

## **A New Technique for Teaching Vocabulary**

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### **Abstract**

Until recently, teaching English vocabulary has received scant attention. It is only with the advent of the communicative approach, it starts to receive its due emphasis. This paper presents a new technique for the teaching of vocabulary. It consists of two stages. In the first stage the teaching/learning burden is placed on the shoulders of the students; they have to watch various TV programs and films, select the vocabulary items they want to learn and present them in the classroom for discussion. The teacher is assigned the role of a facilitator of the teaching/learning process. In the second stage, the teacher is the main source of information; he has to collect the material to be discussed in the classroom, while the students are to discuss it in and outside the classroom. This technique has many advantages; among them is the ample opportunity it presents for the students to practice English in and outside the classroom. When the technique was evaluated, it was not proved to be effective in the classroom. However, the students' positive comments indicate that the new teaching technique deserves to be tested again.

### **0.Introduction**

It is said that language is the blood and flesh of concepts and ideas which are actually expressed by words. Communication will be halted unless one has sufficient repertoire of vocabulary. However, the teaching of vocabulary has received scant attention, or at least, it has not received its due emphasis. Many researchers and linguists (Mera, 1980 and 1981; Allen, 1983 and Jarold, 1990) have expressed their disappointment concerning the inadequacy and scarcity of research in this area, the teaching of vocabulary.

This negligence of the teaching of vocabulary has been due to different reasons. First, for a long time the emphasis was on grammar, while vocabulary was a subordinate element used to help students acquire the different grammatical rules. Second, grammar was assumed to be more important than vocabulary and vocabulary could be acquired through experience and actual communication. Third, the teaching of vocabulary

was related to the complexity and difficulty of the process of acquiring vocabulary. Smith (1983:2), for example, suggests that “the words of the language are interrelated on a variety of levels (e.g. phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic) and each of these levels has a variety of interrelationship. Mera (1981:230) also states that “there seems to be a firm belief that the lexicon, unlike our knowledge of syntax and phonology, is inherently a messy part of our linguistic competence, and ... can not be handled conveniently, using the sorts of rules which have been used to describe the more manageable parts of language.

However, it is with the advent of the communicative language teaching movement in the 1970 s and 1980 s of the previous century that attention has been given to the teaching of vocabulary after decades of relative negligence. Words are considered very important for communication, especially after the development of the specialized EFL programs in the past thirty years. Fromkin and Rodman (1974), among others, have emphasized the assumption that to learn a language, one has to acquire not only its sound system and structure, but also units of meaning; these units of meaning constitute the vocabulary items or lexicon of language.

### **1. Some New Trends in Teaching Vocabulary**

The new trends in the field of language teaching has led practitioners and specialists to devise various new techniques for the teaching of vocabulary, some of which attempt to involve the learners in the teaching and learning process. Kavalauskiene and Janulevieiene (200), for example, have proposed Lewis’s lexical approach for the acquisition of ESP vocabulary where the learners are encouraged to analyze a number of authentic passages in order to identify and learn the unknown words and present them either orally or in writing in the classroom. Ali (2000) has also suggested a technique for the teaching of vocabulary in which the students are asked to select and present unfamiliar words to their classmates and then write them in a form of pocket dictionary in order to be studied and memorized. Another technique for teaching vocabulary is proposed by Grace (1989) who has described two positions on second language vocabulary learning: (a) inferred meaning will be retained because it will lead to deeper processing, and (b) incorrect meanings will be retained if wrong inferences are made.

## **2.The Current Situation at KFU**

Reading is one of the skill areas that have received heavy emphasis in the EFL program in the college of education at King Faisal University (hereafter KFU). There are five reading courses ranging from easy reading passages to difficult and analytical ones. The teaching of vocabulary is a common component of these reading courses where each reading excerpt includes two or more vocabulary exercises that mainly deal with antonyms, synonyms and morphology. The nature of these exercises is, to a large extent, mechanical. For more about the nature of these vocabulary exercises, see Markstein and Hirasawa (1983) whose books are used in the EFL program at KFU.

