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Effective Teaching Methods and Strategies in the EFL Classroom to Facilitate Students’ Vocabulary Development

Effektiva lärmetoder och strategier i EFL klassrummet för att främja studenters utveckling av ordförråd

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Abstract

This research examines how low-level vocabulary students, in particular, might better progress to higher levels of vocabulary in the EFL context. In addition, a variety of strategies and teaching methods are analysed. Vocabulary is the foundation of language learning and is an essential part of reading, writing and speaking. This research examines the importance of high frequency words, teaching methods and strategies in the EFL classroom. Several methods and strategies are analysed to compare and draw conclusions regarding which are the most effective. To be able to find answers to these questions, a number of scientific articles and experimental studies were reviewed. Our findings indicate that the 2,000 most common words in the English language are important in order to progress to higher levels of vocabulary. The research also showed that students who possessed the high frequency words were superior in reading, writing and speaking compared to the students who did not have this word level. Additionally, students with larger vocabulary gained significantly more vocabulary from activities and reading. Choosing the correct teaching strategy and method has proven to be important in order to develop students’ vocabulary. Strategies such as visual aids, function-based teaching and post-reading tasks have shown to be effective methods for teaching vocabulary. Although the 2,000 most frequent words is an important learning goal, the teachers’ choice of methods to achieve this is crucial.

Keywords: Word frequency, EFL, vocabulary acquisition, middle school, vocabulary teaching, vocabulary progression.
The Individual Contributions to the Literature

Overview

We hereby certify that all parts of this essay reflect the equal participation of both signatories below:

The parts we refer to are as follows:

* Planning
* Research question selection
* Article searches and decisions pertaining to the outline of the essay
* Presentation of findings, discussion, and conclusion

Authenticated by:

Johan Espmark

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1. Introduction

Research shows that English as foreign language (EFL) students spend a large amount of time outside of school exposed to English in various forms, such as television, music, video games and books (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012). Moreover, students are exposed to the English language at a much younger age as a result of digitalization and technological advancements. This is noteworthy because, according to Christ and Wang (2010), it is important to develop vocabulary at a young age. Moreover, Christ and Wang claim that there is a variation among students’ vocabulary when they come to school, which may be a result of socioeconomic factors, for example. This variation means that the children have different amounts of word frequency, which will affect their future English learning in tasks, such as reading or writing. Nordlund (2016) has investigated the usage of textbooks in the EFL classroom and concludes that they are widely used. This is important because, according to her research, the vocabulary used in the textbooks are mainly high frequency words. However, there are also a lot of low frequency and one-time words. If the students lack high frequency words, it will be hard for them to read, as research has shown that 98% text coverage is needed in order to understand the text (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016).

Staehr (2008), in his research, claims that students who had low-level vocabulary, less than 2,000 words, performed significantly poorer in listening, reading and writing tests than those with 2,000 words or more. Furthermore, Staehr emphasizes the 2,000 vocabulary level as an essential learning goal for low-level EFL learners. This is significant since his research shows that the majority of the students did not meet the 2,000 vocabulary level. Webb and Chang (2015) highlight the importance of word frequency, and their research shows that students with a larger vocabulary acquire more vocabulary through reading than students with smaller vocabulary.

Word frequency are words that are used more often than words used less often. In order to read a text or communicate it is necessary to have a frequency of words. According to Lightbown & Spada (2018) people in an everyday conversation use about 2000 words. Lundahl (2014) highlights the importance of high frequency words and how students should focus on these instead of the low frequency words. Additionally, Lundahl (2014) maintains the 2,000 most
frequent words as an important threshold for students. Within the vocabulary, there are three different categories which words are divided into. Jalongo and Sobolak (2010) describe those as (1) common and concrete words, for example “door”; (2) abstract words or complex ideas, for example “courage”; and (3) words that are specific or typical within a subject, for example the subject science and the concept “chlorophyll”. Students who lack the high frequency words usually lack the low frequency words as well. The three word categories are a combination of high and low frequency words. When low-level students are struggling with high frequency words, it can also be assumed that they will struggle with low frequency words. It is important to know common, concrete and abstract words in order to receive and produce language. In the school years 4-6, the students need to reach all the category levels and start using subject words (low frequency words). Research has shown that upwards of 85% of a text consists of high frequency words; however, the other 15% consists of low frequency or one-time words. Low-level students lack the high frequency words and, as a result, struggle with reading and producing language.

