

English Vocabulary Acquisition for Efl Students with Learning Disabilities in Israel- A Review of Instructional Strategies for Teachers

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Tania Goldreich ^{a*}

^aAlexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Toma Cozma street 3, Iasi, Romania

*Corresponding author: gold.tania@gmail.com

Abstract

Keywords:

EFL – English as a Foreign Language; LD-Learning disabilities; L1- first language (native language); L2 – second language; SLA-second language acquisition.

This article is about English Vocabulary Acquisition for EFL Students with learning disabilities- LD- in Israel - A Review of Instructional Strategies for Teachers. In this paper I present a review of Instructional Strategies for Teachers who teach English as a Foreign language. I write about several strategies that are geared toward a successful process of vocabulary acquisition. Most of the former theories link vocabulary acquisition to the reading process. When it comes to EFL LD students' reading capabilities, even on a very basic scale, it can impose a severe obstacle. In my study, many of the students are very poor EFL readers, or emergent readers. Still, I believe that within the use of the suitable instructional strategies that do not require fluent reading, we can teach vocabulary effectively. There is a major importance for my students, to be able to study English vocabulary within a meaningful context, and to learn by doing, by action. In this paper I state that The Eco social Context Instructional Strategy is the most effective strategy when it comes to vocabulary acquisition for my EFL LD students. I base my statement mainly on the social ecology study of Bookchin, in his book Social Ecology and Communalism, that elaborates on the relationship between individuals and the environment as all part of one ecosystem. When learning new words withing action in the open environment, the acquisition abilities will be greater.

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselworte:

EFL – Englisch als Fremdsprache; LD- Lernbehinderungen; L1 – Muttersprache (Muttersprache); L2 – zweite Sprache; SLA- Zweitspracherwerb.

In diesem Artikel geht es um den Erwerb des englischen Wortschatzes für EFL-Schüler mit Lernbehinderungen (LD) in Israel – eine Überprüfung der Unterrichtsstrategien für Lehrer. In diesem Artikel präsentiere ich einen Überblick über Unterrichtsstrategien für Lehrer, die Englisch als Fremdsprache unterrichten. Ich schreibe über verschiedene Strategien, die auf einen erfolgreichen Prozess des Vokabelerwerbs ausgerichtet sind. Die meisten der erstgenannten Theorien verknüpfen den Wortschatzerwerb mit dem Leseprozess. Wenn es um die Lesefähigkeit von EFL LD-Studenten geht, kann dies, selbst wenn sie nur auf einem sehr einfachen Niveau erfolgt, ein ernstes Hindernis darstellen. In meiner Studie sind viele der Studenten sehr schlechte EFL-Leser oder Nachwuchslerner. Dennoch glaube ich, dass wir Vokabeln effektiv vermitteln können, wenn wir geeignete Unterrichtsstrategien anwenden, die kein flüssiges Lesen erfordern. Für meine Schüler ist es von großer Bedeutung, den englischen Wortschatz in einem sinnvollen Kontext zu lernen und durch Handeln und Handeln zu lernen. In diesem Artikel erkläre ich, dass die Eco-Social-Context-Unterrichtsstrategie die effektivste Strategie ist, wenn es um den Wortschatzerwerb für meine EFL-LD-Schüler geht. Ich stütze meine Aussage hauptsächlich auf die sozialökologische Studie von Bookchin in seinem Buch „Social Ecology and Communalism“, in der die Beziehung zwischen Individuen und der Umwelt als Teil eines Ökosystems erläutert wird. Wenn Sie in einer offenen Umgebung neue Wörter aktionsorientiert lernen, sind die Lernfähigkeiten größer.

1. English as a Foreign Language (FL) and International Language in Israel

In his book, English as a Global Language, David Crystal (2003), a world expert on the English language, describes English as a global language that is on the rise all over the world. Crystal foresees the future potential of English as the international language of communication and argues that English has been hailed as the most “successful” language ever, with billions of speakers worldwide.

Israel, as part of the global scene, has put effort into English language education since its

establishment in 1948. The guidelines and programs have changed shape and improved over time.

In 2020, the Israeli Ministry of Education released the New Revised English Curriculum that is currently still being used and that includes five new components. Among these five components are the word and grammar lists, which were added to the curriculum in order to standardize the linguistic content of material being taught and tested under the title of the English Curriculum Lexical Bands.



The revised curriculum includes a list of lexical terms to be taught at the foundation and intermediate levels and is based on the criteria of word frequency and corpora such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English. Also included are frequent phrasal expressions and chunks. These are partitioned into bands for elementary, middle school, and high school. The bands contain essential foundational vocabulary required for spoken and written communication.

