BRIDGING THE VOCABULARY GAP - EXPLORING CHALLENGES IN APPROPRIATE WORD USAGE

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to identify and understand the specific challenges faced by students, particularly those from Marathi Medium Schools, in learning English vocabulary. Through comprehensive feedback from English Language Teachers, several key difficulties were identified. These include the differences between the written and spoken forms of English, the extensive volume of words to be learned, limitations in available sources of information about words, the intricacies of word knowledge, challenges in pronunciation, and issues in sentence formation. The study suggests that traditional methods of teaching English are insufficient for addressing these challenges. As a solution, it proposes the introduction of innovative teaching methodologies, emphasising the use of multimedia tools such as the Diksha app, educational videos, and varied reading materials. This approach aims to foster greater interest and engagement among students, particularly those from non-English backgrounds, thereby enhancing their English language skills. The study underscores the importance of adapting teaching strategies to the unique needs of learners to improve their language acquisition and proficiency.

Introduction: Effective communication hinges on a strong vocabulary. It paints the pictures in our minds, conveys our emotions with precision, and allows us to navigate the complexities of thought and expression. Yet, for many students, this vital tool feels less like a paintbrush

and more like a blunt instrument. Difficulties in using appropriate vocabulary can leave them feeling frustrated and misunderstood, hindering their academic and social success.

This research delves into the heart of this challenge, seeking to understand the specific problems students face when it comes to choosing and using the right words. We move beyond the surface of simply memorising new terms, instead embarking on a deep exploration of the complexities influencing appropriate vocabulary usage.

Our inquiry revolves around several key questions:

1. What are the most common types of difficulties students encounter when using appropriate vocabulary? Do they struggle with word choice, understanding nuances of meaning, or applying words correctly in context?

2. What factors contribute to these difficulties? Do they stem from limited exposure to rich language environments, gaps in foundational skills like grammar and reading comprehension, or specific learning challenges?

3. What are the most effective strategies for supporting students in overcoming these challenges? Can technology, targeted instruction, or specific pedagogical approaches bridge the vocabulary gap and empower students to become confident and articulate communicators?

By uncovering the specific nature of the challenges faced by students, we aim to move beyond superficial solutions and develop targeted interventions that truly bridge the vocabulary gap. This research is not just about memorising lists of words; it's about empowering students to express themselves fully, engage effectively with their world, and unlock the full potential of language as a tool for learning and growth.

Review of literature:

Christ T., (2010) Effective vocabulary development is crucial for young children, impacting their future reading comprehension and academic achievement. Studies show significant vocabulary gaps linked to socioeconomic status, with children from low-income families knowing substantially fewer words. This review highlights the importance of deliberate vocabulary teaching in early childhood, especially for disadvantaged children, and outlines effective, research-based teaching strategies for educators to enhance vocabulary learning.

Farjami, Fahime. (2013). Learning a foreign or second language involves mastering a vast number of words, where learners often struggle with retaining new vocabulary in long-term memory. This paper discusses the challenges both learners and teachers face in vocabulary acquisition and retention. It proposes practical learning strategies to make vocabulary learning

more effective and engaging for learners, while providing teachers with innovative techniques and activities for instruction. Drawing on insights from experts, the study aims to enhance vocabulary learning and teaching methods.

Mahmoud Sultan Nafa's 2013 dissertation examines the challenges of second language (L2) vocabulary acquisition among 12th-grade Arab English learners in Dubai. It emphasises the importance of lexical competence in mastering L2 skills and explores brain-based approaches to improve vocabulary teaching and learning. Utilising both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study investigates low vocabulary attainment at Al-Maarif Secondary School and recommends practical brain-based teaching strategies. The findings affirm the effectiveness of these approaches, suggesting their global applicability in English language teaching.

Objective

1. To examine the factors causing difficulties for students in using appropriate vocabulary.
2. To explore the challenges students encounter in utilising appropriate vocabulary.

