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Education Article

Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary in Secondary Schools

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary in secondary schools. The research employed a qualitative descriptive design to obtain an in-depth understanding of how teachers implement vocabulary instruction in classroom settings. The participants of this study were English teachers selected through purposive sampling based on their teaching experience and involvement in vocabulary instruction. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

The findings revealed that teachers used a variety of strategies in teaching vocabulary, including translation, explanation, repetition, memorization, contextual teaching, interactive activities, game-based learning, and the use of media. Among these strategies, contextual and interactive approaches were found to be more effective in enhancing students' understanding and use of vocabulary, while traditional methods such as memorization were mainly effective for short-term retention. The study also found that teachers often combined multiple strategies to address different learning needs and classroom conditions. However, several challenges were identified, such as limited time, large class sizes, varying student abilities, and lack of technological resources.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching strategies depends on how they are implemented and adapted to students' needs. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a balanced and student-centered approach by integrating various strategies to promote meaningful learning and improve students' vocabulary mastery.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary tool for communication, and vocabulary serves as one of its most essential components. In the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), vocabulary plays a crucial role because it forms the basis for the development of all language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without an adequate range of vocabulary, learners may find it difficult to understand spoken or written texts, express their

ideas clearly, or participate effectively in communication. Therefore, vocabulary mastery is often considered a key indicator of language proficiency, especially for students at the secondary school level who are expected to achieve more advanced competencies.

In secondary schools, English is commonly taught as a compulsory subject aimed at preparing students to face global communication demands. At this stage, students are required not only to recognize and understand a wider range of words but also to use them accurately and appropriately in various contexts. However, many students still experience significant difficulties in learning vocabulary. These difficulties may arise from several factors, such as limited exposure to English outside the classroom, differences between the students' first language and English, lack of motivation, and ineffective learning strategies. As a result, students often rely on memorization without truly understanding the meaning and usage of words, which leads to poor retention and limited application.

Given these challenges, the role of teachers becomes highly significant in facilitating vocabulary learning. Teachers are expected to employ effective teaching strategies that can help students acquire, retain, and use new vocabulary meaningfully. Teaching strategies refer to the methods, techniques, and approaches that teachers use to deliver instructional content and engage students in the learning process. In the context of vocabulary instruction, these strategies may include the use of visual aids, contextual teaching, repetition, translation, games, storytelling, and the integration of technology.

Traditionally, vocabulary teaching has often been dominated by teacher-centered approaches, such as providing word lists, translating meanings, and asking students to memorize them. While these methods may help students recognize words in the short term, they are often insufficient for developing deeper understanding and long-term retention. In contrast, more recent approaches emphasize student-centered learning, where learners actively engage with new vocabulary through meaningful activities. Strategies such as cooperative learning, task-based learning, and communicative language teaching encourage students to use vocabulary in real-life contexts, thereby enhancing their comprehension and retention.

Furthermore, the advancement of technology has opened new opportunities for vocabulary instruction. Teachers can now incorporate digital tools, such as multimedia presentations, language learning applications, and online games, to make vocabulary learning more interactive and engaging. These tools not only attract students' interest but also provide varied exposure to language use, which is essential for vocabulary acquisition. However, the effectiveness of these strategies largely depends on how teachers implement them in the classroom and adapt them to students' needs and learning styles.

Despite the availability of various teaching strategies, not all teachers apply them effectively in practice. Some teachers may still rely heavily on traditional methods due to limited resources, lack of training, or time constraints. Others may attempt to use innovative strategies but face challenges in managing the classroom or ensuring that all students are actively involved. Therefore, it is important to examine the actual strategies used by teachers in teaching vocabulary and how these strategies impact students' learning outcomes.

In addition, each classroom presents unique characteristics, including differences in students' abilities, backgrounds, and learning preferences. These differences require teachers to be flexible and creative in selecting appropriate strategies. An effective vocabulary teaching strategy should not only focus on introducing new words but also on helping students understand their meanings, forms, pronunciations, and uses in context. It should also encourage students to become independent learners who can continue expanding their vocabulary beyond the classroom.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on exploring teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary in secondary schools. Specifically, it aims to identify the types of strategies used by teachers, describe how these strategies are implemented in classroom practices, and analyze their effectiveness in supporting students' vocabulary development. By understanding these aspects, the study is expected to provide valuable insights for teachers, educators, and policymakers in improving the quality of English language teaching, particularly in vocabulary instruction.

Ultimately, improving vocabulary teaching strategies is essential for enhancing students' overall language proficiency. When students have a strong vocabulary foundation, they are better equipped to comprehend texts, communicate ideas, and succeed academically. Therefore, investigating teachers' strategies in teaching vocabulary is not only relevant but also necessary for advancing English language education at the secondary school level.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary in secondary schools. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' practices, experiences, and perspectives within natural classroom settings. Rather than testing hypotheses, this study focused on describing and interpreting how vocabulary teaching strategies are implemented and how they influence students' learning processes.

