

THE BASIC WAYS OF TEACHING VOCABULARY FOR EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: As we know, vocabulary is an essential part of language that has a great role in teaching of English language. Teaching vocabulary is a vital part of any English language course. Many teachers are concerned about how to teach vocabulary. New words have to be introduced in such a way as to capture the students' attention and place the words in their memories. Students need to be aware of techniques for memorising large amounts of new vocabulary in order to progress in their language learning.

Key words: active, passive vocabulary, **word association, visual techniques, brainstorming, matching columns, idioms, collocation.**

English vocabulary learning can often be seen as a laborious process of memorising lists of unrelated terms. However, there are many other much more successful and interesting ways to learn and teach vocabulary in the EFL classroom.

1. Making new words memorable

If English vocabulary is taught in an uninteresting way such as by drilling, simple repetition and learning lists, then the words are likely to be forgotten. Teachers need to teach vocabulary so that the words are learned in a memorable way, in order for them to stick in the long-term memory of the student.

2. Teaching active and passive vocabulary

When thinking about how to teach vocabulary, it is important to remember that learners need to have both **active and passive vocabulary** knowledge. That is, students must vocabulary should consist of English words the learners will be expected to use themselves in original sentences, and those they will merely have to recognise when they hear them or see them **written down** by others. Teaching passive vocabulary is important for comprehension – the issue of understanding another speaker needs the listener to have passive vocabulary, that is, enough knowledge of words used by others to comprehend their meaning. This is also called **receptive knowledge of English**.

Teaching active vocabulary is important for an advanced student in terms of their own creativity. This is because in order to create their own sentences, students need active vocabulary.

Active vocabulary contains the words a student can understand and manipulate in order to use for their own personal expression. This is called productive knowledge of English.

3. Word cards and word association

Teachers can use devices for vocabulary teaching such as simple flash-cards or word-cards. The teacher writes the English language word on one side of the card and a sentence containing the word, its definition, its synonyms and pronunciation on the other. Word cards can be an excellent memory aid.



This is also a handy way for students to carry their new vocabulary around with them to look at whenever they have the opportunity.

Another successful [method of teaching vocabulary](#) is the word association technique. If words are stored individually, they are more difficult to remember as they have no context. But if the words are stored together in commonly used phrases and sentences, they are more readily absorbed. Putting words with collocational partners in this way helps the students to relate connected words together.

4. Visual techniques

Teaching vocabulary can become easier with the use of cards with pictures, diagrams and liberal colour coding for grammatical clarity. In this way, words are remembered by their colour or position on a page or their association with other words, pictures or phrases. [Images can link to words](#); words can also be linked to other words, for example, a student might link the word 'car' with 'garage' and with 'mechanic'. This idea of engaging the other senses can also help with developing a kind of **semantic map** where words are listed which relate to each other, which creates a situation where one word reminds the student of another.

5. Brainstorming

When teaching new vocabulary, the method of delivery needs to be fresh and interesting for the students or else they [will not remember the words](#). Ways in which to liven up the introduction of new English vocabulary could include brainstorming around an existing word in the students' vocabulary knowledge. This key word should be written up in the middle of the board and the new vocabulary relating to it can be written around it. Use colourful pens if writing on a whiteboard to emphasise different word types.

6. Matching columns

Once the new vocabulary has been taught, a useful way to test if students have understood the meanings of this new vocabulary is to ask them to match new words from one column with definitions from another column. [Testing comprehension](#) is vital before moving onto new vocabulary. The new words are numbered in column one, and the definitions are mixed up and lettered in column two. Students can also make up sentences using this technique, matching the beginning of the sentence or phrase from column 1 with the end of the sentence or phrase from column 2.

7. What is it to know a word?

Teachers need to ask what is it to **know** a word? There is more to teaching a word than simply [translating](#) it or even using it in a sentence as an example. Knowing a word means knowing not only the meaning, but knowing the contexts in which that word is used, the words which are related to it and where to use the word. It also requires knowing hidden implications that could be connected with the word.

8. Idioms

Alongside chunks of language and fixed phrases and expressions, teachers should include in their vocabulary lessons these kinds of [idioms of the English language](#). Idioms are common features of everyday language and are an important part of advanced language use and a major step towards fluency. Idioms can be introduced to the ESL classroom through authentic reading materials such as informal text from magazines, low-brow newspapers, [letters](#), comic strips, [pop songs](#), dialogue from radio or television and popular films.

9. Collocations

Grammatical collocations are when a noun, verb or adjective occur (usually) alongside a preposition. For example: ‘on purpose’, ‘by accident’, ‘in case’.

Lexical collocations are made up of combinations of lexical items such as nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs. Examples of lexical collocations are: dripping tap, [hopelessly](#) addicted, cook dinner, [happy birthday](#), great expectations.

Lexical phrases are good for teachers to include in lessons as another way of improving the natural sound of the students in speaking the language.

Phrases such as ‘thanks very much’, ‘don’t mention it’, ‘have a nice day’, ‘sorry about that’, are all useful in conversation.

More [idiomatic phrases](#) such as ‘practise makes perfect’, ‘it’s a high mountain to climb’ or ‘it glides like a knife through butter’ are good for fluency and help with understanding commonly used similes.