Karakoça and Köse (2017) explain the importance of vocabulary for language learning. They claim that vocabulary knowledge is important for general language ability, as it concerns the building blocks of language learning and communication. Cartmill, Armstrong, Gleitman, Goldin-Meadow, Medinac and Trueswell (2013) also highlight the importance of vocabulary for subsequent success later on in both school and eventually the workplace. Wilkins (1972. p. 110) argues that “while without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”.

Visual instruction is a teaching method which provides the students with an illustration of a words meaning through pictures, physical objects or demonstration (Sadeghi & Farzizadeh, 2013). Meaning-based teaching is connected to visual instruction, and teachers often use objects or images to support the learners. The main objective is to create a parallel between words and their meaning. This can be done with the help of objects, strategies, pictures or even music (Hassankiadeh, Jahandar & Khodabandehlou, 2012). Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) claim that visual instruction is an effective method to gain vocabulary. Their study shows that students who were taught with visual aids gained a lot more vocabulary. Additional methods include memory-based and function-based teaching. According to Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and
Khodabandehlou (2012) memory-based teaching focuses on remembering words through writing, practicing and rote learning. Furthermore, Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou (2012) explains function-based teaching as participating in various activities, such as role play and interactive tasks.

Collaborative learning is a teaching approach where students work together and learn from each other to develop their proficiency. Communication and interaction are central to this concept of learning (Gibbons, 2002). Atay and Kurt (2006) used a collaborative learning method with the purpose of acquiring new vocabulary, and it was shown to be very effective. Webb and Chang (2015) conducted research on extensive reading to investigate how much vocabulary students acquire from reading. As part of this, the students were divided into small groups and completed post-reading activities, such as role-playing, discussing the stories and looking up words. This method proved to be effective for acquiring new vocabulary from reading.

Teachers have a major influence on learners’ vocabulary development, both in quality and quantity. Teachers also have the responsibility to choose what will be learnt. Through planning and their vocabulary knowledge, they can help when students encounter problems and provide them with the necessary tasks and strategies in order to move forward in the learning process (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016).

In the syllabus for English, it states that students should develop their ability to “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Skolverket, 2018. p.34). Word frequency is a primary part of learning vocabulary, and the teacher needs to provide opportunities for the students to learn high frequency words. Furthermore, students are to able to “express themselves and communicate in speech and writing” (Skolverket, 2018. p.34). In order to communicate and convey meaning, the students need to have vocabulary. The teachers’ role is to instruct the students with new vocabulary, and also provide them with situations where students can use the language. Additionally, students should be able to “adapt language for different purposes, recipients and contexts (Skolverket, 2018. p.35).
1.1 Aim and Research Questions

This study investigates what causes the differences in vocabulary levels of students in the school years 4-6. We will explore the process of acquiring vocabulary as an EFL learner in different contexts and review different research looking at how students learn vocabulary and phrases. In particular, we will present and compare effective teaching strategies for vocabulary.

Our research questions are as follows:

- Why do some learners overuse low-level vocabulary and not progress to advanced-levels?
- What effective teaching strategies can teachers employ to develop students with low-level vocabulary?
2. Methods

In order to investigate the importance of vocabulary development for young EFL learners and the strategies that are effective for teachers and students, we used two databases: Google scholar and Education Resource Information Center (ERIC). Google scholar is more of a general database, while ERIC is a database for education and psychology. We began to search for terms related to vocabulary, overusing language and teaching vocabulary. However, these terms were too broad and generated too many results, many of which were not relevant for our research questions. Eventually, we narrowed down our search terms and started searching more specifically for terms which could be relevant to our research questions.

The search terms we used in the databases to find studies that were significant for our research were the following: “Visual support vocabulary instruction EFL”, “Learning vocabulary efl”, “Vocabulary size in efl context”, “efl learners vocabulary development”, “EFL learner and vocabulary methods”, “vocabulary development AND vocabulary acquisition AND vocabulary exercises AND EFL”, “Vocabulary development AND Word frequency AND efl”, “Vocabulary size AND efl AND proficiency”, “Vocabulary development AND efl learners AND language proficiency” and “Vocabulary development AND low-level OR high-level AND EFL”. When we searched for these terms, we also adapted our search interval to 2004-2019, because this is what we determined to be current research.