The research was conducted in a secondary school, involving English teachers as the main participants. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria such as their teaching experience and their active role in teaching vocabulary. This selection ensured that the data obtained were relevant and rich in information related to the research focus.

Data were collected through multiple techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Classroom observations were carried out to examine directly how teachers applied vocabulary teaching strategies during the teaching and learning process. Through observation, the researcher was able to identify the types of strategies used, classroom interactions, and students' responses. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers to gain deeper insights into their reasoning, beliefs, and challenges in teaching vocabulary. The interviews allowed participants to explain their strategies in detail and share their experiences. Documentation was also used to support the data, including lesson plans, teaching materials, and other relevant documents that reflected the teachers' instructional practices.

In this study, the researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by observation guidelines, interview guides, and field notes. These instruments helped the researcher to systematically collect and record the data during the research process. Audio recordings and written notes were used to ensure that important information was accurately captured.

The data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The analysis process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on relevant information related to teachers' strategies in teaching vocabulary. The data were then organized and presented in a descriptive form to make them easier to interpret. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on patterns and themes identified in the data, while continuously verifying their accuracy.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied triangulation by comparing data from different sources and methods. Member checking was also conducted by confirming the findings with the participants to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives. Furthermore, the researcher maintained prolonged engagement in the research setting to develop a deeper understanding of the context.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. The researcher also ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by not disclosing their identities in the report. Through these procedures, the study aimed to produce credible and ethically sound findings regarding teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary in secondary schools.

RESULTS

The findings of this study revealed that English teachers in secondary schools employed a variety of strategies in teaching vocabulary. These strategies were implemented to enhance students' understanding, retention, and ability to use new words in appropriate contexts. Based on the data obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, several key themes emerged regarding the types of strategies used, their implementation, and their impact on students' learning.

First, the study found that teachers commonly used **translation and explanation strategies** to introduce new vocabulary. Teachers often translated unfamiliar words into the students' first language to ensure comprehension. In addition, they provided explanations, synonyms, and examples to clarify meanings. This strategy was particularly useful for introducing abstract or difficult words. However, it was mostly teacher-centered and sometimes limited students' opportunities to actively engage with the vocabulary.

Second, **repetition and memorization** were frequently used as reinforcement strategies. Teachers asked students to repeat new words, write them down, and memorize their meanings. This approach helped students recall vocabulary in the short term, especially for tests or quizzes. Nevertheless, the findings indicated that students often struggled to retain and use these words in real communication, suggesting that memorization alone was not sufficient for long-term vocabulary mastery.

Third, teachers incorporated **contextual teaching strategies** by presenting vocabulary within sentences, texts, or real-life situations. Instead of teaching words in isolation, teachers encouraged students to understand meanings based on context. For example, students were asked to read passages and identify the meanings of unfamiliar words through clues in the text. This strategy was found to be more effective in helping students understand how words are used in authentic situations.

Another important finding was the use of **interactive strategies**, such as group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and classroom activities. Teachers engaged students in activities that required them to use vocabulary actively, such as creating sentences, participating in dialogues, and completing tasks collaboratively. These strategies increased student participation and made the learning process more engaging.

In addition, some teachers applied **game-based learning strategies** to make vocabulary learning more enjoyable. Activities such as word matching, guessing games, and vocabulary competitions were used to motivate students and reduce boredom. The findings showed that students were more enthusiastic and actively involved when games were integrated into the lesson.

The study also revealed the use of **media and technology** in vocabulary instruction, although it was not applied consistently by all teachers. Some teachers used visual aids such

as pictures, flashcards, and videos to support vocabulary learning. These tools helped students associate words with images, making it easier for them to remember meanings. However, the use of digital technology was limited due to factors such as lack of facilities and time constraints.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that teachers often combined multiple strategies in a single lesson. For example, a teacher might begin with translation, followed by contextual explanation, and then engage students in interactive activities or games. This combination of strategies was found to be more effective in addressing different learning styles and maintaining student interest.

Despite the variety of strategies used, the study also identified several challenges faced by teachers. These included limited class time, large class sizes, varying student abilities, and lack of resources. Such challenges sometimes hindered the effective implementation of more interactive and student-centered strategies.

Overall, the results showed that while teachers were aware of different vocabulary teaching strategies and attempted to apply them, the effectiveness of these strategies depended largely on how they were implemented. Strategies that involved active student participation and contextual learning were found to be more effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery compared to traditional methods focused on memorization.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers in secondary schools employ a range of strategies in teaching English vocabulary, reflecting both traditional and more contemporary approaches to language instruction. These findings highlight the dynamic nature of vocabulary teaching, where teachers attempt to balance the need for comprehension with the goal of fostering active language use.

