



DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS VOCABULARY BY READING ENGLISH COMPREHENSION IN EFL CLASSROOM



Shahriar Mohammad
Kamal¹

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Canadian University of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: shahriarkamal13@yahoo.com



ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 18 October 2018

Revised: 22 November 2018

Accepted: 13 December 2018

Published: 10 January 2019

Keywords

EFL learners

Motivation

Reading comprehension

Dictionary

Vocabulary

Development

Vocabulary development by reading comprehension is an important issue in case of English language learning. There is always an interconnection between vocabulary and reading comprehension or text and it is unavoidable. There are a lot of ways to develop vocabulary. After judging these ways researchers have shown three ways of effective vocabulary development (Mezynski, 1983; Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986): (a) wide reading, (b) direct instruction, (c) building an interest in words. Wide and independent reading is also important to develop the vocabulary of the learners because through this they come into contact of new vocabularies. Words like serenity, contaminate, stabilize, phenomenon, and anxiety are "necessary to make critical distinctions in the physical and social world in which we live" (Stanovich, 1992) and which help learners to develop sensitivity to the subtleties in language and thought (Olson, 1986). This paper aims at examining whether reading English comprehension helps to develop vocabulary knowledge of the EFL learners in EFL classroom. To find out how reading English comprehension help to develop vocabulary of the EFL learners two things are checked: 1) whether the learners are trying to understand the meaning of the word at the time of reading comprehension, and 2) after knowing the meaning of the words whether there is any change in understanding the comprehension passage. The data was collected through mcq tests and twenty participants were selected from a second semester EFL classroom of a private university. The collected data reveals that reading comprehension is an effective way for lexical development. This research also reveals the importance of regular reading for the progress of word stocks.

Contribution/ Originality: The paper's primary contribution is finding a way that will help to teach in an EFL classroom as most of the learners are eager to develop their vocabulary, in other words, English language skill. Reading is one of the components which is very useful to increase word stock, and in this writing, it is identified that reading comprehension could be helpful for the word development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary development by reading comprehension is always a significant issue and various researchers have given emphasis on this. It has become vital part for English language learning, but interestingly, it is too often ignored. There is always an interconnection between vocabulary and reading text and it is undeniable. A learner in an EFL classroom has different levels of word knowledge. And it is important to build word-rich environments in which to immerse learners and teach and model good word learning strategies. It is proved that having learners

look up words in dictionaries and write definitions are not very effective to increase word stock. We are knowledgeable enough to be able to give some recommendations and it is clear to us that which words are needed for reading, for communicating orally and in written format. It is revealed from various study that spelling is an essential tool for writing, it plays key role in learner's vocabulary expansion, developing reading comprehension ability, and increase reading rate and fluency (Perfetti, 1985; Templeton and Bear, 1992).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Various Ways of Vocabulary Development

There are a lot of ways to develop vocabulary. After judging these ways researchers have shown three ways of effective vocabulary development (Mezynski, 1983; Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986): (a) Wide reading, (b) Direct instruction, (c) Building an interest in words. The components stated above are related with the words and concepts and it will be very effective to understand the internal relationship between these. Concept is related with the psychology and this is one of the units of thought and belief and words are media to express the thought and belief of a person. For this reason it will be very effective in an EFL classroom to teach them through concepts which are familiar to them. Through this process it will be very easy for them to understand the word and they can easily retain this in memory and they will be able to use the new words effectively.

To teach vocabulary to the EFL learners following steps can be followed:

(a) **Presenting new concept with the help of familiar words:** For example, the word 'right' means 'correct' but it also means 'suitability of something'.

(b) **Presenting new words with the help of familiar concept:** For example, the unknown word 'pleasant' is related with the concept of 'nice'.

(c) **Explaining the main concept of the familiar words:** For example, the 'goat' refers not only the domestic animal, but it can also refer to a class of wild animal also. In fact, researchers have pointed out that words can be understood 'superficially' or 'deeply', when a word is understood 'superficially', the original concept is not elaborated and there are few connections with other related concepts, in contrast, 'deep' knowledge is opulently expanded and connected with many other concepts (Graves, 1994).

