

Introduction

Acquiring vocabulary is the most important part of language acquisition (Laufer, 1997a). It entails knowing numerous aspects of the language like grammar, spelling, writing system, pronunciation, syntax and pragmatics (Nation, 2001). Without vocabulary, “comprehensible input is neither comprehensible nor input” thus “learners need vocabulary” and should see its “acquisition as the greatest challenge (Folse, 2004).

The field of vocabulary acquisition has gained great interest among linguists to find the preferable way of acquiring vocabulary in a foreign language. Thus, given the importance of vocabulary, it is necessary to shed light on the efficiency of the various methods or strategies of vocabulary learning and acquisition. Vocabulary cards and vocabulary notebooks are among the most used methods. In this paper, I will examine which method is recommended for learning vocabulary in language teaching.

I have become especially interested in this topic because vocabulary acquisition research has implications for teaching. Further, learning about the topic, including the factors that affect the acquisition process, and finding the most effective strategy is very significant for me as a foreign language teacher. My studies will contribute to improving my perspective about teaching vocabulary and its selection and, in turn, will affect my learners’ mastery of English.

The following discussion addresses the importance of vocabulary, which is the core of learning any language. It will include vocabulary targets, the National Curriculum, the selection of vocabulary to teach in class, the factors influencing the learning of vocabulary and the different aspects of a word that have to be taught. I will present various methods for teaching vocabulary, and then focus on two. The first is ‘vocabulary notebooks’ which is an advocated strategy for students to take control of their vocabulary learning (Fowele, 2002,). The second is vocabulary cards which works as a significant method to master vocabulary by drawing on specific guidelines for the cards to be effective (Nation 1990). Both are frequent strategies used in EFL classes, by teachers and learners. In this paper, I will attempt to find out which method is more effective as a learning tool.

The Importance of Vocabulary and Vocabulary Targets

It is widely accepted that vocabulary is the most crucial element for language acquisition and use (Knight, 1994). Vocabulary acquisition plays an important role in the development of the learner's language. In recent years, linguists have become more interested in examining the process of vocabulary acquisition due to the increased awareness regarding the significance of vocabulary in language acquisition.

Language acquisition generally entails two aspects, accuracy of grammar and on extensive vocabulary. However, meaning is mostly conveyed through vocabulary. Reading comprehension for example is strongly related to vocabulary knowledge. Laufer (1997a) emphasizes this by claiming that the lack of vocabulary is considered a huge obstacle in both reading and listening skills, despite grammar mastery. Hence, the key for reading comprehension is lexis. If the learner is familiar the vocabulary in a given text, this will predict successful comprehension of the text (Laufer, 1997a).

Knight (1994) states that vocabulary acquisition is defined as the most important aspect of foreign language (FL) studies. It is necessary for academic studies, universal business, Internet and technology. Schmitt (2008) reinforces that learners must learn a great number of lexical items to achieve a high level of proficiency in English- a difficult challenge that most learners struggle to meet.

Researchers of the topic have suggested that learners must know a certain percentage of the vocabulary within a text and this is referred to as lexical coverage. Bonk (2000) for instance, estimates that knowledge of 95% of all running words in discourse leads to adequate comprehension. Schmitt (2008) suggests that the percentage of lexical items required for a learner to know to understand spoken or written discourse is around 98%. This highlights the significance of vocabulary acquisition.

Language teachers are becoming more aware of the important role of vocabulary in language acquisition. Adopting the Revised English Curriculum (2014) the focus switched to be on vocabulary not on grammatical structures. Nowadays, teachers work and invest efforts to enhance vocabulary acquisition depending mainly on vocabulary. In Israel, the National Curriculum was revised and now lists targets for vocabulary acquisition.