

Enhancing Vocabulary Skills through Literary Texts among Undergraduate Students: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Vocabulary is an essential component of language learning because it enables learners to understand ideas and communicate effectively. Many undergraduate students experience difficulty in learning and using English vocabulary due to limited exposure to the language and insufficient opportunities to practice it in meaningful situations. Traditional teaching methods often emphasize memorization of word meanings, which does not always support the practical use of vocabulary in communication. In this context, literary texts can serve as an effective resource for vocabulary development. Literary texts present language in a natural and engaging context where learners encounter new words within meaningful situations. They also encourage reading habits and stimulate learners' imagination and interest in language learning. Through story based activities, students are able to understand vocabulary more clearly and apply it in different communicative contexts. Story reading also promotes deeper engagement with language and improves comprehension abilities. This paper focuses on examining how literary texts can be used to enhance vocabulary skills among undergraduate students and discusses strategies that support effective vocabulary learning in English language classrooms.

Keywords: Vocabulary Development, Literary texts, ELT, Contextual Learning, LSRW

Introduction

Vocabulary forms the foundation of language learning and plays a crucial role in the development of communication skills. Learners who possess a strong vocabulary are able to understand texts more easily and express their ideas with clarity. For undergraduate students studying English as a second language, vocabulary knowledge is particularly important because academic learning requires the ability to read complex materials and communicate effectively in writing and speech. However, vocabulary learning is often limited to memorizing definitions from textbooks, which does not always help students understand how words function in real contexts. Contemporary language teaching approaches emphasize contextual learning where vocabulary is introduced through meaningful texts and communicative activities. Literary texts serve as a valuable resource in this context because they provide interesting narratives and authentic language use. When students read and discuss stories, they encounter new vocabulary in a natural and meaningful way. This process allows learners to understand both the meaning and the usage of words more effectively. In addition, stories create an enjoyable classroom atmosphere that encourages participation and curiosity. Such an approach supports students in developing confidence while improving their language abilities.

Importance of Vocabulary Development

Knowledge in vocabulary is a key element of successful language learning and effective communication. Students with a strong vocabulary base can understand written materials, participate in discussions, and express their ideas with greater clarity. In English language teaching, vocabulary development should go beyond learning definitions and focus on understanding how words function in various contexts. Learners need opportunities to practice vocabulary through reading, writing, and interactive classroom activities. When vocabulary is introduced through meaningful situations, learners are more likely to remember and use it accurately. Teachers therefore need to design learning tasks that encourage active engagement with language. Such activities help learners connect vocabulary with real life communication and academic learning. A well developed vocabulary also increases students' confidence in

using English. Furthermore, it contributes significantly to the improvement of reading comprehension, writing ability, and overall language proficiency.

Challenges in Vocabulary Development

Undergraduate students often face several difficulties while expanding their English vocabulary. One major challenge is the limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which reduces opportunities for regular practice. Many students rely heavily on memorization techniques, which may help them remember definitions temporarily but do not always help them use words appropriately. Another challenge is the lack of regular reading habits among learners, as academic pressure often limits their engagement with additional reading materials. Differences in linguistic background and educational experiences also influence the pace at which students acquire new vocabulary. When learners encounter unfamiliar words in academic texts, they sometimes feel discouraged and lose confidence in their reading ability. Some students also experience difficulty with the pronunciation and spelling of new words. These problems make vocabulary learning a challenging task for many undergraduate learners. Such challenges highlight the importance of adopting creative teaching strategies that make vocabulary learning more meaningful and engaging.

Using Literary texts to Enhance Vocabulary Skills

Literary texts provide a valuable resource in English language classrooms because they present language in an interesting and meaningful form. Through stories, learners encounter new vocabulary within situations that involve characters, events, and emotions. This contextual exposure helps students understand the meaning and usage of words more effectively than isolated word lists. Literary texts also stimulate imagination and curiosity, which encourages students to read actively and think critically about the text. Story based learning allows teachers to combine vocabulary instruction with other language skills such as reading, speaking, and writing. When students discuss characters, describe events, or summarize the story, they naturally use the vocabulary they have learned. This practice strengthens both recognition and usage of new words. Stories also expose learners to authentic language expressions and sentence patterns. As a result, students gradually improve their comprehension skills and expand their vocabulary knowledge in a meaningful manner.

