

The Role of Vocabulary Class in Developing Reading Skills

Mrs. Nour Elhouda Remil ★¹, Dr. Abdellah Baraka ²

¹ Mascara University, English Department, Algeria, Nourelhouda.remil@univ-mascara.dz

² Mascara University, English Department, Algeria, Baraka.abdellah@yahoo.fr

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Abstract:

The current research investigates the effect of teaching vocabulary in enhancing reading among students of foreign language, namely; English. The researcher aims to shed light on the importance of vocabulary course and its effective role to help learners develop comprehension. Additionally, this research paper focuses on the suitable methods used by teachers to teach vocabulary. Also, it highlights one of the main important aspects of language which are; reading skills and comprehension. In this article, the researcher explains how learning vocabulary words allows learners widening their reservoir of knowledge and develop new skills to clearly read a passage in English

Keywords: Reading; Vocabulary; Effective; Comprehension; Teaching

★ Mrs. Nour Elhouda Remil

1. INTRODUCTION

It is through words that we can build sentences, phrases, paragraphs, and maybe essays. The world of words is big, vague, and complicated. One word can have different meaning, and many words may refer to the same thing. It is all about context and what a word is used to represent. In communication, a word can save the speaker, as it can form a misunderstanding. In language learning, learners need to carry a dictionary wherever they go because they need to check new words, to learn about their meaning and use. Unfortunately, there is no course of vocabulary in the foreign language teaching departments in Algeria. Teachers do not give lectures on explaining words and phrases. Thus, students have to learn vocabulary on their own. They need to read and select new words they do not understand, they need to look for their meaning in the dictionary or the internet, they need to keep using them in order not to forget them. However, this is not the case for most of students. Therefore, students have to learn about vocabulary inside the classroom, and use these new vocabulary words to comprehend a text of a related course. In the following article, the researcher tends to analyse and explain the phenomenon of teaching vocabulary in Algerian universities, English departments. The researcher also focuses on its effects on enhancing reading skills.

2. Review of Related Work

Reading and vocabulary are two interrelated skills of language. When reading a passage in a foreign language, students need to have a vocabulary input in order to understand it. Also, when reading, learners will learn new words and expressions from texts which will enhance the process of learning a foreign language. Therefore, teaching vocabulary has been always an important matter to the field of language teaching and learning. Studies and research in the field of language teaching have been conducted to analyse and examine the issue of teaching vocabulary to language learners and its effects on reading comprehension.

First, a research has been conducted by Kasim, Mustafa and Seyit (2011) on whether vocabulary is a strong variable predicting reading comprehension, and if this prediction degree of vocabulary varies according to the text types. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension in terms of different text types. The study takes place at Ankara-Sincan during the academic year 2008-2009. The participants are 120 fifth grade students at a public school having middle socioeconomic status. The research tools used are the reading comprehension and vocabulary tests in order to evaluate

participants levels. The researchers employ the correlation and bivariate linear regression to analyse and assess the data of this study. They find a medium correlation between vocabulary and narrative text comprehension. However, a large correlation with expository texts is determined. Therefore, one can conclude that vocabulary is one of the strong components of reading comprehension. Bauman (2009) states that research in the area of reading and vocabulary has proven that vocabulary is an important element in reading comprehension regardless the type of research being correlational, factorial, or readability. Also, Joshi (2005) agrees that vocabulary is an important variable that influences reading comprehension.

In the field of language teaching, learning vocabulary has been always a very crucial aspect. Alpino (2017) has organized a study entitle *The Teaching of Vocabulary: A Perspective*. In this research paper, Alpino (2017) sheds light on the role of vocabulary in learning foreign languages, and emphasizes on the importance of learning new words whether in books or verbal communication. Alpino (2017) explains the difficulties teachers face in teaching their students new words, and attempts to explain some strategies used to teach vocabulary. Alpino (2017) also suggests that teachers need to prepare a various, creative, and up-to-date techniques in teaching vocabulary. These techniques depend on some factors including time, content, availability, and its value for the students (Takač & Singleton 2008). In his research paper, Alpino (2017) suggests the following strategies that are used in teaching vocabulary:

- Teaching vocabulary using Objects:

pictures and objects help learners remember vocabulary. This technique requires teachers to use visual aids and demonstration (Takač & Singleton, 2008). However, it works only with concrete nouns, but with other parts of speech and abstract nouns this technique might not be useful.

- Teaching vocabulary by drilling, spelling, and active involvement

Drills are very useful in teaching vocabulary because learners are to repeat the words they hear. Teaching vocabulary through drilling is very workable since it helps learners develop their listening skills to be able to repeat the words after teachers. Yet, it is time consuming and has not been proved to be valid because learners generally forget once the class is dismissed.

