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The Importance of Reading Novels in Promoting EFL Students' Vocabulary Acquisition

أهمية قراءة الروايات في تعزيز اكتساب المفردات لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

Dr/ Noreddine BENTAYEB
نورالدين بن الطيب
Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages - University of Batna2
n.bentayeb@univ-batna2.dz

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Abstract:

The present paper investigates the benefits reading novels would bring to EFL students vocabulary acquisition and the great opportunities it provides for advancement in lexis development. It explores the significant advantages that reading novels offers in the context of vocabulary acquisition for EFL students. Through engaging with narratives, students are exposed to a broad spectrum of vocabulary, including everyday expressions, slang, idioms, subjects-specific lexicon and technical terms which are not commonly featured in conventional textbooks or structured language lessons.

Moreover, novels facilitate deeper understanding and retention of vocabulary by presenting words within context, making it easier for learners to grasp layered meanings a word, phrase, or concept may carry. Novels offer a variety of linguistic structures, cultural references, and diverse writing styles which contribute not only to vocabulary development but also to overall language proficiency. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the important issue of the gainful properties that reading novels, as an alternative learning strategy, might have on the improvement of the students vocabulary store. This study would be profitable to EFL students, teachers, researchers, educationists and the whole community as it provides a framework for prominent insights in the importance of the contribution of reading novels to rise the opportunity of vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: Vocabulary; Acquisition; Novels; Reading; Store.

الملخص:

يبحث هذا المقال في الفوائد التي يمكن أن تجلبها قراءة الروايات لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في اكتساب المفردات والفرص الكبيرة التي تقدمها لتعزيز تطور المفردات. يستكشف المقال المزايا الكبيرة التي تقدمها قراءة الروايات في سياق اكتساب المفردات لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. من خلال التفاعل مع السرد القصصي، يتعرض الطلاب لمجموعة واسعة من المفردات، بما في ذلك التعبيرات اليومية، والمصطلحات العامية، والأمثال، والمفردات الخاصة بالمجالات، والمصطلحات التقنية التي لا تظهر عادة في الكتب الدراسية التقليدية أو دروس اللغة المنظمة. علاوة على ذلك،

تسهل الروايات الفهم الأعمق والاحتفاظ بالمفردات عن طريق تقديم الكلمات في سياقات، مما يجعل من الأسهل على المتعلمين فهم المعاني المتنوعة التي قد تحملها كلمة أو عبارة أو مفهوم.

تقدم الروايات مجموعة من الهياكل اللغوية، والإشارات الثقافية، وأنماط الكتابة المتنوعة التي تساهم في تطوير المفردات بالإضافة إلى تحسين الكفاءة اللغوية بشكل عام. يهدف هذا المقال إلى تسليط الضوء على القضية المهمة المتعلقة بالفوائد التي يمكن أن تحققها قراءة الروايات كاستراتيجية تعلم بديلة في تحسين مخزون المفردات لدى الطلاب. ستكون هذه الدراسة مفيدة لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، والمعلمين، والباحثين، والمتخصصين في التعليم، والمجتمع بأسره، حيث تقدم إطارًا لرؤى بارزة حول أهمية مساهمة قراءة الروايات في زيادة فرص اكتساب المفردات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المفردات؛ اكتساب؛ الروايات؛ قراءة؛ مخزون.

Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is a central element of foreign language learning, as it shapes learners' ability to comprehend and communicate successfully in the target language. For EFL students, limited vocabulary knowledge often represents a major constraint to academic achievement and communicative competence. An insufficient lexical repertoire hinders learners' ability to comprehend reading materials, follow classroom instruction, and understand spoken discourse accurately. As a result, students may struggle to grasp key concepts in academic texts, participate actively in discussions, or express their thoughts clearly and confidently in both written and oral forms. This limitation can lead to frustration, reduced motivation, and low self-confidence, further obstructing language development. Moreover, without adequate vocabulary knowledge, learners may rely heavily on translation or memorization strategies, which do not always promote deep understanding or long-term retention. Consequently, expanding vocabulary is not just a component of language learning but a vital element in enabling EFL students to attain academic success and effective communication in the target language.

