

## Developing Vocabulary Strategies for Freshman EFL Students in Afghanistan

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### Abstract

This article explains learning strategies and classification of learning vocabulary strategies for freshman students which will be greatly useful in teaching English to freshmen students in Afghanistan. It also talks about effective vocabulary instruction which emphasizes in direct instruction. Teachers also use from word play to amplify the knowing of new words and create hunger for learning those new words. It highlights the points English as a foreign language learners (EFL) students need to know about new vocabulary. Furthermore, it clarifies the points EFL students need to know about learning new vocabulary especially they should know about the syntax and content of the new words. Moreover, it tries to show the ways in which vocabulary can be taught. The methodology of this research is library-oriented. I used information from different books and published articles. This article suggests some activities for teaching vocabulary which the teachers can use while teaching to facilitate learning of new words.

**Keywords:** Classification, EFL students, learning strategies, vocabulary, new words, teaching, teachers, freshmen, Afghanistan.

### Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the essential elements of the language system, and it is known as the building blocks of learning a new language. Many scholars believe that lexical deficiency interferes with the daily communication. In addition, many second language learners believe that vocabulary is more important than grammar for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. They emphasized that vocabulary carries the best information they need to understand. However, vocabulary should not be overemphasized in learning a foreign language, since the teachers, researchers, and scholars who have devoted themselves to this field find that vocabulary is one of the most important elements for learning a new language. Although it is believed that without grammar very little can be conveyed, it is also true that without vocabulary nothing can be

conveyed. Therefore, more scholars express that for developing and promoting vocabulary we must be aware of learning strategies.

### **Definition of Learning Strategies**

Yongwei (2017) defined that learning strategies are measures that the students take to study more efficiently. Also, he clarified as different actions and procedures that students take to learn and develop their English effectively.

Based on the above definitions, learning strategies can be determined as a sequence of techniques, tactics, and approaches which are used by students to ensure effective learning. It contains two aspects. First the purpose of using learning strategies is to use learning effectively; second, the essence of learning strategies is behavior, but not simply thoughts of learners.

### **Classification of Learning Strategies**

After a lot of research, authors categorize learning strategies and report that there are different ways to define them. Therefore, vocabulary learning strategies are differently looked at. The following classifications are acceptable.

As Cohen, & Aphek, (2017) quoted and divided the learning strategies into language learning strategies and language using strategies. They also identified the material for learning, separating it from other material, making groups for learning to be easy, repeating the material, and formally committing the material to memory. They have also mentioned that “language using strategies include retrieval strategies, rehearsal strategies, cover strategies, and communication strategies”. This classification is very vivid and clear, and their aims are to improve the freshman learners’ vocabulary learning and using of a second language in different actions.

As there is a relationship between learning strategies and the target language learning, Oxford divided vocabulary learning strategies in two kinds: Direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. In opposite, indirect strategies provide indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, searching opportunities, controlling anxiety, and increasing cooperation.

Based on Yongwei (2017) learning strategies are divided into three types: Social strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Social strategies work in a big grouping that involve either interaction with another person or ideational control. For example, an English language learning class in which the teacher talks non-stop while the students listen. This would be not just boring but also ineffective. The good news for you as a teacher of language is that the nature of your classes is perfect to apply social learning strategies in Afghan context. Cognitive

strategies are involved in specific learning jobs and use directly incoming information. Metacognitive strategies are higher executive skills than the other strategies. For freshmen students in Afghan EFL classes it is better to focus more on specific learning jobs.

### **Effective Vocabulary Instruction**

According to Claire (2011), effective vocabulary instruction emphasizes direct instruction. For example, clarifying key words help English as a foreign language learners (EFLs) to understand difficult text and multiple meaning words. By using direct instruction teachers can incorporate related vocabulary in to before, during, and after reading stages of instruction.

If teachers want to help freshman students to remember new words, they may ask EFLs to use the new words with the objects that are familiar to them, or they may translate the words into students' native/first language. Teachers also use from word play to amplify the use of new words and create hunger for learning those new words. While freshman students learn new words by using them in their reading, teachers give EFLs the tools for understanding vocabulary by explicit instruction. For creating interest in learning new vocabulary, teachers can help students by clarifying the meaning of unknown words by synonyms, descriptions, explanations, and visual aids. Visual aids and synonyms in English and Afghan languages will help.

In addition, it is also needed to connect the new words into students' prior knowledge. For doing this, teachers involve EFLs in learning new words through many different strategies. For freshmen students in Afghanistan, actual objectives are useful to remember new words. For example, in teaching shapes the teacher can bring the object of shapes in the classroom. As Sibold (2011) explained using real objects, pictures, and photographs help EFLs make sense of new words. For creating a rich vocabulary environment, instructors also can use a word wall that involves words from different places, areas, word books, and make a reading room with books that teach and use new concepts. Word walls help students visually and engage them in activities that help them learn new words. This step will however demand a lot of work from the teachers. So, if the government department of education could provide such "walls" in print, Afghan freshmen students will benefit a lot in learning and remembering names of objects they see in the pictures. Finally, for effective learning teachers can integrate the new words with students' homework.

