



## The Necessity and the Importance of Teaching and Learning of English Vocabulary in Tesl and Tefl Classrooms

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**Annotation:** The article deals with the necessity as well as importance of vocabulary and its role in language teaching; using and selecting suitable lexical resources in foreign language classes in order to improve learners' communicative competences both effectively and smoothly in teaching and learning process. Moreover, being able to use academic vocabulary creates great opportunities for learners as they can comprehend better the meaning of sentences so that language teachers try to teach academic vocabulary via various methods.

**Keywords:** Communicative competences, content words, memory-based, valuable authentic materials, lexical items, language and cultural enrichment, structure words, function-based, essential techniques in teaching.

“Without grammar very little can be conveyed,  
Without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”

**David Wilkins**

Vocabulary is considered as a crucial fundamental part to convey meaning in other languages. Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary, students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. As we all know, words of a language are just like bricks of a high building. To start with, we will clarify what we mean when we use the terms “vocabulary” and “word”. According to the Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1989) “the vocabulary of a language is the total number of words in it” and “someone’s vocabulary is the total number of words in a language that he or she knows”. However, this term will be used in a more restricted sense in this paper: we will limit ourselves to what Michael Wallance in his work Teaching Vocabulary calls “**content words**” as opposed to “**structure words**” and include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs derived from adjectives. According to this author, structure words are almost deprived of meaning when considered in isolation. Therefore, it should be considered as part of the grammar of a language.

As regards the term “word”, which will be used as an equivalent to lexical item or lexeme. Therefore, it refers to expressions made up of one or more terms which form units of meaning. Thus “to put up with” or “to paint the town red” would be considered as words from the point of view of vocabulary teaching in the same way as a single word like “chair”. That is why, idioms and multi-word verbs such as phrasal and prepositional verbs will be included. In addition to, now words may

be grouped into different types of semantic fields as well as into phonological and grammatical sets. Admittedly, knowing a word is much more complex than knowing a definition. In fact, now researchers recognize that word knowledge is not so much “declarative” (the capacity to “declare” the meaning of a word) as “procedural” (the ability to “process” a word in relation to other knowledge). “In most cases, knowing a word is more like knowing how to use a tool than it is like being able to state a fact”. According to the methodologists – Baker, Simmons & Kame’enui, “Learning, as a language – based activity, is fundamentally and profoundly dependent on vocabulary knowledge”. They are not just being told here that vocabulary is a help in learning. It is much bigger than that. “Profoundly dependent” and “fundamental” tell us that learning can’t really happen without appropriate vocabulary. Learning starts with vocabulary, is continually enlarged by new and richer vocabulary and can fail for lack of vocabulary. We must be sure to give English language learners sufficient vocabulary instruction throughout the day, in our moment-by-moment classroom interactions. It may be worth teaching students an easier formulation of Wilkins’s view that “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. Definitely, teaching English vocabulary is an important area worthy of effort and investigation. In linguists’ point of view, vocabulary should be ubiquitous in our instruction. It has to underlie and infuse every sphere of learning and it is needed for expressing the meaning of words and also in using the receptive (listening and reading) and the productive (speaking and writing) skills. As a proof, during the past decades researchers and academics have pointed to the importance of vocabulary acquisition for second language learners.

