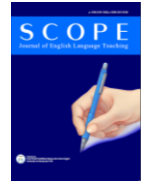




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Research Article

Developing Students' Vocabulary by Using Build-A-Sentence: Teachers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition is crucial for students' academic success, yet many students struggle to expand their word knowledge, which negatively impacts literacy skills. To address this challenge, the Build-A-Sentence instructional technique encourages students to create unique, grammatically accurate sentences using new vocabulary words. This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with ten literacy teachers from SDIT Nurul Ilmi and SMPIT Nurul Ilmi Schools to explore their perspectives on implementing this technique. Using inductive thematic analysis, researchers systematically coded and categorized interview data to identify emerging themes and insights. The analysis revealed several key findings: teachers perceived the method as beneficial for fostering intrinsic motivation and student ownership of learning. The generative sentence construction process was viewed as promoting vocabulary retention through deeper cognitive processing. However, the study also uncovered challenges, including difficulties in managing high student error rates and providing sufficient individual feedback during writing assignments. Teachers recommended scaffolding the technique through modeled samples, templates, and targeted small group instruction to mitigate monitoring challenges. The research contributes valuable insights into the strengths, barriers, and best practices of implementing the Build-A-Sentence approach. By highlighting its potential to enhance vocabulary growth, the study offers guidance for developing more effective vocabulary teaching strategies essential for improving literacy and comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition remains a critical challenge in language education, with researchers and educators continuously seeking innovative strategies to enhance students' linguistic competence. Previous studies by Nation (2001) and Schmitt (2008) have consistently highlighted the importance of contextual and deliberate vocabulary learning approaches. The proposed research, "Developing

Students' Vocabulary by Using Build-A-Sentence: Teachers' Perspective," builds upon this foundational work by exploring an interactive pedagogical technique that encourages active student participation in language learning.

Drawing from theoretical frameworks in sociocultural learning theory and second language acquisition models, this study investigates the Build-A-Sentence method as a potential transformative approach to vocabulary

development. Empirical research by Ur (1996) and Ellis (1995) has demonstrated that sentence-level activities can significantly enhance lexical retention and linguistic understanding. However, existing literature reveals a notable gap in comprehensively examining teachers' perspectives on such interactive vocabulary instruction strategies.

The research aims to bridge this knowledge gap by centering educators' experiences and insights into the Build-A-Sentence technique. Grounded in constructive learning principles and informed by previous studies on task-based language teaching methodologies, the study seeks to provide nuanced understanding of how this innovative approach can be effectively implemented in educational settings. By exploring teachers' perceptions, challenges, and potential benefits, the research contributes to the broader discourse on student-centered vocabulary acquisition strategies.

Technological advancements and globalization have further emphasized the need for dynamic and engaging language learning methods. As highlighted by Warschauer and Meskill (2000) and Chapelle (2003), integrating interactive techniques can potentially revolutionize vocabulary instruction. This study therefore represents a critical investigation into an emerging pedagogical approach that promises to address the complex challenges of vocabulary development in contemporary educational environments. Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' views on implementing the Build-A-Sentence technique to enhance students' vocabulary. The research question guiding this inquiry is: What are teachers' perspectives on using the Build-A-Sentence strategy to develop students' vocabulary?

Students' Vocabulary

Students' vocabulary refers to the range of words and phrases that a student knows and understands. It includes both the words that students use in their everyday language and the academic vocabulary that they need to succeed in school. A strong vocabulary is essential for reading comprehension, writing, and communication skills. Students with a larger vocabulary are better able to understand and analyze complex texts, express themselves more clearly and effectively, and engage in critical thinking. Teachers can use various strategies, such as direct instruction, Frayer models, and explicit vocabulary instruction, to help students expand their vocabulary and improve their language skills.

Vocabulary knowledge is a key foundation for students' academic success and overall literacy development (Blachowicz et al., 2013). However, research consistently shows that many students struggle to acquire sufficient

vocabulary, negatively impacting reading comprehension and learning (Wright & Cervetti, 2017). This has motivated efforts to identify effective evidence-based vocabulary instruction approaches for the classroom.

