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English Vocabulary Teaching Techniques at Secondary Level Schools in the Punjab, Pakistan

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History: Accepted 05 May 2021 Available Online June 2021	<i>The aim of the paper was to identify various English vocabulary teaching techniques employed by teachers in public sector. The data for that purpose was collected through classroom observations. A total of 20 classes in various public sector schools of Rahimyar District of the Punjab Pakistan were observed. The majority of the teachers were found employing various techniques to teach their students vocabulary of English Language. It was found that the teachers employed the techniques like visual aids, separate Word lists and rules related to the formation of words to teach students unfamiliar lexical items of English language. The pupils were further asked to memorize the word lists with their synonyms and L1 equivalents so that they may perform better in their academic exams.</i>
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1. Introduction

Vocabulary plays a vital role in terms of learning a language. In order to be proficient a speaker has to have command over the use, particularly, the contextual use of the vocabulary items in a language. According to O'dell (1997) a speaker - in order to learn a language- must remember at least a small amount of vocabulary items. Interestingly, the writer emphasizes that this shall also help the learner to deal with the grammatical issues which he/she might face in the process of language learning. Moreover, in terms of Jackson &Amvela (2001) vocabulary is considered to be a set or an amalgamation of lexical items of a language. They, definitely, have an important role in language learning as they are the basic linguistic structures that help a language user to communicate meaning, therefore, they have semantic role in terms of communication.

For a language user it is the grammatical structure that helps to convey but it is quite impossible to convey anything when a language users lacks vocabulary of a language. It was declared by Nam (2010) that while learning English as a Second Language (ESL) lack of vocabulary is one of the major hurdles faced by the new language learners. Therefore, vocabulary needs to be given proper attention in the process of language learning. And, this can only be possible when the learners are taught through certain workable techniques vis-à-vis vocabulary teaching in particular and language learning in general.

2. Literature Review

There have been a number of studies which have reviewed the vocabulary learning strategies in the context of teaching and learning ESL and EFL. And, it is a prerequisite that one must go through the already existing studies to have clear cut directionality in terms of the research which one aims to carry out. Therefore, the researcher has gone through a number of relevant studies that talk about vocabulary learning techniques. The past studies including the techniques are being discussed in the following paragraphs.

There is a vast range of techniques through which vocabulary is being taught to language learners since the time immemorial. The range is marked with some classical techniques to the techniques that are being utilized these days. Sokmen (1997), Nation & Newton (1997) and Balci&Cakir (2012) are some of the researchers that have contributed to this area of research. As far as the techniques of vocabulary teaching are concerned, the first one to be discussed here is the classical vocabulary teaching technique.

Students in the second half of the twentieth century were taught to go for implicit and incidental vocabulary learning. This implied that they were supposed to equip them with the strategies that can help them to recognize vocabulary related clues in the given context- textual context in this case. In addition, there is use of monolingual dictionaries as reference books. Students try to grasp the meaning of a word by interpreting the meaning in the given context. In this regards, Sokeman (1997) has been of the view that the process involved in implicit vocabulary teaching technique is time taking this may mislead the learners. One of the studies which were carried out in this context was by Webb (2008). As per the results of the study, the researcher showed that though it was quite possible for the students to guess the nearest possible sense of the provided words, but they were not able to get the knowledge related to the form of that word.

The same has been emphasized by Erten and Tekin (2008) who were of the view that students learning through this technique are more likely to get confused and spend more than the required time when they are trying to make the sense of the given lexical items. But, Nation & Newton (1997), as earlier provided, suggest various activities that can motivate and encourage learners to learn vocabulary of the target language. One of such activities is role-play which, definitely, not only helps the learners to know context specific vocabulary but also encourages them to use it in a kind of real life situation. This is particularly important because through such kind of interactions the learners get the opportunity to learn new vocabulary items which are contextualized. In addition, Webb (2007) mentions that for a learner it is quite easy to learn vocabulary items which are having lexical equivalents as compared to the ones that lack them. And, this works in a way that it enables learners to intact the chain and substitute the provided lexical items. That is to say, the syntactic order remains the same whereas the lexical choices are interchangeably used to convey the intended message.

As compared to the classical vocabulary teaching techniques there are some new vocabulary teaching techniques that help the learners to accumulate a plethora of vocabulary items related to the language that they are learning at the given time. There are a number of techniques in this regards. These techniques are: ordering, semantic mapping and pictorial schemata, as mentioned by Sokmen (1997). Ordering, the first of the given techniques, involves the arrangement of a word list in a particular order. Secondly, semantic mapping involves the process of recalling the associated lexical items to the given word and drawing a diagram based on that. Thirdly, there is a pictorial schematechnique which is to create diagrams and grids. All these techniques are termed as the linking techniques. Through this the learners become able to make a link among the lexical items.

Additionally, vocabulary- in terms of modern techniques- is also taught through collocations. Comparatively, this technique helps the learners to retain the vocabulary items in a better way as they are accompanied by the other words they usually occur with. In this connection, Sokmen (1997) argued that a learner can efficiently learn the collocation accompanied as compared to the single words that they are asked to learn.

The studies given above clearly define the way vocabulary is being taught through various techniques at various levels. But, the aim of this research is to study the problem at the secondary level English classrooms at the given locale of the study. This shall help to explore the techniques in use in the given context.

