



EFFECTIVE VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR YOUNG ESL LEARNERS: EXPLORING ORAL, BODILY AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT METHODS

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Abstract:

The study explores effective vocabulary learning strategies for young learners. The research was conducted at an educational center in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, focusing on young children, in particular. The results revealed that traditional oral memorization is no longer effective for long-term vocabulary retention. In contrast, bodily memorization contributed to improving students' spelling accuracy despite having little effect on word comprehension. Active engagement, including the use of various games, cards, and daily conversations with these words, was the most effective approach for young learners to improve their vocabulary skills. The findings highlight the importance of the teacher's role in finding effective ways and combining them into one so that their young students do not struggle with vocabulary learning.

Keywords: vocabulary learning, learning styles, conventional strategies, oral memorization, bodily memorization, active engagement, vocabulary retention.

Introduction

English, a global language, is spreading all over the world, whether in English-speaking countries or non-English-speaking ones. The language is particularly believed to be necessary for many fields, including science, technology, economics and others. Not only can learning English contribute to excelling in one's field, but



it also provides several opportunities for broadening learners' horizons and personal development. For these reasons, the number of people who want to learn this language is increasing, with a rapidly growing proportion of children starting to acquire it, in particular. Although different methods are implemented to teach children this language easily, they still face some challenges in terms of vocabulary skills. This is mainly because young students are not fully exposed to their own native language yet, failing to integrate English words into their vocabulary. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to have effective vocabulary learning strategies so that their young learners can effectively improve their vocabulary skills. This study aims to explore different strategies that are helpful for young learners.

Literature Review

Vocabulary is a key element of a language. To use the language effectively, one must master its words effectively too. According to Nation (2001), learning new words means being able to understand as well as use them in different forms and contexts. It means that vocabulary learning is not just understanding the meaning, but it also goes beyond this. Meanwhile, Al. Adzillina & Hasanah H. U (2021) say that a similar phonetic symbolism can be seen in every language, which means these symbolic patterns are words of the language. Therefore, vocabulary learning is characterized by building connections with words and their contexts, which results in more opportunities to acquire a language. In addition, Moghadam, Ismail and Ghaderpour (2012) state that vocabulary learning contributes to reading, understanding and exploring the target language. Vocabulary learning is equally important to grammar. While grammar plays a role of foundation to the target language, vocabulary is a pillar to this foundation. Since understanding words affects how we comprehend texts and obtain knowledge through the language, it is vital for being able to express ideas and deliver messages correctly. Focusing on vocabulary along with grammar assists in improving language abilities and communication skills. As for vocabulary learning strategies, Nie & Zhou (2017) point out the three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social mediation. All three categories include different aspects to ensure that students learn vocabulary effectively. While metacognitive strategies encourage students to have an organized learning, cognitive strategies focus on active



practicing. Social mediation, in contrast, is a method to learn vocabulary through cooperation.

Similarly, Kalajahi and Pourshashian (2012) conducted another study to identify effective strategies for the undergraduate English Teaching students. They found out that they did not rely solely on one strategy but instead they used various ones. They also remarked the importance of metacognitive strategies in vocabulary learning.

Methodology

I work at an educational center located in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Our center specializes in teaching children English. Me and my colleague, who also teaches young people, conducted a small experiment to find out which way is the most effective for our students to memorize new words. The experiment lasted for two weeks, including 30 students who were studying at the elementary level, whose ages ranged from 10 to 14. Firstly, they were asked some questions about their own vocabulary learning methods to identify ways to engage them to the activity.

Then, children were divided into three groups for different learning styles. We chose new words that they would learn for the next two weeks, with different techniques to do so. The first group was asked to do what they had always done. This was to use oral memorization in which they would learn new English words through only reading Uzbek-English translations.

In contrast, the second group tried what we called “bodily memorization”. In this type of memorization, students were asked to write down words as many times as they can fully know them. This was used to see how body associations can contribute to the memorization process.

