

‘The Missing Ingredient’: Vocabulary Enhancement through Activities

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates a method of enhancing the vocabulary of hotel management using English-to-Tamil background learners who study English as a second language at private institutes in Vellore, India. The rationale for doing this study is that students who learn all subjects in their mother tongue find difficulty when they learn the same subjects in English. Consequently, they fail to understand and comprehend terms related to their subject. The activities to teach the vocabulary of hotel management in English is expected to enhance students’ skills, such as implementing vocabulary in reading, writing, and speaking. The results of data analysis have shown a positive outcome of the study by helping students to comprehend English and understand the vocabulary of the lesson correctly.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Vocabulary Activities, English Skills, English as Second Language, ESL Learners, Hospital and Hotel Management.

Introduction

Everyone likes ‘Dosa’, but one should know the ingredients and method of preparation to enjoy its deliciousness. It is the language teachers’ responsibility to provide the students with different ingredients required to speak English well. And vocabulary is one of the main ingredients. This article focuses especially on vocabulary activities that are required for students to learn, remember, and implement in everyday life.

Vocabulary is imperative to language and extremely important to the language learners. Vocabulary expertise is the simplest one of the additives of language mastering, like other skills. Vocabulary permits language to flow effectively.

Researchers are unanimous regarding the significance of words in a language. Any human activity that entails language, whether complicated or straightforward, requires words. A lack of vocabulary can also bring about an inefficient communicate and might supply upward thrust to a false impression. There is no factor to discard the significance of proper vocabulary knowledge. In accordance with the view of Stern (1983), a scientific understanding of lexis is strongly felt in language pedagogy.

While we talk about gaining knowledge of a language, the assignment of getting to know the expertise of its words and their meaning comes first. Lexical competence of a learner is taken into consideration as the heart of communicative competence. Laufer (1986)

says, “No language acquisition, whether first, second or foreign child or person can take location without the purchase of lexis (69)”. The importance of vocabulary in second language (L2) learning is often highlighted, saying that it is more important than the other components of language. McCarthy (1990) says that irrespective of how accurately the learners learn grammar, regardless of how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in L2 cannot happen in a meaningful way.

The hassle of vocabulary learning in L2 or foreign language (FL) learning is mentioned broadly in contemporary literature. Fox (1987:308) has found that learning a new word is very difficult in the case of a foreign language. Further, (Kelly, 1986) creating a new word with conjunctions, with its meaning intact, is one of the most significant problems faced by FL learners. It has been found that the L2 learners’ vocabulary troubles are deeply rooted; these troubles usually continue to be a hurdle, but they are cautiously controlled by teaching. Even though the newcomers attain success in learning L2 vocabulary after cautious teaching, such learning is not “time-efficient”, i.e., it takes a long time to learn a small variety of items (Laurie, 1983:363).

Vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. This knowledge helps in the understanding of texts, expression of self, and description of perceptions. The knowledge of the lexicon of a language systematises the mental vocabulary in a speaker’s mind. Vocabulary may be organised according to the content-specific words, generalised

academic words, and so on. Vocabulary instruction must be included in all the stages to increase the academic literacy level of students. According to Wilkins (1972), without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. Vocabulary has to be taught to train the learners to use words with appropriateness and precision for effective communication.

It has been stressed that lexical knowledge is one of the indicators of one’s overall knowledge of the language. Anderson and Freebody (1981), referred to by Mirhassani and Toosi (2000), insist that vocabulary knowledge is an excellent predictor of general language ability. Research evidence has demonstrated that there is a very “strong and positive relationship between overall proficiency and vocabulary test score” (Fan, 2001:83) in the performance of L2 learners of English. A large vocabulary size is assumed to have a positive contribution to learners’ comprehension skill development (McCarthy, 1984). So, it is understood that vocabulary knowledge has an essential role to play in the acquisition of L2 proficiency.