2.1 Criteria for Inclusions

In order for the studies to be current and more relevant, we decided that they should not be older than 15 years. We focused on primary research and “peer-reviewed” articles to ensure quality. We limit our findings to students between the ages of 10-16 years in order to keep the study relevant to our assignment.
2.2 Criteria for Exclusions

Primary school and college/university students were excluded as we wanted to focus on research relevant to teachers of students aged 10-16 years. Articles that were not “peer reviewed” were excluded to ensure quality.

2.3 Table of References

Search engines, search terms, the amount of results we got and how many of them we included are represented in the table below. On top of these references, we also used several other primary sources which are not in this table. However, they are found in the reference section.

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3. Results

The results are divided into two parts. In the first section, we investigate young learners’ low-level vocabularies and why some of them get stuck at low-levels instead of progressing to higher proficiency levels. Following this, we address the teachers’ role in developing young learners vocabulary and what strategies they can use in order to help these students increase their vocabulary.

3.1 Low Level Vocabulary and not Progressing to Higher Levels

In his study, Staehr (2008) investigated the importance of vocabulary size when reading, listening and writing. The participants were 88 EFL learners from Denmark between the ages of 15-16. Their language proficiency was tested as part of their examination. The test was divided into three parts: listening, writing and reading. The listening test comprised of multiple choice questions, where the students listened to three texts. In the writing test, the students wrote a letter to a job agency applying for a job. In the reading test, students were given multiple choice questions and covered four different text types. The aim of the study was to investigate to what extent vocabulary size affects different language skills in the EFL context. The results show the significance of vocabulary size for students to progress in their language proficiency. The importance of frequency words was also emphasized; the students who had knowledge of the 2,000 most frequent words performed above average on all three tests. Out of the three tests, listening was found to be least affected by the amount of vocabulary the students had. Reading was by far the test where vocabulary was the most important; the students who possessed a larger vocabulary performed better. This is not surprising since studies have shown the importance of large vocabularies in order to understand various texts. Although the correlation between frequency words and performing well on the tests are clear, Staehr (2008) also notes that some students managed to perform above average without knowledge of these frequency words. Staehr (2008) claims that this could be through efficient use of a dictionary, which was allowed for the
writing test or some well-used compensation strategies to make up for the deficit in vocabulary, for example, set words into context in order to make sense of the text. This means that frequency words are not the only aspect to consider when teaching vocabulary. Providing the students with several different strategies are also important. Ghazal (2007) emphasizes the importance of letting the students take control of their own learning. With good strategy use, some students could compensate for their lack of vocabulary, which is important to keep in mind when teaching vocabulary (Ghazal, 2007). The study does, however, show the importance of frequency words for low-level EFL students to progress in their language proficiency. The 2,000 frequency words aspect is an important learning goal.

This is significant because, according to Nordlund’s (2016) research, the most commonly used textbooks in Sweden have a large amount of low frequency words. Nordlund (2016) analysed the two most used textbooks in years 4-6: New Champion and Good stuff. The study investigated how many high and low frequency words are contained in these textbooks and whether or not the vocabularies are varied. According to the study, up to 75% of English teachers in Sweden use a textbook in every class. In order to compare the two books, the texts in each book was scanned and saved to a computer; the words were then labeled according to the word class, frequency, tense, and so forth. The results show that there is a wide vocabulary with many high frequency words; however, there is also a large portion of low frequency and one-time words in both textbooks. Research has shown that upwards of 98% text coverage is required for students to understand what they are reading and also create opportunities for additional vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, the results showed that when students only had a text coverage of 80% they could not understand the texts. When text coverage was 90%, some students could comprehend the text. However, the majority had little to no understanding (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016). When the text coverage is lower than 98%, some students may struggle with the text and not be able to use it to further their vocabulary development. This leads to the conclusion that the authors of these textbooks do not seem to take word frequency into consideration when choosing what words to put into their text, despite research showing the importance of frequency words in relation to vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency. This combined with the large amount of textbook usage in the classroom could further support Staehr’s (2008) findings regarding frequency words. According to Staehr’s (2008) research, the
low-level vocabulary students may struggle with the language as a result of their vocabulary deficit.