Learning vocabulary serves as a fundamental pillar in the journey of mastering a foreign language. Thornbury (2002: 13), an esteemed linguist, underscores the critical role of vocabulary, stating that without it, the conveyance of even basic grammatical structures is severely limited. In essence, while grammar provides the framework of a language, vocabulary furnishes it with substance. Consequently, students' linguistic prowess is greatly enhanced when they possess an extensive repertoire of words and expressions.

Effective communication, both oral and written, hinges on the breadth and depth of one's vocabulary. This sentiment resonates with the communicative approach to language teaching, which emphasizes the active use of language in classroom activities. By engaging in meaningful interactions and practical exercises, students not only refine their linguistic skills but also expand their vocabulary essentially.

Central to vocabulary acquisition is the identification of high-frequency words, those commonly encountered in everyday conversations and academic discourse. These words, often termed "service vocabulary," form the foundation of language proficiency and are essential for effective communication in various contexts. Additionally, mastery of academic or technical terminology enhances comprehension and expression in specialized fields, such as science or literature.

The process of learning vocabulary entails more than mere memorization; it requires a nuanced understanding of word meanings and usage. Students must learn to discern subtle distinctions between closely related words and employ them appropriately in different contexts. Moreover, linguistic proficiency involves not only understanding words but also selecting the correct grammatical forms to convey intended meanings accurately.

Outside the realm of formal education, vocabulary plays a pivotal role in everyday communication, influencing interactions in personal, professional, and social spheres. Elihami et al. (2020) compare mastering vocabulary to achieving linguistic "Everest," highlighting how essential it is for efficient language use.

Indeed, vocabulary acquisition is an ongoing process that underpins language learning at all proficiency levels. In conclusion, the quality of one's language skills is intricately tied to the richness and precision of their vocabulary. A

robust vocabulary enables individuals to articulate their thoughts and ideas with clarity and precision, facilitating effective communication across diverse contexts. Thus, investing in vocabulary development is paramount for anyone seeking to achieve fluency and proficiency in a foreign language.

Kinds of Vocabulary

Thornbury (2002:) elaborates on the diverse categories of vocabulary, highlighting the nuances and significance of each type. Here's a more detailed breakdown:

1. **Word Classes:** These categories, also referred to as parts of speech, are foundational elements of grammar. They include nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions. While commonly associated with morphology and syntax, they form the basic building blocks of language structure. Understanding word classes is essential for grasping grammatical rules and constructing coherent sentences.
2. **Word Families:** This classification delves into the interconnectedness of words through common roots or affixes. Within the realm of morphology and syntax, word families explore how words are formed or modified through prefixes, suffixes, or infixes. By examining word families, learners can discern patterns in language and expand their vocabulary by recognizing related terms.
3. **Word Formation:** In English, words can be formed or modified in various ways, such as through compounding, derivation, or conversion. Compounding involves combining two or more words to create a new term (e.g., "blackboard," "houseboat"), while derivation adds affixes to alter the meaning or function of a word (e.g., "happy" to "happiness," "nation" to "national"). Conversion, on the other hand, changes the word class without affixation (e.g., "to butter" as a verb derived from the noun "butter").
4. **Multi-Word Units:** This category encompasses phrases or expressions that consist of multiple words but function as a single semantic unit. Phrasal verbs, for instance, combine verbs with prepositions or adverbs to convey specific meanings (e.g., "give up," "take off"). Idioms, on the other hand, are figurative expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from the individual words (e.g., "kick the bucket," "break the ice"). Mastering multi-word units is crucial for understanding idiomatic language and achieving fluency in communication.

By examining these distinct types of vocabulary, learners can gain a comprehensive understanding of language structure and usage. Each category offers valuable insights into the complexities of vocabulary acquisition, facilitating proficiency in both comprehension and expression.

Concept of Teaching Vocabulary

The importance of vocabulary in language learning cannot be overstated, as it serves as the cornerstone of effective communication. Without a robust vocabulary, learners encounter significant hurdles in expressing their thoughts and ideas to others. Essentially, vocabulary proficiency enables individuals to navigate linguistic landscapes, facilitating interaction and comprehension across various contexts.

