

Vocabulary Teaching Strategies Used by Teachers

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Abstract

Learning new vocabulary as part of English teaching in Jordan has not been investigated thoroughly. However, in recent years, various studies have shown that proper strategies could be the key to effective learning. We think that vocabulary has been sent out to focus in most of the Jordanian textbooks. The aim of this study is to provide the English Language teachers in the Jordanian public schools with a variety of Vocabulary Teaching Strategies. We arranged a questionnaire for a sample of English teachers at Bani – Kinanah Directorate public schools to explore how they deal with the weakness in vocabulary of their students and with the poorness of Vocabulary Teaching Strategies in the curriculums. The results showed that translation technique was the most frequently used, whereas, the Word - list technique is the least used by both male and female teachers. So, we suggest that vocabulary must be given more attention.

Introduction

Vocabulary plays an important role in developing one's language, but it seems that it didn't receive the interest it deserves. One of the reasons behind this ignorance is the focus given to grammar and phonology in language studies (ALQahtani, 2015). Due to that vocabulary received less emphasis in learning English as a foreign language, it became a source of difficulty for learners (Binti Othman, 2015). Studies found that the number of learners' errors in the vocabulary was more than the number of errors in syntax and grammar (Binti Othman, 2015). This refers to the importance given to other fields of study. As a result, the weakness in mastering vocabulary can be observed (Cameron, 2001).

Vocabulary is one of the major problems facing English Language learners. Without vocabulary, they cannot communicate their ideas and they cannot grasp the ideas transmitted to them. Moreover, their reading, writing and listening comprehension are hampered by their limited vocabulary (Bryant et al). Vocabulary is an important starting point to start communicating through written work, reading comprehension, listening and speaking activities, especially in our real life and classrooms (Abu Khadrah, 1995). Wallace (1984) says that the most difficult and disappointing experience while you are speaking another language is to find yourself unable to choose and find the appropriate words to express your ideas (Wallace, 1984).

Jordanian learners are known to encounter many difficulties when learning English, and one of the main

problems is the lack of vocabulary knowledge (Ghanim, 1990). We think that vocabulary should be given the same interest as other aspects of language because the students should know lexis as well as grammar to develop their language. Unfortunately, most of the new textbooks in Jordan nowadays don't pay this issue much attention. so, we think that in order for the students to communicate, write, read and speak English, they should build their vocabulary as good as possible. Vocabulary learning is not precisely defined in the curriculum in Jordanian schools despite the obvious limitations of vocabulary knowledge.

Vocabulary Teaching in Jordan relies on teachers as the primary source. Also, the method of assessment is based on testing language knowledge during final exams rather than the use of the language all over the study year (Ghanim, 1990). Devaluing learners' vocabulary depends on the techniques followed and represents the base stone for having an ideal reservoir of words (Haj Eid, 1994). There are different techniques teachers may use in presenting new words (Ghanim, 1990). These techniques are teaching lists of words, teaching new words as they appear, guessing the meaning, word-analysis or categorization, contextual clues, definitions, visual aids, referring to dictionary and translation (Ghanim, 1990).

In fact, these techniques have a great influence on learning vocabulary which in turn affects the language of the learners and their awareness to be able to choose the suitable words through their language learning (Ayure et al, 2018). Moreover, many researchers did their best to develop students' vocabulary by introducing various techniques. For example, asking students to learn a list of words which is a typical attitude in teaching vocabulary in order to improve students' comprehension (Folse, 2004). Folse, (2004) came with the idea of teaching vocabulary by making a very short conversational context through asking a question to be answered (Folse, 2004).

Moreover, translation technique is an effective method in developing students' vocabulary. It saves the teachers time in explaining difficult words, and it carries the meaning of vocabulary item directly through using dictionaries in order to prevent false understanding (Thorburry, 2002). Dictionary using technique is considered a very vital method for learners to develop their reservoir of words as they use the dictionary wherever they face difficult words that they cannot guess their meaning from the context (Read, 2004).