Webb and Chang (2015) conducted a study on 60 sixteen-year-old Taiwan EFL students, which was based on how prior word knowledge affect vocabulary learning in extensive reading. The aim was to investigate if there was a difference between EFL students with larger and smaller vocabulary sizes when learning vocabulary through extensive reading. An additional aim was whether vocabulary learning is consistent even though there are different reading texts and difficulty levels. The participants were given a vocabulary pre-test, the Vocabulary Levels Tests (VLT), which indicated how many of the most frequent words the learners knew. By means of this result, the participants were divided into three different groups: low-, intermediate- and high-level. Over the course of 37 weeks, the students read 10 texts graded level 1 and 10 texts graded level 2. In this extensive reading program, the students had access to audio versions of the texts. The students also completed post-reading activities, such as reading aloud, role-playing, discussing, and so forth. The students were tested on three occasions with 100 words selected from the level 1 texts and 100 words from the level 2 texts. The results showed that prior word knowledge and vocabulary gains through reading was related. A significant difference was found between the low-level and high-level groups. The high-level group gained substantially more vocabulary through reading than the low-level group. This relates to the study made by Nordlund (2016): since textbooks have many low-frequency words, it could be hard for low-level vocabulary learners to gain more vocabulary and progress to a higher level.

Staehr (2008), Nordlund (2016) and Webb and Chang (2015) all agree that word frequency plays an important role in the EFL classroom, both in vocabulary learning and for the English proficiency. In Staehr’s (2008) research, he tested the language proficiency in listening, reading and writing. In contrast, Webb and Chang (2015) only investigated vocabulary size and word frequencies impact on reading and whether size affects further vocabulary gains. Staehr (2008) agrees that word frequency and vocabulary size are important for reading. However, he also acknowledges that efficient use of compensation strategies can make up for the lack of vocabulary. This is significant because Nordlund’s (2016) research shows that textbooks used in the Swedish classroom contain a wide vocabulary with many high frequency words. Although there are also numerous low frequency words, to comprehend and gain vocabulary from reading
the students need to understand roughly 98% of the words in the text. This could mean that frequent use of textbooks in the classroom might not create opportunities for the students to improve their reading comprehension or gain vocabulary from texts. Importantly, low-level vocabulary students do not have enough low frequency words to progress to a higher level with this type of educational material, which is shown in both Staehr’s (2008) and Webb and Chang’s (2015) research.

To summarise, word frequency is important for the low-level vocabulary students to progress in their English proficiency. Furthermore, textbooks in Sweden are, according to Nordlund (2016), not written with word frequency in mind and may not be suitable for low-level students.

### 3.2 Teachers’ Role in Developing Vocabulary and Strategies they can use

Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) did research on 55 male Iran students in 10 different classes with the age range 10-16 years. The aim was to see whether visual instruction when teaching vocabulary is more effective than the traditional way of teaching vocabulary. The participants were randomly divided into two halves: experimental and control groups. Each English lesson was 90 minutes long, and the groups were taught ten words for a half hour of that lesson. The experimental group was instructed with visual aids and pictures to learn the words. Firstly, the teacher pointed on the vocabulary object and said the word. Secondly, there was a whole class individual repetition after the teacher. Lastly, the teacher wrote the words, and the students were asked to produce sentences with them for the next lesson. Meanwhile, the control group was only instructed with the definition of the words. The experiment lasted for ten lessons; two weeks later the groups were tested on the words. The results showed a significant difference: teaching vocabulary with visual aids allows the learners to gain more vocabulary. Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) concluded that context based vocabulary learning provide the students with support to interpret the meanings of the words. Additionally, they also noted that visual tools are especially good for younger learners since their meaning of words may not be properly conveyed.
However, it is noteworthy to address that these results only provide facts based on homogeneous groups and especially male students. The research wanted to ensure that there was as much as similarity between the both groups. Whether female students or heterogeneous groups benefit from visual aids is still unclear. Furthermore, the description of the steps taken in the control group was also unclear. The experimental group used many more steps in order to attain the new vocabulary, which may not provide the accurate difference between visual instruction and traditional instruction.

Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou (2012) have conducted similar research focusing on the impact of teacher beliefs in the classroom. Teachers’ beliefs on learning will have an impact on their decisions regarding what strategies should be used. The participants in this study were 150 Iranian EFL junior high school students as well as three teachers, one for each control group. The aim of this study was to investigate if meaning-based, memory-based or function-based lexicon beliefs are equally effective when it comes to vocabulary development. A questionnaire was developed to place the teachers into different groups, one teacher for each belief. Each group had 50 students and one teacher, and the group of students were taught for six months using the predetermined belief. After six months, the learners were given a vocabulary test that consisted of 42 words that they should write down or explain, and the students were not aware of this test. The results showed a large disparity between the three different teaching beliefs. The function-based group achieved an average of 39 words correct, meaning-based got 29 correct and the memory-based group got 5 words correct. This shows that there are significant correlations between teaching beliefs and vocabulary acquisition. In this study, it is clearly shown that function-based teaching is superior to both meaning-based and memory-based teaching. Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou (2012) and Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) have both come to the conclusion that some teaching instructions are superior to others in regards to vocabulary acquisition. This study highlights the importance of teachers in the EFL classroom having knowledge of different strategies and methods to use with students can have a major impact on their ability to acquire vocabulary. Teachers need to be open about using different methods in order to give students the best possible conditions to succeed in their learning. It should be noted that only three different teaching beliefs were presented in this study, which could be a factor in the polarizing results. The results, however, are in line with Sadeghi and Farzizadeh’s (2013) findings.
Ghazal (2007) has written a paper in which the importance of vocabulary learning strategies are discussed. In order to accelerate students learning, they need to know how to learn more effectively and efficiently. To help the students become better learners, they need to be provided with the necessary learning strategies. Teachers will have to provide the students with different learning strategies because students learn differently. Research has shown that efficient use of strategies relates to better vocabulary acquisition. In order to provide students with the necessary strategies, the teacher needs to know which strategies to teach. Ghazal (2007) proposes to let the students sit down in small groups and write down their current strategies, and these strategies should be reviewed by the teacher in order to see which strategies the students are missing.

Vocabulary is challenging for young EFL learners, but the usage of learning strategies could help improve their vocabulary as well as retaining new words. However, it is important for the teacher to keep in mind that there is not only one strategy that works for every student in every scenario. Teachers need to provide their students with several different strategies in order to successfully support learners in their vocabulary development. Metacognitive, memory and activation strategies are examples of strategies teachers could provide their students with. Making the students aware of what words are important to learn helps them be in control of their own learning. According to Ghazal (2007), it is important for the students to take control of their own learning. Once they take control, it is easier for them to use different strategies to acquire vocabulary. The importance of strategies is also emphasized by Lundahl (2014). He maintains that effective language learners are aware of different strategies and can use these to solve various language problems.

Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) present an analysis on teaching vocabulary in the EFL context, which is directed to teachers due to their key role in the learning process for students. The aim was to address answers and views on questions regarding vocabulary. Several aspects are analysed, such as vocabulary size and coverage, learner’s vocabulary frequency and what type of words they may already know and need to know. Other aspects are activities and opportunities that provide incidental vocabulary learning, and ultimately the teacher’s role. Many factors explain how much vocabulary an EFL learner possess. These factors are time dedicated to the English language, whether students are in contact with English outside of school or not. Another factor is which teaching methods are used in the classroom. Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016)
emphasise that teachers should pay more attention to vocabulary learning in particular, especially the high-frequency words. This is due to the fact that many texts contain the first 1,000 word families, around 80-83%. Not only texts are related to this, but also television program and movies. They also found that 85% of the first 1000 word families was related to television programs and 86% to movies. On the other hand, with writing and speaking it was found that the second 1,000 word families were used around 6-9%. These results also indicate the importance of the most frequent words, which is highlighted in Staehr’s (2008) and Webb and Chang’s (2015) studies. Furthermore, Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) argue that language teachers’ and course designers’ decisions regarding what should be taught and when should be connected to frequency as a guideline. Time and exposure has proven to be a major factor in order to acquire vocabulary. The study found a research that investigated the impact of English exposure: the experimental group had 10-22 hours of English lessons per week, whilst the control group had 2-6 hours. The experimental group acquired significantly more vocabulary than the control group. In the lesser group, some students learnt 18 words in a year, while some in the other group learnt 430 words.

