VOCABULARY BUILDING STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE LEARNING, CRITICAL THINKING AND ENHANCED READING AND COMPREHENSION

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Abstract
Vocabulary teaching is a crucial component of language learning, with context playing a vital role in enhancing this process. This paper explores the concept of vocabulary and its connection to reading instruction, underscoring the importance of vocabulary for reading comprehension. It also outlines various strategies for teaching vocabulary, such as Semantic Mapping, Categorizing, Context Clues, Visual Aids, Games, and Prior Knowledge. The significance of context clues, both internal and external, in vocabulary acquisition is highlighted. Additionally, the paper addresses modern approaches to vocabulary instruction, including contextual learning, explicit teaching, and the integration of technology. In conclusion, the paper asserts that effective vocabulary teaching should blend these strategies to foster active learning, critical thinking, and enhanced comprehension. Active learning and critical thinking are key 21st-century skills of the learner-centred ESL classroom that can enhance reading comprehension and other aspects of language learning.

Keywords: Vocabulary Building, Strategies, Active Learning, Critical Thinking and Comprehension

Introduction

Words are building blocks with which we communicate verbally and non-verbally. The number of words a person owns determines the power of expression and effective communication. Vocabulary is the number of words a person possesses in different fields of knowledge (Ofodu, Babalola and Dada, 2010).

Vocabulary is the assortment of words, phrases, and expressions that an individual is familiar with and utilizes for effective communication. It includes the spectrum of words, idioms, and phrases that a person comprehends and applies in speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Griffor, Greer, Wollman, and Burns (2017) state that vocabulary serves as a fundamental element of language, and its enhancement is vital for successful communication, understanding, and expression.

A person's vocabulary can be divided into receptive (words recognized) and productive (words utilized) vocabulary. Jamone, Ugur, Cangelosi, Fadiga, Bernardino, Piater, and Santos-Victor (2016) claim that the process of vocabulary acquisition entails learning new terms, grasping their meanings, and applying them in context. This process is crucial for language development, academic achievement, and professional communication.

Vocabulary is fluid and continuously changing, with new terms being introduced and older ones becoming obsolete. It is shaped by various factors, including culture, education, environment, and personal experiences. A strong

vocabulary is imperative for clear expression, effective communication, and attaining success in different areas of life (Jhaver, Birman, Gilbert, & Bruckman, 2019).

AlGerafi, Zhou, Oubibi, and Wijaya (2023) aver that vocabulary is a fundamental component of reading comprehension, and its development is intricately linked with teaching reading. A strong vocabulary enables readers to understand the meaning of texts, make connections between ideas, and interpret the author's message. When readers know the meanings of words, they can comprehend the text more easily, decode unfamiliar words, and read with fluency.

Goodwin and Jiménez (2020) maintain that explicit vocabulary instruction is essential in teaching reading, especially for academic and domain-specific words. Using context clues, such as pictures, sentences, and discussions, can help teach vocabulary in a meaningful way. Repeated exposure to new words and active engagement through discussions, writing, and games can also reinforce vocabulary learning.

Effective vocabulary instruction can improve students' comprehension, fluency, and overall reading abilities (Wei, 2023). It can also enhance students' motivation to read and engage with texts, leading to improved academic success. A strong vocabulary is foundational to reading proficiency, and its development should be a key focus in reading instruction.

Wang, Lund, Marengo, Pagano, Mannuru, Teel, and Pange (2023) assert that vocabulary instruction should be intentional, systematic, and integrated into reading instruction. Educators can use various strategies, such as semantic mapping, word analysis, and word association, to promote vocabulary development. Kumar (2024) posits that by emphasizing vocabulary instruction in reading, educators can help students unlock the meaning of texts and become proficient readers. Therefore, this paper examines the vocabulary-building strategies that will enhance active learning, critical thinking, and comprehension.

Strategies for Vocabulary Building

Vocabulary acquisition is a crucial aspect of language learning, and research suggests that context plays a significant role in facilitating this process. Dwivedi, Kshetri, Hughes, Slade, Jeyaraj, Kar, Baabdullah, Koohang, Raghavan, Ahuja, Albanna, Albashrawi, Al-Busaidi, Balakrishnan, Barlette, Basu, Bose, Brooks, Buhalis, and Wright (2023) claim that when learners are familiar with the context, they can learn words up to four times faster than in an unfamiliar context. This highlights the importance of effective vocabulary instruction that focuses on building connections between known and unknown words (Mosqueira-Rey, Hernández-Pereira, Alonso-Ríos, Bobes-Bascarán and Fernández-Leal, 2022). Strategies such as Semantic Mapping, Categorizing, Context Clues, Visual Aids, Games, and Prior Knowledge can be employed to enhance comprehension and retention.

In language learning, context is key. Xiang and Wang (2019) opine that by leveraging context clues, learners can infer meaning and develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary. There are various types of context clues, including internal clues such as synonyms, antonyms, explanations, examples, definitions, and the general sense of the sentence or passage. External clues, on the other hand, include visual aids, total physical response, physical sensation, prior knowledge, and games.

Similarly, Michel-Villarreal, Vilalta-Perdomo, Salinas-Navarro, Thierry-Aguilera, and Gerardou (2023) suggest that effective vocabulary instruction should incorporate these

strategies to promote active learning, critical thinking, and improved comprehension. By doing so, learners can develop a robust vocabulary that enables them to communicate effectively and engage with various texts and contexts. Zhang and Hyland (2021) explore the importance of context clues in vocabulary acquisition, highlighting the different types of clues and strategies for effective vocabulary instruction.

