

THE ROLE OF VOCABULARY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION LEVEL

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Abstract

Vocabulary is one of the basic units of any language. No language can be taught effectively without its vocabulary. So, vocabulary is the soul of language or we can say it is the heart of language. As in human body heart supplies the blood to whole of the body in the same way vocabulary provides important elements for the comprehension of global understanding through the languages. A learner or a teacher should have a wide range of vocabulary command for easy communication. It is difficult to communicate ideas without a good range of vocabulary. Every language has vocabularies. Without vocabularies we cannot produce any language of the world. Now-a-day, English is the commanding and main communication language of the world. In this competitive world using the English language means the difference between success and failure of the learners' level. So vocabulary is designed for the candidates who plan to sit for any competitive examination like Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Masters of Business Administration (MBA) etc. admission test and what not. Vocabulary is a body of the sentence that governs the language. One must know it in order to speak or write sentences correctly. The present article is to investigate and analyze how the vocabulary can help the learners improve the language as well as to comprehend listening and reading texts and also to express views, ideas and feelings while speaking and writing sentences correctly in real life situation at the higher secondary level education in Bangladesh. Thus, the present study also attempted to elicit information through students' comment based on individual learning experience, and further examine the correlations between teachers' beliefs, their teaching practices and ultimate benefit of the students.

Keywords: Tremendous, enthusiastic, perspective, convenience, vulnerability, obstacle

Introduction

English is a foreign language in our country. In many cases, it is the official language. Since the British rule, English has been deeply rooted in our country. Moreover, it is an international language. It has high prestige and is treated with tremendous importance. English has got an

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important role in our education. As the examination system is fully based on writing skills, students hardly use it in speaking. Most of the time, students memorize various grammatical rules and word meanings without any context (Shillaw, 1995). As a result, they cannot master the language even after the completion of 15 years of their academic study. Traditionally, the teaching of vocabulary above elementary levels is mostly incidental, limited to presenting new items as they appeared in reading, or sometimes listening texts (Salt, 1976). This indirect teaching of vocabulary assumes that vocabulary expansion will happen through the practice of other language skills (Milton and Meara, 1995). Keeping this point in view, in this study, we would attempt to find out the reasons behind the student's incapability of using correct vocabulary. It is a very important issue to find out the reasons before we want to proceed for a remedy. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been introduced in Bangladesh in the 1990s. The aim of this approach is to develop learner's communication skills. Vocabulary plays the most crucial role in any language at the higher secondary education level in Bangladesh. However, after introducing CLT in Bangladesh, more than a decade had passed. Most of the students of our country fail to communicate in English even after passing H.S.C. level. Even most of the students fail in university admission test in English. Some of the students have to do various courses in coaching centers. What are the reasons behind their failure? Are they only responsible for it? We have tried our best to find out the role of learning and teaching vocabulary in learning the English language. Teaching method and learning method also play an important role here. At present, English has achieved the prestige of being international language. Around the globe many consider it as a global language. As Bangladesh is a monolingual country, the people learn English in order to speak with the people of other countries, to do business, diplomatic jobs, and for higher studies. So English is introduced as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum. English is compulsory from playgroup to graduate level. The students of our country have no option but to study English as a subject for examination. But, it is a matter of great sorrow that most of the students of our country are unable to use the English language efficiently in different circumstances. As a result, a teacher who is not motivated or is negative about the method of teaching and learning vocabulary is unlikely to inspire learners to work hard in the class and take initiative outside of the class. On the other hand, a teacher who is enthusiastic and who shows a positive attitude both towards the method and the learners, is more likely to get engaged the learners who are therefore more likely to succeed both inside and outside the class (Nunan, 1991). So English teachers' perception and attitude towards vocabulary teaching and learners' perception of learning vocabulary are vital factors to make the language learning process a success.