Review of Literature

Teaching vocabulary plays a crucial role in ELT, as lexis is the core or heart of language (Lewis 1993, p.89). As students develop fluency in English, it is significant to develop personal vocabulary learning strategies to acquire productive vocabulary knowledge. Though the students instinctively recognise the importance of vocabulary in their language learning and they “carry around dictionaries and not grammar books” (Schmitt 1997:4), there is a gap in acquiring

apt vocabulary learning strategy. The learners frequently use 80% of vocabulary (headwords) from the provided texts (Nation, 1997).

Bright and Mc Greger (1970) proposed a theory for teaching English as a second language, where the teacher has to be the role model for the extensive reading done by the students. Meara (2009) has put forth the idea that though they may know the word and use it in a sentence correctly, they may be incapable of responding correctly to the word. Richards and Renandya (2002) insist that extensive reading helps to develop right and general vocabulary. Baker et al. (2003) suggested that learners, while learning new words, must move from association with one narrow meaning or content of a word, to comprehension in much broader and deeper ways.

Vocabulary lies at the heart of content learning as it serves as a proxy for students' understanding of concepts. Vocabulary is a significant predictor of overall reading comprehension (Baumann, et al., 2003) and student performance (Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986). When readers know a lot of words, they can read more complex texts. When writers know words, they can compose sophisticated documents. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are grounded in the formulation and understanding of written and verbal messages. Without meaning, words and phrases are nothing more than a nonsensical string of sounds or letters.

There are several important features that we need to keep in mind to give effective vocabulary instruction and the different implications for teaching vocabulary in the

content areas. In their efforts to demonstrate the complex nature of word knowledge, students encounter many content words in mathematics, science, and social studies. They may have different meanings, depending upon the content areas, which could confuse the learners, especially the students of other languages.

Most of the English language teachers and materials developers would now agree that vocabulary is an essential part of every language programme; learners themselves often acknowledge its importance and indicate that vocabulary acquisition is the most troublesome aspect of learning English (Meara, 1980). In many ESL settings, at the lower secondary and higher secondary level, English classes traditionally focus on teaching grammatical structure, at the expense of dedicated vocabulary instruction. Unless students attempt to communicate with colleagues in class or in any job context, they realise that "their vocabulary is inadequate" (Feeny, 1976:485).

Compared to children, adolescents and adults make faster progress (Snow and Hoefnagel Hoble, 1978) in learning a new language. Nevertheless, their ultimate attainment is not high. Some researchers proved that elementary school students are capable of learning modern language because of their imaginative capacity and playful spirit.

The vocabulary growth of children is very fast, and there is continuous growth during the pre-school and early school years. Zimmerman (1997) claims that "the teaching and learning of vocabulary have been undervalued in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) throughout its varying

stages and up to the present day". Richards (1976) was among those to alert us to the fact that vocabulary is typically neglected in foreign or second language instruction.

Vocabulary knowledge had long been recognised as central to language acquisition and use (Alderson, 2000; Schmitt 2000 and Nation, 1997). Within reading comprehension, (in both L1 and L2) vocabulary has been found to be more strongly related than all other components of reading (Laufer, 1997). As for grammar acquisition, knowing the words in a text or conversation is said to enable learners to understand the meaning of the discourse, which in turn allows the grammatical patterning to become more transparent (Ellis, 1994). The multiple benefits of vocabulary knowledge have in turn contributed to various interpretations as to what is meant by knowing a word. Among them, Read (1989), Wesche et.al (1996), and Qian (1999) reported that breadth, depth, and reading comprehension were highly correlated; Staehr (2009) found a positive linear relationship between breadth and listening comprehension. In production tasks, direct correlations were seen between breadth and output for writers (Laufer and Nation, 1995) and speakers (Ovtcharov et al., 2006).