Traditional instructional approaches frequently emphasize explicit vocabulary instruction through textbooks, word lists and structured lessons designed to teach specific sets of words in isolation. While these methods can offer regular and clear guidance on word meanings and usage, they frequently fall short in providing learners with the scope and depth of language revelations required for authentic, varied and context-rich language acquisition.

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed toward extensive reading as a complementary strategy for vocabulary development. Among the various forms of reading materials, novels hold particular promise due to their rich linguistic content, diverse stylistic features, and the way they situate language within real-life contexts. Through engagement with novels, EFL

learners encounter a wide range of vocabulary, including colloquial expressions, idiomatic phrases, subject-specific terminology, and culturally embedded language that may not typically appear in conventional teaching materials.

This paper investigates the potential benefits of reading novels for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL students. It explores how exposure to language within the context of novels contributes to deeper comprehension, improved retention, and the growth of vocabulary. Furthermore, the study highlights the broader linguistic and cultural advantages that novel reading offers, positioning it as a valuable alternative or supplementary strategy in foreign language instruction. By examining these dimensions, the paper intends to offer a valuable contribution to the current discussions regarding effective approaches to vocabulary development and to provide insights profitable to students, teachers, researchers, and education practitioners.

1. Vocabulary acquisition and Language development

Vocabulary acquisition is the process of learning and understanding new words and their meanings. It includes learning word meanings, spelling, pronunciation, grammatical use and the context where they apply. Vocabulary can be acquired through two primary ways: incidental learning and intentional learning. Both approaches play a significant role in expanding a learner's vocabulary and fostering language development.

Incidental learning refers to the process by which learners acquire new vocabulary naturally and without explicit effort while engaging in language activities. The process takes place while reading, listening to conversations, watching media, or engaging in everyday interactions. In this case, learners do not focus directly on memorizing vocabulary; instead, they encounter new words while reading books, listening to conversations, watching content, or participating in everyday communication. Through repeated exposure to these words in meaningful contexts, learners gradually understand their meanings, pronunciation, and usage (Webb, 2008). For example, a student reading a story may come across an unfamiliar word and infer its meaning from the surrounding sentences. Over time, frequent exposure helps the learner remember and use the word correctly. Incidental learning is particularly effective because it happens within genuine language contexts, learners are more likely to grasp and retain vocabulary (Nation, 2001).

Intentional learning, on the other hand, involves the deliberate and conscious effort to learn new vocabulary. In this method, learners actively study words and focus on memorizing their meanings, pronunciation, spelling, and grammatical forms. This often occurs in organized educational settings such as classrooms, where teachers provide opportunities for vocabulary acquisition through explanations, exercises, and practice activities. Learners may use tools such as novels, books, vocabulary lists, flashcards, dictionaries, or language learning applications to study and review words (Schmitt, 2008). Intentional learning allows students to thoroughly expand their vocabulary and focus on precise words that are important for academic or professional purposes.

Both incidental and intentional learning complement each other in the process of vocabulary acquisition. While intentional learning helps learners quickly build a basic vocabulary, incidental learning strengthens and reinforces this knowledge through repeated exposure in real-life situations. Therefore, an effective vocabulary learning process often integrates both approaches to promote deeper comprehension and long-term retention of new vocabulary.

2. Vocabulary Acquisition: Cognitive and Linguistic Theories

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language. It describes the process by which learners acquire, memorize, retrieve, and apply new vocabulary in communication. Researchers in cognitive psychology and linguistics have developed a range of theories to explain how learners acquire and build their vocabulary.

Cognitive theories of vocabulary acquisition focus on how the mind processes, stores, and retrieves new words rather than just exposure and repetition. From a cognitive perspective, vocabulary learning is closely related to mental engagement and processes such as memory, attention, perception, and connections. Cognitive theories emphasize that learners actively construct knowledge by connecting new vocabulary with their preexisting knowledge and mental concepts.

The main cognitive theories of vocabulary acquisition are:

- **Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932):** Learners understand new words by linking them to existing mental concepts (schemas). If you already know a “school” schema, learning the word “assessment” becomes easier because it fits into

your existing mental network. Vocabulary is acquired more effectively when learners connect new words to what they already know.