Literary texts are also highly effective in motivating students and increasing their interest in language learning. The engaging nature of stories captures learners' attention and encourages them to participate actively in reading and discussion activities. When students become emotionally connected to characters and events, they show greater curiosity to understand the meanings of unfamiliar words that appear in the text. This curiosity leads to a more active and meaningful process of vocabulary acquisition. Unlike traditional vocabulary learning, which often depends on memorization, story based learning allows students to discover new words naturally while following the narrative. Students also tend to remember vocabulary more easily because the words are associated with memorable situations in the story. In addition, classroom activities such as storytelling, group discussions, and role play create opportunities for learners to use new vocabulary in communication. These interactive experiences promote active learning and help students develop confidence in using newly acquired words. As a result, the use of literary texts not only improves vocabulary knowledge but also strengthens learners' interest and engagement in the language learning process.

Methods for Vocabulary Development

Contextual Vocabulary Learning

Students learn new vocabulary by understanding words within the context of the story. This method allows learners to identify meaning through situations and examples presented in the narrative. Context based learning improves long term retention of vocabulary. It also encourages learners to interpret language independently rather than relying only on memorization. Through repeated exposure to words in meaningful sentences, learners gradually develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary usage. This approach also helps students recognize how words function in different linguistic contexts.

Pre Reading Vocabulary Activities

Before reading the story, the teacher introduces important vocabulary items related to the text. This preparation helps students understand the story more easily and builds interest in the reading activity. It also activates learners' background knowledge about the topic. Such preparation supports learners in approaching the text with greater confidence. Pre reading activities may include discussions, word lists, or simple exercises that prepare students for the

story. These activities create curiosity among learners and encourage them to focus on the text more attentively.

Vocabulary Guessing Strategy

Students are encouraged to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words by examining surrounding sentences and context clues. This strategy strengthens analytical thinking and promotes independent learning. Learners become more confident when they attempt to interpret language on their own. It also reduces their dependence on dictionaries. By practicing this strategy regularly, students develop the ability to understand texts without interruption. This skill is particularly useful in improving reading fluency and comprehension.

Word Mapping

Learners create visual vocabulary charts that include meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and example sentences from the story. This technique helps students understand relationships between words and improves memory retention. Word mapping encourages learners to organize vocabulary systematically. It also promotes deeper engagement with language learning. Visual representation of words makes it easier for students to recall vocabulary during reading and writing activities. Such structured learning also supports long term vocabulary development.

Vocabulary Journals

Students maintain personal vocabulary notebooks where they record new words, meanings, and example sentences. This habit encourages continuous learning and regular revision of vocabulary. It also helps learners monitor their progress in vocabulary development. Over time, vocabulary journals become a valuable personal learning resource. Students can review these journals whenever they encounter similar words in different texts. This practice strengthens their ability to remember and apply vocabulary effectively.

Post Reading Vocabulary Activities

After reading the story, students participate in activities such as sentence formation, matching words with meanings, and writing short summaries using new vocabulary. These

exercises reinforce vocabulary learning and encourage active use of words. They also help students apply vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Such activities strengthen both comprehension and expression. Post reading discussions and group activities further allow students to practice vocabulary in communication. These interactive tasks also promote collaborative learning in the classroom.

Conclusion

Vocabulary development is an essential aspect of language learning, particularly for undergraduate students who require strong language skills for academic and professional communication. Traditional vocabulary teaching methods that focus mainly on memorization often fail to provide meaningful learning experiences. Literary texts offer an engaging and practical approach to vocabulary instruction because they present language within interesting and relatable contexts. Through activities such as contextual learning, vocabulary guessing, word mapping, and vocabulary journals, students can gradually expand their vocabulary knowledge and improve their confidence in using English. Story based learning also encourages reading habits and promotes active participation in classroom discussions. As learners interact with stories, they develop a deeper understanding of language and its expressive potential. Therefore, integrating literary texts into English language teaching can significantly support vocabulary development among undergraduate students.

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