In an attempt to comprehend the different reading passages in a reading course, KFU students either look up the unfamiliar words in their dictionaries, which is a rare practice, or depend on the teacher to provide them with the meaning of these words, which is the common practice. Their concentration, as derived from the course objectives, is mainly on understanding the text and its main ideas. In other words, vocabulary teaching, compared with the teaching of reading, does not receive its due attention. This lack of emphasis on vocabulary teaching reflects our students' problems in reading comprehension.

Actually, there is no specific course for teaching vocabulary in the EFL program, which leads to a negligence of the study of vocabulary on the part of the students; nor do the students realize the role words play in their reading comprehension and communication. This situation leads to several learning problems for the students: poor spelling (Abd-El-Jawad, 1986; Tono, 1999), incorrect use of words and pronunciation errors (Al-Taha, 1995) and finally poor communication.

## **3.This Paper**

This paper consists of two parts: The first describes a new technique for the teaching of vocabulary. It is new in the sense that there are some traditional methods such as the discovery method (Harmer, 1991) and the demonstration and explanation method (Paulston & Bruder, 1976). This newly proposed technique for the teaching of vocabulary places the burden of learning on the shoulders of the students. They have a say on the selection of the words they want to learn, explore the different meanings of

these words, exchange information with their classmates outside the classroom, and finally present them in the classroom for discussion. In the very beginning of this technique, the students will be directed to watch specific TV programs and segments of soap operas displayed on some TV channels. Later and when they get used to the technique, they will have complete freedom to watch whatever TV programs they prefer.

The second part of the study evaluates this new technique while at work in the classroom. Two groups participated in the study; the first, the control group, consisted of 42 students, while the second, the experimental group, consisted of 47 students. The study lasted for seven weeks after which a test was constructed and administered to the two groups. Then the mean performance score of each group was calculated and a t-test was employed to find out the difference between the two means.

#### **4. Advantages of This Technique**

Although the ultimate emphasis of this technique is placed on the teaching and learning of vocabulary, listening comprehension, speaking and communication skills are, as expressed enthusiastically by our students, also developed. It is a well-known fact that students who study English in an environment where English is not spoken as a native language usually do not have a chance to practice their English but in the classroom. Employing the newly developed technique, the students will have an ample opportunity to practice their English in and outside the classroom.

It is said that listening comprehension is one of the difficult skill areas to be developed, especially if the learners are adults, as is the case here in Saudi Arabia. In this technique the motivated students, and through watching different American and/or British TV programs, will be able to develop this important skill. Discussing the advantages of the new technique, KFU students have expressed their satisfaction with the daily practice of listening comprehension. Furthermore, they have started to familiarize themselves with the British and American accents.

It is a known fact that communication is another difficult skill area to be developed. But through the students' interaction with each other outside the classroom and with the teacher inside the classroom, they will be able to develop their communicative competence.

Moreover, it is found that one of the weaknesses EFL learners at KFU usually display in their writing or/and verbal production is that they do not have a sense of the exact meaning and different usages of many of the target language words. This weakness is reflected in the many errors EFL learners usually make. (see Al-Taha, 1995 and 1986 Mukattash, 1981 and Abd -El-Jawad, 1986). The suggested technique attempts to overcome this serious shortcoming.

Motivation plays an important role in teaching and learning. An experienced teacher can employ this technique to motivate his students to learn better. When asked to watch a specific TV program or film to prepare some words and sentence patterns to be presented and discussed in the classroom, the students will feel the responsibility the teacher has placed on them, and they will do their best to carry out their job satisfactorily.

Finally, it is suggested that among the principles of learning there is an important component called "active participation," which is the result of the teacher's deliberate attempt to encourage his students to participate in the classroom discussion (Pratton and Hales, 1986). The newly devised teaching technique requires the students to participate actively in and outside the classroom discussion. It is simply an attempt to maximize the students' verbal interaction and in turn achievement.