In view of the importance of vocabulary, Hunt and Beglar (2005) presented a framework for developing vocabulary in EFL settings, which included tasks that developed both vocabulary breadth and depth. Vocabulary breadth refers to the number of vocabulary items known by an individual. Knowing an item means more than knowing its meaning (concepts, referents, associations), but also

its form (spelling, pronunciation, word parts), and use (functions, collocations, constraints) (Nation, 2001). Thus, depth of vocabulary deals not only with meaning, but also with morphology, phonology, syntax, sociolinguistic aspects, differences between written and spoken uses, and strategies for approaching unknown words.

As a teacher of content, vocabulary is important, because much of learning in the content area involves reading textbooks and other materials that we use in the classroom. Ultimately, if a student faces difficulty in vocabulary, they feel difficulty in comprehension as well. Hence, if they face a hard time learning the content. Some researchers have come up with a framework to help teachers in important vocabulary teaching, because all the words in the text cannot be taught. The most important thing to do when selecting vocabulary is to keep instructional goals and the purpose of the assignment in mind.

Participants

It has been found that in spite of the exposure to academic discourse in the form of printed materials, lectures, discussions, and so on that cover a wide array of subjects, the importance given to vocabulary learning is comparatively scant. Mostly the students are exposed to learning vocabulary through incidental learning, which does not cater adequately to learning the vocabulary required for their discipline of study. It is also observed that lessons were paraphrased and the difficult words were explained in the regional language. The following problems, found through preliminary research, were faced by

the students of the hotel management course.

- 1 The learners did not have specific vocabulary knowledge to comprehend the prescribed syllabus.
- 1 The learners were not given appropriate language input that was required for vocabulary acquisition.

The lack of exposure to English vocabulary related to the content was the main factor that led to this research. Such a lack had a negative effect on their written, spoken, and reading performances. Consequently, they became low-achievers, and at times, they even faced academic failure. Therefore, to address these problems faced by the learners in their academic career, the present study was undertaken to teach content vocabulary.

The targeted group was the pre-final year hotel management students from the colleges of the Vellore district. Most of the learners were first-generation learners. All 120 were selected based on the convenient sampling method.

Classes were conducted twice a week and an introduction to the activity was given at the beginning of the class. Time was also spent ensuring that the learners understood the activity.

Activities

Activity1: Fun with Cards

Objective

- To impart the vocabulary related to food and beverages.
- To teach the learners to learn vocabulary

from the context.

Procedure

Cards preparation: Take 26 cards out of a pack. Divide the cards into two sets. Set A (e&) for the words and Set B (f&) for the meaning of the word. Paste a blank paper at the back of the card. Write the words and meanings on each card.

Step 1: Shuffle the cards.

Step 2: Distribute the cards.

Step 3: Call out any one number (4H)



at random.

Step 4: Student who gets 4D



matches

with 4H



Step 5: Therefore, both the students need to stand up and read the word and meaning.

Step 6: Class repeats after them.

Step 7: Collect the cards.

Step 8: Give a few minutes for the students to recall the words they learnt.

Expected Outcome

Students will be able to learn a minimum of 26 words in one class. This activity not only helps them learn words quickly, but also enables them to remember those words.

Activity2: Yummylicious

Objective

- To encourage the students to use appropriate nouns, verbs, and adjectives related to cooking, throughout the activity.

Procedure

Step 1: Distribute Cadbury’s gems to the students.

Step 2: Write the colours and category on the board.

(Example: red gem = desserts, blue gem = spicy food, pink gem = sweets)

Step 3: The students should describe the

recipe of their favourite dessert based on the colour of the gem they get.

Expected Outcome

Students will have hands-on experience in explaining their recipe. They will use adverbial clauses, such as ‘as soon as’ and ‘until’ to link their action of cooking. Students learn to use adjectives like ‘chilled’, ‘crunchy’, ‘sizzling’, and so on.

The rubric was adapted from the AECLIL project (Assessment and Evaluation in CLIL) to track the content vocabulary development of the students. The researcher followed the same rubrics to assess the improvement of the learners at each stage.

