

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: *This article highlights some effective teaching strategies for teaching vocabulary to young learners. Vocabulary range has always been regarded as an essential part of learning a second language as the more vocabulary we know the better we can understand the meaning of a particular word or communicate with English speakers.*

Key words: *vocabulary, techniques and methods, young learners, integrated skills.*

Vocabulary development is a fundamental component of second language acquisition. For learners at any stage, a broad and rich vocabulary is essential for effective communication and comprehension. However, the process of teaching vocabulary to young learners differs significantly from that of adolescents or adults. It necessitates the use of age-appropriate pedagogical approaches tailored to the cognitive, emotional, and linguistic needs of children. Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating vocabulary acquisition among young learners and must be equipped with a comprehensive understanding of instructional strategies, techniques, methods, and materials. Moreover, an awareness of the developmental characteristics specific to young learners is crucial for designing and implementing effective vocabulary instruction.

Young learner: Young learners are typically defined as children between the ages of five or six—when they begin formal schooling—and eleven or twelve. They possess distinct developmental characteristics that set them apart from adult learners, particularly in terms of cognitive, emotional, and social growth. It is essential for educators to recognize and understand these unique traits, as such awareness directly contributes to the effectiveness and quality of the teaching and learning process. By tailoring instructional approaches to align with the specific needs of young learners, teachers can foster more meaningful and engaging language development experiences. [2].

In this age they find difficulty to know abstract thing because they have a limited knowledge about the word. Because of that every teacher should be able to and know how to work with young children and have patience to explain every tiny thing to them. As Cameron recommends some special characteristics of young learners that teachers should take into consideration:

- Young learners have short attention span. Teachers should give them different types of activities so as to break their boredom;
- They are very active. Teachers should ask them to do role play or involve them in competitions.

- They are less shy than older learners: they should be always involved in a task and teachers should ask them to repeat utterances;
- They are imaginative. Teachers should use as many pictures as they can to teach new vocabulary related to concrete meanings;
- They respond well and positively to rewards from the teacher;
- They have limited knowledge about the world;
- They don't have much listening and reading skills even in their first language;
- They need physical movement and activity as much as stimulation for their thinking.

Vocabulary: A.S. Hornby, a renowned English linguist and methodologist, is widely recognized for his contributions to the field of English language teaching, particularly for non-native speakers. In *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Hornby defines vocabulary in several ways: (1) the total number of words an individual knows or uses, (2) the complete set of words in a given language, (3) the words commonly employed in spoken communication, and (4) a collection of words accompanied by their meanings, especially as presented in educational resources designed for language learners. These definitions highlight the multifaceted nature of vocabulary and its central role in language acquisition [4].

According to Napa, vocabulary is a fundamental component of language, as no language can function without words. Words serve as the primary medium through which individuals convey their thoughts and ideas. The more vocabulary one acquires, the greater their capacity to express complex ideas and communicate effectively. Napa emphasizes that teaching vocabulary—particularly to junior high school students—can be challenging, as it often requires thorough explanation of each word and its various aspects. Moreover, educators must not only focus on definitions but also pay careful attention to how words are used in context, ensuring that students grasp both meaning and practical application [6].

Methods and Techniques. Before discussing effective strategies for teaching vocabulary to young learners, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of methods and techniques. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, a method refers to a particular way of doing something, whereas a technique is a skilled way of carrying out a specific activity. Expanding on this distinction, H. Douglas Brown defines a method as a comprehensive plan for the systematic presentation of language, grounded in a specific approach. In contrast, techniques are the practical classroom activities that align with and reflect the chosen method and underlying approach. Understanding the relationship between methods, techniques, and approaches is essential for educators aiming to design effective and coherent vocabulary instruction for young learners [1].

The Direct Method. The Direct Method, also referred to as the Reform Method, the Natural Method, or the Berlitz Method, is grounded in the belief that learning a second language should closely resemble the way individuals acquire their first language. This method emphasizes extensive oral communication, spontaneous language use, and

immersion in the target language, avoiding translation or explicit grammar instruction. Central to this approach is the principle that “knowing a language means being able to speak it.”

The Direct Method offers several core principles that are particularly effective when teaching young learners:

- Instruction is conducted exclusively in the target language, with the teacher relying on demonstration rather than explanation or translation.
- Focus is placed on everyday vocabulary and practical sentences, ensuring relevance to the learners' daily experiences.
- New vocabulary is introduced through familiar words, building on what learners already know.
- The use of real objects, images, and gestures helps to create meaningful associations and enhance understanding.
- Vocabulary acquisition is encouraged to occur naturally, promoting early thinking in the target language and reducing reliance on the learners' native language. These principles align well with the developmental needs of young learners, who often respond positively to visual, interactive, and immersive language experiences. [1]. This type of method can be effective for younger learners to acquire more stocks of words rather than other methods as this method requires to be active both physically and mentally which is proper to young learners.