- **Depth of Processing Theory (Craik & Lockhart, 1972):** The more thoroughly a learner engages with a word, the better it is embedded and recollected. Simply seeing a word isn't enough. Understanding the word meaning, using it in sentences and associating it with personal experiences help retention. Accordingly, active engagement with vocabulary strengthens memory.
- **Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1986):** Words are remembered better when they are processed both visually and verbally. If a learner reads the word "bridge" while also seeing a picture of a bridge, both verbal and visual codes are stored in memory, making retention and recollection easier. Accordingly, combining language with imagery improves learning efficiency.
- **Connectionist Theory (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986):** Vocabulary is acquired through forming connections in the brain between words, sounds, and meanings. Repeated exposure to a word in various contexts strengthens the neural connections, creating a tissue of associations. Thus, the more our brain sees the word, the stronger the mental network becomes.
- **Information Processing Theory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968):** Based on principles from cognitive psychology, this theory treats the mind like a system that receives, processes, stores, and retrieves information. Vocabulary learned moves through three memory stages: a sensory stage where the mind is briefly exposed to a word (seeing or hearing it), a working stage where the learner actively processes the word and a long-term stage where the word becomes part of permanent vocabulary knowledge through repetition and rehearsal.
- **Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990):** language learning does not occur simply because learners are exposed to input. Instead, learning happens when learners pay attention to specific linguistic features in the input. if a learner reads or hears a new word but does not consciously notice it, it is unlikely to be learned. When learners focus their attention on language forms, they are more likely to notice them. Words that appear frequently in input or stand out as bold text, stress in speech or repeated attract attention and are more likely to be learned.

From a linguistic standpoint, vocabulary acquisition focuses on how language structure, context, and exposure influence the learning of new words. Linguistic theories highlight how words are structured, the contexts in which they appear, and the learner's exposure to them.

Various theoretical frameworks have been developed to account for linguistic vocabulary acquisition, each highlighting different aspects of how we learn words. Here's a brief breakdown:

- **Behaviorist Theory (Skinner, 1957):** language learning, including vocabulary, occurs primarily through stimulus-response conditioning, reinforcement, and imitation. In his view, children learn words because of Repetition, imitation, and reinforcement of correct usage offered by caregivers or their environment.
- **Nativist/Innateness Theory (Chomsky, 1965):** proposes that humans are born with an innate ability to acquire language. That is, our brains are innately born with the capacity to learn language, including vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.
- **Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985):** part of his broader Monitor Model, which includes five hypotheses about language learning, the Input Hypothesis specifically focuses on how learners acquire a second language most effectively when they are exposed to comprehensible input; language that is slightly beyond their current level. In a situation where learners are exposed to language mostly understood, they will recognize familiar words and infer new words or structures from context. It's one of the primary ideas behind immersion programs, reading-based approaches, and natural language learning strategies.
- **Social/Interactionist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978):** vocabulary acquisition is a collaborative process and social interaction where learners acquire vocabulary by engaging with more knowledgeable members of their environment such as parents, teachers, peers, and the broader community. This theory proposes that vocabulary is a tool for communication and social engagement and learners learn words, grammar, and discourse structures by interacting in meaningful contexts.

Linguistic theories of vocabulary acquisition emphasize different factors: some stress repetition and reinforcement, others highlight innate cognitive abilities, some focus on social interaction, and others on the way words are

processed and stored in the brain. In reality, vocabulary learning likely draws on a combination of all these factors.

Both cognitive and linguistic perspectives highlight that vocabulary acquisition is a dynamic and multifaceted process that involves interaction between mental processes and linguistic nourishment. Understanding these theories helps educators design effective strategies such as: extensive reading, contextual learning, and meaningful practice to support vocabulary development among EFL learners.

3. The Role of Reading in Vocabulary Development

Reading plays a critical role in the acquisition and expansion of vocabulary, representing one of the most resourceful channels for encountering and assimilating new lexical items. (Nation, 2001). In contrast to spoken language, which depends heavily on context and immediate feedback, reading exposes learners to a broader lexical repertoire of vocabulary, including both frequent words and rare, domain-specific terms.

Empirical research suggests that extensive reading contributes significantly to both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. Breadth refers to the number of words a learner knows, while depth encompasses a richer understanding of word meanings, collocations, and morphological structures. Studies in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition demonstrate that regular reading correlates positively with vocabulary growth, often surpassing the effectiveness of rote memorization or isolated word study (Krashen, 2004).