Table 1: Description of an Assessment Scale for Vocabulary

Points		Description
5	Excellent	The student demonstrates a complete and thorough knowledge of the subject.
4	Good	The student demonstrates complete knowledge of the subject. Students use the specific vocabulary correctly and appropriately.
3	Satisfactory	The student demonstrates essential knowledge of the subject. A student uses most of the specific vocabulary correctly.
2	Almost satisfactory	The student demonstrates insufficient background knowledge and uses the specific vocabulary incorrectly.
1	Unsatisfactory	The student demonstrates no knowledge of the subject or the targeted specific vocabulary.

Results and Discussions

The data were collected through a series of tests. The first test was the pre-test, which was conducted before the experiment. The

second test was the mid-test. The final test was the post-test, which was conducted to analyse the overall effectiveness of the activities.

The post-test consisted of questions related to content vocabulary and was quantified to 20 marks. Students of the experimental as well as the control groups took part in the test. The post-test included multiple-choice questions and filling in the blanks. The results of the pre-test and post-test were compared and analysed using paired sample t-test.

Table 2: Paired Sample t-test Values of Post-test – Experimental Group and Control Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experiment post-test and control post-test	9.0333	1.8223	.000

According to the analysis of responses, the signified p-value was less than 0.05. The p-value attained implied a significant difference between the experimental and group's post-

test. Table 2 shows the analysis of the post-test values of the control and experimental group. The mean value of the experimental group's post-test and the control group's post-test was 9. The effectiveness of the activities was witnessed on comparing the scores of the post-test performance of the control group and the experimental group.

Table 3: Pre-test and Post-test Values of the Experimental Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experiment pre-test and experimental post-test	-8.9833	1.1273	.000

The signified value below .005 indicated the efficiency of the activities used in this study. The experimental group post-test values are comparatively higher than that of a pre-test. As a result, facilitating the content vocabulary using activities was found to be more effective.

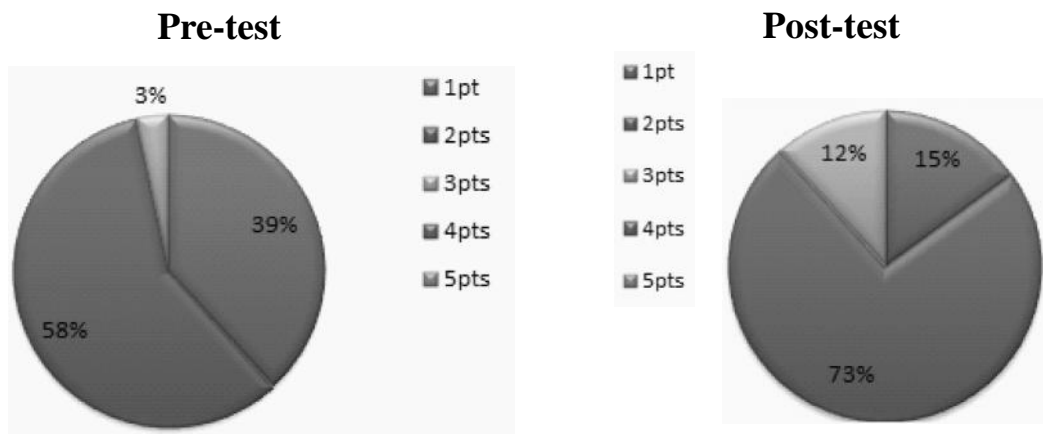


Fig. 1: Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Control Group

Both the pie charts showed that the scores of the students ranges from point 1 to point 3. The students who obtained 1 point are fewer in the post-test. Students who obtained 2 points are high in the post-test than in the pre-test. The results of the experimental group's post-test provide concrete evidence on the content vocabulary development of the target group.

