

PROBLEMS OF TEACHING VOCABULARIES TO 7TH GRADE LEARNERS

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Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component of second language acquisition and directly influences learners' communicative competence. Teaching vocabulary to middle school learners, particularly 7th grade students, presents various pedagogical challenges. This article analyzes common problems in vocabulary instruction such as limited retention, lack of contextual learning, pronunciation difficulties, and low motivation. Additionally, it suggests practical and interactive strategies to improve vocabulary acquisition in English language classrooms. The study emphasizes the importance of communicative and student-centered approaches in enhancing vocabulary learning outcomes.

Keywords: vocabulary teaching, young learners, retention, motivation, communicative approach, EFL classroom

Introduction

Vocabulary plays a central role in mastering a foreign language. As Wilkins (1972) famously stated, "Without grammar little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." [3]. For 7th grade learners, vocabulary development is especially important because this stage marks a transition from basic language knowledge to more complex communication skills. For 7th grade learners, vocabulary learning is particularly significant because they are transitioning from basic language understanding to more complex language usage. At this stage, students are expected not only to recognize words but also to apply them in meaningful communication. However, many learners encounter difficulties in remembering new vocabulary, pronouncing unfamiliar words, and using them correctly in sentences. However, vocabulary instruction at this level often faces

significant obstacles. Students may struggle with memorization, correct pronunciation, and appropriate usage of new words. Therefore, identifying these difficulties and applying effective teaching strategies is essential for successful vocabulary acquisition.

Literature Review

Vocabulary teaching has been widely studied in the field of language education. Scholars emphasize that vocabulary learning is not a simple process of memorizing word meanings; rather, it involves understanding pronunciation, spelling, grammatical behavior, and contextual usage. According to Paul Nation (2001), effective vocabulary learning requires repetition, meaningful context, and active use. [1] Nation emphasizes that learners need multiple exposures to a word in different contexts in order to store it in long-term memory. Similarly, Norbert Schmitt (2000) highlights that vocabulary acquisition is a gradual process involving form, meaning, and use. Students must not only understand the definition of a word but also know its pronunciation, grammatical behavior, and collocations. Research also suggests that young learners benefit greatly from interactive teaching methods. Activities such as games, role-plays, storytelling, and visual learning tools help students become more engaged and motivated in the learning process.[2]

Major Challenges in Teaching Vocabulary

1. Limited Retention of Vocabulary

One of the most common problems faced by 7th grade learners is forgetting newly learned words quickly. Many students tend to memorize vocabulary only for short-term purposes, such as passing tests or completing homework assignments. However, when vocabulary is not used regularly in communication, it is easily forgotten. This issue often occurs because vocabulary is taught without sufficient repetition and meaningful practice. Students may remember a word temporarily but fail to retain it in their long-term memory. Teachers should therefore provide

opportunities for repeated exposure to vocabulary through various activities such as reading tasks, speaking exercises, and writing assignments.[4]

2. Lack of Contextual Learning

Another significant challenge in vocabulary teaching is presenting words without meaningful context. In some classrooms, vocabulary is introduced simply as a list of words with their translations. Although this method may help students understand the basic meaning, it does not teach them how to use the words naturally in real-life communication. Learning vocabulary in context helps students understand how words function within sentences and conversations. Contextual learning also improves comprehension and helps learners remember vocabulary more effectively. For example, introducing vocabulary through short stories, dialogues, or authentic texts allows students to see how words are used in realistic situations.

3. Pronunciation Difficulties

Pronunciation can also be a major obstacle for 7th grade students learning English vocabulary. Many English sounds and stress patterns are different from those found in the Uzbek language. As a result, students may find it difficult to pronounce new words correctly. When students feel unsure about their pronunciation, they may become hesitant to speak in class. Fear of making mistakes can reduce their participation and limit their opportunities to practice vocabulary. Teachers can help students overcome this problem by providing pronunciation models, encouraging repetition, and creating a supportive classroom environment where mistakes are viewed as a natural part of learning.[2]

4. Low Student Motivation

Motivation plays a crucial role in vocabulary learning. When lessons consist only of copying words from the board or memorizing definitions, students may lose interest quickly. Young learners require engaging and interactive activities that make learning enjoyable. Teachers can increase motivation by incorporating games, competitions, group tasks, and multimedia resources into vocabulary

lessons. When students enjoy the learning process, they are more likely to remember and actively use new words [3]

Effective Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary

To overcome the challenges mentioned above, teachers should use different strategies that help students understand, remember, and use vocabulary effectively. Using a variety of teaching methods makes lessons more interesting and allows students to learn new words in a meaningful way. When vocabulary is taught through practice, interaction, and real-life examples, students are more likely to remember and use new words confidently.