Reading also promotes incidental vocabulary acquisition, allowing learners to absorb new words naturally while focused on comprehension rather than deliberate memorization. This process is particularly effective when texts are above the learner's current proficiency level, offering unique chances to engage cognitive processing without causing comprehension failure. Moreover, the cognitive mechanisms involved in reading such as semantic mapping, inferencing, and contextual prediction promote long-lasting word retention and enhance the ability to use new vocabulary in prolific language exchanges (Grabe, 2009).

Furthermore, reading supports the development of metalinguistic awareness; the ability to analyze, manipulate, and consciously consider language itself, its sounds, words, and grammar separately from the act of merely

communicating or understanding meaning. This enables learners to recognize word forms, syntactic patterns, and morphological variations (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). This awareness not only strengthens the mental lexicon but also improves learners' capacity to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words autonomously. In the context of vocabulary acquisition, exposure to authentic texts can also provide cultural and pragmatic insights that enrich lexical knowledge beyond mere wordlist definitions.

In sum, reading serves as both a vehicle for vocabulary expansion and a cognitive tool for deepening vocabulary knowledge. Its role is multidimensional, encompassing incidental learning, reinforcement of existing knowledge, and enhancement of metalinguistic skills, making it a pillar of effective vocabulary development tactics.

4. The Benefits of Reading Novels for Vocabulary Acquisition

Reading novels has long been recognized as a powerful tool for language development and vocabulary acquisition. Reading novels provides learners with extensive exposure to authentic, context-related language. Unlike isolated word lists, novels immerse readers in rich linguistic input, presenting words and phrases in varied syntactic structures and meaningful contexts.

Novels provide a wide range of vocabulary in context, often presenting both formal and informal language, which exposes learners to the diversity of linguistic forms they are likely to meet in real-life communication. This allows learners to acquire both high-frequency words and less common, sophisticated vocabulary, which contributes to advanced language proficiency (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998).

Exposure to rich, authentic texts provides learners with encounters with diverse lexical items in meaningful contexts, which facilitates incidental vocabulary learning. Unlike rote memorization of word lists, reading allows learners to infer meanings from context, strengthening both semantic and morphological awareness (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). This process supports the growth of learners' mental lexicon, allowing them a fine-tuned perception of word forms, syntactic patterns, and morphological variations.

Furthermore, reading novels engages cognitive processes such as prediction, inferencing, and pattern recognition, which contribute to deeper lexical processing and stronger retention of word meanings (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Beyond vocabulary, novels are a powerful cognitive tool for

learning and retaining new vocabulary. This effectiveness stems from the way novels employ plot, character development, and setting to capture the reader's attention and stimulate higher-order thinking to create lasting mental associations with language.

Extensive reading, which involves reading large volumes of narratives for overall comprehension rather than detailed study, has been found to be highly effective in promoting vocabulary acquisition. Studies indicate that learners who engage in sustained, voluntary reading of novels acquire new words incidentally at a faster rate than learners who rely solely on explicit instruction (Day & Bamford, 1998). Novels, with their compelling narratives and rich linguistic networks, provide repeated and meaningful encounters with vocabulary essential for the consolidation of vocabulary in the mental lexicon. Repeated exposure not only strengthens the recognition of word forms but also enhances learners' ability to infer meanings and apply words in new settings and support independent language learning.

Moreover, novels offer multiple repeated encounters with a word across varied registers, styles, and cultural contexts, which enhances pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence. Such encounters contribute not only to the recognition of literal word meanings but also to an understanding of figurative language, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic nuances, thereby enriching lexical knowledge beyond dictionary definitions (Schmitt, 2008).

In addition, reading for pleasure can increase learner motivation and engagement, which are crucial factors in long-term vocabulary retention and autonomous language learning (Krashen, 2004). The emotional and motivational aspects of engaging with novels significantly influence the process of language acquisition. Captivating narratives increase reading enjoyment and internal motivation, which in turn promote consistent reading traditions and regular language practice.

In conclusion, reading novels functions as a foundation in vocabulary acquisition and broader language development. By providing rich linguistic input, fostering metalinguistic awareness, exposing learners to cultural and pragmatic language use, and enhancing motivation, novels offer a multidimensional approach to language learning. Integrating extensive novel reading into language syllabi represents a successful strategy for promoting both vocabulary growth and complete linguistic competence.