Kelly, Buckley, Lieberman, and Arndt (2022) claim that by understanding the role of context in vocabulary learning, educators can design instruction that maximizes learning outcomes and fosters a lifelong love of language learning. With the right strategies and approaches, learners can unlock the power of vocabulary and achieve their language goals. The following are strategies for teaching vocabulary.

Semantic Mapping: Knowledge helps you remember new information, and people who know a great deal about a topic also know its vocabulary. One critical finding from research is that word learning takes place most efficiently when the reader or listener already understands the context well. In fact, we learn words up to four times faster in a familiar context than in an unfamiliar one (Landauer & Dumais, 1997; Hirsch, 2006). Vocabulary instruction that compares and contrasts word meanings and that activates prior knowledge not only helps students learn new words, but also has been shown to improve comprehension of a reading selection (Graves, 2006). Therefore, an important goal of instruction in any subject, in any grade, should be to help students acquire the vocabulary associated with the content and to make connections between known and unknown words.

Rangan (2023) states that the key vocabulary routines are designed to teach words in relation to other words: Semantic Mapping, Categorizing, Semantic Feature Analysis, and Opposites (sometimes called Scaling). This post will provide details on how to use Semantic Mapping (Heimlich & Pittelman, 1986), which is a well-researched activity that helps students draw on background knowledge of a topic and see connections between ideas and words related to that topic. It is highly interactive and offers opportunities for rich, collaborative discussion among students.

Generating a semantic map involves two steps. First, the teacher chooses a key concept word central to the topic covered in the reading or classroom lesson and writes it in the center of a page or on the board. Students are then asked to brainstorm as many words as they know associated with the key word. This brainstorming is best done as a whole class or in smaller cooperative groups. The teacher or a scribe writes the words generated on the board. Fede (2022) suggests the visual below as an example of a semantic map that was generated in a fifth-grade classroom related to the text students were reading that had information about baseball.

Once a significant number of words have been generated, students are asked to make connections among the words and group them into categories. See the visual below of the categorized baseball words. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer to this task! Sometimes one of the words on the map becomes the word for a category (e.g., *uniform*), and sometimes a new word needs to be generated for the category (e.g., *referee, equipment*). Once the categories are identified, students can be asked to add more words to each category. Sometimes there will be words that are not easily grouped into a category (e.g., *innings, game, summer, dugout*). This is a simple example, but semantic mapping can be used with any grade level, right up through high school, using a sophisticated key content word and more advanced academic vocabulary.

Scaffolds: Chesney and Citron (2018) state that a new concept word will be so foreign to students that they are unable to generate many of their own words. For example, the background information for students growing up in a city may not be sufficient to brainstorm many words related to the word *harvest*. When this happens, teachers can provide some background knowledge about the topic to get the brainstorm going. Another scaffold is to provide a list of words that includes some that are related to the key word and some that are not. Students consider each word to determine if it should be added to the semantic map. The categorizing part of the activity can also be scaffolded by the teacher providing category topics. If you are working with young children who have not yet developed solid reading and writing skills, you can use a picture in the center of the map instead of a word, and the brainstorming can be done orally with the teacher transcribing the words.

A Before and After Activity: A semantic mapping activity can begin before students read or learn new information as a way to help them access what they already know about a topic. It also serves as a great "after" activity to extend the vocabulary learning. Alzubaidi, Zhang, Humaidi, Al-Dujaili, Duan, Al-Shamma, Santamaría, Fadhel, Al-Amidie and Farhan (2021) maintain that teachers can bring back the semantic map or the words listed in categories and ask students to add any new words they have learned about the topic. As noted above, one advantage of semantic mapping is that it is a collaborative task that provides lots of opportunities for the students to talk about words and how they are related, using real-life contexts to explain the words they generate. It is also engaging and motivating, and an important part of developing a word-conscious classroom in which students enjoy learning words!

Besides, Pettersen, Goddard, Huang, Meng, Couch, Croll, Morris, and Ferrin (2020) claim that there are several classroom examples of semantic maps. They stated further that the first one from a grade 2 classroom is interesting because you can see that the words at the top of the map were generated before the students listened to a read-aloud about snails. Words such as *slow, slimy, small*, and *slithery* are words the students already associated with snails. The words on the bottom of the map were generated after the read-aloud. Words such as *gastropod*, *herbivore*, and *mollusk* represent new, academic words that the students learned.

Picture Clues: Using images to build vocabulary with contextual clues in speech. Aguilera, Castro, Romero, and Messa (2019) postulate that the use of picture clues is a highly effective strategy for teaching vocabulary by linking unfamiliar words to visual representations, which enhances both decoding and comprehension skills. This technique involves using images to infer meanings, predict content, and enhance vocabulary acquisition, especially for visual learners. It is applicable across various grade levels by connecting word recognition with comprehension (Shafiq & Gu, 2022). This strategy enhances reading proficiency and serves as a visual aid to assist children in decoding unfamiliar words

Key Strategies for Using Picture Clues

i. Picture Walks: Before starting to read, have students look through illustrations to guess the vocabulary related to the topic (e.g., a "playground" setting suggests words like "seesaw" and "slide").
ii. Vocabulary Matching: Engage students in activities where they connect words to the corresponding images to build recognition, as seen on YouTube.

iii. Visual Context Clues: Encourage students to analyze images for hints to figure out difficult words, according to this YouTube video.
iv. Picture Dictionaries: Use visual dictionaries for games like "I Spy" to find words, or "Four Square" to define, illustrate, and use words, as mentioned by Continental Press.
v. Image-Based Definitions: Have students draw pictures to illustrate new vocabulary words, a method detailed by ERIC - Education Resources Information Center.