Broadly defined, vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. However, vocabulary is more complex than this definition suggests. There is a distinction between *vocabulary* and *lexis*, which includes not only the single words but also the word combinations that we store in our mental lexicons (Lewis, 1993). First, words come in two forms: oral and print. Oral vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in listening and speaking. Print vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in reading and writing (Parry, 1991). Second, word knowledge also comes in two forms:

receptive and productive. Receptive vocabulary includes words that we recognize when we hear or see them. Productive vocabulary includes words that we use when we speak or write. Receptive vocabulary is typically larger than productive vocabulary, and may include many words to which we assign some meaning, even if we do not know their full definitions and connotations or ever use them ourselves as we speak and write (Goulden et al., 1990). Adding further complexity, in education, the word vocabulary is used with varying meanings. For example, for beginning reading of teachers, the word might be synonymous with “sight vocabulary”, by which they mean a set of the most common words in English that young students need to be able to recognize quickly as they see them in print. However, for teachers of upper elementary and secondary school students, vocabulary usually means the “hard” words that students encounter in content area textbook and literature selections (Ney, 1996). Even words that are similar in form but different in meaning are difficult to learn though the speaker is aware (Abberton, 1968). For purposes of this research, we define vocabulary as knowledge of words and word meanings in both oral and print language and in productive and receptive forms.

Learning vocabulary is a complex process. The students’ aim in learning vocabulary process is primarily their ability to recall the word at will and to recognize it in its spoken and written form (Goulden and Read, 1990). Generally, knowing a word involves knowing its form and its meaning at the basic level. In deeper aspects, it means the abilities to know its (Harmer, 1993): i) Its meaning, i.e. to relate the word to an appropriate object or context; and using mnemonics; ii) Usage, i.e. knowledge of its collocations, metaphors and idioms, as well as style and register (the appropriate level of formality), to be aware of any connotations and associations the word might have; iii) Word formation, i.e. ability to spell and pronounce the word correctly, to know any derivations (acceptable prefixes and suffixes); iv) Grammar, i.e. to use it in the appropriate grammatical form;

Materials and Methods

The research of the paper deals with the research methodology adopted in order to conduct the research. Not only qualitative but also quantitative research was used for finding answers. We interviewed 20 college students and teachers from urban and rural areas. There were eight interview questions, which guided me to bring teachers and students perception towards vocabulary teaching and learning. The use of these qualitative and quantitative methods helped me to get a clear perspective into the issue.

Data collection

As the research has to be conducted with the English teachers from different colleges, I decided to collect data from the English teachers of urban and rural areas. Firstly, I selected a renowned district in Bangladesh where I found more than twelve high schools. Among the twelve schools, I decided to talk with the English teachers of the eight colleges and one madrasa. I was lucky to get a Kamil madrasa in that district. To collect data, I had to go there

five times. In my first visit, I had to select colleges in my convenience and got in touch with the principals of each college and told them about my purpose of visit. As I was from Dhaka and from North South University, they all cordially accepted my request. I requested the headmaster to select the English teachers who are going to face my interview. No doubt that all the teachers including the headmaster were excited and most of the English teachers agreed to face the interview. It should be mentioned that I along with some of my friends who are very much familiar figures in that district visited the colleges which helped me a lot to take the interview of the English teachers. However, during my second visit, I started conducting the interviews. I conducted with four teachers from two different colleges in the same district and among four, two were female and two were male. As soon as I reached the two colleges, both the principals cordially received me and my friends and called on the English teachers who were teaching the classroom. We waited till the class was over. After that, the principal took me away to a room, which was free from noise and asked me to take the interview of an English teacher. In the meantime I was introduced to that English teacher. We entered the room and asked the teacher my interview questions while one of my friends was busy videotaping the whole interview session, and took photograph with his permission. During my third visit, I also interviewed four other teachers. On my fourth visit to that district, I completed collecting data from twelve English teachers and two Madrasa English teachers.

Results and Discussion

Examining students' and teachers' perception: At first through perception survey analysis we tried to know their present perception status towards teaching and learning vocabularies.