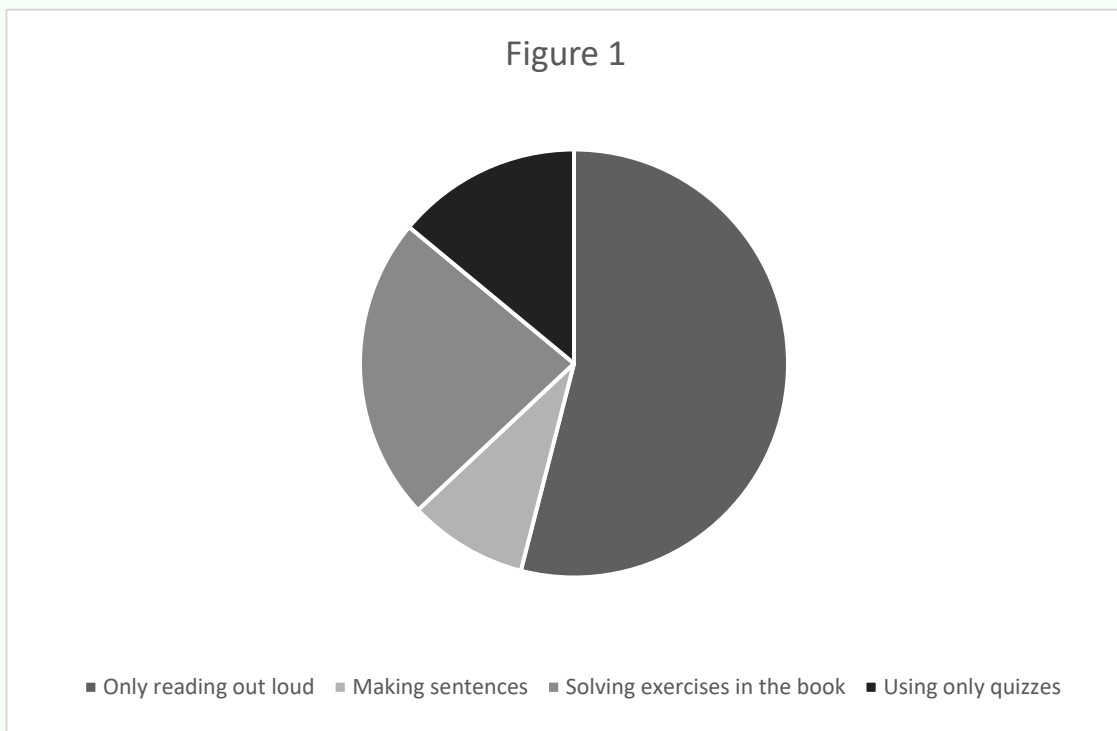
The third group experienced a different method, constantly engaging with words in their everyday life. They were asked to use new memorized words actively in their conversations constantly. Games and online quizzes were presented for them to review those words. In addition to such retention, students were given pictures with words and special flashcards to use at home rather than ordinary dictionaries. Their main task was also making up sentences and small stories using the given words.

After a week of the process, they were given a test consisting of 25 English and 25 Uzbek words to translate. The results were compared to each other to find out what

is the best way to learn new words and how we, teachers, should address our students to learn words effectively and for a long time.

Results

Through answers given by students, we identified that most students learn new English words mostly using their own language. A considerably small number of elementary level students learn words using the only target language. The Figure 1 breaks down the percentage of students using different strategies:



In addition, most of the students pointed out that they have to revise their memorized words frequently on a daily basis. They use traditional dictionaries to know translations, whereas a small number of them might find meanings from other sources, including books and movies.

After the experiment finished, results were unsurprising. As we expected, the group of children who engaged with oral memorization had lower scores in test than those who used activating methods. Starting with the first group, in particular, they showed better results with English-Uzbek translations, at 18-22 words being found. However, when it comes to English-Uzbek translations, these students were not



able to memorize words effectively, finding 8-13 words. Notably, this was because most of them were written with incorrect spellings although they almost knew translations, so they struggled to find the correct spelling for words they can remember, which resulted in lower scores in their English-Uzbek column.

In contrast, the second group had average results, with effective spelling. Most students were able to find more than 15 words and wrote English versions correctly. For Uzbek translations, they struggled a little, though, finding 13-15 words. It was evident that when they did not know the word, they could not guess the meaning by reading it multiple times. Bodily memorization helped them to remember the spellings better but not the meanings, highlighting its weakness.

As for the ones who used a totally different approach, they had quite high results. Their correct answers for English-Uzbek translation were between 21-24, while that for Uzbek-English translation were 20-23. They could write words correctly, along with Uzbek translations.

Discussion

Looking at the results, we can say that conventional ways of learning vocabulary are no longer effective for children. Oral memorization can be the best way for beginner level students, but after qualifying to another level, it is better to change methods, too. In the beginning, memorizing words from basic topics – colors, fruit and vegetables, occupations and so on – can be effectively done through oral repetition. However, after the difficulty level of words is increased, it is better to use active engagement for learning them. The flashcards, being surrounded with these words and actively using them in conversations can help more to learn words for a long time.

In terms of “bodily memorization”, this method is useful to correct spelling mistakes. Making students write down words a couple of times is enough to make sure that their body memorizes the patterns of these words. Especially, young learners tend to learn words with incorrect spelling as they cannot differentiate pronunciation from spelling as good as adult learners do. For example, young students often miswrite these words: “success”, “focus”, “suddenly” and “century” as “saccess”, “fokus”, “saddenly” and “sentury”, even though they can correctly pronounce it. This is because they are not mature enough to understand phonetical



structures of words fully. Therefore, this method could work well to improve their writing skills, but not to full extent for memorization of words.

Conclusion

Although the study conducted by Zuraina, Jayakaran, Roselan and Ahmad Baki (2012) suggested that learners' responsibility is a major factor for finding strategies to improve their vocabulary skills, I think that teachers' role is crucial in children's language learning process. Teachers should be able to find what ways are effective for their young students to learn new words and they should also know how to integrate the methods into one another. This is because vocabulary learning cannot be accomplished through just one method, but the combination of many. As Asgari and Ghazali (2011) emphasize the importance of vocabulary learning strategies in enhancing students' skills, every language teacher should take these strategies into account to ensure their students have an effective vocabulary learning journey.

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