5. The Advantages of Novels Over Other Forms of Reading Material

Novels make vocabulary memorable and emotionally engaging. They help words stick in memory and sound emotionally because words are embedded in vivid, meaningful contexts, repeated naturally, connecting them to feelings and senses, and weaving them into captivating stories that give them life.

In a novel, words aren't presented in isolation, they appear naturally within sentences, dialogues, and descriptions. This amalgamation allows readers to encounter vocabulary in authentic and meaningful contexts, where the surrounding words, actions, and settings provide rich evidences to their meanings. Unlike learning from a list of words or definitions, where vocabulary is presented as abstract bare elements, reading a novel involves multiple cognitive processes: the brain simultaneously interprets narrative events, character emotions, sensory imagery, and linguistic structures. As a result, each new word becomes linked not only to its semantic meaning but also to an animated mental projection and an associated emotional variation. Contextualized word learning has been shown to promote deeper understanding and stronger retention (Elgort, 2011).

Stories evoke a wide range of emotions including suspense, joy, grief, or excitement. When readers vocabulary within such emotionally charged contexts, the words become tied to the feeling they provoke. This emotional connection plays a crucial role in memory retention, as cognitive and neuroscientific research demonstrates that information associated with emotional experiences is more easily encoded and consolidated in long-term memory, making them far more memorable and meaningful (Cahill & McGaugh, 1998).

Novels naturally repeat words in varied contexts. This repetition is particularly beneficial for vocabulary retention. Novels present vocabulary in dynamic and diverse linguistic settings unlike flashcards or word lists, which often rely on repetitious memorization and isolate words from meaningful frameworks. Words in novels appear in dialogues, narrative descriptions, or internal character thoughts, each time accompanied by slightly different syntactic structures or emotional tones. This type of contextualized repetition supports understanding and discards the mechanical effort associated with memorization acquisition techniques (Elgort, 2011).

Another fascinating intersection of extensive reading and vocabulary acquisition is how words are used to create meaning. Stylistics can significantly

aid vocabulary acquisition. Stylistics emphasizes delicate differences in meaning, connotations, collocations, and tone. Stylistic features of literary passages encourage learners to examine diction, syntax, figurative language, and register. Metaphors, similes, alliteration, anaphora, euphemism, symbolism, personification, and irony are stylistic devices that make language inventive and appealing. Learners are exposed to rich, varied, and precise language and help acquire vocabulary appropriately for context, improving command and communication ability (Simpson, 2004).

Words in novels are connected to synonyms, antonyms, and collocations, forming lexical networks that provide multiple retrieval pathways during recall (Schmitt, 2000). Beyond these etymological connections, words are also linked to concepts, ideas, objects, and actions, which allows learners to retain new vocabulary within existing cognitive frameworks (Anderson, 1990). Furthermore, words often carry sensory imagery associations with sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile experiences which enrich meaning and facilitate deeper retention in memory (Paivio, 1991).

This cross-connection enhances both comprehension and retention, as activating one module in the network can trigger related words and concepts, making retrieval more efficient.

Narratives consist of various components such as plots, characters, and story arcs, which offer a rich context for learning language. When vocabulary is related to these elements, words are stored in memory not just as isolated units, but as part of a meaningful narrative framework. Encountering a word in connection with a plot event or a character's action allows learners to memorize that word in a situational and emotional context, enhancing recall and deepening understanding (Day & Bamford, 1998).

Novels help words stick in memory and resonate emotionally by situating them in meaningful situations, providing natural repetition, and tying them to the senses and storytelling in addition to the choices of the stylistics employed in literary texts. Ultimately, this makes learning vocabulary an immersive experience rather than a mechanical drill.

6. Implementation Considerations for Using Novels in EFL Classes

Selecting suitable literary texts for EFL learners is a complex pedagogical task that necessitates thoughtful consideration of various factors, including linguistic difficulty, Theme appropriateness, and cultural accessibility. Once The

choice of novels is made, implementing reading techniques such extensive reading, intensive reading and guided reading will allow learners capitalize on vocabulary acquisition and promote analysis of language forms, comprehension, and layered meanings. To enhance vocabulary learning, learners should actively engage with new words through techniques such as maintaining vocabulary journals, participating in debates about the text, and completing exercises or activities derived from the novels, which encourage retention and practice of the language in meaningful contexts (Cobb, 2007).