2.2. Various Ways of Reading Independently

The importance of wide reading in the growth of learners' vocabulary is well recognized (Nagy and Anderson, 1984; Nagy, 1988). According to Scott and Nagy (1994): ". . . to promote the goal of vocabulary development, independent reading should be encouraged as a regular task." In fact, wide and independent reading is important to develop vocabulary of the learners because through this they come into contact of new vocabularies. Words like serenity, contaminate, stabilize, phenomenon, and anxiety are "necessary to make critical distinctions in the physical and social world in which we live" (Stanovich, 1992) and which assistance the learners to improve sensitivity to the delicacies in language and thought (Olson, 1986). Wide reading is absolutely essential for vocabulary development of most learners (Zechmeister *et al.*, 1995; Chaffin, 1997). So in a word, it is clear that if there is opportunity for the learners to read independently, they can develop or learn many new words. Most of the time it is found that the learners fail to develop any kind of learning strategies and for this reason in an EFL classroom, it is important to present a model of independent learning strategies, so they can understand the importance of reading independently.

To become an independent learner of words few steps are mentioned below:

- (a) Understanding the structure of the words.
- (b) Understanding the clues that are given in the text.
- (c) Effective use of the dictionary.
- (d) Development of contextual knowledge.

(a) Understanding the structure of the words (Knowledge about Morphology): Researchers have advised that learner's ability to understand the meaning of unfamiliar or unknown words while reading draws significantly on their understanding of the structural aspects of words (Scott and Nagy, 1994). Every individual words have their own meaning, i.e. comfort and dishonor, but they can also be a part of those words which do not have any particular kinds of meaning, i.e. prefixes (un-, re-, dis-) or suffixes (-ful, -ness). To the learners this morphological understanding is critical when they encounter less frequent words in their reading. From the observation of Aronoff (1994) it becomes clear that those learners who have good command of morphology they will face fewer problems in their reading. According to Aronoff (1994) "most new words encountered in reading are morphological outcomes of known words. Readers who have good command of morphology, will be able to understand these words without giving much effort, especially at the time of writing".

Learners can start their learning of morphemic elements with suffixes, prefixes and main words, later, frequently occurring Greek and Latin word roots can be reconnoitered (Templeton, 1989; Nagy *et al.*, 1993). For example, Arch ('chief, as in archaic), Calor ('heat' as in calorie), Anti ('old' as in antique). Most of the specific content areas of vocabulary are composed by Greek and Latin elements, for this reason knowledge of the most commonly occurring examples will help the learners to learn new concepts and words. Some instruction of understanding the root function of the word are given below which will be executed by the language instructor: The language instructor will write two words, i.e. Auditory and Auditorium on the board and mark the common words (the letter a-u-d-i). Then the word 'audi' will be explained as root word and like a base word, this root word has meaning and affects the sense of the word that it's in. Latin word Audi means hear, the meaning of Auditory and Auditorium are discussed in terms how they are related with the meaning of the root word. (Auditory means hearing and Auditorium means a place where people sit to hear).

(b) Understanding the clues that are given in the text: Language instructors always play a vital role in teaching new words with clues in an EFL classroom. For example, a comprehension on Bronte (1847) can be provided in the classroom and after it is read by the learners the language instructor will read the following line of the provided comprehension passage again: "If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it." (p.72).

The instructor will analyze the concepts of the unfamiliar or unknown words, such as perished, annihilated, stranger etc. After understanding the proper meaning of the unknown words learners will try to relate with the lines and try to understand the statement which it wants to express. At the same time it is important that the learners will understand the limitation of the new words.

(c) Effective use of the dictionary: For the development of vocabulary, it is important to know proper usage of dictionary. Dictionary entry is an important and effective component of understanding a new word. Templeton and Bear (1992) has shown a good example of using a dictionary effectively. The example is based on Robyn Montana Turner's *Biography of Faith Ringgold*. Instructor can create a situation where it is necessary to use dictionary to find out the meaning of the word. The instructor will give the instruction focusing on the enhancement of the sentence, "Faith Ringgold took decision to use cloth frames as a technique of enhancement of her art. When thinking about the text the word may narrow the possibilities of finding the exact meaning - but possible meanings will come out, for example, "observing" or "viewing." Morphemic examination may help in classifying the prefix and suffix, after doing this level of investigation. This is certainly a condition in which the dictionary would be needed. The instructor would highlight the word 'enhancement' that to check the meaning in the dictionary, learners would required to check the base word, enhance, noting that the 'ment' is added. By this it will be shown that learners may need to be careful to point out the changes in spelling when they will check the base or main word for an unacquainted word. Looking up a root word will also show the learners how to spell other formats of the word. The Oxford dictionary definition is "intensify, increase, or further improve the quality, value,

or extent of." The instructor will analyze the word in relation with text and discuss which is suitable within the text and what is functioning in Faith Ringgold's mind when she took decision to use cloth borders. Now, after analyzing whole situation it is clear that Ringgold possibly wanted to make her quilts more beautiful and attractive.