Implementing the Strategy

i. Model the Strategy: Show students how to look at the picture first to gain context.
ii. Combine with Phonics: Encourage students to blend visual evidence with initial sounds or word chunks (e.g., seeing a "rat" while trying to decode the word).
iii. Verify for Meaning: Ask if the chosen word makes sense with both the sentence and the picture.
iv. Use Diverse Materials: Apply this strategy to picture books, informational texts with illustrations, and dedicated vocabulary cards.

Game Playing: Game-based learning in education is a method where elements of games are integrated into the learning activities that help teach students about different subjects (Rasheed, San & Kvamsdal, 2020). This approach is competitive and promotes interaction among students by using fun as a way to learn. Typically, this kind of learning includes materials and activities where students are divided into teams and compete according to certain rules or guidelines. For instance, a teacher might split a class into two groups for a spelling contest, where students earn points each time a member of their team correctly spells a vocabulary word. Teams can gain extra points for harder words, and the team with the highest score at the end of the class wins.

The goal of game-based learning is to encourage students to participate in learning activities more actively than they might otherwise do. Mustajoki and Mustajoki (2017) posit that activities based on game principles often include rewards for students as motivation, like extra credit points or special privileges (for example, leaving class early or choosing the theme for a year-end event). These learning activities are frequently selected as alternatives to more conventional classroom tasks and assignments.

Wu (2023) affirms that game-based learning represents a potent educational strategy that enhances student engagement, motivation, and knowledge retention by integrating educational content into game formats. This method encourages active learning, problem-solving, and collaboration, providing immediate feedback and a secure, low-risk environment for students to learn from their mistakes.

This video details the benefits of game-based learning and provides examples:

Key Benefits of Game Playing in Education

i. Increased Engagement: Interactive, enjoyable, and often competitive formats capture attention more effectively than traditional methods.
ii. Safe Failure Environment: Games diminish the fear of failure, motivating students to take risks, retry, and learn from their mistakes.
iii. Immediate Feedback: Students promptly recognize their errors, which accelerates the learning process, as stated by Legends of Learning.
iv. Enhanced Skill Development: Games encourage critical thinking,

interpersonal skills, and academic knowledge, according to the Erasmus Mobility Academy

v. Personalization: Game-based learning can be adjusted to accommodate individual learning styles and paces.

Types of Game-Based Strategies

i. Digital Games/Simulations: Utilizing software for complex scenarios and decision-making, as noted by the Center for Innovative Teaching & Learning.
ii. Role-Playing Games: Students take on roles to understand historical, social, or scientific contexts.
iii. Classroom Games: Incorporating board games, quizzes (such as Kahoot), and interactive activities.
iv. Game Design: Encouraging students to create their own games to demonstrate their understanding of the content, according to the Center for Innovative Teaching & Learning.

Key Considerations for Implementation:

i. Align with Learning Objectives: Ensure that the game directly supports educational goals rather than merely serving as entertainment.
ii. Reflection: Promote conversation after the game to relate the experience to educational themes.
iii. Balance Rivalry and Cooperation: Ensure that games cultivate a supportive environment instead of one that is overly competitive and stressful.

Listening Clues: Listening clues are defined as verbal signposts, contextual hints, and non-verbal cues that aid listeners in comprehending, evaluating, and interpreting spoken information (Vallance, 2012). Important clues include transitional phrases (like "first," "however"), words that are stressed to indicate emphasis, context clues (such as synonyms or examples), and the emotional tone of the speaker, which all contribute to effective comprehension and active, empathetic listening.

Key Listening Clues & Strategies

i. Signposts/Transition Words: Be alert for structural indicators that connect ideas, such as "first of all," "in addition," "moving on to," or "in summary".
ii. Significance of Tone and Stress: Pay attention to words that the speaker emphasizes or emotional variations in their voice, which reflect their attitude and the importance of the message.
iii. Context Clues: When you encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, look to surrounding words that provide definitions, synonyms, or examples.
iv. Active Listening Cues:
    a. Backchannel signals: Verbal acknowledgments like "I hear you," "makes sense," or "uh-huh".
    b. Non-verbal cues: Eye contact and leaning forward demonstrate engagement.
v. Effective Listening Skills (The 4 R's):
    a. Receiving: The ability to hear and recognize sounds.
    b. Understanding: The skill of interpreting the context.
    c. Evaluating: The process of determining if the information is accurate or biased.
    d. Responding: Giving feedback, whether verbal or non-verbal.
vi. Preparation Clues: Preparing questions in advance to identify critical information, such as names, times, or specific numbers.

Advertising Ads Interest: Employing advertising ads and focusing on specific interests represents an effective and modern pedagogical strategy that boosts student engagement, cultivates media literacy, and

enables personalized learning experiences (Allegra, 2025). By harnessing real-world marketing content, educators can convert passive consumption into critical analysis, teaching students how to dissect persuasive communications.