Of course, learning a language cannot be increased, to only learning vocabulary but it is also true that “no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to convey a wide range of meaning, communication in a L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way”. The idea was defended by many applied linguists: V. F. Allen, M. Wallace, P. Corder, L. Taylor, D. Willis, McCarthy and so on. According to linguistic materials, vocabulary is obviously a very important element within a language as the overwhelming majority of meaning is carried lexically and something to be taken into consideration both in Second and Foreign Language Teaching – although not the only one that conveys meaning. Not so long ago, vocabulary is always one of the biggest problems in language learning. Namely, it may be more difficult for learners to possess a range of vocabulary, which is wide enough to satisfy their needs in communication. Because learning vocabulary is a challenge for learners due to the size of the task, variety of vocabulary types including single words, phrases, collocations and strategic vocabulary, as well as grammatical patterning, idioms and fixed expressions. It is common fact that foreign language learners always encounter new words, which hinder their reading comprehension. Moreover, a limited vocabulary can prevent learners from developing ideas or arguments effectively in writing. Nowadays teaching is a crucial part of teaching foreign languages so that a number of teachers use variety effective strategies to teach several types of vocabulary as we have discussed in our first chapter in different ways. Obviously, it is essential for teachers to explicitly educate learner by using valuable strategies which can engage students to learn new words with association strategies, imagery and graphic organizers. Most teachers make mistakes while introducing a new word by giving a lexical definition as a dictionary definition which is difficult to understand for them. According to observe, in general there is a tendency to concentrate on grammar, paying little attention to vocabulary. Therefore, for many years methodologists and linguists recommend that vocabulary teaching for these kinds of learners can be performed in two ways: one is called “**memory-based**” and another is “**function-based**”. Memory-based refers to concentrating on memorizing words, analyzing the parts of speech, focusing on affixes, listening and repeating, writing and practicing, imagining the written forms of the words and connecting the words with their synonyms and antonyms. In this group teachers believe that using keyword methods to memorize the words such as mnemonics, concentrating on the form of the words and using strategies to remember them (without direct attention to meaning) is an effective teaching approach to vocabulary learning. Memory-based teaching implies that the teacher may use a list of the words which are in the same family with selected word, synonyms or antonyms or even words derivations or affixes (such as sedate - “quiet”, “calm” and its derivatives: sedately, sedateness, sedative; supersede is “to sit above,

hence “to replace”) and then ask the learners to repeat and memorize them. Memorizing may be good and useful as a temporary technique for any kind of tests, but not for learning a foreign language.

In contrast, function-based refers to the negotiation of meaning through the application of words in sentences, texts and contexts or through activities that help the learner understand the targeted words better and to make relationships between the words and the learners’ own experiences. In addition to, “meaning” is one of the most controversial terms in the theory of language. At first sight the understanding of this term seems to present no difficulty at all – it is freely used in teaching, interpreting and translation. In fact that the book which is named “The Meaning of Meaning” by C. K. Ogden and I.A. Richards collected over sixteen different definitions of meaning. That is why, learners need to learn not only what forms are possible but what particular forms will express their particular meaning. Admittedly, when conveying the meaning of words to the students, teacher should teach that a word may have more than one meaning when used in different contexts. For instance, “word” has several different meaning when used in context. One may say: “If you want help, just say the word”; “How should I word this letter?”; “What does this word mean?”; “Can I have a word with you?” Teachers should make the teaching learning vocabulary process not only clearly but also smoothly for their students while expressing any meaning. If teachers don’t convey the meaning of the words, students can’t realize them and know how to use the words in contexts. We shouldn’t forget that the meaning of words can be communicated in many different ways.

All things considered, based on Lewis’s point of view “Lexis is the core or heart of language”. In fact, learning vocabulary is rather more complex process than it might at first sight appear. That is why, when teaching vocabulary to build students’ knowledge of words and phrases, helping them learn any and all of these different components assists them in enhancing their English vocabulary knowledge and use. It is worth emphasizing that the concept of a “word” can be defined in various ways, but teachers need to be aware of and focus on significant aspects: form, meaning and reference. Recharids Renandya believes that vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read and write. At the same time, vocabulary is stored in the brain in a highly organized and efficient lexicon, although not like a dictionary. Sometimes students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) are weaker than English as a second language (ESL) learners at recognizing particular constraints on vocabulary usage, such as the fact that only young people use a particular word or expression, which might be colloquial and not usually deemed appropriate in more formal contexts such as speeches. Likewise, students must be taught to use sentence structure to establish the grammatical category of the new item, word structure to find out the type of word and its meaning, as well as contextual, logical and cultural clues to discover the meaning.

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