Techniques. A wide variety of interactive techniques can be effectively utilized to enhance vocabulary instruction for young learners. These techniques not only make learning more engaging but also support the cognitive and social development of children by encouraging active participation and meaningful communication. Among the most effective approaches are meaning-based techniques, where vocabulary is introduced in context rather than in isolation, helping learners grasp both the meaning and usage of new words [Nation, 2001].

Vocabulary games provide a playful yet purposeful learning experience that can increase motivation and retention. According to Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby [2005], games promote interaction, reduce learner anxiety, and make vocabulary acquisition more enjoyable. Discussions and debates, though often simplified for young learners, encourage critical thinking and require students to use newly acquired vocabulary in context, reinforcing language use in authentic situations.

Role-playing allows children to adopt different characters and practice language in simulated real-life settings, thereby enhancing fluency and confidence. Similarly, project work enables learners to explore topics in depth, often involving collaborative tasks that naturally incorporate target vocabulary.

Group work fosters peer learning and communication, allowing students to negotiate meaning and practice language in a social setting [Slavin, 1995]. By integrating these interactive techniques into the classroom, teachers can create a rich linguistic environment that supports vocabulary development through engagement,

repetition, and contextualized use—factors that are especially important for young learners, who benefit from experiential and social learning opportunities.

Meaning-based technique. Meaning-based vocabulary instruction is closely associated with visual teaching techniques, as teachers often rely on images, objects, and other sensory aids to help young learners make meaningful connections between words and their referents.

The primary goal of this approach is to create a direct association between language and meaning, allowing learners to internalize vocabulary through context and experience rather than translation. As noted by Rogova, instructional techniques can be broadly categorized into two groups: visual and verbal.

Visual techniques are particularly effective for teaching concrete vocabulary to children, as they involve the use of realia (real objects), flashcards, pictures of animals, fruits, vegetables, and other tangible items. These tools support comprehension and retention by making abstract language more accessible and engaging for young learners. For example, a teacher might hold up a pencil and ask, “What is this? It is a pencil. Is it a pencil?

Yes, it is. Is it a pen? No, it is not.” Through this interaction, students not only learn the word pencil, but also observe its use within familiar and repetitive sentence structures, reinforcing both vocabulary and basic grammatical patterns.

By integrating visual aids into vocabulary instruction, teachers can create an immersive and interactive learning environment that supports the natural language acquisition process. This method is particularly suited to young learners, who benefit from concrete, hands-on experiences and multisensory input.. [7]

The second category of instructional techniques identified by Rogova is the verbal technique, which involves the use of spoken or written language to convey the meaning of unfamiliar words. Unlike visual techniques, verbal methods rely on linguistic tools such as contextual clues, synonyms, antonyms, definitions, and word-building elements to facilitate vocabulary learning. These techniques are especially useful for teaching abstract or less tangible vocabulary that cannot easily be represented through images or objects. One effective verbal strategy is the use of context to infer meaning. By embedding new vocabulary within familiar sentences or narratives, teachers guide learners toward understanding through exposure and logical deduction. For example, in the following classroom exchange, the teacher uses a simple narrative to introduce the word thirsty:

Teacher: It was hot. We had nothing to drink. We were thirsty. Do people need water or bread when they are thirsty?

Pupil: They need water.

Teacher: What do people need when they are thirsty?

Pupil: They need water.

Teacher: It was hot. We had nothing to drink. We were thirsty. Were we thirsty?

Pupil: Yes, you were.

Teacher: Were we thirsty or hungry? (The pupils are already familiar with the word hungry.)

Pupil: You were thirsty.

Teacher: Why were we thirsty?

Pupil: You were thirsty because it was hot.

Through this dialogue, the teacher helps students infer the meaning of thirsty by placing it in a clear and relatable context, gradually reinforcing its use through repetition and comparison with known vocabulary. This approach not only aids in comprehension but also encourages learners to think critically about language and meaning. Verbal techniques such as this are highly effective in developing a deeper understanding of vocabulary, especially when visual aids are insufficient or unavailable. They also support the development of inferencing skills and contextual awareness—key competencies in language learning. [7]

The pupils' responses to the teacher's questions indicate their understanding of the word thirsty, demonstrating that the meaning can be effectively conveyed through context without resorting to the use of the mother tongue. This approach not only facilitates vocabulary acquisition but also encourages active participation through a natural dialogue between the teacher and the learners. As a result, students gain valuable practice in both listening comprehension and spoken interaction. Considering the points discussed above, it is important to note that a limited vocabulary can significantly hinder students' development across all four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Therefore, prioritizing vocabulary instruction is essential to support overall language proficiency. In particular, instruction should focus on the 2,000 most frequently used words, as these form the core vocabulary learners are most likely to encounter in everyday communication and academic texts.

To support effective vocabulary acquisition, especially among young learners, a range of strategies should be employed.

Among these, the use of visual aids has proven particularly effective, as it helps learners connect new words with concrete images or experiences, thereby enhancing both comprehension and retention.

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