Learners are now compelled to develop a variety of language capabilities and to use English both in writing and orally in operating an extensive scale of tasks. With teacher assistance, they must manage intercultural and technological abilities and strategies in English through a variety of formats. The English Curriculum 2020 is designed to address these requirements by affiliating with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2011, 2018), which is now generally used around the globe and which describes the abilities required for language learners to perform and communicate efficiently in English.

The English Curriculum 2020, coordinated with the CEFR, espouses an action-oriented methodology to the description of communicative competence. It relates to learners as language users with real-life requirements. Can-do statements outline what English language learners can really do with language in various situations, for diverse purposes, and this is expressed in encouraging terms at each level on the excursion toward English language competence. Teaching is based on real-life communication contexts and structured around real-life assignments, and teachers share the goals with the learners. This is not to say that teachers are now losing their teaching freedom. On the contrary, teachers are expected to make the maximum of their professional abilities and training whilst contextualizing their teaching abilities to the real world. This is a major step for teachers.

2. EFL Vocabulary Learning

The curriculum explains how learners develop lexical knowledge. According to Laufer (2020),

Two main factors determine the process of learning new English vocabulary:

One, by how many times words are appear in the language processing, and what do learners do with these words. Additionally, what learners do with the words may be more important than their exposure to the word.

Two, by repetition, which is of great importance, as all the researchers stress. There is first-hand evidence as to the effectiveness of word-focused teaching. A set of drills that demand learners to recognize, remember, and use the words in diverse contexts can greatly contribute to the ability of students to increase their vocabulary.

The activities could be of any sort, and variation is very helpful in cases of words that have diverse uses in diverse contexts.

The vocabulary component in the revised curriculum, called Lexical Bands, is geared to the general Israeli learners from elementary through high school who have the essential vocabulary.

The language demands I presented above are problematic mainly for students with LD or with any other types of challenges that result in limited grade-level skills. Regardless of the cause of the challenge, LD students need to have a different or modified approach and strategy when it comes to acquiring vocabulary methods.

According to Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, and Jacobson (2004), there are several strategies that could benefit LD students. They also discuss reading skills and state the most critical obstacles to vocabulary development for LD students, differences in the levels/amount of independent reading, strewn word knowledge, and mainly—the lack of strategies to learn words from content.

3. Activity-Based Instructional Strategy

In their study Jitendra et al., (2004) researched several strategies. One of the strategies they suggest is called the Activity-Based Method/Strategy.

According to their research into this method, vocabulary is being taught within the setting of developmentally suitable, subject-specific activities. Students encounter and interact with new vocabulary words through practical, tangible, hands-on learning. The results of their study indicated that in comparison to textbook learning, when suitably structured, activity-based instruction enables content processing of word knowledge for LD students.

Also, students taught using activity-oriented methods and materials scored higher grades than those taught using textbook learning.

Among the other strategies they studied and researched, Jitendra et al., (2004) found that the effectiveness of diverse instruction methods supports the general guidelines for context and explicit

instruction, as well as the necessity for a productive approach to words learning.

The findings of this study indicate that educators need to give emphasis to instructional methods that directly teach vocabulary.

4. Direct Instruction Strategy

The direct instruction strategy includes direct word instruction. According to Alshahrani (2019), direct instruction method in vocabulary helps students strengthen their vocabulary and fluency. A direct word instruction was observed to be effective at expanding vocabulary.

Naeimi and Foo (2015), point out the fact in which vocabulary can be acquired using tools such as vocabulary lists and dictionaries that make the students pay more attention to explicit interaction with the form and the meaning of vocabulary. It is commonly accepted that student achievement in language learning is noticeably affected by the application of vocabulary learning strategies. In their study, they talked about the direct instruction measure or structured reviewing.

Structured reviewing included reviewing words at different times. For example, students acquire a group of vocabulary items in English, then wait for 15 minutes before applying them again, then practice them a while later, a few hours later, the next day, two days later, four days later, the following week, and so on, until the words become more or less instinctive.

According to Sedita (2005), direct vocabulary instruction promotes word consciousness, i.e., having an interest and awareness of words. Word-conscious learners appreciate learning new words and engaging in word play. Teachers need to take advantage of opportunities to foster the interest of students in words, the indirect meaning of words, having fun with words, and discovering how concepts and words are connected through different contexts.

Students gain from hearing new language that includes the vocabulary and sentence structure.