How advertising interests can be utilized as a teaching strategy:

i. Developing Media Literacy and Critical Thinking

1. Analyzing Persuasive Techniques: Students investigate advertisements to pinpoint strategies such as Pathos (emotion), Logos (logic), and Ethos (credibility).
2. Deconstructing Ads: Students learn to interrogate who created an ad, the reasons behind its creation, and the target audience.
3. Ad Literacy Training: This initiative assists young individuals, particularly those in grades 6-12, in grasping the intent behind advertising (e.g., selling products, influencing behavior).
4. Critiquing Imagery and Text: Students assess how visuals, sounds, and text are combined to convey a specific message.

ii. Enhancing Engagement and Creativity

a. "Making" Media: Students design their own advertisements, which aids in understanding message construction and encourages creativity.
b. Using Familiar Content: Leveraging popular brands, mascots, or trending advertisements keeps students engaged and makes lessons more relatable.
c. Gamification: Implementing activities such as analyzing "advergaming" (computer games intended to sell products) can enhance awareness of marketing techniques.

iii. **Subject-Specific Applications**

a. English/Language Arts: Students analyze the rhetoric, tone, and persuasive language present in advertising copy.
b. Health Education: Instructors can use food or alcohol advertisements to discuss the influence of marketing on health choices and teach critical reasoning.
c. Business/Economics: Students explore target audiences, consumer behavior, and economic trends.

iv. Customizing Instruction to Align with Student Interests

a. Personalization: Educators can implement "interest targeting," akin to digital marketing strategies, to deliver tailored educational content that resonates with student interests.
b. Contextual Learning: By grasping the subjects that captivate their students, teachers can design lessons that feel pertinent, thereby enhancing motivation.
c. Interactive Tools: Employing interactive media and online resources for assignments ensures that students remain engaged in today's digital environment.

v. Examples of Activities

a. Advertisement Analysis: Students present magazine advertisements to analyze the target demographic and persuasive strategies employed.
b. Advertising Campaign Project: Students collaborate in groups to develop an advertisement for a product, honing both their creative and analytical abilities.
c. Brand Recognition: Students recognize well-known brands by examining partial logos to gain insights into branding.

A Word a Day: The "Word a Day" strategy improves vocabulary by presenting one new word each day, emphasizing its definition, pronunciation, and contextual application. Christopoulos and Sprangers (2021) admit that this technique enhances student engagement through regular daily exposure, which fosters better retention and confidence. It enriches both reading and speaking vocabulary by weaving the word into daily classroom dialogue.

Key Strategies for Implementing "A Word a Day"

a. Introduce and Display: Announce the word aloud for correct pronunciation and showcase it on a word wall, flip chart, or interactive whiteboard.
b. Student-Friendly Definitions: Supply clear, relatable definitions instead of complicated dictionary meanings.
c. Visual Supports and Context: Use images, cartoons, or graphic organizers like the Frayer Model (definition, characteristics, examples, non-examples) to reinforce understanding.
d. Contextual Usage: Ask students to use the word in sentences, both spoken and written, throughout the day.
e. Reinforcement Activities: Engage students with games such as vocabulary Bingo, Pictionary, or charades to practice the new words.
f. Journaling: Encourage students to keep a dedicated "Word of the Day" logbook or notebook.

"A Word a Day" Challenge: Inspire students to incorporate the word into conversations, challenging them to use it at home or with other staff members.

Significance of A word a day

a. Increased Word Consciousness: Encourages curiosity and awareness of new vocabulary.
b. Improved Retention: Daily repetition assists in transferring words from short-term to long-term memory.
c. Interactive Learning: Fosters active participation and collaboration among students.
d. Contextual Understanding: Students learn to utilize words in various contexts, enhancing comprehension.

Rebus Story: Raphel (2018) claims that rebus story is a narrative that employs a blend of words, images, and symbols to communicate a message or narrate a tale, frequently utilizing wordplay, puns, and clever twists. It represents a distinctive method of storytelling that necessitates the reader or listener to decipher the clues and assemble the meaning.

The term "rebus" is derived from the Latin expression "non verbis sed rebus," which translates to "not by words but by things." This encapsulates the notion that rebus stories utilize objects, images, and symbols to express meaning, rather than depending solely on text.

Maier (2023) claims that rebus stories typically incorporate visual components such as pictures, diagrams, or icons to signify words, phrases, or concepts, rather than stating them explicitly. This approach can render the story more engaging, interactive, and memorable. The objective is to convey a message or narrate a story in a manner that is both clever and entertaining.

Practicing high frequency words with Rebus Story

Rebus stories, which substitute words with images to assist early readers, serve as an effective method for teaching high-frequency sight words (such as "the," "and," "said," "little," "was").

a. Education World (Highlights Rebus): Provides rebus stories like "With My Senses" that combine picture clues with common words.

b. Daily Routine Rebus Story: It outlines a daily routine using simple, high-frequency words and picture substitutions.
c. Short Vowel Rebus Stories: There are stories such as "Sam's Fat Cat" that incorporate short vowels and sight words to enhance fluency.
d. Sight Word Worksheets: Supplies PDF downloads for "Rebus Picture Stories: Sight Word Worksheets for Early Learners".
e. Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT): Showcases free rebus story, including thematic options like "Earth Day".

Key High-Frequency Words Used

These narratives generally concentrate on Dolch or Fry sight words, which include:
Phase 3/4: will, see, he, you, that, for, she, they, this, down, was, her, with, went, said, have, there, little.

a. Common Nouns/Actions: house, cat, day, school, play, friends, eat. Rebus stories can manifest in various formats, including:
b. Picture stories: Utilizing images to narrate a story or convey a message.
c. Wordplay stories: Employing puns, homophones, and other forms of wordplay to construct a narrative.
d. Symbol stories: Utilizing symbols or icons to represent concepts or ideas.
e. Interactive stories: Requiring the reader to engage or make decisions to advance the narrative.

Diversity of Rebus stories

a. Education: To instruct language, history, or other subjects in an engaging manner.
b. Advertising: To craft memorable and catchy advertisements.
c. Entertainment: As puzzles or games, or as a distinctive form of storytelling.