6.1 Linguistic Difficulty

The language difficulty of a novel is the primary consideration when selecting texts for EFL learners. Research suggests that learners benefit most from texts that are slightly above their current proficiency level, a principle which is often associated with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), and which theorizes that understandable input with a manageable level of difficulty promotes language acquisition. The key aspects to consider within the linguistic difficulty include:

- **Vocabulary density**: Novels flooded with expert or obsolete vocabulary may overcome learners and hinder comprehension. Target literary texts should contain a majority of common words familiar to learners, with limited use of less common lexical items.
- **Sentence complexity**: Simple syntactic structures are more accessible to low-level learners, whereas advanced students are able to handle texts that include complex sentence patterns, subordinate clauses and figurative language or even stylistic devices.
- **Grammatical structures**: Novels should offer opportunities to encounter grammatical forms that learners are currently studying, allowing for reinforcement of classroom instruction in an authentic language use.

6.2 Thematic Relevance

Fascinating and attractive content is vital for maintaining learners motivation and promoting consistent reading. Novels should be selected based on themes that match with learners' interests, experiences, and cognitive development. Attention must be driven towards:

- **Age relevance**: Young adult learners may benefit from novels addressing romantic experiences, exploration, comedy, friendship, and personal growth,

whereas adult learners may prefer themes of social issues, politics, family, identity, or historical narratives.

- **Cultural familiarity**: Texts that resonate with learners' own experiences or interests can enhance engagement and comprehension. Stories set in familiar cultural contexts, dealing with family issues, work, community, social expectations, or personal growth and maturity experiences tend to be widely appreciated.
- **Cognitive and emotional stimulation**: Challenging but meaningful narratives that encourage critical thinking, emotional involvement, and reflection can facilitate deeper language processing and vocabulary acquisition.

6.3 Cultural Relevance

In EFL instruction, introducing learners to real cultural settings is important, yet educators must carefully consider the cultural appropriateness and learners' backgrounds. These considerations include:

- **Cross-cultural understanding**: Novels can serve as openings on target-language cultures, helping learners acquire not only linguistic competence but also familiarity with the English sociocultural environment. Selecting texts that properly and respectfully depict cultural norms, values, and practices can promote intercultural competence.
- **Avoiding cultural barriers**: Some texts may contain cultural references, idiomatic expressions, or social practices that are too obscure or peculiar, possibly causing confusion or misinterpretation. Supplementary materials, glossaries, or pre-reading activities can mitigate these issues.
- **Balance between familiarity and challenge**: While culturally familiar content facilitates comprehension, exposure to culturally distant texts can enrich learners' perspectives and expand their vocabulary repertoire.

6.4 Practical Issues

Beyond linguistic and thematic factors, some practical issues may influence novel selection. Factors to consider are:

- **Text length**: Short novels and stories or abridged versions, unlike lengthy ones, are generally more manageable for EFL learners, particularly at lower proficiency levels.

- **Support materials**: Novels accompanied by learner guides, vocabulary lists, comprehension questions, activities or adapted editions can greatly enhance learning experiences.
- **Multimodal support**: Audiobooks, graphic novels, audio narrations, animations, images, illustrations or multimedia adaptations, can provide additional support, for learners with different learning styles and facilitate vocabulary acquisition.

6.5 Active Vocabulary Reading Techniques

Augmenting one's vocabulary store through reading is a cornerstone of effective reading, comprehension, and communication. However, simply encountering new words in texts is often not enough to ensure permanent understanding or convenient usage. This is where active vocabulary reading techniques take center stage. Unlike passive reading, which involves skimming or reading for general meaning, active reading engages the reader in a focused effort to energetically identify, understand and store new words. By applying the bellow structured active reading strategies, readers can transform unfamiliar words into everlasting functional language skills for communication:

- **Annotated reading**: while reading, learners underline or highlight unfamiliar words. In addition, they write quick notes about the meaning, likely synonyms or translation in the margin. Readers can also mark words that appear repeatedly, which allows them to track patterns and recognize how vocabulary is used throughout the text.
- **Context clue analysis**: instead of immediately reaching for a dictionary, readers try using the surrounding text to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words. Look for clues such as definitions, examples, contrasts, or synonyms within the sentence. Readers check the dictionary only to confirm their understanding after they have made an educated guess.
- **While reading journaling**: readers keep a separate notebook dedicated to new vocabulary. For each unfamiliar word, they write down the word itself, its meaning, the sentence from the text where it appears, and finally, create their own sentence using the word.
- **Word frequency tracking**: encourage readers to pay attention to words that appear multiple times in the text. Focusing on these repeated words can strengthen memory and often reinforces understanding and retention.