Method: Survey –Interview and Cross – Sectional survey design

Population: All the teachers teaching English subject to the students studying in the Primary Schools of Zilla Parishad Schools in Pune District

Sampling Method: Purposive Sampling

Sample Size: For objective 1st 10 English teachers and for objective 2nd 200 teachers teaching English Subject to the Primary School Students in Zilla Parishad Schools in Pune District

Findings and analysis:

Objective 1 : The first objective focused on identifying factors that lead to students' struggles with appropriate vocabulary usage, as observed by English Language Teachers. This was assessed through a survey conducted via interviews, which explored the following points.

Table 1: Factors contribute to the difficulties students face in using appropriate vocabulary.

Responses	Sub-Themes / Sub-Category
The English language has an exceptionally large vocabulary, making it challenging for students to learn and remember all the necessary words.	**Vastness of the English Language**
There are significant disparities in the vocabulary, syntax, and idiomatic expressions used in written English compared to spoken English.	**Differences Between Written and Spoken English**

Words often have multiple meanings or are used differently in various contexts, which can be confusing for learners.	**Contextual Usage**
English is rich in idioms, slang, and culturally specific expressions that can be difficult for students, especially those from different cultural backgrounds, to grasp.	**Cultural and Idiomatic Expressions**
English spelling and pronunciation can be inconsistent, making it hard for students to link how words are said to how they are written.	**Phonetic and Orthographic Challenges**
The existence of words that sound the same but have different meanings (homophones) or words that are spelled the same but have different meanings (homographs) adds to the complexity.	**Homophones and Homographs**
Students may not have enough exposure to a wide range of vocabulary in varied contexts, especially in non-native English speaking environments.	**Limited Exposure and Practice**
The quality of educational resources and instruction in vocabulary can vary greatly, affecting students' ability to learn effectively.	**Educational and Resource Limitations**
Individual differences in cognitive abilities and learning styles can impact how students acquire and use vocabulary.	**Cognitive and Learning Differences**
Without a strong personal interest or motivation, students might find it difficult to engage with and remember new vocabulary.	**Lack of Motivation or Interest**
Traditional teaching methods that focus more on rote memorization than on practical usage can hinder effective vocabulary acquisition.	**Inadequate Teaching Methods**
The overwhelming amount of information available, especially online, can sometimes lead to confusion rather than clarity in learning vocabulary.	**Technological and Information Overload**

These factors collectively contribute to the challenges students face in learning and using English vocabulary effectively.

Objective 2: The second objective concerned with understanding the problems faced by the students regarding the use of appropriate vocabulary which are observed by the English Language Teachers. The same was evaluated through a survey utilising the questionnaire, as shown in the figure:

Table 2. Challenges faced by the Students in Learning the Vocabulary

The Challenges faced by the students in learning vocabulary	No of Responses
The Constraints of Information Sources Regarding Vocabulary	10
Constraints on Information Sources Pertaining to Vocabulary; Intricacies in Understanding Words	4
Students face the daunting task of mastering an extensive vocabulary.	20
In English, there is a disparity between how words are written and how they are spoken.	80
The discrepancy between English's written and spoken forms; Challenges in Grasping Word Complexities	24
The divergence between English's written and spoken expressions; Constraints in Information Sources about Vocabulary	36
English presents a difference between its written and spoken forms; Students are required to assimilate a vast number of words.	24
English exhibits a variation between its written and spoken versions; The sheer volume of words students must learn is overwhelming; Limitations in the Sources of Word Information.	2
Grand Total	**200**

Observations: The data collected from teachers specialising in English regarding the obstacles students face in vocabulary acquisition are presented in the figure. It reveals that 40% of these educators believe the primary difficulty for students is the disparity between written and spoken English. Other significant challenges identified include limited sources of information, the complexity of words, and the extensive length of some words.

Interpretation: The above table shows that there are various challenges faced by the students in learning the English Vocabulary in which the major challenge is the written and spoken form is different.

2. Which are the problems students face due to the poor vocabulary?

Table 3: The Students Skills Affected due to the Poor Vocabulary

The Students Skills affected due to Poor Vocabulary	No of Responses
Communication	12
Reading	6
Reading;Communication	30
Reading;Speaking	48
Reading;Writing;Communication	6
Reading;Writing;Speaking;Communication	22
Speaking	8
Speaking;Communication	36
Writing	16
Writing;Communication	14
Writing;Speaking;Communication	2
Grand Total	**200**

Observations: The feedback gathered from English teachers focused on the impact of poor vocabulary on student skills. Analysis of these responses emphasises that the most affected areas are reading and speaking, as indicated by 24% of respondents. Additionally, the rest of the surveyed population concurred that inadequate vocabulary hampers not only reading and speaking skills but also affects students' writing and overall communication abilities in English.