Furthermore, Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) emphasise successful models and methods for teachers to use as a guideline in teaching vocabulary. Examples are (1) establishing goals and needs, (2) environmental factors, (3) following vocabulary-teaching principles, and (4) evaluation of the vocabulary. However, Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) also highlight that vocabulary which can be taught in the classroom is limited. Teachers should encourage students to engage in activities outside of school to enhance their vocabulary, especially those who have limited vocabulary. Such activities are extensive reading and extensive viewing, which provide the learners with different opportunities to expand their vocabulary. Extensive reading is shown to be suitable for every kind of level. Therefore, teachers should provide learners with texts suited to their level. The research analysis demonstrate some points that are noteworthy when providing texts for students. Firstly, reading material should be easy and contain high-frequency vocabulary. In order to provide students with texts that are adapted to their vocabulary levels, teachers could use a RANGE programme when selecting texts. This programme compares high and low frequency words in texts. Also, to diagnose how much vocabulary a student possess, teachers could use VLT. Secondly, students need a variation of reading material and different topics. Lastly, students should be comfortable and feel free to choose what to read. Meanwhile,
extensive viewing could be more suited for advanced learners because it is harder for the teacher to provide scaffolding. The teacher can provide some strategies for the learner: (1) repeated viewing, (2) contextual vocabulary learning skills, (3) programme selection, (4) narrow viewing, (5) subtitles. There are several benefits using extensive viewing since it provides both aural and visual exposure, which gives the learners contextualized opportunities to easier pick up new words. Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) agree with Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) regarding the importance of visual support in order to gain vocabulary.

Atay and Kurt (2006) have investigated two different post-reading activities: written tasks combined with interactive tasks and discrete written tasks. These were compared to see which tasks is more effective for learning vocabulary. The participants in this study were 62 grade 6 students from Turkey. The participants were subjected to a pre-test to determine their proficiency levels, and they were found to be at the same level. During a six week period, the two groups worked with the same textbooks and the same instructions. However, the experimental group used reading comprehension and interactive post-reading tasks, such as group work and using pictures, whilst the other group did written vocabulary tasks. After the six week period, two tests were administered: a CYLET (Cambridge young learner English test) and a VKS (Vocabulary knowledge scale). These tests were chosen to see how much selected and unselected vocabulary the students learned during these six weeks.

Results show the experimental group outperformed the control group on both tests. On the CYLET test, the experimental group scored 89 out of 100 and the control group scored 84. The scores were significantly lower on the vocabulary test: the experimental group scored 52 whilst the control group scored 44 out of 100. Based on these results, one can draw the conclusion that interactive tasks combined with reading comprehension leads to better vocabulary acquisition for low-level EFL learners. These findings are in line with Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou’s (2012) research about memory, meaning and function-based teaching. Another important aspect of this study was the interest from the students. Not only did the experimental group outperform the control group, but the students in the experimental group also enjoyed the interactive tasks more than their regular teaching. These tasks were also found to be better suited for the students’ needs in the classroom. However, all students in this study were beginner/low level learners, which means it is hard to make similar conclusions regarding
students with higher proficiency. The sample size of having two fairly small groups created the opportunities to carry out some of the tasks but also limits the results impact. The results show that reading comprehension combined with interactive tasks helps students improve their vocabulary. However, it does not compare different kinds of tasks which limits the study.

Ching-Ying and Wei Shu (2013) did research in an elementary school in Taiwan on 56 5th grade students. The aim of the study was to compare whether hierarchy vocabulary exercises or copying vocabulary exercises are more effective for acquiring vocabulary and reading comprehension. Hierarchy vocabulary exercises contain five categories: selective attention, recognition, manipulation, interpretation and production. The study contained different phases over a six-week period, where students began with a pre-test to investigate if there was homogeneity between the experimental group and control group. Following this, they were given vocabulary instruction but with different exercises. By the end of every lesson the students were given a vocabulary test to investigate the short-term memory effects of the chosen activities. During the last week of the experiment the participants were provided a delayed post-test to investigate long-term memory effects. Hierarchy vocabulary exercises outperformed the copying vocabulary exercises in the vocabulary tests, both in the immediate post-tests and also to a large degree in the delayed test. These findings are further strengthened by Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou’s (2012) research, showing the vocabulary differences between students using memory-based learning in comparison to meaning and function-based learning.