Students' level of vocabulary knowledge is closely related to the quality of their language skills. According to Elihami et al. (2019), teaching is a complex process that includes mentoring students, giving assessments, disseminating information, and promoting comprehension.

This highlights the comprehensive role of educators in facilitating the language acquisition process, particularly in terms of vocabulary development. Braun (2006) proposes a repertoire of techniques for teaching vocabulary, each tailored to address specific learning objectives and enhance language proficiency. These techniques range from improving reading comprehension skills for ESL students to fostering word-building abilities and teaching strategies for deriving word meanings from contextual cues.

For instance, instructors may employ activities that involve analyzing affixes and word roots to expand students' vocabulary repertoire. Additionally, techniques such as deciphering definition and inference clues embedded within texts aid in enhancing comprehension and word retention. By utilizing a diverse array of instructional strategies, educators can effectively engage students, encouraging simultaneous exploration of word forms and meanings. In essence, the selection and implementation of appropriate teaching methodologies are pivotal in capturing students' interest and fostering a deeper understanding of vocabulary. Engaging instructional techniques not only stimulate learning but also empower students to navigate linguistic challenges with confidence and proficiency. Thus, educators play a crucial role in cultivating vocabulary acquisition skills, laying the foundation for linguistic competence and effective communication.

Concept of Learning Vocabulary

Learning is an active and dynamic process through which individuals acquire knowledge and skills through deliberate study and engagement. It involves a series of cognitive and behavioral activities aimed at gaining expertise and understanding. This process transforms in nature, as it involves assimilating new information and integrating it with existing knowledge and experiences. Through learning, individuals refine their perceptions,

expand their capabilities, and adapt their behavior to new challenges and contexts.

The process of learning encompasses various stages, including input, processing, and reflection. Input involves the acquisition of new information from various sources, such as teachers, textbooks, or firsthand experiences. Processing refers to the cognitive activities involved in making sense of this information, organizing it, and relating it to existing knowledge structures. Reflection involves critically evaluating one's learning experiences, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and actively seeking ways to enhance learning outcomes.

In the context of language learning, such as acquiring proficiency in English, mastering vocabulary is essential. Vocabulary serves as the building blocks of language, enabling individuals to comprehend and express ideas effectively. Understanding a wide range of words enhances reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and oral communication skills. Moreover, vocabulary acquisition is an ongoing process that requires regular practice and exposure to new words and contexts. While it may be unrealistic to learn every word in a language, learners can continually expand their vocabulary by actively engaging with language materials, such as reading books, listening to podcasts, or participating in language exchanges. By systematically learning new words and phrases, students can gradually enrich their vocabulary repertoire, improving their language proficiency and overall communication abilities.

Additionally, individuals with a diverse vocabulary are better equipped to express themselves clearly and persuasively in various social and professional settings. In summary, learning is a multifaceted process characterized by active engagement, cognitive processing, and reflection. In language learning, mastering vocabulary is crucial for effective communication and linguistic proficiency. By adopting a proactive approach to vocabulary acquisition and continuous learning, individuals can unlock new opportunities for personal and intellectual growth.

Problem in Learning Vocabulary

Developing a robust vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of English language acquisition. English, like any language, encompasses a vast lexicon comprising thousands of words, presenting a significant challenge for learners to master comprehensively. Even native speakers may not possess knowledge of the entire vocabulary due to its sheer breadth. Despite this, various sources indicate that around 800 words are essential for effective English conversation. However, this represents only a fraction of the language's lexicon.

To assess one's existing vocabulary knowledge, individuals can utilize resources such as vocabulary lists provided by platforms like the World English Club. This exercise can be enlightening, revealing the extent of one's familiarity with commonly used words. It may also highlight areas for improvement and further vocabulary acquisition. One common hurdle encountered by English language learners is the tendency to forget newly acquired vocabulary shortly after learning it. This phenomenon, known as "forgetting curve," underscores the importance of consistent review and practice in vocabulary retention.