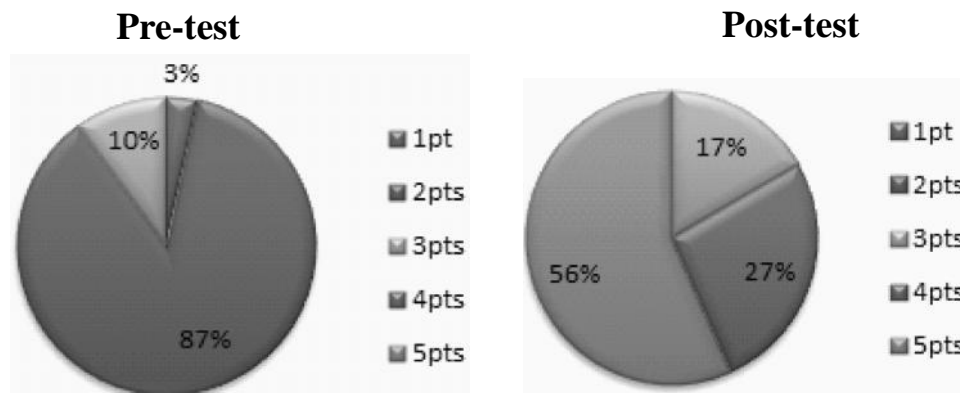


Fig. 2: Pre- and Post-test Marks of the Experimental Group

Both the pie charts in Fig. 2 show the percentage of points obtained by the experimental group in the pre- and post-tests. The pre-test points lie between 1 and 3, whereas the post-test points lie between 3 and 5. The values show a large difference between both the tests. The students' low performance in the pre-test is due to a lack of word knowledge. The vocabulary activities helped, and their post-test performance was significant. Most of the students gained more than 4 points in the post-test.

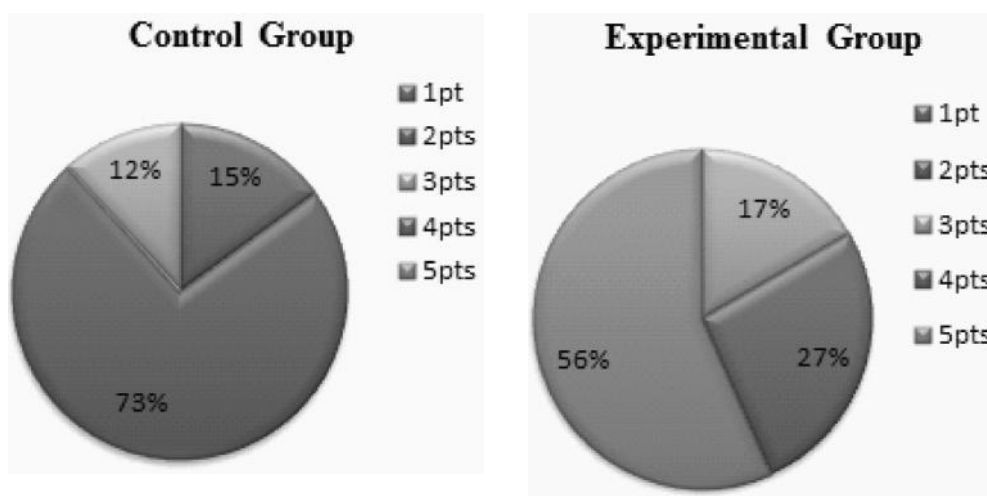


Fig. 3: Post-test Marks of the Control Group and the Experimental Group

The scores of the control group post-test values were abysmal when compared to the performance of the experimental group post-test values. There was a considerable difference between the scores concerning the range of marks. This vast difference might be the result of the right approach, which provided an appropriate learning environment, exposure, and motivation. Teaching techniques and methods need to be updated with new approaches and activities, based on the needs of the students.

Conclusion

Sometimes we may run out of words and struggle to remember the words for fluent conversation. The activities implemented in this study have shown rapid results. The proposed activities can enhance the vocabulary of students.

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