(d) Development of contextual knowledge: An important way to learn new words by independent reading is developing contextual knowledge. It is very important for the learners to identify the words which are valuable for understanding the text, when they will find an unfamiliar word, if it established that the word is not important to understand the text, then they can follow these steps:

- (a) Search for contextual clues
- (b) Identify the base or roots of the word
- (c) Find out the suffixes or prefixes of the word
- (d) Try to recollect similar kind of words which will help to remind present word.
- (e) Try to utter the word
- (f) Take reference from the dictionary

2.3. Strategies to Motivate the Learners for Reading

To motivate the learners for reading is setting a goal for them. It is important to develop group learning goals for the entire class, and allow individuals to set some personal goals as well. Simplification of the curriculum is important and it should be relevant to learners' goals. Usage of skill-specific tasks and assignments to address one learning point at a time is essential. Tracking the students' progress, motivating them by pointing out positive achievements is also necessary. The instructor should use visual aids in instructions. Working only out of a model or text can be tedious and discouraging for learners, so mixing some lively teaching tactics can be useful. They should use slides, drawings, videos, flash cards or other items to help learners visualize concepts and also should consider other approaches such as labeling items in the classroom to further cement vocabulary comprehension.

Usage of small rewards were as positive reinforcement or for learning advancements and good behavior. Giving out little treats to learners who earn high scores on their homework and tests or provide a modest prize for the winners of group games. The instructor can create an opportunity for the learners to watch a popular movie or TV show in English at the end of productive lessons.

2.4. Some Process of Becoming Skillful Reader

There are mainly three ways of becoming a skillful reader:

(a) Having background knowledge of the topic and particular words: A skillful reader always tries to relate their background knowledge with the new words to find out the meaning. For example, while reading a text about tiger they try to gather information about it, such as types of fish, place they live and their characteristics. And it is proved that making an association with the text information helps them understand the text. Readers who struggle at the time of reading to connect new words with old ones. And this isolates the readers from the text and causes increased difficulty.

(b) Ability to make inference: The use of background knowledge assists readers to fill in the gaps between old and new information. Struggling readers have no idea what to do when they find a new word because their critical thought does not include in their reading process. They either keep reading without knowing the meaning of the written piece, or take a break in reading when they think they cannot understand any further.

(c) Possession of rich experience: A skillful reader has a rich vocabulary knowledge; struggling readers have less experience and they fail to connect their vocabulary knowledge with reading and understanding. For example, if readers have a variety of experience of trees, it is less complicated for them to categorize trees, understand their characteristics, and learn new vocabulary related to trees. However, struggling readers who have less experience

about trees may have a hard time to understand the content and making inferences from unfamiliar information in texts.

2.5. Some Basic Approaches to Teach Vocabulary to EFL Learners

Learning vocabulary is not an easy process for EFL learners, it takes time to remember the words that are learned. It is supported by the experts that a person has to use a new word at least fifty or sixty times before he can use it properly in a sentence. Generally EFL learners have limited exposure to English-speaking community and culture. Some basic approaches that can be followed by EFL learners to develop vocabulary are given below:

(a) Activating pre-knowledge of the words: Before starting vocabulary lesson in an EFL classroom, instructor should use the picture of the words that will appear in the lesson. The instructor will share the idea of the picture with the learners, so that they can understand the concept of the word properly. By this process the EFL learners will be able to use the word properly in a sentence.

(b) Arrange the words categorically: After going through the lessons, the instructor will help the learners to put the related words into different categories. For example, if the lesson is about playing cricket, the learners will look at the picture of cricket team playing in the field. The instructor will guide the learners by pointing to various players by saying that they are all playing positions such as batsman, wicketkeeper, fielder etc., then the instructor may point to players batting and bowling, pointing that these are activities of the game.

(c) Searching for new words: The instructor will read the lesson to the students and the learner will repeat the lesson after the instructor. Finally the instructor will ask the students to search for new words.

(d) Guessing the meaning of the new words: After the learners have found the new words, they will be asked to find the meaning of the new words from the context of sentences or from the context of the whole passage.

(e) Explaining words through examples: Now the instructor will explain the meaning of the words which the learners will fail to understand. For example, giant tortoise means the tortoise which is not small in size.

(f) Making various activities based on the new words: The instructor may ask question based on the new words. After this the learners may ask question to each other using new words.

