

VOCABULARY LEARNING ACROSS THE KEY STAGES



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Why is vocabulary learning important?

WHY IS VOCABULARY IMPORTANT?

- Vocabulary is 'the core component of all the language skills' (Long & Richards 2007:12)
- 'without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed' (Wilkins 1972:111)
- Vocabulary is everywhere: it connects to the systems of sound and spelling, word and sentence structure, grammar and to meaning systems.

WHY IS VOCABULARY IMPORTANT?

- Vocabulary knowledge also plays a critical role in text comprehension (Nation 2006)
- Vocabulary knowledge is also regarded as an accurate indicator of FL ability (Milton 2006) and as an effective predictor of overall FL exam grade (Milton 2006; 2008)
- Language teachers as well as researchers have a keen interest in understanding how vocabulary develops (Macaro 2003:6)
- Learning of vocabulary is of key importance to the learners themselves (e.g. Courtney 2014)

MFL PROGRAMME OF STUDY

KS2

- explore the patterns and sounds of language through songs and rhymes and **link the spelling, sound and meaning of words**
- speak in sentences, **using familiar vocabulary, phrases** and basic language structures
- **read carefully and show understanding of words, phrases** and simple writing
- **broaden their vocabulary and develop their ability to understand new words that are introduced into familiar written material**, including through using a dictionary

MFL PROGRAMME OF STUDY KS3

- develop and **use a wide-ranging and deepening vocabulary** that goes **beyond their immediate needs and interests**, allowing them to give and justify opinions and take part in discussion about wider issues
- **read and show comprehension of original and adapted materials** from a range of different sources, understanding the purpose, **important ideas and details**, and provide **an accurate English translation** of short, suitable material
- **read literary texts** in the language [such as stories, songs, poems and letters], to stimulate ideas, develop creative expression and expand understanding of the language and culture
- **write prose using an increasingly wide range of grammar and vocabulary**, write creatively to **express their own ideas and opinions**, and **translate** short written text accurately into the foreign language.

TWO KEY QUESTIONS:

- How many words do learners need?
- How should we teach them?

VOCAB THRESHOLD FOR READING COMPREHENSION

- Optimal threshold
 - 8,000 word families yielding the coverage of 98% of words in a text (including proper nouns)
- Minimal threshold
 - 4,000–5,000 word families resulting in the coverage of 95% of words in a text (including proper nouns)

Source: Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski (2010)

RESEARCH FROM UK

- Milton (2006)
 - Learners learn up to 170 words per year up to GCSE
 - On average learners take GCSE with under 1000 words of vocabulary
 - Plateau in KS3

LEARNING VOCABULARY

- Word difficulty has been shown to be related to several factors such as:
 - Pronounceability
 - Whether it is a content or a function word and its part of speech
 - Concreteness/Imagability

‘the more the word represents patterns and knowledge that learners are already familiar with, the lighter the learning burden is’ (Nation 2001:23).
- Learning burden is also related to the L1 of the learner, their familiarity with the L2 and their language learning experience, also the similarity of writing systems in L1 and L2

THE TEACHING OF WORDS IN MEANING GROUPS

- Erten & Tekin (2008)
 - Study with young learners of English in Turkey
 - Compared the learning of words in semantically (meaning) related (animals, food) and unrelated sets (random selection of nouns)
 - Semantically unrelated sets were learned quicker and with better results, both immediate and in longer term
 - Semantically related sets impede learning due to interference
 - Argue for thematic rather than semantically organised sets
 - Instead of scarf, coat, pants, skirt
 - Jumper, changing room, try on etc.

LEARNING VOCABULARY – COGNATES

Cognates – Lado (1956)

If a word is a loan word from the first language, following regular sound patterns and having roughly the same meaning as in the L1 then the learning burden will be light and it will be easier to learn and retain. Cognates require fewer encounters to retain (Willis & Ohashi, 2012)

How should we teach vocabulary?

IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT

'In essence, anything that leads to more and better engagement should improve vocabulary learning, and promoting engagement is the most fundamental task for teachers, and materials writers, and indeed, learners themselves'

(Schmitt 2008: 339-340)

EXPLICIT TEACHING

- Schmitt (2010) argues that with beginners we need to focus on explicit teaching of vocabulary
 - Actions
 - Objects
 - Pictures (need to be clear and prototypical)
 - L2 definitions
 - Contextual clues
 - L1 translation – although this has been criticised by some

BENEFIT OF VISUAL SUPPORT

- Learners benefit from the use of visuals, objects or gestures when memorising words
- Tonzar et al. (2009) found that picture-based teaching methods were more effective than text-based methods for young (13 years old) learners of German and English
- Rule & Mitchell (2012) observed a positive effect for the use of gesture in word learning for Year 3 (aged 7-8) English learners of French

TEXTUAL SUPPORT

- Lack of consensus and conflicting advice about when to introduce the written word to support vocabulary learning
- Hu (2008) found that all learners benefited from hearing the auditory form with support of L2 text, the overall effect was much smaller for learners with lower levels of L1 phonological awareness (PA). Need to give training in PA for these learners to benefit fully

RECYCLING

- Vocabulary teaching is ineffective if words are not consolidated and used regularly
- Substantial forgetting occurs and therefore learning new words needs to be a cyclical process
- Spaced repeated retrievals strengthen associations and longer term retention
- A repetition can only be effective if it is seen by the learners as a repetition
- 8-10 encounters for initial form-meaning links to be made, could need up to 20 encounters

ACTIVITY

- Working in pairs or small groups:
 - Describe a vocabulary learning activity that you feel works well. How did you know? How could this be changed/improved?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of (over)using cognates?
 - Working with a colleague in a different phase – what are the similarities and differences in your vocabulary learning activities?
 - How do you assess vocabulary knowledge?
 - Discuss your scheme of work and the role vocabulary teaching plays in this. Do you think it should be amended?