One of the prominent strategies identified in this study is the use of translation and direct explanation. This approach remains widely used because it provides immediate clarity and ensures that students understand the meaning of new words. This finding is consistent with traditional vocabulary teaching practices, where the teacher plays a central role in delivering knowledge. While translation can be effective for beginners or when dealing with complex vocabulary, overreliance on this strategy may limit students' ability to think independently in the target language. Students may become dependent on their first language rather than developing the ability to infer meaning from context.

The study also revealed the frequent use of repetition and memorization as reinforcement techniques. These strategies are helpful in building initial familiarity with new vocabulary and supporting short-term retention. However, the findings suggest that memorization alone does not guarantee long-term mastery or the ability to use vocabulary communicatively. This supports the view that vocabulary learning should go beyond rote learning and involve deeper cognitive processing. Students need opportunities to use new words in meaningful contexts to fully internalize them.

In contrast, contextual teaching strategies were found to be more effective in promoting vocabulary understanding. By presenting words within sentences, texts, or real-life situations, teachers help students grasp not only the meaning of words but also their usage. This aligns with communicative language teaching principles, which emphasize the importance of context in language learning. When students learn vocabulary in context, they are more likely to remember and apply it appropriately in different situations.

Interactive strategies, such as group discussions and collaborative tasks, also played a significant role in enhancing vocabulary learning. These strategies encourage active participation and provide students with opportunities to practice using new words. The findings indicate that students become more engaged and confident when they are involved in interactive activities. This supports the idea that language learning is a social process, where interaction facilitates understanding and retention.

Furthermore, the use of game-based activities was found to increase students' motivation and interest in learning vocabulary. Games create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, which can reduce anxiety and encourage participation. When students are motivated, they are more likely to engage

actively with the learning material, leading to better outcomes. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating enjoyable and meaningful activities into vocabulary instruction.

The integration of media and visual aids also contributed positively to vocabulary learning. Visual elements such as pictures and videos help students form mental associations with new words, making them easier to remember. However, the limited use of technology observed in this study suggests that there is still room for improvement in integrating digital tools into classroom practices. Factors such as limited resources and lack of training may hinder teachers from fully utilizing technology in vocabulary instruction.

Another important point highlighted by this study is that teachers often combine multiple strategies in their teaching. This combination approach is beneficial because it addresses different learning styles and needs. For instance, while some students may benefit from visual aids, others may learn better through interaction or repetition. By using varied strategies, teachers can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Despite these positive practices, the study also identified several challenges that affect the implementation of effective vocabulary teaching strategies. Large class sizes, limited instructional time, and varying student proficiency levels make it difficult for teachers to apply interactive and student-centered approaches consistently. These challenges require teachers to be adaptable and creative in managing their classrooms and selecting appropriate strategies.

In summary, the discussion highlights that while traditional strategies such as translation and memorization are still commonly used, more interactive and contextual approaches are more effective in promoting vocabulary mastery. The findings suggest that teachers should strive to balance different strategies and focus on creating meaningful learning experiences that encourage active student participation. Enhancing teachers' ability to integrate diverse strategies, including the use of technology, can further improve the quality of vocabulary instruction in secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that teachers in secondary schools employ a variety of strategies in teaching English vocabulary, ranging from traditional to more interactive and student-centered approaches. Common strategies identified include translation, explanation, repetition, memorization, contextual teaching, interactive activities, game-based learning, and the use of media. These strategies are often combined within a single lesson to accommodate different learning needs and classroom situations.

The study reveals that while traditional strategies such as translation and memorization are still widely used and helpful for introducing new vocabulary, they tend to be less effective in promoting long-term retention and communicative use of language. In contrast, strategies that emphasize context, interaction, and student engagement—such as group work, discussions, and task-based activities—are more effective in helping students understand and use vocabulary meaningfully.

Additionally, the use of games and visual media has been shown to increase students' motivation and participation in the learning process. However, the integration of technology in vocabulary teaching remains limited due to various challenges, including lack of resources and time constraints. Teachers also face difficulties such as large class sizes and varying student abilities, which can affect the implementation of effective strategies.

Overall, the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching strategies depends not only on the type of strategy used but also on how it is implemented in the classroom. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to adopt a balanced approach by combining different strategies and focusing on meaningful, student-centered learning. By doing so, students can develop better vocabulary mastery, which ultimately supports their overall English language proficiency.

In conclusion, improving teachers' strategies in teaching vocabulary is essential for enhancing the quality of English language education in secondary schools. Future efforts should focus on supporting teachers through training, providing adequate resources, and encouraging the use of innovative and interactive teaching methods.

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