Study Design

The present research was designed to help the learners to improve their vocabulary by making them involved completely in the process of learning. Pairs of cards and dictionaries were used in the pair work. During this activity, the learners learn new words (synonyms/antonyms; one-word substitutes) with their spelling, pronunciation, meaning and usage in different contexts. Handouts are used in the group work. In this activity learners interact and practice the learnt words. They also build up their creativity. They overcome their fear and improve their confidence level. The enhancement of their competence can also be assessed through this activity.

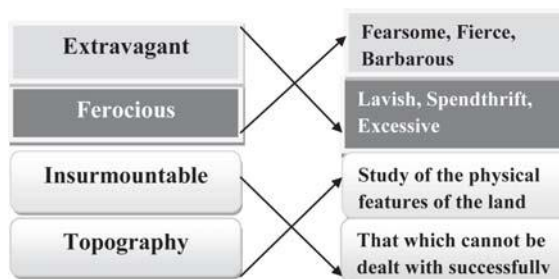
### Material

#### 1. Pairs of cards:

Fifteen pairs of cards of two colours were made. On a yellow card a new word was written and its synonyms were written on the other side of other colour card, and vice-versa. So, each one of the pair had a set of synonyms of the word on the other card and a new word on the other side whose synonyms were on the other side of the second card.

Similarly for one-word substitutes, pairs of cards were made. Two one-word substitutes to be taught were written on two separate colour cards and their “explanation” was written behind the card of the other word of the pair.

### Samples



#### 2. Dictionaries

#### 3. Handouts:

- a) Consisting of a short, familiar story or passage with the difficult words highlighted, followed by multiple choice type questions focusing on vocabulary; and
- b) Consisting of interesting pictures of different themes.

### Participants and Duration

Thirty learners, for a one-hour-and-forty-minutes class (Lab). (For pair work, if there are 60 learners, two more colour cards with the same words should be used. Based on the number of learners, their capacity and time limit, the teacher can decide the number of words to be taught and hence the number of pairs of cards).

### Procedure

#### Pair Work:

Pairs of cards were used for pair work. All the thirty cards were shuffled and distributed to the learners. They were asked to find out their partner having the synonyms. The rationale behind the two colours is to make their job easier, i.e., they need not go to

learners with similar colour cards. Dictionaries were provided to the paired learners. They were asked to write one antonym for better understanding and use the synonyms in different sentences to make them analyze the difference in meaning of those synonyms.

Similarly, to teach one-word substitutes, the learners were asked to look at the explanation and find out their partners with the key word. Then the pairs of learners were asked to use the key word (one-word substitute) in their own sentences.

### **Group Work**

Handouts were used for group activity. The learners were divided into groups (4 or 5 learners in each group). Vocabulary was taught through a reading or listening activity. Instructions were given beforehand. (For listening activity, the learners asked to read the handouts prior to listening to the text; while listening they answered the questionnaire in the handouts.) It was a reading activity here, as the handouts were printed texts. The learners read and did the task.

A second set of handouts (consisting of pictures) was given to groups of learners. They were asked to write down a few lines about at the picture using the words learnt. It encouraged their creativity. Later, the learners were asked either to read or speak out.

### **Role of the Teacher**

As “knowledge of the words may progress

from superficial to deep at various stages of learning (Laufer, 1998),” the teacher should be ready to facilitate the learners at various stages. S/he should help them in tracing their partners, if it is a difficult word by giving a clue and should be familiar with the pronunciation of the given words to help them in pronouncing the words. S/he should discuss the minute differences in meaning of the synonyms by providing examples.

The teacher should motivate the learners by setting a time limit and making them compete among the group members. S/he should monitor the learners and help them to comprehend the picture.

### **Evaluation**

The second set of handouts (consisting of pictures) was used for assessment. The learners were judged based on the number of new words used in their speech. Even their pronunciation could be assessed.

### **Results**

The learners learnt thirty new words along with their usage in different contexts. They got accustomed to the new words in the group activity. They also enjoyed the activities and found them useful in learning new words and their usage.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some learners may not understand the minute differences among the synonyms. They may not show interest in using those words in sentences of different situations due to lack of ideas. It is difficult to get pictures for all the words to be used.

### Recommendations of the Study

- a. The teacher should monitor and encourage the learners by guiding them in using the words in different sentences.
- b. If the learners are more in number, ten pairs of cards with multiple colours should be used.
- c. Based on the level of the learners and the time available, the teacher should decide on the number of words to teach along with discussion.
- d. Class time may not be used for introducing new words, but for making the learners practise the words already learnt.
- e. If the learners make mistakes/mispronounce the words while speaking, they should not be corrected then and there, but later, and even then corrections should be made in general with the whole class.

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