### **Strategies for Teaching Academic Vocabulary**

Sibold (2011) mentioned that effective strategies help freshman students to learn new vocabulary explicitly. For example, association strategies, imagery, and graphic organizers. It is also mentionable that while introducing a new word, you have to avoid lexical definitions that do not make sense to the students. Instead, teachers can describe or explain the word or provide examples.

Furthermore, repetition is an important key to learn new vocabulary. First, ask the students to listen to the pronunciation of the new word and at the same time show the actual object or picture of that word. And ask them to repeat the word at least three times. Then ask them to use it in a sentence. For example, the teacher reads, “There are several geographic regions in Afghanistan.” After that the teacher explains and shows these regions on a map. Then students will be asked to work in pairs and use the words in sentences. This can be repeated for every key word.

While teaching academic vocabulary by using this repetition cycle, choose content-specific words from the textbook, which should be critical to students’ understanding of the main concept, topics, and subtopics. After doing the activities that make revelation to the words in context, then ask the students to practice the words. By using different strategies teachers can develop the students’ learning of new words. Until learning vocabulary through reading is not effective, direct teaching of vocabulary will enhance learning, and it is a great opportunity for academic success. This strategy is a lot of help to the EFL teachers as well as native languages in African schools and colleges.

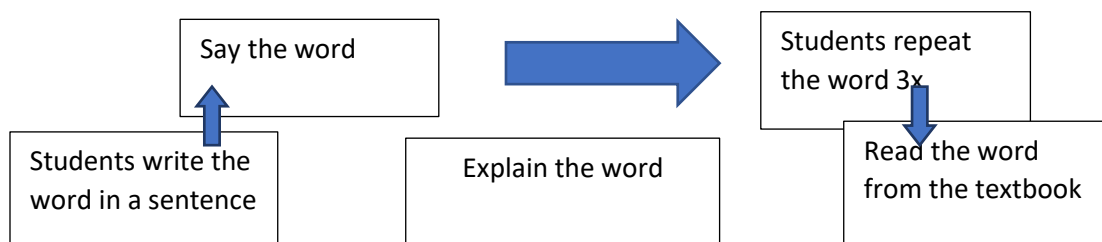


Figure 1  
Sibold, (2011, p. 26)

### The Points Freshman Students Need to Know about New Vocabulary

When freshman students want to understand a piece of text, they must be aware of a basic understanding of the meaning, the syntax, and the context in which it has been read. Mcbain (2011) quotes and explains that vocabulary must be given from authentic experiences in reading and listening, while students use words in different contexts of language. This method shows that students understand the exact words as they read them in a text, story, or sentence.

Contexts provide the grammar of sentences and the meanings of words in a paragraph, a whole essay, or other text. “Context is also taken to include the reader’s expectations and purposes for reading; various aspects if the location and situation in which the person is reading; and even the person’s culture and times-in short, the reader’s entire background of knowledge and experience” (Brown, 1997, p.3).

Kuhn & Stahl (2003) defined that there is no single way in theory that explains fluency accurately. Fluency means that a freshman student pronounces the word, use the correct intonation, and understand its meaning in context. In addition, it is also important to understand its spelling and if there is any cultural difference, like British and American, they have to know.

Nation (2002) stated that instructors must know the ways how to teach the words that can be easy for students to remember. It is also a good taught that if students relate the words to their own lives. Actually, it is not possible for all words but if it is possible, it is a good chance for students to personalize the word to their own live which makes it easier to understand. Furthermore, the students need to categorize the word and to distinguish if it is a noun, a verb, or an adjective, and also this helps them to understand syntax, and with which tense the writer is communicating.

One of the most important vocabulary acquisition strategy that Nation (2002) calls “noticing” is to see and recognize meta-cognitive skills a word to be learned. Also the teachers should help students to get the habit of noticing by saying in the class which item is the word, for example, passive, verb, adjective, phrase and so on. If the students want to study vocabulary efficiently and as self-regulated learners, the following points are needed.

- By clearly marking vocabulary lessons
- A focus on vocabulary practice and recall of past vocabulary
- Giving and studying lists of vocabulary words from context

The above steps are easy achieve, but we need some concentrated effort on our part as teachers.

In addition, Nation (2002) also added that a good way of developing the idea of noticing is structured vocabulary notebook exercises that are made to ask students to focus on a particular set of vocabulary words.

### **The Ways in Which Vocabulary Can Be Taught**

According to McBain (2011), there are various theories to teach vocabulary from a lexical approach -- theme based, lexical phrase method, the grammar translation method, the audio lingual method and the communicative language method. Research shows that there is not only one way to teach vocabulary learning; it also means that teachers must change their traditional teaching approaches, or they can integrate it with all or as many different ways of teaching and the activities of teaching vocabulary to improve vocabulary acquisition. It is not a challenge for Afghan teachers. We have always received always used various methods and we have encouraged memorization. But in the context of EFL, “The full understanding of words at the beginning of the semester is procrastinated when students move on to new vocabulary in a new unit and sometimes a new book

and the process starts all over again” (McBain, 2011, p, 6). It shows the value of memorizing lists of vocabulary words for throughout the year to review with students what they have learned.