Significance of Rebus Stories Encompass:

a. Enhanced cognitive skills: Rebus stories can aid in the development of problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity.
b. Increased engagement: The interactive nature of rebus stories can render them more enjoyable and memorable.
c. Unique expression: Rebus stories provide a creative avenue to convey complex ideas or messages.

News on Board: News on Board (or utilizing news in the classroom) is a vocabulary instruction method that employs current, real-world news articles, headlines, or advertisements as a resource for teaching new vocabulary (Bingham, 2023). By incorporating authentic, timely materials, this approach connects classroom vocabulary with real-world English, enabling students to learn words in context rather than through isolated dictionary definitions.

Key Aspects of the News on Board Strategy

a. Authentic Context: Students encounter vocabulary in natural, real-world contexts, which aids in understanding usage, collocations, and nuances.
b. Student-Centered Engagement: Educators often encourage students to bring in articles that pique their interest, enhancing motivation and allowing them to influence the curriculum.
c. Interactive Activities: This strategy frequently includes collaborative reading, analyzing headlines, discussing articles, and engaging in word games (e.g., crosswords, matching) based on the text.
d. Vocabulary Retention: Since newspaper articles often cover

ongoing stories, students are exposed to the same target words repeatedly over several days or weeks, which supports long-term memory retention.

e. Word Notebooks/Journals: Students typically document new vocabulary encountered in news articles, along with definitions, example sentences, and illustrations to build a personal vocabulary repository.

How to Use News on Board for Vocabulary Instruction

a. Predicting from Headlines: Students make predictions about the story's content solely by reading the headline and then deduce the meanings of unfamiliar words before reading the complete article.
b. Word Selection & Sorting: Educators curate a list of words from an article, some of which are present and some are not, and ask students to identify the correct ones, or they match words with their definitions.
c. Cloze Lessons (Fill-in-the-blanks): Teachers provide students with a news article that has key vocabulary words omitted and ask them to fill in the blanks using context clues.

"Word Watcher" Wall:

Fill-in-the-Blank Space Strategy: The fill-in-the-blank strategy is a classic approach used to assess a learner's understanding and recall. Khurana, Koli, Khatter and Singh (2022) claim that sentences are stripped of certain words, and learners are tasked to complete them. This strategy is widely used because it directly engages learners in the content. There is one correct answer, usually a single word or a short phrase. According to Wankhade, Rao, and Kulkarni (2022), this strategy is often used to determine factual knowledge and is closely tied to the content being learned. In fact, most often the fill-in-the-blank strategy is used after reading a text about a topic or at the end of a unit study.

The fill-in-the-blank method is a flexible teaching approach where students fill in sentences or texts with missing words or phrases Chen, Liu, Huang, Wu, Liu, Jiang, Pu, Lei, Chen, Wang, Zheng, Lian, and Chen, (2024). This technique effectively engages learners, fosters critical thinking, and evaluates understanding.

Significance of fill-in-the-blank space

a. Vocabulary enhancement: Fill-in-the-blank tasks assist students in expanding their vocabulary by giving context and motivating them to use words meaningfully.
b. Grammar reinforcement: By completing blanks, students practice grammar concepts like verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure.
c. Reading understanding: This method aids students in concentrating on essential information and grasping the connections between ideas in a text.
d. Critical analysis: Fill-in-the-blank tasks compel students to think critically and make educated choices about the missing details.

Categories of fill-in-the-blank tasks

a. Sentence completion: Students finish a sentence with a missing word or phrase.
   Example: The capital of Nigeria is _____.
b. Text completion: Students fill in gaps in a brief text or paragraph.
   Example: The _____ (adjective) weather made it perfect for a day at the beach."
c. Cloze tasks: Students fill in gaps in a text where words have been omitted, usually at regular intervals.

Advice for crafting effective fill-in-the-blank tasks:

a. Select authentic texts: Pick texts that are relevant and engaging for your students.
b. Focus on specific skills: Target particular vocabulary, grammar, or comprehension abilities.
c. Adjust difficulty: Modify the difficulty level to match your students' requirements.
d. Give feedback: Provide feedback and support to help students learn from their errors.

Best practices:

a. Be concise: Use brief sentences or texts to maintain student focus.
b. Provide clear instructions: Ensure students know what is expected of them.
c. Promote teamwork: Encourage students to collaborate in pairs or groups to discuss and complete tasks.

Context Clues: Scholars like Arndt and Woore (2018b) state that context clues enable one to know the meaning of a word by developing guessing ability. Through this they can arrive at the total meaning of a sentence, paragraph or passage. A word is not an isolated unit in a sentence. It is always closely related to the words in that same sentence, even to words in the preceding and following sentence.

Long (2021) posits that context clues are hints that allow students unlock the meaning of unknown words by drawing on context, while providing a tool for checking those guesses (Markauskaite, Carvalho & Fawns, 2023). Contextual redefinition is an instructional strategy that helps learners to understand the importance of using context and structures to understand unfamiliar words. The learners use the context to make educated guess about the meaning of an unfamiliar word. They engage in the discovery of new words and satisfy on the ways in which they derive the meaning of the words.

Levinson and Torreira (2015) add that using context clues, is a condition in which students are actively involved in predicting words meaning. That makes them naturally curious to see if they are correct or way off. Long (2021) says teaching vocabulary through context simply means to look for clues which might tell the reader something about the meaning of the word in question. Carlisle and Stone (2005) opine that context clues are hints found within a sentence, paragraph in a passage that a reader uses to understand the meaning of a new word.