As discussed above, we noticed that students are unable to choose their suitable words when they are asked to speak or write in any subject. Besides that, they are facing a huge difficulty in comprehending what they hear or read. This is due to their inability to have sufficient vocabulary to meet these needs. This may be a result of many factors such as using inappropriate techniques to present these words by teachers.

This study aims to investigate the common methods and techniques used in vocabulary teaching that most teachers use at the Jordanian schools. This study will also try to find out if there is a significant difference in the use of vocabulary Teaching Techniques regarding variable teacher's experience, and to find out if male and female teachers use the same techniques and if there is a correlation between both orders of techniques used by male and female teachers. Moreover, this study will try to provide English teachers with a variety of Vocabulary Teaching Techniques that may be applied in the classroom to facilitate vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, this study tries to focus on such techniques used by basic and secondary stages teachers.

Review of Literature

Due to the important role of vocabulary for students to understand what they hear and read as well as to express themselves, vocabulary teaching should be taken into account by every teacher. Presenting vocabulary in the classroom should be a must, and using different techniques should be focused on in order to find out the most effective techniques (Nation, 2001; Alhabahba, 2016).

Teachers should employ all the best in teaching vocabulary in order to help their students build up their vocabulary stock which in turn can have a positive influence on their proficiency because there is a relationship between the teachers' inadequate techniques of teaching vocabulary and the students' difficulties in using them (Bataineh, 1987).

For English language learners (ELLs), vocabulary development is especially important. The average native English speaker enters kindergarten knowing at least 5,000 words. The average ELL may know 5,000 words in his or her native language, but very few words in English. While native speakers continue to learn new words. ELLs face a double challenge of building that foundation and then closing the gap they have (Bataineh, 1987). It may be surprising how quickly new ELL students can communicate verbally with peers but remember that there is a big difference between social English and academic English. Reading, writing, speaking, and understanding academic English takes place in the classrooms. Using a combination of strategies will help ELLs to close this gap (Stuart, 2005).

Cameron (2001) states that Vocabulary Teaching Strategies are the processes that language learners and teachers employ to help them in comprehending and recalling vocabulary items (Cameron, 2001). In addition, Takač (2008) describes VLSs as: Activities, behaviors, steps, or techniques used by learners (often deliberately) to facilitate vocabulary learning. Vocabulary Teaching strategies can help learners to discover lexical items (both their meanings and forms), and to internalize, store, retrieve, and actively use these in language production (Takač, 2008).

Researchers introduce their views to support any precise techniques for teaching vocabulary, and dealing with new words, or to oppose a particular technique. In fact, the techniques they presented had their merits and their demerits. Cao Wangru (2016) suggested four options of Semantic zing" in which the meaning of vocabulary can be presented in the classroom (Wangru, 2016). The four options are by material association, translation, definition, and finally by context. His favorite order of new vocabulary presentations is as follows:

- a. Material association: teachers can present a new word meaning by showing real objects, pictures and drawings.
- b. Translation: teachers can introduce the equivalent in the first language.
- c. Definition: teachers can introduce the meaning through synonyms, paraphrasing in simple English words, or dictionary.
- d. Using words in context.

Kaplan and Tuchman (1980) provided five strategies for dealing with vocabulary. These strategies lead to have independent learners (Kaplan & Tuchman 1980):

- The first strategy is helping the students to predict the words that will come on in the passage from the chapter title or heading.
- The second strategy is by teachers presenting a word as a stimulus for the students to give another word as a respond.
- The third strategy is that teacher selects an appropriate concept and writes it on the board, then asks the students to write down as many words as they can that is related to the subject.
- The fourth is that teachers help students to guess the meaning of words using context clues.
- Finally, teacher helps students to predict the meaning of words that have different meanings (Kaplan & Tuchman, 1980).

Shahrzad (2011) stated that the reader can follow one of two techniques when he encounters a word that is unfamiliar to him (Shahrzad, 2011). These two techniques are:

- 1) Referring to dictionary.
- 2) Depending on the contextual information or context clues that are included or found in the reading selection.