(g) Learning vocabulary by dictation: Here, in this activity the instructor will dictate the paragraph which has new words in the lesson. If the learners can spell and write the words correctly then it will become clear that they have learnt the words properly.

(h) Lots of practice in using English: An EFL learner have to practice using English, they have to find out the opportunity to practice reading and writing in English to develop their vocabulary.

(i) Exposure to English culture and community: It is very difficult to learn English words but it is often found that most of the EFL learners try to memorize the rules of the English grammar; at the same time they try to memorize vocabulary also. But they have to come out of the process, they should find out the opportunity to experience the English culture and community.

(j) Motivating to learn English: By developing group learning goals for the entire class and allowing individuals to set some personal goals, learners can be motivated. Skill-specific exercises and homework assignments are very important tools to motivate learners to learn English.

3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

To find out how reading English comprehension help to develop vocabulary of the EFL learners two things are checked: 1) whether the learners are trying to understand the meaning of the word at the time of reading comprehension, and 2) after knowing the meaning of the words whether there is any change in understanding the comprehension passage. The main assessment tool used for this study was reading comprehension based mcq test. The reading comprehension test consisted of seven selected questions. Answer sheets were provided for giving the answer. The test was taken into two parts. 20 minutes time was given for each part of tests. In the first part of the

test, words were not analyzed but in the second part of the test some ideas were given about the words. There was also an option for keeping blanks for answer on the answer sheet if they are very much confused about the answer.

3.1. Participants

For this study, twenty participants were selected from an EFL classroom of a private university who were in second semester at that time. They were selected randomly.

4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The result of the two tests are given below:

Test 1: Result and Data Analysis-

Table-1. Results of test

Question	Correct	Incorrect	Not Answered
1.	55%	45%	0%
2.	45%	35%	20%
3.	25%	35%	40%
4.	60%	40%	0%
5.	80%	20%	0%
6.	60%	15%	25%
7.	72%	20%	08%

Source: Participants of the test.

From the result it is clear that though participants have given many correct answers, they have also given many incorrect answers. About some questions they are confused so they do not give any answer of those questions. No. 1 question is correctly answered by 55% of the participants, 45% of them have given incorrect answer. Everybody has answered the questions. In no. 2, 45% have given correct answer, where as 35% have given incorrect answer and 20% have not given any answer. Highest number of correct answer 80% is given for question no. 5 and incorrect answer for this question is 20%. Second highest correct answer is given for no. 7. Here 72% is correct answer, 20% is incorrect answer and 08% did not answer. For no. 4 & 6, 60% were correct answer, 40% and 15% were incorrect and no answers respectively. For no. 6 25%, and for no. 4 it is 0% respondents did not answer.

Test 2: Results and Data Analysis -

Table-2. Results of test

Question	Correct	Incorrect	Not Answered
1.	75%	25%	0%
2.	60%	40%	0%
3.	40%	60%	0%
4.	85%	15%	0%
5.	100%	0%	0%
6.	81%	19%	0%
7.	90%	10%	0%

Source: Participants of the test.

In test 2, it is found that participants have developed much in comparison for test 1. Everybody has tried to give answer of every question. 75% of participants have given correct answer to no. 1 question, 25% have given incorrect answer, where as it was 55% and 45% respectively in test 1. 100% correct answer is given for no. 5. Second highest number of correct answer is given for no. 7, 90%, where as it was only 72% in test 1, only 10% incorrect answer is given of this question. 85% correct answer is given for no. 4 question, 15% is incorrect.

So it is clear from the result that the participants have developed their condition in test 2. Because when they start test 2, they have some knowledge about the critical words of the comprehension. So they have tried to answer every question and they have given answer correctly. In test 1 these participants have no idea about the comprehension and its words, so they fail to give answer correctly. But when some ideas about the words are given,