Teacher's perception

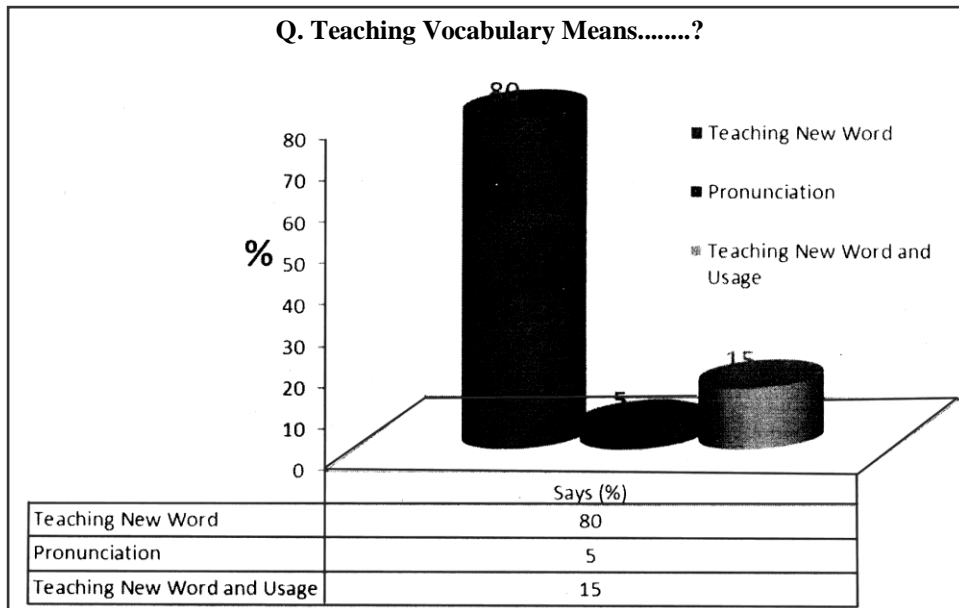


Fig. 1. Teachers' perception about the meaning of vocabulary.

The first analysis is that most of the teachers think teaching vocabulary mean teaching only the meaning of new words and then the others think the meaning and usage, whereas rest of them think pronunciation as well (Fig. 1). The very basic part of vocabulary learning means learning their meaning but in-depth meaning of vocabulary teaching is not well-known to teachers, which is disappointing.

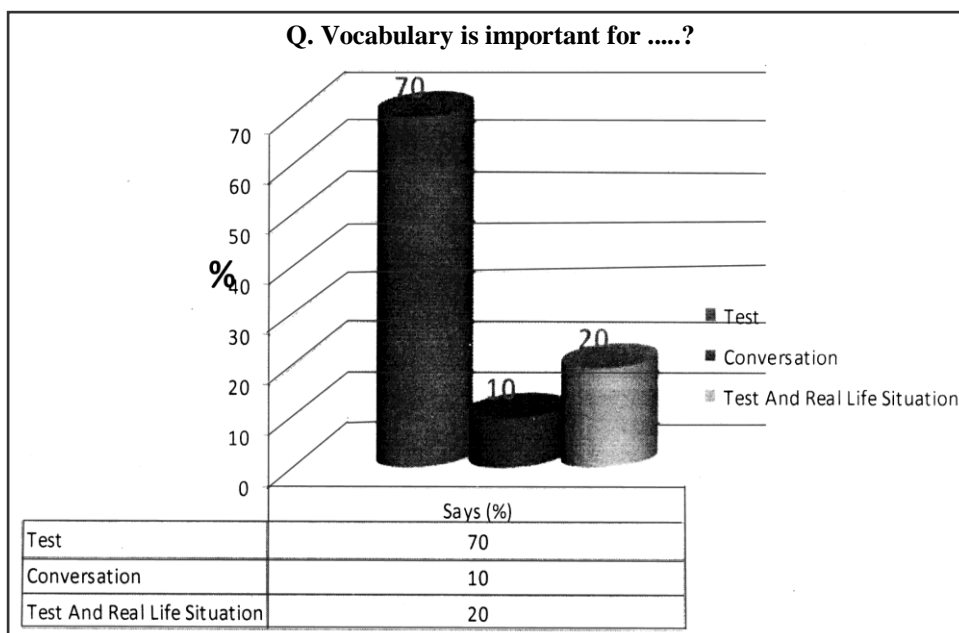


Fig. 2. Teachers' perception about the importance of vocabulary.

The teachers think vocabulary is very important for test (Fig. 2). It is because of language being almost the sole instrument of understanding and expressing things out, any test requires a grand coverage of vocabulary range spanning from acutely individual up to political issues. The greater the range, the more will the student feel relaxed going through the test. It is experimentally reached to the confirmation of the fact from both on the teachers' as well as students' side. It is an undeniable truth that students often experience difficulties solving a particular problem only due to ignorance as to one or even two words, which affects the whole grading point. As for conversation, the necessity of good understanding in vocabulary is a must. But our daily necessities could easily be served with the very resources we normally have, accepting frequent structural collapse; though in that case good communication cannot reach considerable acceptance. If we intermix test and real life situation, the need for important level of vocabulary rises higher. For both require a considerable level of understanding. Students and teachers alike fall prey to lower performance.