Arndt and Woore (2018b) agree with above scholar and say, context clues are defined as information from immediate textual setting that helps in identifying a word. These clues can be words, phrases, sentences, illustration, syntax, typography, etc. Long (2021) states that context clue is the technique used by learners to catch text that surrounds it. At this point, Carlisle and Stone (2005) argues that context clues are not only the sentences paragraph or selection in which the word is found. He also adds that all the information surrounding the words, whether it is a fewer other words, pictures or other sentences are also applicable.

Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer (2018) believes that context clues are information in the text that can be used to help deduce the meaning of an unknown vocabulary within the text. Context clues are words, picture, graphs, tables and single notes all of which might be included in the text. Carlisle and Stone (2005) and Reardon (2011) restrict their view on external context clues to mere visuals (pictures, tables, graph). Furthermore, Dearden (2014) posits that there are four contexts that help create successful language communication; linguistic, extra linguistic situational and extra situational. Evans and Levinson (2009) suggests that a good reader works around while he/she is reading. He does not read with blind eyes.

If you come to a word you do not know, look around. This means read the sentence again, read the sentence before and read the sentence afterwards. Use your brain to think of a word that makes sense.

Types of Context Clues: Studies by different scholars have shown that L1 and L2 learners use different context clues. Through this, they can broadly and narrowly understand a text and learn a new word (Cai & Lee, 2010; Greenwood & Flanigan; 2007).

In other words, context clues can be narrowly sourced from within a text or widely traced from extra – external. These are what the researcher here calls internal and external context clues.

Internal Context Clues

Internally, context clues are divided into different types. These are types of context clues which mostly provide linguistic information to the learner on vocabulary. These clues provide information mostly within a written text or spoken expression, without necessarily referring to the external source of deriving the word meaning. Different scholars have unanimously identified various types of internal context clues that assist within a text to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These are as follows:

i. Synonym: This is also known as restatement, comparing, or alternative depending on what – particular scholar calls it. Synonyms are words with the same meaning, e.g Herquiet, timid ways made us guess at her true feeling about the story, because she kept her ideas to herself and never spoke in the class.
ii. Antonym: This is a word or group of words that has an opposite meaning. This also involves the meaning of an unknown term, e.g although some men are loquacious, talk at all, others hardly
iii. Explanation: The unknown word is explained within a sentence or in a sentence immediately preceding, e.g. The patient is so somnolent stay awake for more than a short time. that she requires medication to help her
iv. Example: Specific examples are used to define the unknown term, e.g., celestial bodies such as the sun, moon and stars are governed by predictable laws.
v. Definition: Definition also clarifies the meaning of an unfamiliar word, e.g., a scholarship is a grant or prize to pay for school.
vi. General sense of the sentence or passage: This is what some scholars call collocation, cohesion, etc. e.g, I like a prescription that will alleviate make me younger and thinner. my aches and pain, and also
vii. Punctuation: The meaning of a word is also explained by using different punctuation marks, such as bracket, commas or dashes, e.g
    a. Bracket: A tornado (a violent storm of twisting wind) struck Edmonton and caused a lot of damage.
    b. Commas: A tornado, a violent storm of twisting wind, struck Edmonton and caused a lot of damage.
    c. Dashes: A tornado – a violent storm of twisting wind struck Edmonton and caused a lot of damage.
viii. Reference Clues: This is when an unknown word is referred to again, using synonyms after words like “this, that, these, those, or the”. Sometimes there is no obvious clue word, e.g., Yesterday, some shysters came to my door. These dishonest men pretended they were doing a survey, and they tried to convince them to buy a magazine.

ix. Morphological features, like prefixes, suffixes, and root words, or containing the nominal compound, e.g., fire–resistant root = fire, resistant, root (Olaofe, 2013). There are also connecting words with other morphologically related words, e.g biologist, zoologist, etc.

x. Hyponymy: An unknown word is simplified by familiar words (or examples) from the same conception, e.g The museum contained almost every type of vehicle; car, bus, train, carriage and coach.

xi. Summary: This clue sums up an idea or a situation with a word or phrase, e.g. Mrs Christopher contributes money to the Red Cross, the Girls' Club and the Cancer Society. She also volunteers many hours in the emergency ward of the hospital. She is indeed altruistic.

xii. Mood/Tone Clues: The author sets a mood, and the meaning of the unknown word must be harmonized with the mood, e.g. The lugubrious wails of gypsies matched the already whistling of the wind in the all – but deserted cemetery. Lugubrious means sorrowful, which fits into the mood set by the word "wails, already and deserted cemetery".

xiii. Cause and Effect: This is a clue in which the author explains the reason for or the result of the word. Words like "because, since, therefore, thus, so, etc, may signal context clues. e.g. She wanted to impress all her dinner guests with the food she served, so she carefully studied the necessary culinary arts.

xiv. Inference Clue: Sufficient clues might be unavailable to the careful reader to make an educated guess at the meaning; e.g. She told her friend, "I am through with blind dates forever; what a dull evening! I was bored for even minutes. The conversation was absolutely vapid. Vapid means uninteresting (Matson, 2014; Ramire & Frontzen, 2016).

Though initially the internal context clues were effective in assisting the learners, on deeper observation, the authors 'view had its own shortcomings. They focused on a narrow level of helping the learners because they provided clues based on the textual levels only. This is to say, when students are reading or listening, the immediate context remains insufficient to assist them in deriving the meaning of unknown words. Even the immediate context was not provided adequately in a way that the learners could integrate the linguistic items within a text to deduce the meaning. Hence, learners are left helpless for insufficient context, shallow clues, and therefore without other alternatives to assist them in thinking deeply.