Raymond (1985) studied the vocabulary development exercises and the vocabulary recognition strategies trying to differentiate between them. Williams at the end of his study suggested five strategies to be followed by teachers (Raymond, 1985). They are:

- 1) Word analysis,
- 2) Identifying lexical familiarization,
- 3) Inferring meaning from the context,
- 4) Unchaining nominal compounds, and
- 5) Synonym search.

Johnson and Johnson (1986) examined the effects of presenting pre-selected unfamiliar vocabulary on reading comprehension (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). The sample of the study consisted of 72 students from the advanced level reading at the English Centre at Southern Illinois University. Their results indicated that the comprehension of ESL readers was not affected by exposing students to the meaning of difficult words.

Rabadi's study (2016) explored the use of Vocabulary Teaching Strategies (VLSs) in undergraduate Jordanian students who had English language as a major (Rabadi, 2016). Data were collected via a questionnaire of VLSs adopted from Schmitt (1997) (Schmitt, 1997). Respondents were 110 Jordanian students majoring in English language and literature selected from eight Jordanian universities. The results indicated that memory strategies were used most frequently while metacognitive strategies were utilized least frequently.

It seems that there is a lack of interest in vocabulary in the Jordanian English curricula. Students are exposed to vocabulary very quickly without giving these items enough time to be presented properly. Teachers are really

spoilt for choices, and they are free to choose the suitable technique for teaching vocabulary.

Definition of Terms

These are the operationally defined terms for the purpose of the study:

Technique: It is a well-organized strategy in which the teacher tries to achieve a particular goal to solve an issue while introducing an activity.

Vocabulary teaching: It is a process of presenting the meaning of new words by employing any technique trying to get students to understand new words.

Guessing technique: It is to guess the meaning of new words from the context.

Translation: It is giving the Arabic equivalent of the new English word.

A combination of techniques: It is using more than one technique in presenting new words.

Semantic field: It involves dividing the new words into semantically related words and using opposites to introduce new words.

Methodology

Study Population

The population of this study consisted of 5 male and 5 female English teachers of the basic and secondary stages from 5 public schools at Bani – Kenanah Directorate of Education in Irbid, Jordan. The study was held during the second semester of the academic year 2021 / 2022.

Instruments

In the process of data collection, a questionnaire consisting of 12 items was used to investigate the most common techniques that English teachers use in teaching vocabulary in the basic and secondary stages (see Appendix). While developing the items of this questionnaire, we used some items from other researchers (Bataineh,1987). Most of the items of the questionnaire were developed by us, depending on the available literature, our experience and observations.

The questionnaire is intended to elicit answers to the questions of the study. Each item of this questionnaire was followed by five options in which teachers were asked to place a tick under the most appropriate option that points their actual response indicating how often they apply it. The items covered four commonly used vocabulary teaching techniques that are:

1. Translation items
2. Definitional items
3. Word—list items
4. visual —aids items

Validity

The questionnaire was given to a jury of English specialists including two supervisors in the directorate of Education, and two experienced teachers in order to elicit their views regarding the accuracy of the language and the adequacy of the items indicating whether those items can represent the techniques of vocabulary teaching that we are intending to investigate. The questionnaire was reviewed and modified in accordance to their comments.

Reliability

The questionnaire was distributed to all members of the sample and in order to avoid bias, the 10 members answered the items separately.

Procedures and Implementation

This study was carried out during the second semester of the academic year 2021 / 2022. The following precautions were observed:

- 1- Information regarding the study population was obtained from the headmasters of the schools from which the sample was taken.
- 1-The validity and reliability were ensured.
- 2-We obtained the permission from Ajloun Directorate of Education in order to carry out this study.
- 3-We distributed the questionnaires by ourselves to the sample of the study and they were given a brief idea about the aims of the study in order to ensure the cooperation by indicating real and actual responses in teaching.
- 4-The data were computed and analyzed.

Statistical Analysis

The data, which were obtained from the responses of the subjects on the questionnaire, were tabulated and were statistically analyzed. The analysis was done through frequency counts. The mean scores and standard deviation were used to find out the most common vocabulary teaching techniques employed by teachers.