- Teaching vocabulary using drawing and picture

Alpino (2017) suggests that drawing on blackboard or flash cards can be an easy way to teach students new words. This technique can be used many times in different contexts, and it can help young learners understand some elements from lectures.

- Teaching vocabulary using mime, expressions and gesture

Alqahtani (2017) explains that mimes and gestures are important features in communication. Some vocabulary can be taught using this technique such as the adjectives "sad and happy". Also, gestures have a significant role in teaching foreign language inside the classroom. Tellier (2007) indicates that gestures are used in managing the classroom (to start/end an activity, to question students, request silence, etc.), evaluation (to show a mistake, to correct, to congratulate, etc.) and explanation to give indications on syntax, underline specific prosody, explain new vocabulary, etc.)

- Teaching vocabulary using enumeration and contrast

A technique based on presenting a collection of items that refer to a single one word. (Gruneberg & Sykes, 1991) presented the example of the word clothes. In order to teach students the word clothes, we may present a group of clothes such as a skirt, T-shirt, pants... So, students will recognize the meaning of the word.

On the other hand, learners understand better through the opposite of the word or the contrast which means showing the differences, for instance; black and white, good and bad, before and after.... etc.

- Teaching vocabulary through guessing from Context

Dubin (1993) suggests that guessing from context is an appropriate strategy to widen learner's vocabulary. Mainly, there are two types of context. The first type is related to the text, specific context. It entails the morphological, semantic, and syntactic information in a text. The second type is the general context, it is based on the background knowledge the reader has about the subject being read (Alqahtani, 2015). The specific context represents the words and the sentences surrounding the intended word in the text. These words help learners understand the meaning of the word (Alqahtani, 2015).

The combination between these techniques will lead to a better acquisition of vocabulary among students of EFL learning. Teachers may mix between the above techniques according to the students' needs and requirements, in addition to the nature of the lecture.

In an attempt to identify the role of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension, Sidek and Rahim (2015) conduct a cross-linguistic study. The purpose of this study is to examine how vocabulary knowledge affects the understanding of a text. In this study, 10 students from an EFL class in a Malaysian public high school were selected randomly. The researcher has used a set of reading comprehension tests and a set of vocabulary tests of an EFL reading text, and a native language text as tools to accomplish the purpose of the study. Individually, each participant is asked to read the EFL text without limiting the time, however, the participants are asked to do the test without looking back at the text. Similar strategy is used with the native language text. After completing the tests, participants were interviewed, and the scores were compared. The results show that the students score significantly better results in L1 text compared to EFL text. When interviewed, participants explained that they lack vocabulary knowledge in EFL compared to their native language. As a result, Sidek and Rahim (2015) conclude that vocabulary teaching is one of the necessary aspects that play an effective role in determining reading comprehension performance in EFL.

A similar study has been organized by Chahli (2015) which aims at investigating the importance of teaching vocabulary to improve reading comprehension among 1st year LMD English students. 10 teacher and 50 students at Biskra University, English department have participated in this study. She (2015) has used questionnaire as a research tool to select data. From the analysis of students and teacher's questionnaire, the research deduces that students are conscious about the importance or reading skills in gaining much vocabulary. Teachers also suggested that effective strategies for reading texts and practices in vocabulary should be improved for a better process of language learning and teaching.

Vordesti, Bambang and Luwandi (2015) conduct another study on improving vocabulary mastery in reading comprehension through wall picture. Its purpose is to improve students' vocabulary using wall pictures among seventh grade students at SMP Nusantara Indah Sintang. The method used in this study is the Classroom Action Research (CAR). Their study has confirmed that the process

of vocabulary can achieve success through the use of wall pictures as a learning strategy.

3.. Research Questions and hypotheses

3.1. Research Questions

The main purpose of the current research is to focus on the importance of vocabulary course and to mention how important it works to improve learners' skills of reading and comprehension. The researcher notices that without an extensive course of vocabulary at the English department, students will face difficulties in reading and comprehension, as a result, they will struggle in their academic career. Therefore, the following research questions are asked to fulfil the purpose of this research.

1. What is the impact of vocabulary on reading comprehension?
2. Why is vocabulary course necessary to improve reading skills?