results have changed. This means that they are improving gradually. Their vocabulary skill has developed so the answer is given correctly.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As the participants were selected randomly, their levels were not tested. It was an open session and those people were encouraged to take part who thought they had problems with vocabulary. So, results may vary in a controlled environment.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed at examining whether reading comprehension helps develop vocabulary of the EFL learners. From the test results it can be said that learners can improve their vocabulary gradually through reading comprehension. To develop vocabulary skill we have to keep in mind that it is a process of elaborating and expanding the hidden meaning of the word. When learners read, write, and explore words that works as the fundamental process of vocabulary development throughout the rest of their lives (Blachowicz and Fisher, 1994). Wide reading plays a significant role in developing vocabulary, and the instructor facilitates this process by teaching strategies for learning words independently. Instructors should also directly teach important specific words, and they should develop and sustain learners' interest and curiosity about words.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Aronoff, M., 1994. Morphology. *Encyclopedia of English Studies and Language Arts*, 2(1): 820-821.
- Blachowicz, C.L.Z. and P.J.L. Fisher, 1994. Vocabulary instruction. *Encyclopedia of English Studies and Language Arts*, 2(1): 1244-1246.
- Bronte, E., 1847. *Wuthering heights*. USA: Lerner Publishers.
- Chaffin, R., 1997. Associations to unfamiliar words: Learning the meanings of new words. *Memory & Cognition*, 25(2): 203-226. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3758/bf03201113>.
- Graves, M.F., 1994. Vocabulary knowledge. *Encyclopedia of English Studies and Language Arts*, 2(1): 563-566.
- Mezynski, K., 1983. Issues concerning the acquisition of knowledge: Effects of vocabulary training on reading comprehension. *Review of Educational Research*, 53(2): 253-279. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543053002253>.
- Nagy, W.E., 1988. *Teaching vocabulary to improve reading comprehension*. Urbana, IL: International Reading Association, Newark, DE and National Council of Teachers of English.
- Nagy, W.E. and R.C. Anderson, 1984. How many words are there in printed school English?. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 19(3): 304-330. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/747823>.
- Nagy, W.E., I.-A.N. Diakidoy and R.C. Anderson, 1993. The acquisition of morphology: Learning the contribution of suffixes to the meanings of derivatives. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 25(2): 155-170. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10862969309547808>.
- Olson, D., 1986. *Intelligence and literacy: The relationships between intelligence and the technologies of representation and communication*. Practical intelligence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Perfetti, C., 1985. *Reading ability*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Scott, J.A. and W.E. Nagy, 1994. Vocabulary development. *Encyclopedia of English Studies and Language Arts*, 2(1): 318-322.
- Stahl, S.A. and M.M. Fairbanks, 1986. The effects of vocabulary instruction: A model-based meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 56(1): 72-110. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543056001072>.

- Stanovich, K., 1992. Are we overselling literacy? In C. Temple & P. Collins (Eds.), *Stories and Readers: New Perspectives on Literature in the Elementary Classroom*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon. pp: 209-231.
- Templeton, S., 1989. Tacit and explicit knowledge of derivational morphology: Foundations for a unified approach to spelling and vocabulary development in the intermediate grades and beyond. *Reading Psychology: An International Quarterly*, 10(3): 233-253. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0270271890100303>.
- Templeton, S. and D.R. Bear, 1992. *Development of orthographic knowledge and the foundations of literacy: A memorial festschrift for edmund henderson*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Zechmeister, E.B., A.M. Chronis, W.L. Cull, C.A. D'anna and N.A. Healy, 1995. Growth of a functionally important lexicon. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 27(2): 201-212. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10862969509547878>.

APPENDIX

Test Paper (Test - 1)

Name: Institution:.....

Read the comprehensions A & B and answer questions 1 to 7:

[N.B. – Keep the answer sheet blank if the answers are very much confused]

A. The development of the modern presidency in the United States began with Andrew Jackson who swept to power in 1829 at the head of the Democratic Party and served until 1837. During his administration he immeasurably enlarged the power of the presidency. “The President is the direct representative of the American people,” he lectured the Senate when it opposed him. “He was elected by the people, and is responsible to them.” With this declaration, Jackson redefined the character of the presidential office and its relationship to the people.

1. The word ‘immeasurably’ in the passage is closest in meaning to -

- (a) frequently
- (b) greatly
- (c) rapidly
- (d) reportedly

2. Democratic means -

3. Declaration means -

B. Whigs and Democrats differed not only in their attitudes toward the market but also about how active the central government should be in people’s lives. Despite Andrew Jackson’s inclination to be a strong President, Democrats as a rule believed in limited government. Government’s role in the economy was to promote competition by destroying monopolies¹ and special privileges. In keeping with this philosophy of limited government, Democrats also rejected the idea that moral beliefs were the proper sphere of government action. Religion and politics, they believed, should be kept clearly separate, and they generally opposed humanitarian legislation.

4. The word ‘inclination’ in the passage is closest in meaning to -

- (a) argument
- (b) tendency
- (c) example
- (d) warning

5. Strong means -

6. Legislation means -

7. Promote means –

[Source: Practice Test- 1, *The Official Guide to the TOEFL IBT* (3rd edition)]

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.