### **5. Audiovisual Aids**

Television and video have been employed in different teaching/learning situations for a long time. Hill (1989) has suggested various teaching/learning situations where television, radio, and video can be used. In addition to this technological equipment, this technique will exploit the telephone as a necessary educational tool.

### **6. The procedure**

The proposed technique consists of two stages, each of which consists of different steps. In the first stage, most of the burden is placed on the students. It consists of the following steps:

#### **Step One**

The teacher divides his students into groups, the number of each depends on the size of the class. At any rate, the number of each group should not be less than four and not more than six. Furthermore, each group

should have a leader in order to direct the discussion concerning the selection of the TV program and the telephone calls and finally present the group's viewpoints to the other students in the classroom. The leader of the group could be assigned by the teacher or elected by the members of the group on the basis of his/her active participation in the classroom.

### **Step Two**

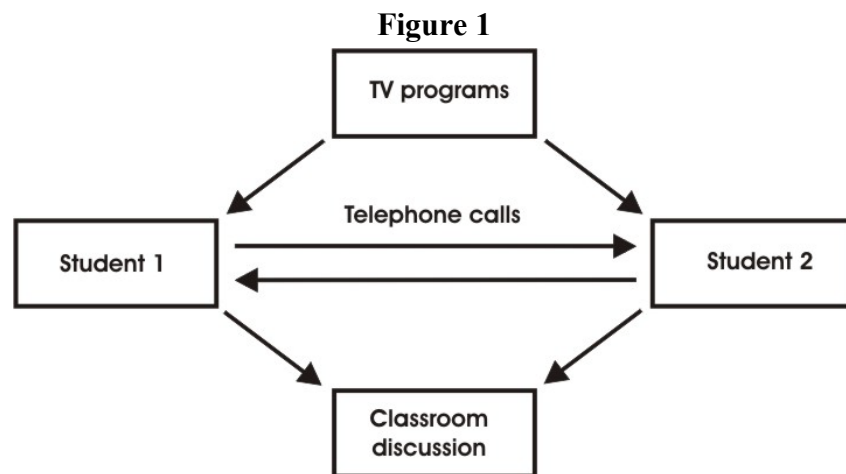
In the very beginning of the implementation of this technique, the teacher assigns the TV program to be viewed by all the participants. At this stage, the news program displayed either on the CNN or the BBC channels is recommended, since the language used in these programs-called Standard English in the United States and Received Pronunciation in Britain-will be easy to understand. Then later, the students can select any program-it might be a film or a soap opera-to watch. It is important for the members of each group to know exactly which program or segment of a program to watch. Each member's task is to select a number of sentences that include new words and to write them down. Then each student has to check the meaning and pronunciation of these unfamiliar words.

### **Step Three**

Having finished viewing, each member has to call his mate in the group to discuss the meaning, pronunciation, and spelling of the selected words. It will be all the better if the other members of the group have selected different words in different sentences. In this case each student has to write these sentences and exchange them with the rest of the members of the group. It is also recommended that the students try to construct sentences other than those derived from the TV program.

### **Step Four**

In the classroom the teacher acts as a facilitator of teaching and learning. He asks the leader of each group to present the sentences that include the new words to the rest of the class. Then the teacher writes these sentences on the board as new sentence patterns and explains their structure. And finally he asks his students to use these words in sentences of their own. When necessary, the teacher can model the new words and ask his students to repeat them after him. Figure 1 is an illustration of the whole process.



After watching a TV program, students discuss the new words out and in the classroom

#### **Step Five**

It is known that words, which are not practiced, are likely to be forgotten. So it is possible that the students or some of them may forget the newly learned words or keep them as recognition ones. To help them retain these words, the teacher is to prepare some communicative drills, a role play for example, to be carried out by the students in the classroom weekly. It is also essential for the teacher to prepare a vocabulary test based on the vocabulary items presented in the classroom every other week.

