

Effective Methods for Teaching and Learning ESP Vocabulary in EFL Classes

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Abstract:

In spite of the fact that, learning and teaching vocabulary is very important in learning EFL courses, vocabulary is still creating a great challenge for both teachers and learners. This paper aims at offering some effective methods for introducing and practicing vocabulary in ESP classes. Like other EFL courses, learning vocabulary in ESP is essential for enriching students' repertoire and subsequently enhance their communicative competence. It is pointed out that ESP teachers should be trained in selecting the appropriate academic vocabulary teaching strategies to motivate students to learn a great number of words or terminologies that help them understand information in their major subjects.

Key words: EFL, ESP, learning vocabulary, teaching vocabulary, academic vocabulary, vocabulary teaching methods/strategies, types of vocabulary

0. INTRODUCTON

Vocabulary is one of the big problems that students encounter during learning mostly inside classrooms when they need to use new words or even old ones in solving exercises related to reading passage or any other activities. Generally, to avoid such

complexity, the section of the lesson plan concerning vocabulary should be accurately prepared before delivering the list of the target words. In the case of ESP classes that's the main issue of this study, it is necessary to specify and decide the appropriate academic vocabulary that should be introduced and practiced, using the appropriate methods and activities to meet the needs of that particular group of learners.

1. REVIEW:

1.1. What is Academic Vocabulary?

Here are some selected definitions of the academic vocabulary stated by researchers and practitioners in the field of TEFL .

Academic vocabulary is the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills which includes learning new information, describing abstract ideas and developing student's conceptual understanding. Academic vocabulary is used to teach about the content of the discipline; e.g. Students who study chemistry are required to know the chemistry concepts (Chamot and O'Malley 2007, cited in Herrel, 2004).

Academic vocabulary includes general academic terms such as analyze, infer and conclusion. It enables students to understand the concepts and content taught in schools; it is critical for students to have a deep understanding of the content vocabulary in order to understand the concepts expected throughout the content standards (Marzano 2004, in Adger, 2002).

Academic vocabulary helps students to convey arguments and facilitate the presentation of ideas in a sophisticated manner. It also prepares students for academic success by helping them preview, learn and practice vocabulary from Academic Word Lists. Cummins also stated that the main barrier to student comprehension of texts and lectures is low academic vocabulary knowledge, due to the sub-technicality of

the academic language. Besides, the academic vocabulary is based on more Latin and Greek roots than the daily spoken English vocabulary (Schmidt 2005, in Zwiers, 2008).

1.2. Types of Vocabulary

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) distinguish two types of ESP vocabulary according to frequency:

1. General Vocabulary

With higher frequency in common or several situations.

2. General Vocabulary

With specific meaning in a particular field.

Cummins (1999, in Herrel, 2004) stated that there are four types of vocabulary:

1. Reading vocabulary

This refers to all the words an individual can recognize when reading a text.

2. Listening vocabulary

It refers to all the words an individual can recognize when listening to speech.

3. Writing vocabulary

This includes all the words an individual can employ in writing.

4. Speaking vocabulary

This refers to all the words an individual can use in speech.

According to Driscoll(2005), there are two types of words:

1. Concrete Words refer to objects or events that are available to the senses (e.g. can be seen or touched) or having physical referents. (e.g. table, house, lion, etc.)

2. Abstract Words refer to ideas or concepts; they have no physical referents (e.g. freedom, justice, love, friendship, etc.)

2. LEARNING ESP VOCABULARY

Learning ESP vocabulary is more difficult than general purposes (EGP)vocabulary. ESP vocabulary is less frequent. In

other words, It is learnt for specific uses related to technical or academic needs, but EGP vocabulary is frequently used for different general purposes like every day English. Learning vocabulary required a period of time as stated by Schmitt (2000, p. 131) “the object of vocabulary learning is to transfer lexical information from short-term memory, where it resides during the process of manipulating language, to permanent long-term memory”. Thus, learning new words depends on several exposures to a particular word. As Schmitt states above the information is removed from the limited short memory(called working memory) to long memory(called information storage), where Information can be stored for a period of long time.

Depending on memorization, learning concrete words is easier than learning abstract words. Learners can more easily remember words like: table, house, and lion if they appear on a list than words such as freedom and injustice. The reason is that the verbal system represents the meaning of the words, but the imaginative system represents images of the words. The concrete words are remembered better with two memories available at recall, as opposed to one for abstract words.

It becomes noticeable that the great challenge for learners is to transform vocabulary from the quickly forgotten (short-term store) to the never forgotten (long-term store), and to turn passive knowledge of vocabulary into an active form or be able to use it.

3. TEACHING ESP VOCABULARY

Vocabulary in ESP courses are designed around students' needs based on their field of study. The objective of teaching vocabulary is to strengthen students' proficiency and help them to get ready to cope with everyday situations and deal with professionals in many fields such as: engineering, medicine, education, IT, business administration, law, etc. A suitable

approach for teaching ESP words is the lexical approach which follows the principle that lexis (words, terminologies or expressions) is the most important part of any language and should be treated that way.