In addition to individual challenges, teaching vocabulary poses its own set of complexities. Educators must navigate the task of selecting which words to prioritize for instruction, taking into account factors such as frequency of use and relevance to learners' needs and interests. However, recent research suggests that many teachers face difficulties in implementing effective vocabulary teaching practices. This challenge stems from a lack of consensus on best practices and a dearth of resources and training in vocabulary instruction methodologies.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that emphasizes not only vocabulary acquisition but also retention and effective teaching strategies. Educators and learners alike must engage in ongoing efforts to expand and reinforce vocabulary knowledge through targeted instruction, practice, and review. By doing so, individuals can enhance their language proficiency and communication skills, empowering them to navigate diverse linguistic contexts with confidence and competence.

Build-A-Sentence strategy

The Build-A-Sentence strategy has emerged as one promising technique to develop students' vocabulary. This approach involves guiding students to construct grammatically correct sentences using new vocabulary terms (Scott, 2008). Proponents argue that by contextualizing words in student-created sentences, it promotes active engagement and deep processing found to enhance word learning (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Specifically, needing to apply vocabulary to write meaningful sentences requires generative use and application rather than just passive exposure. The technique scaffolds this process by having teachers model sample sentences then shift responsibility to students constructing their own.

Several studies have examined the efficacy of using Build-A-Sentence for vocabulary growth in reading contexts. For example, Hall (2016) found second-grade students taught vocabulary through Build-A-Sentence showed significantly better word knowledge gains than those

learning words through dictionary definitions. Comparable reading comprehension benefits occurred as well. Similarly, Nash and Snowling (2006) reported the technique improved both vocabulary and reading comprehension versus just providing word exposure. The benefits occur across academic abilities and age levels (Joffe et al. 2007).

While quantitative studies suggest the promise of Build-A-Sentence for vocabulary development, minimal research has qualitatively investigated teacher perspectives on implementing the strategy. Understanding teacher views could provide critical insight into the approach's feasibility, fit within curricula, and potential modifications needed for effective classroom application (Dixon et al., 2012). Examining how teachers perceive using the technique can support its effective adoption. This study aims to help address this knowledge gap.

METHOD

Research Method

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive design to examine teachers' perspectives on using the Build-A-Sentence strategy for developing students' vocabulary. Qualitative description aligned to the research aims for an in-depth understanding grounded in participant experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). There are ten SDIT Nurul Ilmi and SMPIT Nurul Ilmi School teachers recruited using purposive sampling. They have at least two years' experiences teaching literacy or English/Language Arts subjects and have used the Build-A-Sentence technique for vocabulary instruction on multiple occasions. This criterion ensures they can provide insight informed by sufficient strategy application. Participants came from across three local school districts, representing a range of demographics.

The interviews spent 45-60 minutes and took place at the teachers' schools for convenience. Open-ended questions elicited perspectives on the perceived effectiveness of Build-A-Sentence for vocabulary development, implementation challenges, strengths/weaknesses of the approach, and recommendations for strategy modifications. Probes gathered illustrative examples and rationale behind stated viewpoints. With consent, the interviews with audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Transcripts underwent thematic analysis using an inductive approach to identify common themes related to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding captured key perceptions about using Build-A-Sentence for word learning. Codes analytically refined into coherent categories and themes describing teacher perspectives using the constant comparative method. Member checking, transcript review, and researcher reflexivity ensured

credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A report will convey key themes supported by excerpt examples.

The proposed descriptive qualitative study provided rich insights into teachers' perspectives for adopting Build-A-Sentence as an effective vocabulary instruction strategy. Findings could inform wider strategy implementation to ultimately improve student lexical development essential for literacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several key themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews with teachers (n=10) regarding their perspectives on using the Build-A-Sentence strategy for vocabulary instruction. Prominent themes centered on the benefits for student engagement and word knowledge application, the importance of modeling and scaffolding when implementing the strategy, challenges managing student errors, and recommendations for modifications and use with certain groups.