In addition there are lots of **idiomatic and phrasal verb collocations** such as:

- putting something or someone off
- coming down with a cold
- giving up on something
- giving in to something
- feeling under the weather
- striking up a conversation
- bumping into someone
- getting out of something
- butting in on a conversation
- giving in to something or someone
- In telephone calls, we talk about ‘being put through’ and ‘cutting someone off’
- Sometimes single words in English have different meanings, for example, the words ‘drive’, ‘pool’, ‘stroke’, ‘bottom’, ‘fence’, ‘catch’, ‘strike’, ‘match’.

10. Prefixes and suffixes

Prefixes can make a word negative, for example, adding ‘un-’, ‘a-’ or ‘dis-’. These [inflections](#) are vital for students’ understanding of words and can increase their vocabulary substantially simply by inflecting words they already know.

Suffixes work in this same vocabulary enhancing way, by adding endings such as ‘ing’, ‘less’ and ‘ly’.

Teaching the prefixes and suffixes appropriate to new vocabulary can help students to guess what a new word might mean by reference to words they already know. In this way, prefixes and suffixes can help to [introduce new words easily](#).

For example, knowledge of the word ‘friend’ can help a student to guess the meanings of the words ‘friendly’, ‘friendship’, ‘unfriendly’ or ‘friendless’.

Teaching students the common **prefixes and suffixes of the English language** can help students to increase their vocabulary greatly by recognising these other derived words.

11. Connotations and Appropriateness

Teaching vocabulary involves teaching the connotations of a word and its appropriate usage. The connotations of a word are the feelings it strikes up such as [positive or negative feelings](#), and more specific ones for certain words. Related to this area of connotation is

appropriateness, such as whether or not a certain English phrase is acceptable in polite conversation with a stranger, or if it would be a faux pas or even taboo. It can help students understand if a word is rare or old fashioned, if it is a [funny word](#), or more commonly used in written text, [formal or informal](#) or only used in a certain dialect. These issues are important in vocabulary teaching in order for the student to feel confident using the new vocabulary in new or challenging situations.

12. Polysemy and homonymy

When teaching vocabulary, there are subtle differences between similar English words that needs to be communicated to the students in order to avoid causing confusion. Teaching polysemy enables the student to distinguish between the different meanings of a word with closely related meanings; teaching homonymy distinguishes between the different meanings of a word with distinct meanings.

13. Register

Register is the relationship between the content of a message, the receiver, and how the message is communicated. Knowledge of these things helps students to distinguish between levels of formality and the effects of certain topics on the listener.

14. Practice, presentation and production (PPP)

The [Practice, Presentation and Production teaching method](#) is a popular and effective way in which to teach new vocabulary. Also, The PPP technique in teaching is a common way to introduce students to new words and concepts. This can be especially useful in the EFL classroom. The PPP method in English teaching is a three-step lesson plan and teaching approach that helps the student **learn, understand and practice** new vocabulary.

Actually, there are three stages in a PPP TEFL lesson. Firstly, the teacher **presents** the new word, an event which involves the presentation of [pronunciation](#) and [spelling](#) in context. Next, the teacher allows the students to **practice** the new word in a controlled setting, making sure the student has understood the vocabulary and usage properly. Lastly comes the **production** stage, where there is a period of less-controlled practice and an informal assessment of learning. This is where the students get chance to use the new word or phrase in an original way and to relate it to their knowledge and experiences. These three stages of a PPP lesson help the student to consolidate the new word in their mental vocabulary bank.

The sequence of a PPP lesson in EFL teaching has a great role to improve students' vocabulary skill. This EFL teaching method of presentation, practice and production is an approach that follows a definite sequence:

1. The teacher presents the new vocabulary and explains the form of the language in a meaningful context.
2. The students practise this new vocabulary through controlled activities such as worksheets or question and answer activities to check comprehension.
3. The students use or produce what they have learned in a communicative activity such as a role-play, communication game, or question and answer session.

Basically, each stage of the Presentation, Practice and Production lesson must be planned well to be effective. However, the PPP method in TEFL is a highly flexible approach to teaching and there are many different activities a teacher can employ for each stage. Presentation can include mime, drawing and audio. In fact, it is a good idea to try to engage with the students' different senses to get across the meaning of the new word, using visual,



kinaesthetic (movement) and audio techniques. It is also important to make sure that students have understood the new word before encouraging them to practise it. It is often fun and highly effective for students to play games to practise vocabulary and to produce it.

In conclusion, this article aims to highlight the importance of vocabulary learning as an essential part in foreign language learning. Lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second/foreign language and a lack of vocabulary knowledge is an obstacle to learning. An attempt is made to review the trends in the area of teaching vocabulary through various techniques EFL teachers use when teaching. Before presenting the meaning or form of vocabulary items, teachers need to notice the type of the vocabulary, the students' level and characteristics, and also the value of the techniques for the learners. In other words, students' age, level of education as well as English proficiency may affect their learning, so teachers need to be aware of these differences when applying their teaching technique. They can further provide their students with vocabulary learning strategies with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in more than one context. Speaking of vocabulary teaching in an EFL setting, learners should be equipped with the idea of what vocabulary is and how to achieve comprehensive acquisition.

Commonly, there are several basic ways concerning the teaching of vocabulary. However, there are a few things that have to be remembered by most English teachers if they want to present a new vocabulary or lexical items to their students. It means that the English teachers want students to remember new vocabulary then it needs to be learnt, practiced, and revised to prevent students from forgetting. Techniques employed by teachers depend on some factors, such as the content, time availability, and its value for the learners. This makes teachers have some reasons in employing certain techniques in presenting vocabulary.

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