- **The question method**: Before reading a passage, a reader should take a moment to ask himself which new words might appear and which words could be key to understanding the text. After reading, the reader attempts to recollect these new words and define them from memory, reinforcing both comprehension and retention.
- **Reading with purpose**: Readers set a clear goal for vocabulary learning, such as deciding to learn a given number of new words from a particular text. As they read, highlight these words, look up their meanings, and try to use them immediately, which helps reinforce understanding and retention.
- **Chunk-Based Reading**: read and process text in meaningful chunks (a group of words that form a meaningful unit, like a phrase, clause, or even a short sentence) rather than word by word. Instead of cracking every single word individually, readers recognizes patterns and understand the meaning of the group as a whole.
- **Repeated reading**: Reading the same text multiple times can greatly increase vocabulary learning. The first reading is made for the purpose of gaining a general understanding of the content. During the second reading, close attention should be paid to new vocabulary and how it is used. Finally, the third reading is devoted to using the new words in own sentences.
- **Active post reading**: After finishing a text, the reader chooses five to ten new words and actively work with them. Readers create flashcards for review, write own sentences using the words, and reinforce learning by teaching or explaining the words to others.

Active vocabulary reading is not just about seeing words; it's about engaging and interacting with them, intuitive understanding, noticing patterns, using context, recording, and practicing retrieval.

7. Challenges and Considerations

Novels offer EFL learners a valuable opportunity for developing language abilities, enhancing vocabulary, and gaining a deeper comprehension of English. However, incorporating novels into the EFL classroom presents several challenges that educators must carefully consider. One key concern is the difficulty level of the texts, as novels often contain complex sentence structures, advanced vocabulary, and refined stylistic and literary devices that may be difficult to understand for learners with varying proficiency levels. Such

intricacies may hinder reading and spoil the entire acquisition progression. Novels should be carefully selected to fit the learners' current abilities while still providing equal opportunities for growth.

Another important factor is time constraints, since reading full-length novels requires a significant investment and a continued commitment to the activity. Such investment and commitment may be very hard to maintain within a limited classroom schedule. Teachers may find it difficult to allocate sufficient time for students to read since learners are already crammed with other courses of the curriculum and other language learning activities. Moreover, some students may read more slowly due to proficiency level, vocabulary limitations or sentence structure complexity, which can extend the time required to complete the novel. Careless reading time planning can lead to frustration, reduced motivation, or even withdrawal.

Additionally, cultural differences can pose difficulties, as novels frequently host contexts for references, idiomatic expressions, or social frameworks that may be unknown to EFL students, requiring additional explanation and guidance from the teacher to bridge the gap. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that the reading activities are accessible and meaningful for all proficiency levels.

Conclusion

Traditional vocabulary instruction, while valuable for introducing specific words in a structured and organized learning, often lacks the contextual richness and authentic exposure necessary for deep and lasting acquisition. Such instruction typically emphasizes rote memorization, isolated definitions, and repetitive drills, which can lead to surface-level vocabulary learning within which words remain short-lived and disconnected from practical language. In contrast, extensive reading, mostly through novels, provides a rich and practical context for vocabulary growth.

Novels immerse learners in various linguistic environments, presenting a wide range of vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and culturally refined language that stretch beyond the confined area of the classroom. This experience not only facilitates comprehension and prolonged retention but also enhances learners' ability to use fluent language across various communicative situations. Furthermore, reading novels can rise motivation, cultural awareness and engagement with the target language, contributing to full language development.

The findings and discussions presented in this paper highlight the value of integrating novel reading into EFL instruction as an alternative strategy to traditional vocabulary teaching. This paper recommends situating vocabulary learning within meaningful, authentic contexts to help students overcome lexical limitations, build confidence, and achieve both linguistic proficiency and academic success. It also recommends promoting novel reading as part of vocabulary instruction to offer a promising pathway for fostering more resourceful and sustainable language learning experiences.

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