This is also an opportunity for teachers to use the vocabulary in different contexts throughout the year. Finally, different words in a text need different degrees of instructional focus in the class: some words may be attestation in teaching and others may be addressed with a short demonstration or explanation.

### **General Guidelines for Teaching Vocabulary**

Keep in mind several general principles which facilitate learning of new words.

- Teach new words in the context of a meaningful subject-matter lesson and facilitate students’ discussion that need for them to use the new word. Textbook lessons help us in this and other following processes.
- Be sure that students can hear the correct pronunciation of the word and practice it by reading it aloud several times. It is also important that they can hear the syllable structure and stress pattern of the word to make it easy to remember. Stress pattern will demand better training for our teachers. While perfection may be hard to achieve, we need to learn and use as much as we can. In due course both students and teachers will achieve stress patterns that help comprehensibility.
- Teach the parts of the word; root words, base words, prefixes, and suffixes that students will meet frequently.
- Teach the words in related groups to help students to understand how words are related or interrelated.
- Clarify examples/applications which are related to the meaning of the new vocabulary.
- Ask the students to connect new words to something with which they are familiar.
- Offer the opportunity for students to paraphrase the definition of a new term until they can identify the main ideas.
- Create opportunities to learn new vocabulary in using different learning formats which actively engage them in the learning process (Williamsburg, 2015).

#### Activities for Teaching Vocabulary

While you selected new words for instruction and made good instructional goals for chosen terms, now it is better to choose instructional strategies that go with these goals. There are lots of activities to use in teaching vocabulary, but I am going to suggest you some of them to use while teaching new vocabulary.

### **Same Word, Different Subject**

1. Every school subject contains of technical vocabulary words and specific words. Technical words are those words which have only one meaning.
2. Explain students that specific vocabulary words are those which are used in various subjects and may have various meanings in each subject.

### **Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy**

1. Tell students to clarify two words related to a specific topic.
2. Ask students to write their words on the board.
3. Have students to explain their words to the group by defining them, ask the group why they should learn them, and tell where they found the word.

### **Semantic Feature Analysis**

Semantic feature analysis helps students to know the relationship between words in categories. It clarifies how words are both similar and different and how it emphasizes the unity of each word.

### **Word Map**

The word map method is useful for helping students to develop a general definition. It focuses on three questions, “What is it?”, “What is it like?”, and “What are some examples?”

### **Word Web**

1. “Before reading the text, divide a list of words that students will encounter in their reading. Record these words in the center rectangles of word webs equal in number to the words on the list” (Williamsburg, 2015, p. 7).
2. Pronounce each word and ask the students to share what they think each word means.
3. They have to complete the word webs during reading. Students encounter a word and place it in the center of a word web, then record on one of the circles around each center. And circle the words and phrases which helps them to remember the meaning of the words.

### **Semantic Word Map**

Semantic word map is a diagram that shows the relationship between concepts and related ideas. Most of a learner’s knowledge of words can be stored in word maps in the brain.

### **Words Alive**

1. Ask students to write the vocabulary word above the first box.
2. Instruct students to answer the five given questions.
3. Have students to draw a picture that show the meaning of the word.
4. Direct students to write a caption that describes the picture and uses the vocabulary word.

## Word

What do you think the word means?

What does the dictionary say the word means?

Write a definition of the word using your own words?

What are some other words that mean the same thing as the word?

What are some other words that mean the opposite of the word?

## Sketch of Word

Picture Caption Using the Word

What do you think the word means?	
What does the dictionary say the word means?	
Write a definition of the word using your own words?	
What are some other words that mean the same thing as the word?	What are some other words that mean the opposite of the word?
Sketch of Word	
Picture Caption Using the Word	

Figure 2  
Burg, 2015, p. 10

## Conclusion

English language students who want to learn academic vocabulary may have difficulty in comprehending reading materials and class instruction. The strategies which are explained in this article help EFL learners to expand their knowledge to understand how to achieve their goals while learning/teaching vocabulary. It is also important for teachers to make connections between the students' prior knowledge and the new vocabulary. In addition, by partnering with parents or others in the family of the students who have some command over English as a foreign language, teachers increase the opportunities for learners to help them in learning academic vocabulary. There are also some points to know about new vocabulary like fluency that an EFL student can pronounce the word, use the correct intonation, and understand its meaning in context. The way of teaching vocabulary is another important point that teachers have to pay attention while teaching. There are various theories to teach vocabulary -- a lexical approach, theme based, lexical phrase method, the grammar translation method, the audio lingual method and the communicative



language method. In conclusion, I realized through my research and teaching experience that the most important ways for teaching vocabulary is the activities which the teacher use. I mentioned some of those activities that teachers may use while teaching.

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