

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING VOCABULARY FOR EFL LEARNERS

**Bazarbaeva Altinay**

4<sup>th</sup> year student, Foreign

Languages and Literature

Department

Nukus State Pedagogical

Institute, Uzbekistan ,Nukus

**Abstract:** Vocabulary forms the building blocks of language. A strong vocabulary base allows learners to express themselves effectively, understand others, and engage in meaningful conversations

**Key:** vocabulary, word meaning, receptive, lexical items, productive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, lexicon, oral , written, spoken

The knowledge of words and word meanings is vital for the academic success of students. Vocabulary, is defined by Stahl (2005) as knowledge; not simply a definition but an understanding of how a word fits into the world. Vocabulary word knowledge can be understood through listening and reading, known as receptive vocabulary and through words spoken and written, known as productive or expressive vocabulary. There are nearly 600,000-800,000 words in the English language; therefore, it makes learning new vocabulary an ongoing process. The average student begins first grade with approximately 6,000 words of spoken language (Chall , 1983). Students will continue to learn roughly 3,000 more words each year. (Beck, McKeown, Kucan, 2013). Subsequently, there are some words that require more teaching than others.

Vocabulary is a critical skill needed to successfully comprehend through listening and reading. One of the main skills that teachers will be expected to teach in the elementary grades is teaching a student to read and gain meaning from the text. Learning to read is a continuum and continues with secondary teachers' ability to be able to teach students how to analyze and critique what they read (Chall, 1983). Students will not be successful at comprehending any texts if they do not know the meaning of the words in which they are decoding. For many, lack of vocabulary knowledge could be a reason that students are not able to access the meaning of a text.

Vocabulary is the set of lexical items in a language: it is also called 'lexicon'. The term lexicon is known in English from the early 17 century, when it made mention of a book containing a selection of language's words and meanings: arranged in alphabetical order. The term itself comes from Greek 'lexis' word. Besides, it has taken on a more abstract sense, especially within linguistics, referring to the total stock of meaningful units in a language not only the words and idioms, but also parts of the words which indicate meaning, such as prefixes and suffixes.

Knowing a language involves mastering its structure and vocabulary, which is a crucial aspect taught in schools and colleges. However, the challenge lies in determining which words and idioms students should learn, considering the limited time and group size. The number of words to be taught depends on the syllabus requirements, which are determined by the teaching conditions and methods. Programmed instruction has been proven to increase the number of words learned as students can work independently with the program. Vocabulary teaching is particularly important in reading as it involves learning new words, synonyms, antonyms, idioms, etc. The selection of vocabulary must follow specific principles and consider the conditions of teaching and learning a foreign language at school.

Vocabulary skill is often considered as a critical aspect of foreign language learners as limited vocabulary in a second language, impedes successful communication. Considering the importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (2000)

emphasizes that lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language. Nation (2001) then describes the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and language practice as complementary: The skill of vocabulary enables language use and conversely. Language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge.

There are numerous activities and drills that can be utilized to enhance vocabulary during English lessons in schools and colleges. These activities aim to teach the formation of parts of speech, related words, compound words, affixation, guessing vocabulary, and using dictionaries. If students are unable to comprehend the vocabulary in a text, they will struggle to grasp its meaning and main concept. Various teaching techniques and methods are available for effective vocabulary learning.

Teaching vocabulary is crucial for developing reading abilities, as it is the first step in the process. It is important to choose vocabulary that aligns with the linguistic material and follow scientific principles for selection. The chosen words should be commonly used, easily combined, versatile in terms of style (oral or written), relevant to the syllabus topics, and useful for word-building (such as use, used, useful, useless, usefully).

The traditional approach to selecting vocabulary based on word frequency is purely linguistic, but modern approaches take into account the specific language skills being developed. For example, reading vocabulary is selected based on analyzing printed texts, while speaking vocabulary is selected based on analyzing recorded spoken language. Other principles are used for teaching purposes. The selected words can be divided into two categories: structural words that make up the form of the language and words used in communication.

In teaching vocabulary, both structural words and content words are important for practical needs. The teacher's main concern is not the selection of vocabulary, but rather how to get students to remember and use the words. Students may have

difficulties in assimilating new words, as each word has its own form, meaning, and usage. Concrete words denoting things, actions, and qualities are easier to learn than abstract words. Structural words are the most difficult for certain language speakers.

The process of learning a word involves identifying the concept and using it in communication. The teacher's role is to explain the word, help students recall and recognize it, and encourage them to use it in speech. Various techniques can be used to help students remember and use new vocabulary.

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