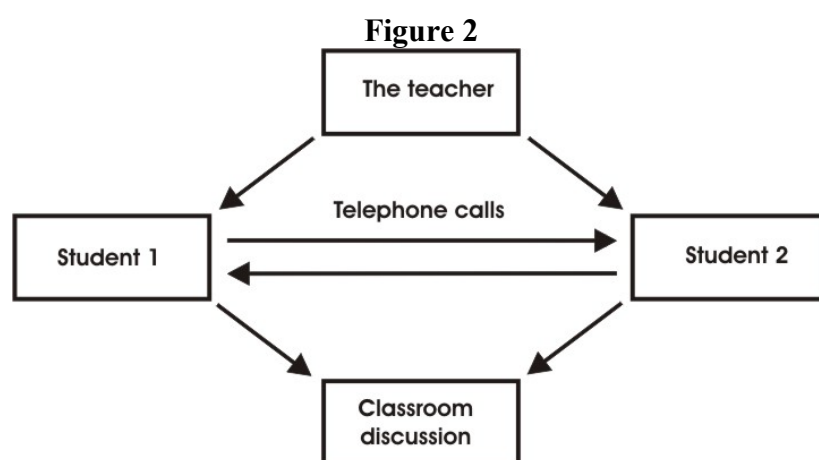
#### **7. Some Notes on the First Stage**

First, it is more than important that while calling each other, the students have to use English. They are not supposed to use their native language unless it is very urgent: to know the meaning of a new word whose meaning is difficult to be grasped in English. Second, it should be made clear from the very beginning that all the members in a group have to participate in viewing the assigned TV segment, in the conversation with their mates and finally in the classroom discussion. Third, in addition to the TV programs, the teacher can select different American and British films and ask his students to watch them or parts of them and select different sentences including new words.

In the first stage of the new technique for teaching vocabulary, the students participate actively in the teaching/learning process. Since they select the new words they want to learn, they are actually the source of information. In other words, they play a major role in their own learning and teaching. Nevertheless, some of the students, if not most of them, will avoid some words, either because of the difficulty of their pronunciation or of their weird spelling. (For more about the avoidance strategy of second language learners, see Richards, 1989). Therefore, the second stage of this teaching technique will reverse the roles of the teacher and the students, and try to minimize the negative effect of the avoidance strategy, which is likely to be employed by the students.

### 8. The Second Stage

In spite of the fact that the teacher is the main source of information in the second stage of the technique, the students are still to participate actively in the teaching/learning process. They have to carry out some role plays and tasks where they have to use the new words introduced by the teacher, discuss them with each other on the telephone outside the classroom, and finally discuss them again in the classroom. The second stage, as figure 2 illustrates, consists of the following steps.



The teacher is the source of information, while students are to discuss the words out and inside the classroom.



### **Step One**

While reading a magazine or a book or viewing a TV program, the teacher is to select some vocabulary items, which, he thinks, are unfamiliar to his students. It will be better if he also quotes the sentences that include the selected words.

### **Step Two**

In the classroom the teacher can surprise his students with some unfamiliar words and ask them about their meanings. It is most likely that one or two students might know the meanings of some words; it will not make any difference. Then the teacher writes the words on the board, models them and asks his students to repeat after him. After that, he writes the sentence patterns on the chalkboard and helps his students practice them employing some exercises such as substitution drills. Finally, the teacher encourages his students to construct similar sentences. I would like to call this technique "teaching by surprise, where the sudden presentation of the vocabulary items and the prompt drills on them will call the students' attention and help them retain these newly introduced words.

### **Step Three**

To reinforce the newly learned words, the teacher asks the members of each group to telephone each other and discuss the different meanings, common usages, spelling and pronunciation of these words. Finally, they are to construct more sentences similar to those introduced in the classroom.

