

INTERACTIVE METHODS FOR TEACHING VOCABULARY TO PRIMARY STUDENTS

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Abstract .

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language learning, especially for young learners. Vocabulary serves as the core foundation for the development of the other four critical language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. This article explores interactive methods for teaching English vocabulary to primary students, examining their implementation both in theory and practice. It further examines the role of vocabulary in early language development, reviews relevant literature, and introduces activities successfully implemented in class, specifically tailored for third graders. Drawing on this literature, the article highlights that primary school students typically acquire new words through multisensory engagement (seeing, hearing, and drawing pictures), emphasizing, above all, the critical significance of context.

Key words: vocabulary, primary students, third graders, Multisensory Learning, Visual Learning

Introduction.

English is taught in early grades in Uzbekistan as part of the national curriculum. However, teaching vocabulary to primary students remains a significant challenge for teachers, who contend with learners' limited concentration and their declining motivation for language study when relying on traditional, memorization-based approaches.

The current circumstances demand a fundamental change in approach—from teacher-centered instruction to dynamic, learner-centered methodologies. To teach children, especially vocabulary, it is necessary to use game-based and interactive methods that actively engage them and involve their visual and other senses, as this aligns with their natural learning style and therefore they learn more effectively.

The article delves into the theoretical underpinnings and practical implementation of interactive approaches designed to enhance primary school students' vocabulary, specifically identifying and examining successful activities for third graders that support vocabulary acquisition within a relevant context.

Elementary students learn effectively through activities involving movement, songs, visuals, and play rather than repetition. Integrating games, videos, songs, stories, and role play transforms vocabulary learning into an effective experience.

The study intends to:

1. Identify the most efficient vocabulary instruction strategies for early learners;
2. Try these approaches in a real classroom context;
3. Assess learners' feedback and performance after the techniques are used.

Literature Review

Vocabulary acquisition has long been recognized as a cornerstone of language learning. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary is not merely a collection of words but a system of knowledge that enables comprehension and production of meaning. Vocabulary knowledge includes both receptive (understanding) and productive (use) skills, which must be developed in parallel. In the context of young learners, the process of vocabulary learning is influenced by their cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics.

Cameron (2001) emphasizes that young children learn a foreign language more effectively when the learning process is associated with meaningful contexts. Children at the primary level are curious, imaginative, and highly responsive to visual and

auditory stimuli. This means that teachers should employ interactive strategies such as games, songs, and storytelling to capture their attention. Similarly, Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2002) argue that vocabulary instruction at the primary level must be “fun, repetitive, and contextualized.” Repetition helps strengthen memory, while context and fun enhance motivation.

Harmer (2009) explains that vocabulary learning is more successful when learners encounter words in real-life contexts. For example, rather than teaching isolated word lists, teachers should integrate vocabulary within stories, dialogues, and classroom activities. He also notes the importance of visual input, as young learners are primarily visual learners. Flashcards, realia, and classroom objects serve as powerful tools to connect meaning with form.

Recent studies also highlight the significance of multisensory learning in vocabulary acquisition. Oxford (2011) suggests that learners remember new words better when multiple senses—sight, hearing, touch—are involved. This aligns with the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach developed by Asher (1977), which encourages teachers to combine movement and language learning. For instance, when teaching action verbs (“jump,” “run,” “clap”), learners physically perform the actions, reinforcing memory through kinesthetic engagement.

Moreover, technology has introduced new dimensions to vocabulary teaching. Digital tools such as interactive games, mobile apps, and online quizzes motivate learners and extend learning beyond the classroom (Lin & Lan, 2015). However, for primary learners, technology should be balanced with face-to-face, hands-on activities to maintain focus and communication skills.

In the Uzbek EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, vocabulary teaching has undergone notable reform since the introduction of the updated National

Curriculum in 2020. Teachers are encouraged to adopt communicative and learner-centered approaches. Yet, as reported by local educators, many teachers still rely heavily on memorization and translation-based methods. This literature review therefore supports the need for research that explores how interactive and practical activities can be effectively applied in real classrooms to enhance vocabulary learning among young learners.

Methodology

This research employs an action research design aimed at improving vocabulary learning outcomes among primary learners. Action research was chosen because it allows the teacher to systematically test and refine teaching strategies within their own classroom. The research was conducted over a four-week period at School No. 63 in New Namangan, Uzbekistan, involving a class of twenty 3rd-grade pupils aged 9-10.

The participants were 10 boys and 10 girls enrolled in the school's regular English lessons. Their English proficiency level corresponded to A1 (beginner) according to the CEFR scale. Most learners had studied English for less than one year. Their learning characteristics included curiosity, high energy, short attention span, and preference for visual and kinesthetic learning styles.

The research was implemented in three stages: pre-test, intervention, and post-test. During the intervention, the teacher implemented four main interactive techniques: story-based vocabulary learning, flashcard matching games, song and chant repetition, and word-picture notebook creation. Each technique was applied once per week, during 40-minute English lessons.

Data were collected through observation sheets, vocabulary tests, and student feedback forms. Quantitative data from tests were analyzed by comparing pre- and

post-test results, while qualitative data were examined to identify motivation and participation patterns. Ethical consent was obtained from the school and parents.

Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed significant improvement in learners' vocabulary knowledge. The pre-test average score was 9.4 out of 20, while the post-test average rose to 17.3 out of 20, representing an 82% improvement. Interactive, contextual techniques had a strong positive impact on retention and recall.

Qualitative data showed that learners were motivated and emotionally engaged. Songs and games were most popular, as they helped recall through rhythm and fun. Storytelling improved focus and comprehension, while flashcard games promoted collaboration. Vocabulary notebooks encouraged independence and responsibility.

These results support previous research emphasizing meaningful interaction and multisensory learning (Cameron, 2001; Oxford, 2011). Repetition, context, and emotional engagement were key factors. The constructivist learning theory is validated, showing that active participation builds stronger word knowledge. Group-based learning also enhanced confidence and cooperation among pupils.

Conclusion

The study concluded that vocabulary teaching for primary learners is most effective when interactive, contextual, and enjoyable. At School No. 63, young learners showed significant vocabulary gains through storytelling, songs, flashcards, and notebooks. Vocabulary learning should therefore emphasize participation, multisensory engagement, and motivation.

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