3. Methodology

The methodology followed in this study was solely qualitative in nature. The data collection method was non-participatory classroom observation which included a check list having various techniques and their traits as the items of observation. The locale of the study was District Rahimyar Khan of the Punjab, Pakistan. Ten (10) public sector secondary schools of the district were taken as a sample and the data was collected from two classes of each school. The data was collected by visiting a total number of twenty (20) classes where the teachers were mainly involved in teaching vocabulary to the learners. The data was then interpreted and descriptively presented as per the results.

4. Discussion of the Results

During the classroom observation it was found that that English language teachers mainly relied on the classical vocabulary teaching techniques. One of the key observations in this connection was the complete reliance of the learners over their teachers, which might be one of the reasons that the teachers chose to go for such classical vocabulary teaching techniques in their English language classrooms. The results of the study are being discussed below with the traits which were observed in the classrooms.

As per the observations of the language classrooms, particularly the ones that were marked with the lessons of English vocabulary learning were observed to be the teacher centered classrooms. The teachers were found to be providing students with the word lists to remember the unfamiliar words that were introduced in the lesson which they were going through at the given time. Moreover, the word list included all the essential information- what the teacher thought to be essential for the learners- that included synonyms, word equivalents or definitions in Urdu and their pronunciation which was written in Urdu.

During the observation of the classes it was found that the teachers were emphasized that the students ought to remember the provided word list as they might encounter any of the lexical items in their Secondary School examinations. This sort of technique aimed at making the students able to remember the wide list of vocabulary so that are able to perform in a better way at the college and in their exams. This definitely was effective in the given context as this helped the students to show their good performance at the level and to grab good grades which seemed to be the ultimate goal of the majority at the locale of the study.

One of the benefits of the technique was that the students were able to remember and practice the pronunciation of the given words in an effective and accurate way. As the teacher at the time of writing on the black board was asking the students to the way he/she pronounced the words. Moreover, the meaning of the given words was being taught to them. But, this needs to be remembered that the equivalents that were being provided to the students were really decontextualized. By the decontextualized vocabulary we mean that the exact meaning which the word referred to in that particular context was not provided. Most importantly, there is a flaw in this technique as it will impede the students' ability to use the learnt vocabulary in an accurate way.

Therefore, the use of vocabulary after knowing its meaning seems to be of great importance. In case the students are not able to use the lexical items in an appropriate context, surely, this can be because of the way they have been taught vocabulary in their language classrooms. The element of the usage of vocabulary in the given context was missing as the students were only limited to the recognition of the vocabulary items that they were being taught in the secondary level language classrooms. The students in this connection were not provided with any of the materials that they could use to practice the given vocabulary items. This could lead them to not learn the vocabulary items in a practical way which is, definitely, their loss. Because, just knowing the meaning of a lexical item is not enough for a learner. If a learner wants to become proficient in a language, he/she must learn its context appropriate use as well.

Students, in this connection, were just observed following the instructions provided by the teachers and were not involved in any kind of writing task which could have helped them to make the learning effective and practical.

Finally, results of the data show that the techniques employed to teach students English vocabulary are quite outdated and they can only help them to grab good results visavis their exams but they do not help them in any way to enhance their use of vocabulary in real life situations.

5. Recommendations

As far English language vocabulary learning of the students of the locale is concerned, the teachers are in dire need of trainings that can help them to update their knowledge related to teaching methodologies, specifically, the ones related to teaching vocabulary to the students. The teachers may follow the techniques given below:

It is not denying the fact that the students through the techniques that are being employed now are able to achieve good grades in their examinations. But, the somehow the aspect of the practical use of vocabulary is bracketed out, which is really of the great concern for the language teachers and its users. The teachers must, therefore, take care of the students' current and future linguistic needs and devise their techniques accordingly.

This can be done by employing certain modern language teaching techniques which are really effective in terms of the practical use of vocabulary. The techniques like, audio-visual input, cartoons, games and role play really enhance the students' vocabulary. More importantly, through such contextual use the students become able to use the vocabulary items in the real life situations. Through audio-visual aids students not only master the contextual use but they also acquire the contextual meaning of the lexical items. Additionally, they get to know the actual pronunciation of the words and the way the words are articulated by the native or near-native speakers of English language.

With that the students must be taught through the technique of collocations. This shall help the students to remember and use the work easily in a given linguistic context. The teachers can help students in enhancing their vocabulary through task based approach. That is to say, the teachers must involve students by asking them to use the learned vocabulary items in their own sentences and appropriately in the blanks that they provide them in the form of work sheets. Through work sheets students shall be having the benefit of using the recently learnt vocabulary shortly after they have been provided with the input. This would really be helpful for them to use the vocabulary items in the relevant contexts that they might encounter in future.

6. Conclusion

The researcher through this study explored the strategies which were being used at the locale of the study to teach students English language vocabulary. The strategies which were being employed at the locale reflected mainly the classical strategies. These were aimed to help students to get good grades in their exams but the main goal of language learning was being bracketed out. It was also found that there was a dire need to update the teaching methods which were also quite classical or what are termed as traditional. Though these can help the students to retain knowledge but when it comes to the practical aspect of language they really affect students' performance. Therefore, modern vocabulary teaching must be explored by the teachers of the locale so that they are able to help their learners not only in getting good results but also in making them able to use language, particularly vocabulary, in an effective and accurate way in real life situations.

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