Interpretation: It can be inferred that a limited vocabulary leads to weakened communication skills, encompassing reading, writing, and speaking in English.

3. What issues have you observed in students when it comes to learning vocabulary?a

<div align="center">Table 4: Strategies adopted by the Learners</div>

Strategies adopted by the Learners to learn Vocabulary	No of Responses
Applying new English words in daily conversation	26
Learning a word through reading	26
Learning a word through reading;Applying new English words in daily conversation	24
Learning a word through reading;Using monolingual dictionary	72
Learning a word through reading;Using monolingual dictionary;Applying new English words in daily conversation	2

Learning a word through reading;Using various English language media	4
Using monolingual dictionary	18
Using monolingual dictionary;Applying new English words in daily conversation	4
Using monolingual dictionary;Using various English language media	6
Using various English language media	14
Using various English language media; Applying new English words in daily conversation	4
Grand Total	**200**

Observations: The teachers were queried about the specific challenges students encounter while learning English vocabulary. 36% of the teachers pointed out that students struggle with learning new words during reading and using monolingual dictionaries. Additionally, they highlighted issues like identifying and applying new words in reading contexts, as well as difficulties in utilising various media for learning new vocabulary.

Interpretation: It can be deduced that students are experiencing difficulties both in learning new words during reading and in incorporating these new words into their daily conversations.

4. How do barriers in language learning impact the English language acquisition of students from Marathi medium backgrounds?

Table 5: **Impact of Learning Barriers on Vocabulary Learning of the Students**

Impact of learning Barriers on vocabulary learning of the students	**No of Responses**
Writing cannot be developed; Reading skill is poor	2
Communication can be delayed; Reading skill is poor	2
Writing cannot be developed	2
All of above	194
Grand Total	**200**

Observations: The teachers were inquired about the effect of learning barriers on vocabulary acquisition, particularly among students from Marathi Medium Schools. An overwhelming 97% agreed that poor vocabulary skills would impede all aspects of the students' communication abilities, including reading and writing. They also suggested that a limited vocabulary could slow down the pace at which these students learn to read and write in English.

Interpretation: It is inferred that barriers in vocabulary learning can hinder students' reading and writing abilities, as well as their overall communication skills. This could result in a slower progression in their ability to read and write in English.

5. Is it common for students from Marathi Medium Schools to face challenges in pronouncing English words?

Table 5 Difficulty in Pronouncing English Words by Marathi Medium Students

Difficulty in pronouncing the words by the students	No of Responses
Yes	200
Grand Total	**200**

Observations: The teachers were asked about their views on whether the Marathi Medium Students will have difficulty in pronunciation of the English Word. 100% teachers felt that the Marathi Medium students face difficulty in pronouncing English Words.

Interpretation: It is interpreted that the Marathi Medium Students face English Word Pronunciation difficulty while learning a vocabulary. It is one of the major challenges faced by the students from Marathi Medium. The observations and interpretations based on the analysis of the data received through the questionnaire from 200 School Teachers teaching English subjects in Zila Parishad Schools of Pune District is presented below.

Conclusion: In conclusion, based on the feedback from English Language Teachers, students encounter a multitude of challenges in learning English vocabulary. These include the disparity between English's written and spoken forms, the overwhelming number of words students need to learn, limited sources of information about words, the complexity of word knowledge, difficulties in pronouncing complex words, and challenges in sentence formation. To address these issues, there's a pressing need for innovative teaching methodologies. Incorporating multimedia tools, such as the Diksha app, educational videos, and diverse books, can significantly spark students' interest in the English language. This approach is particularly crucial for students from Marathi Medium backgrounds, as it promises to substantially aid in enhancing their English language skill sets. By adopting these methods, we can hope to bridge the gap and facilitate a more effective and engaging learning experience for students facing these language learning challenges.

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