The following research hypotheses are suggested

3.2. Research Hypotheses

- ⇒ Learning vocabulary can help students enhance their reading since it allows them to understand the meaning of the words in context and understand the author's messages.
- ⇒ Vocabulary course needs to be taught at the English department to encourage students to widen their language baggage, and develop their reading skills.
- ⇒ Students are unable to develop their vocabulary reservoir unless it is taught as a course. They rarely check their dictionary.
- ⇒ Students read articles, essays, and books chapters that might help them to fulfil some assignments, but they find problems understanding the meaning of these passages due to the lack of vocabulary.

4. Methods

The research methods in academic writings explain what the researcher does and how she or he does it including the steps followed to achieve the purpose of the research. these steps include the type of research used, the data collection and the data analysis methods. to ensure the reliability and the validity of the present

research. The researcher has used mixed method approach in order to analyse and collect data. The mixed method can be defined as a method of collecting and analyzing data necessary to the research using two methods, qualitative and quantitative data (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). To analyze and investigate the problems faced by language learners in reading comprehension and the effect of vocabulary in enhancing reading, the researcher has collected the data using both qualitative and quantitative tools. The quantitative tool used is the questionnaire. Ten open and closed questions are asked to gain information and opinions from the students. Also, the researcher has used Excel to analyse the data obtained from the questionnaire through the use of graphs and tables. Additionally, the qualitative tool used is observation. It was entailed as a backup tool to the questionnaire to provide additional information needed to accomplish the objectives of the study. The researcher of the current study is a teacher who is teaching English at Mascara department. As a teacher, she observed the lacks and the needs of vocabulary course which will help students improve reading comprehension.

5. Participants

The study took place at the department of English, Mascara University, Algeria. Participants are 30 English Master students studying didactics (language teaching). These students were chosen because they are the researcher students. Although they are adults' learners, studying at this department for 4 years, they face enormous difficulties when reading a text related to any course. So, the researcher notices that these students lacks and their needs of the vocabulary course is very important to help them enhance reading comprehension and widen their English vocabulary background. The following table shows the characteristics of these participants:

Participant's sex	Age	Number
Males	Between 21 and 25	09

Table 1. The sex of the

Females	Between 21 and 25	21
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number, age and participants

6. Results

The main objectives of this study are to reveal the important of vocabulary course in enhancing reading skills and reading comprehension, and to show why is this course important for language learners. It seeks as well to help learners enlarge their vocabulary knowledge through effective learning strategies.

• Students Questionnaire Results:

Question 1: Do you/did you study vocabulary course at university

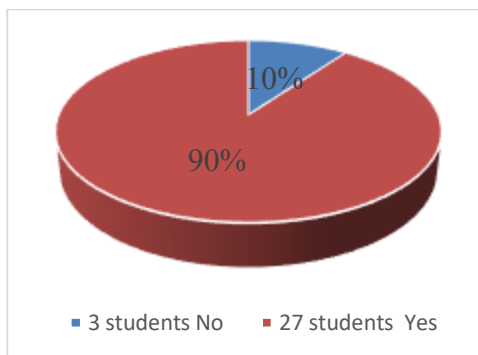
Table 2. The percentage of students studying vocabulary course at university

Students	Yes/No	Percentage
30 students	No	100%
0 students	Yes	00%

The lack of vocabulary course among the different courses' students are studying at university from first year till their master degree tells how unfortunate students are. This causes problem in the process of learning English throughout their academic career. Inside the classroom, students tend to use Arabic and French because they fail to find the exact words to say when speaking. When reading, students fail to paraphrase or explain a sentence they read because of the lack of words' meaning.

Question 2: Is vocabulary course important for your studies?

Figure.1 Students' awareness of the importance of vocabulary course



As shown in the graph, 90% of the participants are aware of the importance of vocabulary in the process of learning English. As adult learners thinking of writing master dissertations, these students faced many difficulties because of the lack of vocabulary. They always fail to participate inside the classroom, understand their teachers, and sometimes fail to communicate in English side talk among their peers outside the classroom. These are only some of the students' struggles due to the lack of vocabulary.

Question 3: why is vocabulary important for your studies?

The answers of this question vary from one student to another. However, some students' answers were the same, they just put them in different words. The researcher summarizes the answers as the following:

- Because I found myself weak to express myself in English and I need to be trained in (2 students)
- Because I make lots of mistakes and I do not have a rich background in English (5 students)
- It helps me read and understand what I am reading and enhance my writing skills (20 students)

Students' responds confirm their awareness of the necessity of vocabulary course. Precisely, 20 participants confirm that their skills of learning language will be improved once they start studying vocabulary course. According to them, the skill of reading and the comprehension of text will also be enhanced after enlarging their vocabulary background.

Question 4: What do you need vocabulary for?

