IMPROVING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY

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Abstract: Vocabulary is an essential part of language learning, yet many EFL students struggle to remember and use new words. This study examines ways to improve vocabulary teaching for Grade 6 students at School No. 31 in Namangan district. Data were collected through teacher reflections, student questionnaires, and classroom observations. The findings show that students respond better to interactive methods such as word games, quizzes, and visual activities. These approaches helped increase student engagement and made it easier for them to remember and use new vocabulary. After applying these methods, students became more active and confident in using new words during lessons. The study concludes that using meaningful, interactive activities and connecting vocabulary to real-life contexts can improve students' learning outcomes.

Keywords: vocabulary learning; EFL; word games; interactive activities; action research; Grade 6

O‘QUVCHILARNING LUG‘AT BOYLIGINI OSHIRISH

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Annotatsiya: Lug‘at boyligi til o‘rganishning muhim qismi hisoblanadi, ammo ko‘plab EFL o‘quvchilari yangi so‘zlarni eslab qolish va ularni amalda qo‘llashda qiynaladilar. Ushbu tadqiqot Namangan viloyati 31-maktabining 6-sinf o‘quvchilari uchun lug‘at o‘rgatish usullarini yaxshilash yo‘llarini o‘rganadi. Ma'lumotlar o‘qituvchi kuzatuvlari, o‘quvchilar so‘rovnomalari va dars jarayonidagi kuzatishlar orqali to‘plandi. Natijalar shuni ko‘rsatdiki, o‘quvchilar so‘z o‘yinlari, viktorinalar va vizual materiallarga asoslangan interaktiv usullarga yaxshiroq javob beradilar. Ushbu yondashuvlar o‘quvchilarning faolligini oshirib,

yangi so‘zlarni eslab qolish va qo‘llashni osonlashtirdi. Ushbu usullar qo‘llanilgandan so‘ng, o‘quvchilar dars jarayonida yangi so‘zlarni ishlatishda faolroq va ishonchliroq bo‘la boshladilar. Tadqiqot shuni xulosa qiladiki, lug‘atni real hayot bilan bog‘lash va mazmunli, interaktiv faoliyatlardan foydalanish o‘quvchilarning o‘zlashtirish natijalarini sezilarli darajada yaxshilaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: lug‘at o‘rganish; EFL; so‘z o‘yinlari; interaktiv faoliyatlar; amaliy tadqiqot; 6-sinf

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is very important in language learning because without enough words, students cannot understand what they read or hear or express their ideas clearly. However, in many EFL classrooms, vocabulary is still taught mainly through repetition and memorization, which often leads to recognition rather than real use. During my teaching practice with Grade 6 students at School No. 31 in the Namangan district, I noticed that students could recognize words in exercises but struggled to use them independently. This showed a gap between passive and active knowledge. This made me reflect on my teaching methods and ask: how can I improve my students’ vocabulary? By collecting data and trying different classroom strategies, I aimed to find more effective and engaging ways to teach vocabulary.

2.My Teaching Context

This research took place during my teaching practice at School Number 31 in the Namangan district of Uzbekistan. The participants were twenty students from a Grade 6 class, aged eleven to twelve. I am a student teacher at the Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages named after Is'hakhan Ibrat, studying in group XTA-JU-23, and this action research was part of my practical training. These students had been learning English since primary school and had several lessons each week. However, their active vocabulary remained limited, and they rarely used English outside of structured tasks. Vocabulary teaching in this class had mostly relied on word lists, translation, and written repetition. I believed

that more interactive, activity-based approaches would help students connect words to meaning and use them more confidently.

3. Literature Review

Vocabulary knowledge plays a central role in second language development. As Nation 1 points out, acquiring a word fully requires repeated encounters across different contexts, not a single exposure such as copying from the board. This view is supported by Webb2, who found that depth of vocabulary knowledge - knowing how a word works, not just what it means - is a stronger predictor of language use than breadth alone. The debate between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning remains relevant. While Krashen3 emphasized the role of comprehensible input in natural acquisition, more recent work by Schmitt4 suggests that explicit vocabulary instruction is especially important in classroom settings where students have limited exposure to English outside school. Game-based learning has gained increasing support in EFL research. Sundqvist and Sylvén 5 found that students who engaged in interactive, game-like activities showed measurable gains in vocabulary retention compared to those receiving traditional instruction. Games provide repeated, meaningful encounters with target words and offer immediate feedback, both of which support long-term retention.

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1 Nation, I. S. P. (2013). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

2 Webb, S. (2020). *The Routledge handbook of vocabulary studies.* Routledge.

3 Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition.* Pergamon Press.

4 Schmitt, N. (2019). Understanding vocabulary acquisition, instruction, and assessment: A research agenda. *Language Teaching, 52*(2), 261–274. **https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000053**

5 Sundqvist, P., & Sylvén, L. K. (2016). *Extramural English in teaching and learning.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Visual support also plays an important role. Mayer6 argues that combining words with images reduces cognitive load and helps learners build stronger mental representations, particularly at lower proficiency levels.

Finally, Vygotsky's 7 sociocultural theory highlights the value of collaborative learning. Pair and group tasks allow students to use new vocabulary in meaningful interaction, negotiate meaning, and support one another - dimensions that list-based instruction rarely provides.

4. Research Questions

This study was guided by three questions:

1. Which vocabulary teaching methods do I use most often, and which ones help my students learn new words effectively?
2. How do my students feel about the vocabulary activities used in class?
3. In which activities do my students participate most actively and learn new words better?