Sasan Baleghizadeh and Arezoo Ashoori (2010) have compared the effects of keywords and wordlists in an EFL context. The participants in this study were two classes with 22 female students in each. The aim was to see which one of these methods was the most effective for the retention of words. The groups were randomly chosen to use the keywords or the wordlist. A wordlist was used in both groups: the control group got a word list with words written in Persian and the English translation for the words and practiced these words using rote learning. The experimental group got the same list; however, in between the words, there was a keyword which had a similar sound to the English word. The keyword method was explained to the experimental group, and they were asked to practice the words using the provided keyword. This experiment was conducted over two sessions. At the end of the second session both classes were given the test. The test itself contained the 20 words they had been practicing in English, and their task was
to write the words definition in Persian. Results showed a significant difference between the two
groups: the experimental group got an average of 17 correct answers out of 20 whilst the control
group got 12.5. This leads to the conclusions that using the keyword method is more effective
than the regular word list. Adding keyword to the regular word list gives the students something
to help them remember, instead of simply reading the translations repeatedly. This shows that
keywords can positively affect the learners using these methods in the retention of vocabulary.
Keywords lets the students make correlations between words and provides them with additional
methods for remembering words. Prior to the test, both groups had been exposed to several
different strategies; but when talking to the students after the test, they did not report the usage
of efficient strategies. Ghazals’ (2007) research on strategies and the importance of using effective
and efficient strategies can be seen here. The students have different strategies, but they do not
know which strategies to use. It should be noted that the keyword strategy was compared to a
group where the students simply use their existing strategies, whereas the experimental group was
given a strategy to focus on. Alongside this, it is possible that some students used different
strategies entirely, as a result of their previous knowledge of the language. Keywords can be a
good addition to the teaching of vocabulary, but it is not the only method a teacher should use.
As Ghazal (2007) writes in his paper, a teacher must be able to use several different strategies and
methods. Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou’s (2012) research on teacher beliefs
could show this research in a different light. Their research suggests that memory-based learning
(keywords) in comparison to meaning and function-based teaching is not effective. In their
research, the memory-based teaching performed significantly worse than the other two.
Keywords has its use and place in the classroom, but there are other methods that have shown to
be more effective.

Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013), Atay and Kurt (2006) and Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and
Khodabandehlou (2012) all confirm that pictures are an effective tool to use when teaching and
learning vocabulary. Also, all studies indicate that traditional ways of teaching are not equally
effective. Atay and Kurt (2006) and Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) use meaning based teaching,
and both results show that students acquire more vocabulary through this method. Students’
vocabulary acquisition is dependant on different instructions; both studies show that teachers
create learning opportunities in different ways. While their findings are similar, their methods and
participants vary. Atay and Kurt (2006) used interactive tasks where the students are in charge of
their own learning. Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013), however, have more emphasis on the teachers and their role in order for the students to learn. There is a difference among the participants. In Sadeghi and Farzizadeh’s (2013) research, there were only male students and a large variance in age, while with Atay and Kurt (2006) it was 62 6th grade students. Although there was a difference among the participants, one can draw the conclusion that age or gender does not matter considering the results in these studies are very similar. In contrast, Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehtlou’s (2012) results indicate that functional teaching is superior to meaning based.

3.3 Discussion

Low-level vocabulary learners have been shown to struggle in their advancement to higher levels of vocabulary. Staehr (2008) notes the importance of high frequency words and found that students who had over 2,000 word frequency also performed significantly better in various tasks such as, writing, reading and listening. A larger vocabulary not only performed better in various tasks, but also gained more vocabulary, which is shown in a research by Webb and Chang (2015).

Visual instruction has shown to be an effective method in different contexts for teaching vocabulary: Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) and Atay and Kurt (2006) used this method in their research. Using visual instruction in the classroom involves images to create a connection between words and pictures. Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) used pictures in a way where the pictures alone would be enough to create understanding. Atay and Kurt (2006) used images as scaffolding for their post-reading tasks. However, instead of using them to create understanding, the pictures were used to enhance the students’ understanding and retain new words. Atay and Kurt’s (2006) research showed that pictures can be an effective part of post-reading activities and help the students create meaning of what they read. Hassankiadeh, Jahandar and Khodabandehtlou (2012) take a different approach. Instead of looking at only pictures, they also include objects in their research. The goal is to create an association between a word and something else; this could be a tiger plushie and the word is stripes. Tigers have stripes, and when the student thinks about stripes they can relate that word back to the tiger. In doing so, the students can create meaning and connect words to pictures, objects, music, and so forth.
Atay and Kurt (2006) and Webb and Chang (2015) used interactive group exercises, which is a collaborative teaching approach. Communication and interaction is a central aspect and students learn from each other. In communication, writing or listening the students can contribute with different experiences and knowledge in order to facilitate learning.