Similarly, the question was asked to know the reasons vocabulary is needed at language learning departments. students have varied answers on this question. The researcher tries to sum up their answers in the following

- To improve my writing and communicative skills (08 students)
- To easily communicate in English (9 students)
- To be able to read books and texts related to the courses I take and understand them (13 Students)

Learning languages is a very challenging process. Students learning English need to learn different skills such as reading, writing, speaking and communication. The participants of this study are Master students who need to master these skills in order to perform well inside the classroom. Most importantly, 13 students are aware of the vital role of vocabulary in enhancing reading comprehension. As students, they need to read to prepare lectures, to gather information for their lecture's presentation, and to acquire knowledge necessary for their studies. Through the process of reading, students need to have a large vocabulary to read adequately.

Question 5: Do you learn vocabulary words on your own?

The researcher confirms that master students have not been studying vocabulary course at university. On the other hand, vocabulary is very vital in the process of learning languages. Therefore, students need to learn vocabulary on their own. The answers of the participants are as follow:

Students who answer with yes (17 students)

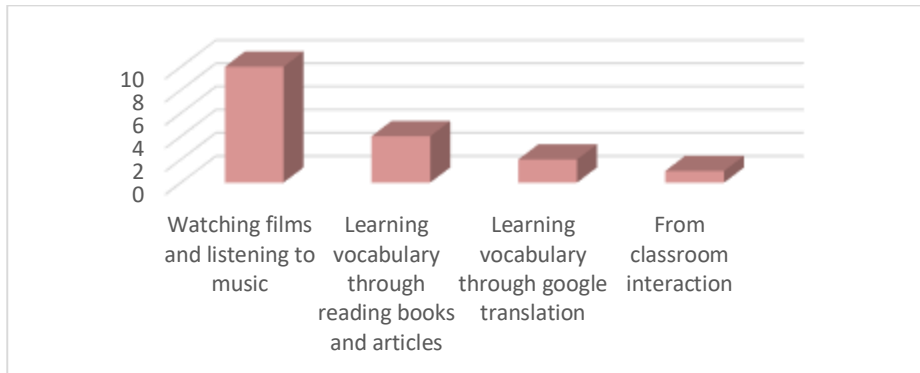
Students who answer with no (13 students)

To notice, students who said no, we do not learn vocabulary by ourselves are not few. This leads to the shortage in the language learning process and drives to an urgent need of teaching vocabulary as an academic subject at the department of English.

Question 6: If yes, how do you learn new words in English?

The 17 Students who answer with yes have different ways of learning vocabulary. Their answers are as follow:

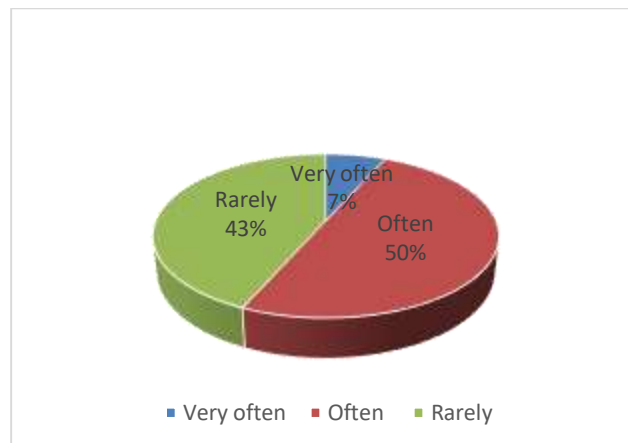
Figure.2 Different ways participants use to learn new vocabulary



The researcher notices that students are unable to achieve success in learning vocabulary on their own. First, learning vocabulary through watching films and listening to music does not teach academic English and academic vocabulary needed for learning English. Second, google translation does not teach vocabulary, and students quickly forget what they translate most of times.

Question 7: How often do you check dictionaries to fetch for new words?

Figure.3 How often Students check dictionaries



As shown in the graph, answers to this question vary from very often to often and rarely. Students who answered with *very often* are 7%, and students who answered with *often* 50%. The rest of the participants answered with *rarely*. Students show less interest in checking dictionaries and learning new words. Most of the students who answer with *often* claim that they check dictionaries mainly when doing a homework. They add that checking dictionary rarely does not help us to learn new words since we soon forget them.

Question 8: When reading, do you understand the text without referring to the dictionary?

Students' answers differ from yes, no and sometimes as shown in the following table:

Table 3. students use of dictionaries when reading a text.

Answers	Students
Yes	07
No	12
Sometimes	11

The table reveals that participants are unable to read a text and understand it without the use of the dictionary. It is obvious since they are foreign language learners on one hand, and since they read advanced texts related to the subjects they study. Therefore, checking dictionaries when reading to understand the meaning of difficult words is a very necessary task.