### **Step Four**

As it is the case in the first stage, the learners might keep some of the recently acquired words as recognition ones, or they might forget them altogether. To help his students retain these words as productive ones, the teacher is to prepare different activities such as role plays to be carried out by his students weekly. He is also to prepare a test based on these words every other week.

### **9. Some Notes on the Second Stage**

First, this kind of a teaching technique places heavy duties on the teacher; he has to be active in and outside the classroom. Outside the classroom, the teacher is to view different TV programs in order to select a variety of them to be watched by his students, especially in the beginning of

the implementation of the technique. Also he is to select some new words to be presented to his students in the second stage of this teaching technique. In the classroom, he is to play the role of a facilitator: he models the new words, discusses their different usages, directs the discussion and helps his students construct new sentences. Second, the second stage of this teaching technique is of extended importance. Because the teacher has to prepare the material to be discussed in the classroom, the students will be left free to do other things. Furthermore, the students' weekly TV viewing will not become monotonous, as they will have some rest they really need. Third, the teacher has to be enthusiastic and vivid in the classroom in order to create that kind of enthusiasm and vividness necessary for the success of this teaching technique, and for the students to put more effort in and outside the classroom.

### **O. The New Technique at Work**

To verify its effectiveness, the new teaching technique was put at work where it was applied to 42 Saudi students enrolled in a reading class, Text I, (En. 32). They were divided into eight groups, each of which consisted of six students except one which consisted of only five. The members of each group elected a leader who had a meeting with the researcher to plan the TV viewing sessions, arrange the telephone calls, prepare the material to be discussed in the classroom, and finally discuss the teacher's part when he prepares the words to be discussed in and outside the classroom through the telephone calls.

#### **1. The Control Group**

Due to the regulations of the university, the researcher waited till the next year when he taught 42 Saudi students enrolled in the same reading course, Text I, (En. 32) and considered them as the control group. In addition to the assigned material, the students were asked to watch some TV English programs in order to acquire more vocabulary items. It is noteworthy to mention here that the students in this group were not asked to discuss the words they might extract from these programs in the classroom.

## **2.The Technique in the Classroom**

Three hours weekly are usually allotted to the reading course (En. 323) , one of which is specified for the implementation of the new technique which lasted for seven weeks. This hour is actually specified for the teaching of vocabulary in the regular reading course. It should be admitted that the whole teaching process was about to collapse in the first two weeks because the students faced various problems: some members were not able to watch the assigned TV program; others did not participate in the telephone calls; and finally, few students did not use English in their discussion. However, with some motivation and encouragement, these problems were overcome to the extent that most of the students participated in the discussion in and outside the classroom.

## **3.Data Collection**

At the end of the instruction session, a vocabulary test was constructed and administered to both groups, the control and experimental. The test consisted of two parts. The first included three short paragraphs where the students were asked to use ten underlined words in sentences of their own. In the second part, the students were asked to use ten isolated words in sentences.

## **4.The Scope of the Learned Vocabulary**

The teaching of vocabulary in the Department of Foreign Languages is part of the reading course where students are usually asked to work on two or more vocabulary exercises that are based on the reading passage. The same will be followed in the new teaching technique; that is in addition to the reading passages, the students are to watch the news and learn as many words as possible. When the students get used to the new technique, they will be asked to watch films and other relevant programs. Put briefly, the scope of the learned vocabulary will be limited to those kinds of vocabulary items the students might encounter in the traditional classroom where they are presented with many reading passages of various topics.

## **5.The Hypothesis**

To evaluate the effectiveness of this new teaching technique, a null hypothesis was constructed and tested. It reads as follows: There is no

significant statistical difference between the mean performance scores of the two groups.

### 6. Findings and Discussion

The t-test statistical technique was employed to find out the difference between the mean performance scores of the two groups. As table 1 shows, it is quite clear that the t-value, 1.066 is not statistically high enough to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained.