Teachers put a lot of effort toward helping them to learn vocabulary related to their field of study. In other words students may know about the content better than their English teacher who needs to have a background about learners' major subjects.

Furthermore, ESP teachers should not only teach technical vocabulary but should also check if the learners understand it. ESP is seen as an approach rather than a product, by which is meant that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material or methodology (Dudley-Evans and St John1998). So ESP teaching procedures mostly depends the learners situations, needs, the language required and the learning context, and thus establishes the primacy of need. Need is defined by the reasons for which the student is learning English. Therefore, ELT teachers who teach ESP courses should be familiar with the vocabulary of the field of study and collaborate with major departments in order to design syllabi that integrate both content of specialization subject and English language.

A language teacher should also be innovative and proficient in the application of methodologies pertaining to teaching vocabulary items in a classroom situation (Frisby1957). Thus, an efficient language teacher can use selected vocabulary methods or activities or can use integrated activities in ESP classes depending on ability, level of understanding and interests of the learners to achieve the effectiveness of teaching and learning vocabulary.

Nation (1997) was one of the first researchers who developed vocabulary learning strategies. He pointed out that vocabulary learning strategies should involve choice. There are several strategies (some are mentioned below) to choose from

to learn, require knowledge and benefit from training to increase the effectiveness of vocabulary learning and use.

4.1. Effective Methods for Teaching Vocabulary in EFL Classes:

According to what has been pointed out by the researchers above and the researcher's long experience in teaching ESP courses the following selected methods are considered to be very effective and beneficial in ESP classes.

First, the learner perceives the new words by two methods:

- 1. Visually** by showing the written form of the word or mouth movement.
- 2. Aurally** by hearing sound of the new word and repeating by the students (one to three times) to learn the correct pronunciation of the word.

Second, some effective methods for teaching the meaning of words are presented below:

1. Demonstration: Introduce the meaning of the word, using pictures or photographs or simple drawings like stick figures.

2. Explanation The new word can be explained by various means:

-description(e.g. places like house, mall, bank, etc.) –

Giving synonyms (e.g. shop=store, close=shut) or antonyms(e.g. high# low, large# small)

-Giving a defining contexts or examples for the new word (e.g. company: Aramco company or Almarai Company)

- Translation has been the most widespread activity used for presenting the meaning of a word in ESP classes for EFL learners, especially for translating terminologies for saving time because of the limited time of ESP courses. Although translation is not favoured by many researchers but the researcher believes(due to her own experience) that it is to some extent useful in ESP classes and low English level

learners. Using native language(e.g. translating equivalents) increases their motivation to learn English.

3. Dramatization, Imitation and Gestures

Many situations can be dramatized at ease and it is very interesting and effective (e.g. sing, eat, sick, cough, etc.) the teacher can act or use gesture or body movements (e.g. wave, shake, high, low, angry, body parts, etc.)and imitate.

4. Series, Scales and word families:

The meaning of words (e.g. the months of the year, the days of the week, the parts of the day, ordinal numbers, cardinal numbers, etc.) that form part of well-known series can be made clear by placing them in their natural order or teaching the words in families or groups having relatively the same reference of meaning like furniture(chair, bed, table, cupboard, etc.)

5. Parts of words

The parts of complex and compound words which are more common than the simple words should be separated into their components to help students understand the meaning easily (e.g. design, **designer**, **designation**)

6. Parts of Speech:

The grammatical or syntactical analysis of word parts and functions(e.g. noun or verb, subject or object)

4.2. Effective Activities for Vocabulary Practice

As mentioned above that memorizing vocabulary is creating a great challenge for learners, the researcher is suggesting some activities for practicing vocabulary to fix the new words in the learners' memory (Thornbury 2002:p. 94-99):

1. Identifying

Listening exercises can be given e.g. Listen and underline specific words or expressions you hear (in the given text)

2. Selecting

Learners should recognize words and make choices among them, by comparing or putting them in families e.g. cross the odd word or the incorrect one.

3. Matching

Learners are given exercises for recognizing words and pairing them with their synonyms, antonyms, definition, pictures to words etc.

4. Sorting

Learners should put the lexical items into different categories, e.g. put these nouns in two groups – positive and negative.

5. Completion:

Learners are often asked to fill in the gaps in a given context. These tasks are called multiple choice activities.

5. CONCLUSION

It is observably that lexis is a very important part of a language and different efficient vocabulary teaching methods mentioned in this paper are supposed and studied by researchers and expertise in this field of language in order to make the learning of words easy and useful for the students. The EL teachers who teach ESP classes, should be qualified and well-trained so that they can choose the vocabulary and vocabulary methodologies that are matching their students' academic needs. Besides, they should be creative and skillful in using the most interesting and popular methods that greatly attract their students' attention and encourage them to learn a large number of words such as dramatization or acting, gestures and drawings, exemplifying, synonyms and antonyms. The students should also be helped and trained in using the words or terminologies for their academic and communication needs.

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