1. Teaching Vocabulary Through Context

One of the most effective ways to teach vocabulary is through meaningful context. Instead of presenting words as isolated items, teachers can introduce them in stories, dialogues, short texts, or real-life situations. When students see how words are used in sentences, they can understand the meaning more clearly and learn how to use the words correctly.[6]

For example, when teaching vocabulary related to media or entertainment, the teacher can present a short dialogue between friends talking about a movie or a concert. Students can read the dialogue and identify the new words. This helps them understand how vocabulary functions in real communication and improves both comprehension and retention.[4]

2. Using Visual Materials

Visual materials are very helpful for teaching vocabulary, especially for young learners. Pictures, flashcards, diagrams, real objects, and videos help students connect new words with visual images. This connection makes vocabulary easier to understand and remember.[6]

For instance, when teaching words related to music or television, the teacher can show pictures of instruments, singers, or TV programs. Students can describe what they see and use the new vocabulary in simple sentences. Visual learning also makes lessons more interesting and supports different learning styles.

3. Interactive Classroom Activities

Interactive activities play an important role in vocabulary learning because they encourage students to participate actively in the lesson. When students are involved in activities such as games, group work, and discussions, they practice vocabulary in a natural and enjoyable way.

Activity 1: Sentence Arrangement

In this activity, students are given mixed or scrambled words and asked to rearrange them to form a correct sentence. This activity helps learners practice grammar, understand word order, and remember vocabulary more effectively. It also develops their critical thinking skills.

Activity 2: Crossword Puzzle

Crossword puzzles are a fun way to review vocabulary. Students read definitions and fill in the crossword with the correct words. This activity helps students improve spelling, recognize word meanings, and reinforce previously learned vocabulary.[6]

Activity 3: Vocabulary Guessing Game

In this activity, the teacher or a student describes a word without saying it directly, and the rest of the class tries to guess the word. For example, a student might say, "It is something people listen to when they want to relax or dance." Other students guess the word "music." This game improves vocabulary recall and encourages students to think creatively.

Activity 4: Word Association

The teacher says a word, and students quickly say another word related to it. For example, if the teacher says "film," students may respond with actor, cinema, director, or camera. This activity helps students expand their vocabulary and see connections between words.[5]

Conclusion

Teaching vocabulary to 7th grade students can be challenging, but it is very important for developing their English skills. Many students forget new words

quickly, have problems with pronunciation, or lose interest when vocabulary lessons are not interesting. Because of these difficulties, teachers should use different teaching methods that make vocabulary learning easier and more enjoyable. First, vocabulary should be taught in context, not only as a list of words. When students see new words in sentences, stories, or dialogues, they can understand the meaning better and remember them for a longer time. Teachers should also give students many chances to use new words in speaking and writing activities. Second, teachers should make lessons more interactive and engaging. Games, group work, and creative tasks can increase students' motivation and help them remember vocabulary more easily. Visual materials such as pictures and flashcards are also useful because they help students connect words with images. For example, a teacher can organize a "Make a Story" activity. Students receive several new vocabulary words and create a short story using them. This helps them practice the words in a meaningful and creative way. Another useful activity is the "Guess the Word" game. One student describes a word without saying it, and the other students try to guess it. For example, a student may say, "It is a place where people watch movies," and other students guess the word "cinema." Generally, vocabulary teaching becomes more effective when teachers use creative activities, meaningful contexts, and regular practice. When students are actively involved in the learning process, they remember vocabulary better and feel more confident using English in real communication.

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