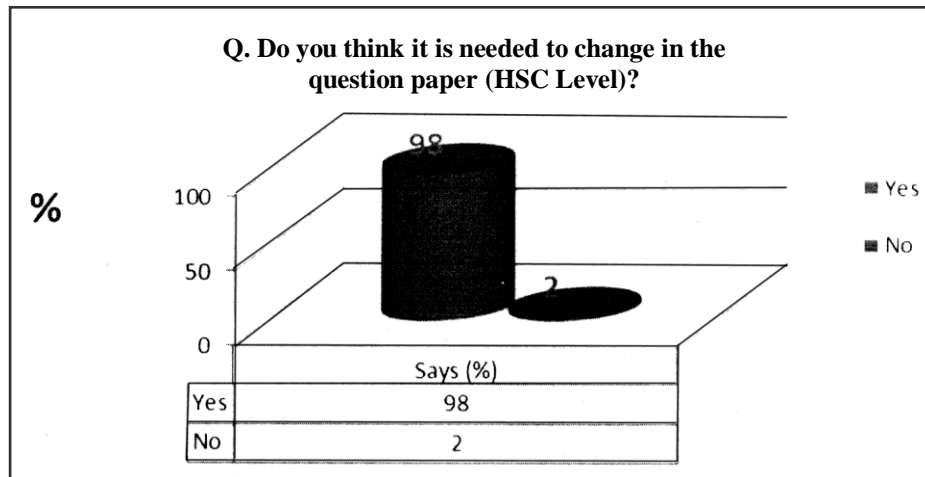


Fig. 3. Teachers' perception about the question paper of HSC level.

Most of the teachers think that NCTB should bring change in question paper, which is very significant for standard test and evaluation of students' skill in English (Fig. 3). The purpose in which NCTB brought out the publication i.e. communication skill, is proving valueless. Not only the question patterns but the texts incorporated are not practical enough to meet the targeted goal of the concerned authority. A great lack in diverse form of questions is fairly evident thorough out the book. Regarding total negation in this case is almost possible; unless economic status and those of time consuming issues are brought into account.

Student's perception

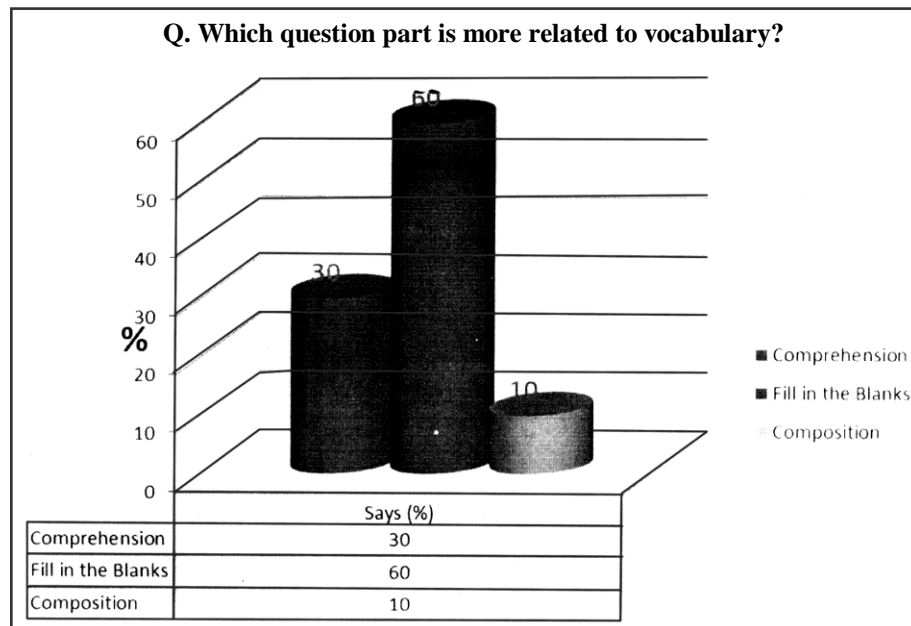


Fig. 4. Students' perception about vocabulary.

The comprehension accumulates a lot of unfamiliar vocabularies which give rise to problem while solving; but students could overcome that when supported by other familiar resource (Fig. 4). So the possible level of difficulty is not up to the mark. Yet some items are obviously intricate to go thorough. While comprehension is fairly solvable with a shortage of coverage, filling in the blanks requires knowing every single word.