Question 9: What is the important of vocabulary in reading texts and passages?

This question was asked to check whether students are aware of the impact of vocabulary in reading comprehension. They answer as follow:

- It helps understand the meaning and context: 10 students
- It helps us improve writing: 12 students
- It helps develop critical reading skills 08 students

The answers of this question tell that students are able to learn vocabulary to fulfill their requirements. The participants of this study need vocabulary to read texts easily. Through reading adequately, students will develop critical reading skills and learn how to develop their writing skills.

Question 10: Do you thing that teaching vocabulary as a subject becomes necessary in English classes, and how?

Table 4. necessity of teaching vocabulary in class

Answers	Students number
Yes	30 students
No	00 students

....how?

Students believe that vocabulary needs to be taught at classes today. They find it difficult to learn vocabulary on their own since they lack strategies of learning. They claim that time is also a shortcoming to learn vocabulary outside the classroom. They suggest that vocabulary class gives the students the chance to be a good reader, and a good writer since it teaches them meaning of words and phrases related to a specific academic area.

- **Observation checklist results:**

In order to obtain authentic data and valid results, the researcher has used an observation checklist to answer the research question and to either confirm or deny the hypotheses.

While observing, the researcher notices that students rarely check the dictionary inside the classroom and they mainly keep taking notes. Sometimes, students ask their teacher for further explanations of the meaning of words they meet with.

Concerning reading, students are asked sometimes to read loudly a passage from a book or a handout. When reading, students make some spelling mistakes, and sometimes they stop at words they do not know their meaning. They fail to read it correctly. Further, these particular words and phrases prevent them from understanding the passage. Therefore, the researcher deduces that these students need to learn vocabulary and spend time checking dictionaries to widen their knowledge on certain topic related to the subjects they are studying.

For teachers, the researcher notices that teacher fail to explain all words in a reading passage due to the lack of time and the necessity of accomplishing the target of the lecture. As far as the reaction of teachers to these problems, the researcher notices that teachers are aware of these kind of problems in reading comprehension, and they attempt to explain the passages, but they fail to stop at each word and explain it. The need to a vocabulary course at languages departments is becoming urgent and very crucial.

7. Discussion

In an attempt to answer the research questions and confirm or deny the research hypotheses, the researcher conducted the present research. First, the impact of vocabulary on reading comprehension is great and needs to be highlighted by teachers and learners. Since vocabulary is a key component of language and through the input of vocabulary, language learners will develop the skills of reading comprehension and other skills of language. The idea of the importance of vocabulary in improving reading skills has been proved by Kasim, Mustafa and Seyit (2011). Similarly, these authors (2011) confirm that vocabulary is a strong variable predicting reading, and readers need to learn vocabulary to access to reading. In the same veins, Bauman (2009) and Joshi (2005) claim that vocabulary is one of the most crucial elements in reading and comprehension. The need to learn vocabulary led language experts to innovate certain strategies to help learners acquire vocabulary quite easily and in short period of time. The researcher of the study suggests that vocabulary course is very necessary to improve reading skills. The requirements of foreign language learners call for the vocabulary course to aid them develop the reading skills and comprehend passages and texts. Teaching vocabulary as course will allow teachers to pay attention to each detail since it is taught full time. The use of different strategies such as teaching vocabulary through objects, pictures, spelling, drills, expressions, gestures, or contrast as suggested by Alpino (2015) will also encourage learners to develop knowledge of vocabulary.

As a result, teachers who teach vocabulary need to be aware of these strategies, and allow students to take their time learning new vocabulary. In addition, teachers ought to respect the requirements of their students to know what kind of vocabulary they need and what they need it for. Through reading, students can improve their vocabulary skills and learn new words and expressions, but still learning a language adequately does require learning other skills such as writing, speaking, and communication.

To conclude, vocabulary affects reading comprehension and the need to create a subject of vocabulary at university classes such as phonetics, written expression, and oral communication is urgent and compulsory.

8.CONCLUSION

When learning a foreign language, learners need to learn different language

skills such as reading, speaking, listening and reading. These language skills allow language learners to achieve adequacy in the target language. Reading is one of the core elements of language that enables students to acquire input of the language. Through appropriate reading, foreign language learners will be able to comprehend different styles of the target language. To achieve successful reading, learners are compelled to understand the language of the text, the words written and the expressions. Thus, the core subject of this research article is allowing language learners to learn vocabulary inside the classroom in order to achieve successful reading skills and comprehension and thus facilitate the process of learning the target language.

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