The syllabus recommends that “Pupils should have the opportunity to take initiatives and assume responsibility, and to develop their ability to work both independently and together with others” (Skolverket, 2018. p.8). The collaborative aspect can be found in Atay and Kurt (2006), Webb and Chang (2015), while several other studies provide the students with opportunities to work independently. Moreover, the syllabus adds that teachers “provide scope for pupils to exercise their ability to create and use different means of expression” (Skolverket, 2018. p.13). In the studies where post-reading tasks were used, students were given different exercises to express themselves (Atay & Kurt 2006), (Webb & Chang 2015). Furthermore, Skolverket maintains that “pupils should have the opportunity of experiencing knowledge in different ways” (Skolverket, 2018. p.9). Ching-Ying and Wei Shu (2013) used hierarchy vocabulary exercises, which contain five different steps in order to acquire knowledge. Additionally, students should “receive support in their language and communicative development” (Skolverket, 2018. p.9). Support can be provided in many different ways, and the studies shows those variations through giving the students different strategies and instructions.

Vocabulary is an important part of language development because it provides the students with the foundation to progress in their language learning. Vocabulary is necessary when listening, speaking, writing and reading. This is emphasised in the syllabus: “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Skolverket, 2018. p.34) and “express themselves and communicate in speech and writing” (Skolverket, 2018. p.34). In order for the students to learn vocabulary, they need learning strategies. As a result of the differentiated classroom, several strategies are required. Teachers need to provide their students with the necessary strategies to facilitate learning. When teaching vocabulary, it is important to keep in mind that all words are not equally important. Some words are used more often than others, and these words should be prioritised over the less used words as they are more important. High frequency words cover about 85% of the words in texts the students will encounter in their school years. Furthermore, high frequency words are important when producing language as they...
are more commonly used words and appear more often. In order for the students to progress to a higher level of vocabulary, the teachers need to adapt their educational material to the students’ needs. For instance, teachers can provide the students with post-reading tasks, such as role play and discussion. Teacher could also use visual support to provide students with an illustration of a words meaning.
4. Conclusion

Our findings indicate that low-level students struggle in their advancements to a higher level due to their lack of high frequency words. Students vocabulary deficit will affect their reading, writing, oral and listening skills. The 2,000 most frequent words should be considered when teaching vocabulary since students will encounter these words more often. Furthermore, students who already possess a large vocabulary acquire more words faster and easier than the low-level vocabulary students. Nordlund’s (2016) research has shown that textbooks used in classrooms may not be suitable for low-level students since they contain many low frequency words.

Selecting the appropriate teaching strategy and method for the chosen activity is important in order to facilitate learning effectively. This is a crucial choice for the progression of low-level vocabulary learners. Different strategies, such as visual aids, have shown to be an effective method for teaching vocabulary to low-level students. Additionally, teachers could also use activities like post-reading tasks in order to acquire vocabulary. While visual aids are effective, functional based teaching is according to Hassankia deh, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou (2012) the superior method for teaching vocabulary. These findings are in line with Skolverket (2018) and emphasised in the syllabus: students should “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Skolverket, 2018. p.34) and “express themselves and communicate in speech and writing” (Skolverket, 2018. p.34).

In this paper, there are many aspects that emphasise vocabularies role in reading, while listening and writing were not covered as thoroughly. Furthermore, the space constraint within the paper meant that we had to exclude certain activities and strategies. As a result, only a portion of the available methods were covered. Functional based teaching were shown to be the most effective teaching method. However, reviewing additional studies within this area should be considered to conclude if it is more effective than other methods.

In further research, it would be interesting to conduct a study on word frequency in relation to the textbooks used in Swedish schools. Another interesting aspect would be to investigate how frequently teachers use these textbooks as a material in their education. Finally, it would be noteworthy to ascertain how aware the teachers are of word frequency.
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