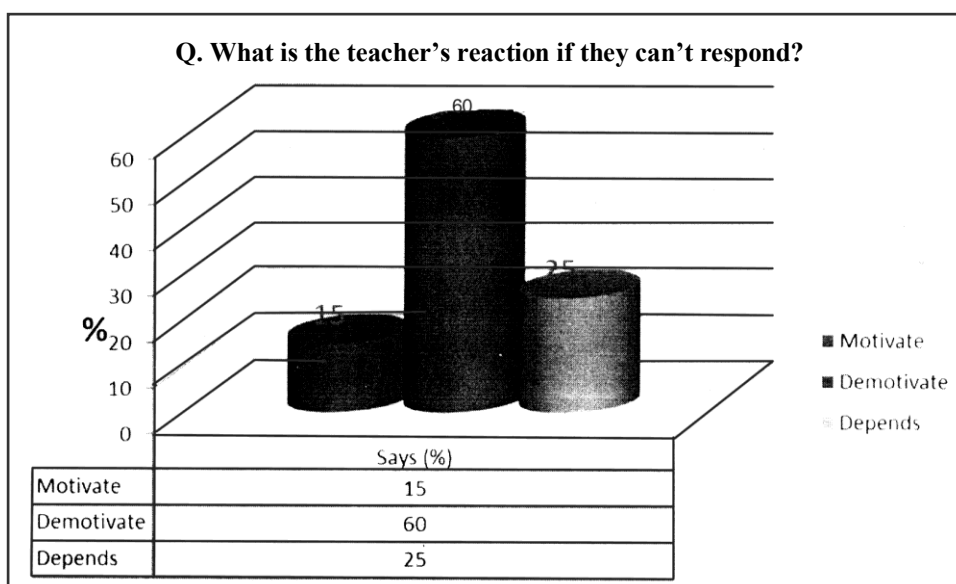


Fig. 5. Teachers' perception about students' response.

The motivation is very important in second language acquisition. Our survey shows most of the students feel afraid to interact with their teachers in case they should encounter any discouraging remarks from their teachers' side (Fig. 5). This scenario reflects a greater vulnerability and a concrete obstacle in second language learning process. Most of the students of Bangladesh study and learn only for getting good marks. Their power of active vocabulary is not praiseworthy at all. The resource whatever they have is very passive. Though it varies from institute to institute and in some respect of area, the students of English version have better, and Bangla version students of metropolitan areas have satisfactory skill in vocabulary and their usage. On the other hand, academies of rural area and Madrasa students have very poor level skill in vocabulary. Even after knowing the words and its meaning they can't use it properly and correctly. Most of them read from commercial guidebook and they do not have any other extra book even someone does not have a dictionary. They think solving the model question in the only solution. Fifty percent of them practice model test to get any one of the common in exam.

Most of them cannot speak English very well. But it does not bother them. Even they do not know the main purpose of the new syllabus which is meant to make them skilled in communication. They are not aware that their shortage of vocabulary will be a dire problem in university admission test. Students are also relevant regarding their text book

because the work and exercise of textbook does not match with the questions. Since the aim is to get good marks and there is no use of practice irrelevant exercise, they avoid the book. They prefer the exercise book on some lessons of their text book.

Conclusion

Vocabulary holds such an important place in teaching or learning a language as some people think that mastering the vocabulary of a language means mastering that vocabulary which is one of the most important aspects of foreign language learning. Though it is not true, we cannot deny the fact that to learn a language, vocabulary is a must because all languages make use of words. Every learner of a language is supposed to learn at least, some vocabularies of that language. English is the richest language of the world. The numbers of words recorded in the oxford English dictionary are near about half a million. The question arises whether a single man is supposed to learn all these words if he wants to learn this language and whether it is possible for a person to learn all these words. It is neither possible nor desirable even to know all these words of a language. A learner is only supposed to have a working knowledge of the vocabulary. The writers' panel also suggests that: i) teachers must be well prepared before conducting the class; ii) supply teaching aids appropriate for vocabulary teaching and learning; iii) English examination system should evaluate a student's ability to implement vocabulary in writing; iv) the environment of the classroom must be in favor of CLT; v) creating motivation among the students; vi) arranging extra classes for vocabulary discussions; vii) government should take long term policy for the implementation of vocabulary teaching and learning for all education level.

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