Results

The results of the study are presented with respect to the research questions. As it was mentioned before this study aimed to investigate the most common techniques of vocabulary teaching among EFL Jordanian teachers. It amid

also to discover if there is a positive correlation between male and female teachers in using or employing the techniques of teaching vocabulary. In addition, this study attempted to find out if there is a significant difference in using these techniques in accordance to the teacher's experience and to qualifications. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study population.

Table 1. Distribution of the Study Population on the basis of Experience, Qualification, and Gender

Experience	Number	Qualification (years)	Male	Female
1 - 5	4	4	2	2
6 - 10	3	8	1	2
11 - 15	3	12	2	1
Total	10	10	5	5

The four most common techniques applied and their mean scores and standard deviations (SD) for all participants is shown in table (2).

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Most Commonly used Vocabulary Techniques by Teachers

No.	Technique	Mean	SD
1	Word - list	2.80	0.51
2	Definitional	2.05	0.91
3	Visual aids	2.36	0.45
4	Translation	3.52	0.43

Table 2 clearly shows that teachers use all four types of techniques included in the questionnaire. The results showed that the favorable strategy used by teachers was the translation technique whereas the Word - list technique is the least used by both male and female teachers. However, strategies which required deep cognitive processing including using Definitional and Visual aids were not used regularly by the teachers of this study.

Our second goal was to evaluate whether male and female teachers use the techniques in the same order through Mean and SD results, and if there is a positive correlation between males and females in using these techniques in accordance with their order or not. Table 3 showed the order of use of the four Vocabulary Teaching Techniques for male teachers, whereas Table 4 showed the order of use of the four Vocabulary Teaching Techniques for female teachers separately.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviations of the Most Commonly Used Vocabulary Techniques by Male Teachers

No.	Technique	Mean	SD
1	Word - list	2.91	0.31
2	Definitional	2.02	0.22
3	Visual aids	2.36	0.25
4	Translation	3.72	0.43

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviations of the Most Commonly Used Vocabulary Techniques by Female Teachers

No.	Technique	M.	SD
1	Word - list	2.00	0.20
2	Definitional	2.44	0.24
3	Visual aids	2.90	0.30
4	Translation	3.50	0.42

Table 3 and 4 showed that the translation technique is mostly used by both male and female teachers, whereas definitional technique is the least used by male teachers, whereas, the word-list technique is the least used by female teachers.

Discussion and Recommendations

It is quite obvious from the results shown in Table 2 that all types of techniques included in the questionnaire were used by male and female teachers of various experiences and qualifications. However, the Vocabulary Teaching Techniques were used in different degrees by both teachers. The successive ordering of these techniques according to their mean scores, as shown in Table 2, was as follows:

Word-list (2.80), definitional (2.02), visual-aids (2.36), and translation (3.52),

The results of this study revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between the order of the techniques applied by male and female teachers in accordance with their application. It is clear that word-list and translation techniques head the list of all techniques and the difference between them is very little when we had a look at the mean scores in the tables. It seems that most teachers prefer to write the words on the chalkboard with their definitions in the form of a list as this may enable them to guess students' abilities in learning new words with their meanings by heart, and this makes it easier for teachers to test students by memorizing the meaning of these new words or writing them in exams.

Also, it appears that teachers might be influenced by the types of activities in both textbooks and workbooks, such as word matching to its meaning or opposite meaning. These activities are found in textbooks in the form of a list. Moreover, teachers appear to be affected by the traditional methods in presenting vocabulary. This may refer to the idea of imitating their old teachers in teaching vocabulary through word list and translation techniques.

We believe that teachers responses were objective in using these two techniques in the classroom, and we previously expected that word-list and definitional techniques would be at the head of tables according to their application because teachers are equipped enough to employ these techniques with the help of active students in the classroom that previously looked up for the new words meanings from the dictionary and written them in their notebooks in the form of a new word in simple words or given the familiar synonyms effectively. This finding is in line with Schmitt's (1997) (Schmitt, 1997), Al-Fuhaid's (2004) (Al-Fuhaid, 2004) and Rabadi's (2016) studies (Rabadi, 2016), which reported that using bilingual dictionary strategy was the most frequently used by

respondents.