Sedita claims that even though it is impossible to explicitly teach all the new words students are required to learn each year, it is useful to practice direct instruction in some words.

Teachers should choose words that are of importance to the text and that are useful to know in numerous situations.

Once specific words are chosen, vocabulary instruction should be solid for a word to “really stick” to the learner. Teachers need to give clear explanations and examples of the meanings of the word in a variety of contexts and give students chances to use the words. Simply asking children to look words up in Google Translate or in a dictionary will not do the trick. Students should give examples of situations in which they can use the word and compose simple sentences using the word.

According to Sedita (2005), this kind of direct vocabulary instruction is especially important for LD students.

5. Vocabulary Instruction Within Context Strategy

In this strategy, vocabulary is being taught within the context of developmentally suitable particular activities, with learners engaging in hands-on learning as they interact with the new vocabulary.

I would like to suggest that this strategy, along with the ecological approach presented by Van Lier (2010) in his article *The Ecology of Language Learning*, are of great benefit to the LD learners. The field of teaching vocabulary in an environmental/ecological context is worthy of research and a field that I would like to develop further.

It is believed that the interaction of learners with their surroundings will increase their level of vocabulary acquisition and deepen their understanding of the structures of words. In the end, knowing how learners better learn vocabulary can certainly help achieve the EFL teaching and learning goals.

Alghamdi (2019), and Griva et al. (2010) outlined in their papers the process of an experiment for early EFL learners, a FL project that was operated in a game-based context.

Their aim was to develop early basic English language skills in young learners while they were engaged physical activities and in interactive simulation. The results implied the effectiveness of the hands-on approach and the helpful effects of the project on the learners’ skills improvement in FL.

According to them, following a topic-centered method was proven to be a very effective method to teach communication in a partially natural context and is an appealing option for teaching English to specific group of young learners. There are indications that language learning that takes place in a “playful”/ hand-on atmosphere:

1. fuels student motivation.
2. makes students feel assured.
3. creates constructive attitudes to EFL.

The learners were given a chance to explore several experiences in different situations. As the goal of these activities proved to be delight in the language itself, they yielded a more relaxing atmosphere, and enabled a higher level of understanding and a better learning process Griva et al., (2010).

The Ecology Approach, the study of the relations among elements in an ecosystem or environment, and of the interactions among such elements specifically, presented by Van Lear (2010) aims to examine the learning process, the activities and actions of teachers and learners, and the many-faceted nature of interaction and language use.

Our everyday lives are all about interactions and relationships, and language helps to establish, maintain, and increase such relationships. The world is full of opportunities to build relationships. One of the highest priority tasks for educators is to create a rich environment for teachers and for learners Van Lier (2010).

6. The Ecosocial Context Instructional Strategy

Sociocognitive theory regards learning, including second language acquisition, as the developing placement of individuals face to face with their ecosocial environment (Atkinson et al., 2018).

According to Bookchin (1993), social ecology is the field of study of how individuals interact and connect with the environment around them, and how these interactions reflect on society and the environment as a whole. In the chapter "What is Ecology?" in his book *Social Ecology and Communalism*, he claims that environmentalists are too geared on studying the individual's indicators of a problem instead of on attending to the real issue: the conviction that humans should control nature. Bookchin considered that life and society should be regarded as one ecosystem, where all involved parts are similarly important to a sustainable, balanced and healthy environment.

When discussing the effects of environment/nature/surroundings in general for ESL studies, there are many attributions to consider. Many studies have been written about how environmental methods can support learning structures, and specifically ESL acquisition.

According to Atkinson et al., (2018), humans have a unique quality: We are evolutionarily adjusted to adapt, and we have evolved to adapt to numerous metiers. Instead of regarding SLA as merely cognitive statistical input and processing, we should better look at it as a process of engagement in which learners are actively responsive, alive, and attentive to what is going on around them. Talking about interaction with the surroundings, learning interactions that are beyond the classroom, these all provide richer learning opportunities in comparison to input-processing tasks only.

Human interaction involving teaching or learning is evolving, but its critical rise is enabled by strong environmental structuring.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I have reviewed a few strategies that teachers can use to instruct LD Students and help them to acquire EFL vocabulary. I provided background information from the new official English curriculum, which is the guide for the English teachers in Israel. Of the strategies presented here, I believe that teaching within context and within the ecosocial environment are the most suitable for LD high school students, and these are the instructional strategies I would like to further explore and research.

Authors note:

Tania Goldreich is a doctoral student in the department of Philology under the supervision of Professor Anca Cehan, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania

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