Improved Engagement & Application

A consistent finding was that teachers viewed Build-A-Sentence as increasing student engagement during vocabulary learning. Eight teachers highlighted how actively constructing sentences appeared to intrinsically motivate students and foster greater involvement with new words. Rather than passive approaches, the creative generation aspect facilitated engagement:

"Students seem to really enjoy coming up with silly or interesting sentences using the new vocabulary. It makes working with new words fun instead of boring." (MDR)

Linked to this engagement was the perspective from seven teachers that the strategy promoted effective vocabulary learning by pushing active application versus memorization. Producing meaningful sentences required deeper cognitive processing:

"They can't just copy a definition for a sentence...they have to think about how to use the word properly. That deeper exposure sticks better than just rote practice." (MIP)

Challenges in Managing Student Errors

However, six teachers pointed out that student-generated phrases frequently had grammatical or lexical problems. The teachers found it difficult to keep an eye on and deal with these problems during the activity.

"I'm running around checking every sentence they write, catching mistakes in word usage or syntax. It's really

tough to manage with the whole class doing this at once.” (MBD)

The time-demanding nature of continually checking and correcting student mistakes was a drawback. Teachers offered recommendations like using this strategy in small groups and providing sentence frames or templates to support proper usage.

This qualitative study aimed to provide insight into teachers' perspectives on using the Build-A-Sentence strategy as an approach for developing students' vocabulary knowledge. Interviews with teachers experienced in applying this technique revealed perceived benefits for engagement and learning, implementation challenges, and recommendations that largely align with previous quantitative research on the strategy.

The view that Build-A-Sentence heighten student motivation and interest during vocabulary instruction mirrors other findings highlighting active generative techniques as intrinsically rewarding, fostering greater involvement (Guthrie et al., 2006). Linking new words into original sentences stimulates creativity and ownership missing from more passive approaches. Teachers also perceived this generation process promoted deeper cognitive engagement for increased retention above rote memorization methods, consistent with theories on productive vocabulary learning (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). This aligns with quantitative studies showing greater word knowledge gains from Build-A-Sentence exposure versus definitions alone (Hall, 2016).

However, carrying out the strategy effectively does present classroom challenges. The large number of use and grammar mistakes made by students made it difficult for the teachers to provide enough oversight and criticism. The perceived time/effort required for sufficient scaffolding and small group or individual application poses barriers also seen in applying other constructive methods (Dixon et al., 2014). This likely contributes to decreased large-scale adoption. Recommendations centered on more gradual responsibility transferal through sentence starters, templates and models in early stages prior to fully independent construction.

CONCLUSION

Teachers recognize the Build-A-Sentence technique as a promising approach for vocabulary learning, highlighting its potential to enhance student motivation and engagement in language acquisition. The research reveals that this method offers significant advantages in promoting active vocabulary usage through interactive sentence construction, while simultaneously uncovering important

implementation challenges that require careful consideration.

The findings suggest that while the technique shows considerable promise, its successful adoption depends on several critical factors. Structured scaffolding emerges as a crucial element in effectively implementing the Build-A-Sentence strategy, particularly when scaling the approach across different educational contexts. Teachers noted that differentiated instruction and flexible implementation are essential to addressing the diverse learning needs of students.

As an exploratory qualitative study, the research acknowledges its limitations in broad generalizability. The findings point to several key areas for future investigation, including the technique's effectiveness across various age groups, academic abilities, and learning environments. Researchers recommend further studies that explore implementation variations, compare different scaffolding approaches, assess student perspectives, and develop more standardized implementation procedures.

The study makes a compelling case for Build-A-Sentence as an innovative vocabulary learning method. However, it also emphasizes the need for continued research and support to overcome potential barriers to widespread adoption. Teachers and educational researchers are encouraged to view this approach as a promising tool that requires ongoing refinement and contextual adaptation.

Ultimately, the research highlights the method's potential to transform vocabulary instruction by creating more interactive, engaging, and student-centered learning experiences. While challenges exist, the Build-A-Sentence technique represents an important step towards more dynamic and effective language education strategies, offering a nuanced approach to addressing the complex challenges of vocabulary development in contemporary educational environments.

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