Regarding female teachers the use of visual aid came second. Using visual aid techniques in teaching new words is very appropriate at basic stages since children like to see things, and they are usually asking what is this? " or " what is the meaning of this ...?" It seems they love to know the names of concrete things and see them in this stage rather than knowing the meaning of abstract words. Many researchers encouraged the use of visual —aids technique in teaching vocabulary, such as Wright et al. (2015) (Wright et al., 2015) and Gallagher (2015) (Gallagher, 2015).

The use of translation technique as the first option by both teachers shows that resorting to the first language is indispensable in teaching vocabulary of foreign languages, since the minds of the learners might be controlled by their first language. It appears from the tables that male teachers use translation technique more than female teachers and this may be due to that male students insist on teachers to translate the new words by themselves.

Despite the training that teachers receive, they use translation technique the most. This may be due to the fact that many teachers want to make sure that students get the meaning of the new words which is easier to be memorized in their original language. Moreover, teachers use this technique because it doesn't consume time and some teachers may resort to translation in very weak classes. In addition, we believe that many teachers encourage their students to use bilingual dictionaries via asking them to prepare their lessons in advance. This technique was thought to be effective as it prevents false understanding of the new words. On the other hand, we found that the translation technique slows the production and comprehension of the target language.

As for the qualification, we found that it has no significant effect on using the visual aids and the definitional techniques. This may indicate that teachers of different qualifications used these techniques as they might be affected by their training and the nature of words at the basic teaching stages in which most of the teachers are in need to use visual aids to present the meaning of the words to the students who are at early stages.

Study Limitations

This study has a limited population sample which are teachers of the basic and secondary stage classes in five public schools in Ajloun Directorate of Education. Moreover, the findings of this study depend on the content validity of the tool (Questionnaire) of the study.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of our study suggest some implications for Vocabulary Teaching Strategies. This study suggests that English teachers should be motivated to employ Vocabulary Learning strategies appropriately with the aid of more training regarding the least frequently used strategies such as English language media strategies, long-term strategies, and computer strategies. In turn, students would be able to experience successful learning in their academic studies. Future studies on Vocabulary Teaching Strategies can be conducted among other learners in

different contexts, using other techniques in the process of data collection and also identifying the restrictions that may prevent teachers from employing various types of Vocabulary Teaching Strategies in their learning process.

In light of the findings of this study and to improve the vocabulary learning of students at their basic stages, the following suggestions and recommendations for teachers and curriculum planners should be taken into consideration:

1. Jordanian teachers have to pay more attention to other vocabulary teaching techniques such as guessing technique which is needed to enhance students' vocabulary.
2. Teachers should exploit their abilities and experiences in improving teaching vocabulary by using suitable techniques.
3. Teachers have to develop additional appropriate tasks for students to study new words.
4. The Curriculum planners should vary in using different types of vocabulary activities that require different Vocabulary Teaching Techniques.
5. The Curriculum planners should support teachers with a teacher's guide book to guide them to employ the best technique.

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Appendix. Questionnaire Items

No.	Items	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	I explain the meaning of the new words in English				
2	I ask the students to write the new words and their dictionary meanings in their notebook making a list				
3	I use pictures to teach the meaning of some new words.				
4	I use familiar antonyms, for students to teach new words.				
5	I teach new words as they appear in the text.				
6	I explain the meaning of new words both in English and Arabic.				
7	I ask the students to pronounce the words.				
8	I draw on the chalkboard to introduce the meaning of some new words.				
9	I ask the students to use English dictionaries to look up the meaning of new words.				
10	I bring real objects to the classroom in order to present the meaning of some new words				
11	I encourage the students to use the words in real situations outside the classroom				
12	I ask the students to spell the new words.				