The learners could not infer meaning in relation to the language function in socio – psycholinguistic setting. Often, it was possible to present a text to the learners which they totally lack the knowledge of all the words that are used in that text. Here, external context clues must be regarded in addition to the internal context clues for vocabulary development to take place effectively, more importantly in context. In reaction to the shortcomings of internal context clues, several scholars suggested that external context clues should be integrated.

Of the fourteen (14) internal context clues, mood/tone, reference, general sense of the sentence and inference context clues have been rejected in this study. This is because these four context clues are above the level of the students, J.S II. The clues are not clearly pointed out. The students of J.S. II level may lack knowledge of other words that occupy the general sense of the sentence or passage. In mood/tone context clues, the learners must think critically to the higher level. This is difficult for J. S. II

students. The mood and tone context clues need more psychological composure and maturity, learners at the J.S. II are playful. They may get confused or lose interest in it.

External Context Clues: These clues incorporate the use of context clues, mostly from the external sources (mainly non – linguistic concepts). These sources provide the information that internal context clues fail to offer. These context clues are also categorised into different types as follows:

i. Visual Aids: This is the association between word and anything that could be sighted by the learners, such as realia, pictures, drawings, computer presentation film, etc. Its theory believes most learners are capable of associating new information with concepts in a meaningful way. This is a meaningful visual image, and visual images make learning more efficient (Müller, Evans, Schied, & Keller, 2022). Barrett (2016) believes that about 94% of all learners are moderately good at using visuals. A picture is worth a thousand words.

ii. Total Physical Response, Demonstration, Mimicry, Gesture. This theory believes that language can best be learned when words are linked with practical physical movement. e.g running, smoking, walking, prepositions, when acted out physically, are easier to be provided by the teacher and learned by students than in explanation (Jenkins, 2012; Johangard & Moinzade, 2018).

iii. Physical Sensation: This is the association between word expression and specific physical sensation. Words like warm and the natural weather, coolness and its natural sensation, and smoothness and its physical feeling are associated. Other examples are natural/physical tastes like sour, bitter, sweet, and smelling and their natural sensation. Also, there are different colors and their physical real appearance (Oxford,1990), where words are associated with natural sounds, e.g buzz, tick (clock), bark (dog), etc. (Richard, 2006).

iv. Prior Knowledge: This is previous knowledge which the learner has acquired, which helps in deducing the meaning of words in context. That is how people and things act in a given situation (Thomas & Harden, 2008.; Olaofe, 2013).

v. Games: Matching pictures to appropriate expressions (sentences) (Serivener, 1994:8). Some of the games are:
   a. Act out a word or say a word which is acted out.
   b. Figure it out: The words will be covered or deleted from the context, the students try their guess to provide the words(s) deleted or its equivalent (Jenkins, 2012; Ramirez & Frantzen, 2016).

Steps in Using Context Clues during Vocabulary Development

Jenkins (2012) and Zhang and Koda (2018) suggest seven steps that are helpful to anyone trying to apply context clues when tracing the meaning of unfamiliar words.

These steps are as follows:

i. Locate the unfamiliar word.
ii. Write down the word in your student's response journal or sticky notes.
iii. Write down the paragraph or page number.
iv. Read before and after the word; read around the word.
v. Write down words that help you find the meaning of the word using context clues.
vi. Write down what you think the word means; make a prediction

vii. Check to make sure that your prediction makes sense; reread to confirm.

Contemporary strategies for Teaching Vocabulary

Modern vocabulary instruction techniques emphasize active participation, contextual understanding, and spaced repetition to facilitate the transfer of words into long-term memory. Prominent methods encompass the use of semantic mapping and graphic organizers, the integration of digital tools for gamified practice, instruction on word roots and affixes, and the implementation of 'word consciousness' routines. The following are contemporary strategies for teaching vocabulary:

i. **Contextual Learning and Explicit Instruction**: Rather than relying on rote memorization, students are exposed to words within context and receive direct instruction regarding definitions, denotations, and connotations.

ii. **Semantic Mapping & Visuals:** The application of graphic organizers aids students in linking new vocabulary to familiar concepts. Techniques involve the creation of vocabulary cards that include definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and personal connections.

iii. **Digital Tools & Gamification**: The use of applications and games such as Wordle, Boggle, or interactive Prodigy Math games enhances engagement and offers, as noted in Prodigy Math and 21K School, frequent and enjoyable practice.

iv. **Spaced Repetition and Recycling:** Vocabulary is revisited multiple times over extended durations through various activities (writing, speaking, games) to ensure retention, often highlighted as a crucial factor, as indicated by MLSCN and Gianfranco Conti, in long-term memory.

v. **Word Consciousness Routines:** Fostering a classroom environment that values rich language, such as keeping 'word collector' journals or engaging in 'word of the day' activities, as recommended by Credits for Teachers, boosts motivation, according to notes.

vi. **Morphological Awareness:** Instructing students on roots, prefixes, and suffixes enables them to deconstruct and comprehend new vocabulary, as noted by HMH.

viii. **Concept Check Questions (CCQs)**: Educators employ specific questions (e.g., 'Why,' 'How') instead of merely asking 'Do you understand?' to assess comprehension of a word's nuances.

Lexical Games: Lexical games are designed to direct students' focus towards vocabulary material, with the objective of aiding them in acquiring and broadening their vocabulary, as well as demonstrating and practicing the application of words in communicative contexts. Exercises that are lexically oriented and presented in a game format foster the enhancement of students' attention, stimulate their cognitive interest, and contribute to the establishment of a positive psychological atmosphere during the lesson.

i. Memory game: The instructor writes words or phrases on the board that require reinforcement. The teacher then instructs the students to turn away or close their eyes while erasing one lexical entry (LE). The pupils must deduce which LE has been omitted and accurately write it on the board.

ii. Snowball game: The teacher initiates the game by stating the first word. Each subsequent student is required to recite all preceding words in the order they were introduced, followed by

stating a new word. Should any participant forget a word or misplace the order, they are removed from the game.

iii. Team game: Students are organized into two teams, with a member from the first team articulating a word in English, while the students from the opposing team must promptly identify the word in English to earn a point. The duration of the game is set at five minutes. The team with the most points wins.