5.Exploratory Phase

1.Methods of Data Collection

Three tools were used to collect data throughout the study:

a. Student questionnaires

These questionnaires were given before and after the intervention. They helped me understand students' attitudes toward vocabulary learning, their enjoyment during activities, and their confidence in using new words. The questions were written in both English and Uzbek so that students could answer easily and honestly.

b. Classroom observations

6 Mayer, R. E. (2019). *Multimedia learning* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

7 Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

These observations were carried out throughout all lessons. I noted how many students actively used new vocabulary, whether they attempted to use English words during activities or switched to Uzbek, and how engaged they were during group and game-based tasks compared to traditional exercises.

c. Reflective teaching notes

After each lesson, I wrote short notes about what vocabulary activities worked well and where students struggled. These reflections helped me track how students' word knowledge, participation, and confidence in using English developed across the intervention.

6. Exploratory Research Findings

1.Questionnaire Results

All twenty Grade 6 students completed the questionnaire. Their responses gave me a clearer picture of which vocabulary activities they found most useful and which ones they genuinely wanted to do more of in class.

Table 1. Questionnaire Results: Student Preferences for Vocabulary Activities

Activity / Factor	Students (n=20)	Percentage
Word games most enjoyable	13 students	65%
Quizzes help remember words better	9 students	45%
Pictures help extend word knowledge	8 students	40%
Vocabulary activities helpful overall	8 students	40%
Want more game-based activities	12 students	60%

Source: student questionnaire data

Most students clearly favorite game-based learning. Around two thirds said they enjoyed word games the most, and sixty percent wanted more of these activities in their lessons. Nearly half of the students also found quizzes

useful for remembering new words. Forty percent pointed to picture-based activities as helpful for learning related vocabulary, which suggests that visual support matters more than traditional methods might assume.

2.Classroom Observation Summary

Classroom observations across the lessons supported what the questionnaire had already suggested. Students were noticeably more active and engaged during word games and sentence creation tasks than during traditional exercises like writing word lists or translating. Positive feedback from the teacher - including smiling and nodding - helped create a comfortable atmosphere where students felt safe trying out new words. Over time, participation gradually improved, especially among students who had previously been quiet or hesitant to work independently.

7. Action Plan

Based on the questionnaire and observation findings, I developed an action plan to make vocabulary instruction more interactive, meaningful, and student-centered. The plan followed the four-stage action research cycle: plan, act, observe, and reflect. During the planning stage, I identified four main changes. First, word games such as matching tasks, word association, and vocabulary bingo would be used regularly to give students repeated exposure to new words in an enjoyable, low-pressure setting. Second, short quizzes at the start or end of lessons would help consolidate learning and allow students to track their own progress. Third, picture-based presentations would replace or supplement word lists, helping students connect new words to images and real-life contexts. Fourth, pair and small group tasks would create opportunities for students to use vocabulary together and learn from each other. These changes were carried out over several weeks during my teaching practice. After each lesson, I continued writing reflection notes and observing how student participation and vocabulary use developed.

8. Results

Following the action plan, noticeable improvements appeared in both engagement and vocabulary use. Students who had previously stayed quiet began joining in more willingly, especially during word games. The quality of their responses also improved - answers became longer, vocabulary more varied, and students started using newly learned words in their own sentences rather than falling back on the same familiar ones.

Table 2. Student Engagement and Vocabulary Use Before and After Intervention

Indicator	**Before**	**After**
Active participation during vocabulary tasks	Low, limited to a few students	High, most students involved
Use of new words in student responses	Rare, mostly familiar words	More frequent, broader range
Student engagement during games/activities	Moderate	Noticeably high
Voluntary attempts to use vocabulary	Infrequent	Regular and increasing
Student-reported enjoyment of lessons	Mixed	Mostly positive

Source: classroom observation data

Students also shared positive reactions through informal conversations and the final questionnaire. Many said they enjoyed the new activities and felt they were learning words in a way that actually stuck. Several mentioned that linking words to pictures and using them in games made vocabulary easier to recall than simply copying from the board.

9. Discussion and Findings

The results of this study generally supported what the literature suggests about vocabulary learning. Students who encountered new words through games, pictures, quizzes, and group tasks showed stronger retention than had been typical under traditional instruction. This reflected Nation's8 view that varied and repeated exposure is essential - passive copying alone rarely leads to productive word use. Motivation and enjoyment also played a clear role. Classroom observations showed higher participation and longer responses during game-based activities, suggesting that when students find tasks engaging, they process new language more deeply. The supportive classroom atmosphere - positive feedback, smiling, nodding - appeared to reduce hesitation and encourage students to try out new words more freely. Collaborative tasks proved particularly effective. When students worked in pairs or small groups, they helped each other understand and use new vocabulary in ways that individual written exercises simply did not allow. Peer interaction created a natural context for meaningful vocabulary use, which traditional list-based methods rarely provide.

10. Conclusion

a. What I Learned

This study made it clear that vocabulary learning works best when it is active, meaningful, and tied to real contexts. Students do not retain words by seeing them once or copying them repeatedly — they learn by using words, encountering them in pictures, playing with them in games, and practicing with classmates. Implementing these approaches showed me that when students genuinely enjoy a lesson, their attention and effort improve naturally. This will stay with me as I plan vocabulary instruction in my future teaching.

b. Challenges

8 Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language.* Cambridge University Press.

The main difficulties were managing time during game and group activities, and making sure every student had a fair chance to participate. Some students remained quieter during pair work, and it was not always possible to give individual support to those who needed it most. A longer study with more systematic tracking of individual progress would help address these gaps. Even so, the overall findings provided solid evidence that moving away from traditional methods and toward varied, interactive vocabulary activities leads to real improvement in both engagement and word use.

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