**Table 1**  
**The t test for independent samples**

Group	N. of cases	Mean	Std.	T	df	Sig
Exp.	47	12.72	2.79	1,006	46	.289
Cont.	42	12.02	3.40		41	.295

P<.05

Although the difference between the mean performance scores of the experimental and control groups is not statistically significant, the new teaching technique should not be neglected as a successful one. It really deserves to have another chance to be tested in the classroom. What makes the teaching/learning situation hopeful is the students' oral comments at the end of the experiment. "It helps me familiarize my ears with the American accent," said one student. "It helps me improve my listening comprehension," said another one. A third student said, "The new technique helped me speak English "fluently. These comments, of course with many others, indicate that this new teaching technique needs to be evaluated again in order to be proved effective.

However, for this technique to be effective, the following conditions should be met:

1. A course of three hours should be specified for the teaching of vocabulary where the new teaching technique could be implemented fully and successfully. This means that the time, one hour a week, allotted for the implementation of this technique is not enough. This short time might be the reason of the statistically insignificant difference between the mean performance scores of the groups.
2. Students should be made familiar with the new technique and follow the teachers' instructions and fully participate in all the activities in and outside the classroom.
3. To get away from the traditional teaching methods, students need a lot of motivation, encouragement and enthusiasm.
4. The teacher has to create a positive atmosphere in order to help the students carry out whatever tasks assigned to them.

### **Conclusion**

Unlike other techniques, the learning burden in this new teaching technique is placed on the shoulders of the students. They have to select the teaching/learning materials and discuss them in the classroom with the teacher functioning as a facilitator of the learning process. In the second stage of this teaching technique, the teacher is the main source of information. He has to prepare the new words and sentence patterns to be discussed in the classroom. However, the students still have an active role in the teaching/learning process. They have to discuss the introduced words and sentence patterns in and outside the classroom. In order to help the students retain the new words, the teacher has to prepare some activities such as a role play in order to be carried out by the students. He also has to prepare a vocabulary test every other week. This new technique of teaching vocabulary is an attempt to help students learn and retain new words which, in turn, will help them develop other language skills such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension and communication.

When this new technique was evaluated in the classroom, it did not prove effective. The t-value was not high enough to reject the null hypothesis. However, based on the students' oral comments, the new technique deserves to be given a second chance on the conditions that more time should be specified for its implementation; students should be

motivated and encouraged in order to be familiar with it; and finally, the teacher should create a positive atmosphere so that the new technique can be carried out successfully.

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## طريقة جديدة لتعليم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية

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قسم اللغات الأجنبية - كلية التربية

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ال د :

يعد الاهتمام بتعليم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية حديثاً إلى حد ما. فمع ظهور الطريقة التواصلية، بدأ الاهتمام بتعليم مفردات اللغة. تقدم هذه الدراسة أسلوباً جديداً لتعليم المفردات وهي، أي الطريقة، تتكون من مرحلتين. في المرحلة الأولى يكون عبء التعلم ملقى على أكتاف الطلاب حيث عليهم مشاهدة برامج وأفلام إنجليزية مختلفة ومن ثم اختيار الكلمات التي يودون تعلمها ومناقشتها مع زملائهم خارج وداخل الفصل. للمعلم في هذه المرحلة دور محدد وهو دور المنسق للمناقشة وتقديم الحلول عند ظهور المشكلات. أما في المرحلة الثانية، فالمعلم هو الذي يختار الكلمات وعرضها على الطلاب لمناقشتها داخل وخارج الفصل. وأخيراً فأن لهذا الأسلوب فوائد كثيرة أهمها إتاحة الفرصة كاملة أمام الطلاب لممارسة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية داخل وخارج الفصل. ومع ذلك فعندما تم تطبيق هذا الأسلوب في الفصل، لم يكن مؤثراً إلى الحد الذي كان يأمل به الباحث. ولكن تعليقات الطلاب الإيجابية على هذا الأسلوب تشير إلى إمكانية تطبيقه مرة أخرى ولكن في ظروف أفضل.