Graphic Organizer: On an A4 sheet, divide it into four rectangles. At the intersection of these lines, inscribe the word or phrase you wish to memorize. Label each rectangle, starting from the top left and moving clockwise:

i. Description: Articulate the term using your own language.
ii. Characteristics: Provide at least three intriguing characteristics of the term.
iii. Synonym: What is it similar to?
iv. Antonym: What is it dissimilar to?

Students will utilize their vocabulary to populate the rectangles, enhancing them with illustrations or diagrams.

The Memorization Method "Graphic Organizer" aids students in acquiring new vocabulary. By defining new lexical units in our own terms, providing examples from familiar contexts, and incorporating visual imagery, any word can be firmly etched in memory for an extended period.

How to Utilize the Graphic Organizer in the Classroom:

- Preparation: Compile a list of words to be learned for a specific topic. When working with groups of 3-4 students, assign each group the task of mastering one word.
- Mini Demo: Clarify to the class what a graphic organizer is and instruct them on how to complete the graphs.
- Group Work: Facilitate students' engagement with new vocabulary by discussing the word assigned to each group. Employ guiding questions to steer the group's thought process in the appropriate direction.
- Class Discussion: Assign one student from the group to present their word.

Encourage members from different teams to interact and familiarize themselves with other words.

This should take about 2-3 minutes to maintain the flow of the lesson.

Electronic Dictionaries: Electronic dictionaries not only provide transcription but also possess the ability to audibly pronounce words. Among the most prevalent options are ABBYY Lingvo, Multiplex, Multitran, and Cambridge Dictionaries Online, such as http://wordsteps.com. This platform enables users to engage in activities akin to those performed with a traditional dictionary (Vocabulary). By clicking on the "create a new dictionary" button, users can assign a name, input words and their translations into designated fields, and the program subsequently generates exercises. Various types of exercises are available, including multiple-choice questions, word formation from letters, and performance statistics. Additionally, users have the option to utilize thematic dictionaries that have already been compiled by others. It is important to note that there are word limitations in the free version.

Flash Cards: Cards should be user-friendly. It is essential to select an appropriate size for the cards that will comfortably fit in the palm of your hand, facilitating easy handling.

i. Thick cards or cardboard are utilized for the cards; they can also be laminated to extend their usability.

ii. A word in a foreign language is displayed on the front side of the card, with the option to include a transcription and an example of the word's usage in a sentence. The back features either a picture or a translation that conveys the lexical meaning of the word.

Employing flash cards is an effective strategy for:

- Learning the visual representation of words
- Retaining lexical meanings
- Rapid verbal recall of a word (reading)
- Transitioning words from passive vocabulary to active use (speaking)
- Enhancing motivation to learn a foreign language.

In the 1970s, German scientist and journalist Sebastian Leitner introduced a practical approach to vocabulary acquisition (specifically foreign vocabulary) that requires less effort than traditional methods—namely, the technique of simple repetition of flash cards, which involves continuously sorting through them.

In this approach, the so-called flash cards are categorized into groups based on the student's mastery of the information on each card. For instance, when learning a foreign language, a student attempts to recall the meaning of a word presented on a flash card. If successful, the card is moved to the next group; if unsuccessful, it returns to the initial group. Each subsequent group is reviewed at progressively longer intervals. Thus, according to the Leitner system, you frequently review those words that are more challenging to remember, which enables you to conserve time on words that are easily recalled. Consequently, this leads to a reduction in the overall time dedicated to training. The adapted method of the Leitner system involves utilizing a stack of flash cards. When the word on the top card is recognized, it is moved to the end of the stack. Conversely, if the word is unfamiliar, after reviewing the translation, it is relocated to the middle of the stack (closer to the front) to ensure it appears sooner and more frequently than words that are already known. This approach facilitates more frequent repetition of challenging vocabulary, promoting its long-term retention. Flash cards can also be created for phrasal verbs and idioms.

Mind Map Memory Card: The Mind Map memory card serves as an alternative to conventional methods of information processing and transmission (such as notes, brief summaries, diagrams, etc.). This alternative is deemed more effective due to its foundation in natural psychological principles, and, importantly, it transforms the learner into an active architect of their own knowledge. The psychological foundation of the memory card technique is rooted in associative thinking. From the perspective of its developers, the memory card represents a model of the brain's functioning.

By recalling just one element of this information card, an individual can trigger a cascade of interconnected facts and events. This results in a multidimensional associative thought process, enabling one to perceive not only the object in their environment but also its relationship with other objects.

Conclusion

Vocabulary building is a crucial aspect of language learning, and context plays a pivotal role in facilitating this process. Effective vocabulary instruction should incorporate strategies such as semantic mapping, contextual learning, and technology integration to promote active learning and improved comprehension. By leveraging context clues, including internal and external clues, educators can empower

learners to develop a robust vocabulary. Contemporary approaches, such as game-based learning and visual aids, can also enhance vocabulary retention and motivation. Ultimately, a well-designed vocabulary instruction can equip learners with the skills and strategies needed to navigate complex texts, communicate effectively, and achieve academic success. By harnessing the power of context and contemporary teaching approaches, educators can unlock the full potential of language learning.

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