

A Study of Vocabulary Building in English Language Curriculum at Primary Level in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore specification for vocabulary development in curriculum and instruction at primary level. The objectives of this study were: a) to evaluate specification of vocabulary building in English text-books being used in public and private sectors at primary level; b) to investigate the techniques used for vocabulary building by teachers; and c) to compare the specification for vocabulary building in public and private sectors. To achieve these objectives, English text-books from classes 1-5 were evaluated and analyzed to examine the comparative specification of vocabulary building at primary level. Besides this, a questionnaire probing the use of various techniques/activities for vocabulary building was administered to randomly selected 100 English teachers (50 from public and 50 from private sector). The analyzed data revealed that there was almost double specification of vocabulary in text-books used by the private institutions as compared to the text-books used in public sector institutions. Furthermore, the provision of vocabulary development in text-books in both sectors was not up to the mark according to the theoretical assumptions; and teachers were deficient in the effective use of vocabulary development techniques. On the basis of findings, it was suggested to revise and improve text-books of English, arrange in-service trainings for developing teaching skills of language teachers, and conduct further research in the area of vocabulary development.

Keywords: Vocabulary development, English Curriculum, English Teacher, Teaching methods, Text-books, Public and private sectors.

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Introduction

Language is a priceless gift of God to human being. Without it human being would have remained only a dumb animal. Language is ubiquitous. It exists everywhere: in our dreams and thoughts, relations and communications, prayers and mediations, and customs and rituals. Language is the best mean to know the past, understand the present, and peep into the future. Language ties society through verbal and non-verbal forms. According to Sapir (1921), language is chiefly human and non-instinctive way of exchanging ideas, desires, and emotions by way of system of voluntarily produced symbols. Languages are composed of various elements. English language is comprised of elements like sound system-phonology, the structural or the grammatical elements, and lexical element or vocabulary. Vocabulary is lexical element which involves four basic teaching-learning skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Vocabulary building is headed for language learning. Students' interest and teachers' motivation plays vital role in vocabulary building.

According to Beglar and Hunt (1995), and Luppescu and Day (1993), vocabulary building is pre-requisite when learner is learning a second language. People who have vast stockpile of words are more capable than those who have limited knowledge of words. Vocabulary may be defined as a set of words in a language which is known to an individual. Vocabulary generally builds up with the mental development of a child. It plays important role in communication and obtaining knowledge. Acquisition of vast vocabulary in second language is challenging.

Adger (2002) stated that vocabulary is not limited only to meaning of words. It also covers up how words in a language are ordered, how an individual can draw on and build up stock of these new words and the association between phrases and words. Harmon, Wood and Kiser (2009) pointed that vocabulary learning is a lifelong and natural phenomenon or a continuous process of acquiring new words in comprehensible and substantial contexts.

In teaching vocabulary, the teachers' role cannot be underestimated. Their epistemological beliefs greatly affect their classroom teaching (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997), because they make decisions about instructional choices on the basis of their knowledge and beliefs (Borg, 2003). Borg (2003) further adds that lack of available resources is another important factor that undermines language teachers' instructional abilities. Coady (1997) reported that most of second language teachers were not taught with a due focus on vocabulary during their studentship and training and thus

traditionally they continue to neglect vocabulary teaching with proper thrust. According to Macaro (2003), second language teachers neglect vocabulary and they need research based experiences to accomplish vocabulary teaching.

Significance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is main aspect of language learning. According to Hunt and Beglar (2005, p. 2), “the heart of language comprehension and use is the lexicon”. Due to the fact that English is international language and the language of modern science a person’s knowledge hinges on the size of English vocabulary he/she owns. The success of an individual in second language is dominated by his/her vocabulary. It builds up one’s control over the second language and this gives one confidence. Dearth of stock of words or inability to recall the correct words makes one incompetent, be it oral or written. The established facts about the vocabulary are that: a) Vocabulary size has been directly linked to reading comprehension; b) an extensive vocabulary aids expressions and communication; c) linguistic vocabulary is synonymous with thinking vocabulary; and d) a person may be judged by others based on his or her vocabulary.

Vocabulary plays significant role in children’s development, predominantly in reading. It was noticed that children with better vocabularies had better academic achievements in general (Smith, 1941) and far better achievement in reading in particular (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Graves, 1986; Stahl, 1998). In fact, students with higher vocabularies had higher IQs (Bell, Lassiter, Matthews, & Hutchinson, 2001; Hodapp & Gerken, 1999). According to Stahl (2005) vocabulary knowledge is the knowledge of a word that implies its definition as well as its fitness into the world. Hence words are imperative nuts and bolts of social needs. Human life relies on the use of words. Words are necessary for self expression. With the help of words man can gather considerable treasure of knowledge.

Cummins (1999) has stated four distinct forms of vocabulary i.e. reading vocabulary, listening vocabulary, writing vocabulary, and speaking vocabulary. Reading vocabulary includes all the words a person is able to know while reading any text. Listening vocabulary is vocabulary that an individual is able to understand while listening to speech. Writing vocabulary encompasses the words a person makes use of in writing while speaking vocabulary consists of words which an individual uses in speech (Cited in Herrel, 2004).

Vocabulary may be defined as “the words we must know to communicate effectively: words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)” (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009, p. 385). Educationists have found the value of vocabulary development for long time. In the beginning of 20th century, John Dewey (1910) affirmed that vocabulary is the most significant in view of fact that a word is a means for thinking regarding the meanings that it expresses. From that time, there has remained an “ebb and flow of concern for vocabulary” (Manzo, Manzo & Thomas, 2006, p. 612; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000). Vocabulary learning is a central goal of teaching for teachers in all subjects at early grades of schools (Harmon, Wood & Kiser, 2009). Latest research, nevertheless, shows that vocabulary teaching may be problematic because a lot of teachers are not “confident about best practice in vocabulary instruction and at times don’t know where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning” (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008, p. 315).

Seashore (1947) investigated children’s vocabularies, which provides useful information about vocabulary growth during early school years. He viewed that vocabulary could be secured by giving the children an opportunity to display all they have learned from their experiences. For this purpose, a test was prepared and administered among children with age ranging from four to ten. Based on the results of this test, it was concluded that a learner at age 4, may have the vocabulary size of 5,600 basic words. It could be 9,600 basic words, 14,700 basic words, 21,200 basic words, 26,300 basic words and 34,300 basic words for the learners of age 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 years respectively.

Children learn vocabulary at remarkable pace. In early childhood, young children gain knowledge of vocabulary at the speed of almost 2,000 to 4,000 new words annually (Brabham & Villaume, 2002; Nagy, Anderson & Herman, 1987), or more or less seven words in a day (Anderson & Nagy, 1991; Beck & McKeown, 1991). Wonderfully, a person learns new vocabulary at this speed “without conspicuous effort or organized instruction and without any forgetting” (Smith, 1998, p. 14). Ruddell and Shearer (2002) projected that children would come across more than 100,000 words, in school while reading. Graves (2000) thought that a student’s vocabulary might be enlarged by 3,000 to 5,000 words per annum by reading.

According to Nagy and Anderson (1984), a large vocabulary is must for progress in school. As learners shift from lower class to upper, learning becomes more complicated. Majority of the researchers consider that young children unsurprisingly add up between 2,000 to 3,000 new words every year; however by fifth class they come upon 10,000 new words in their reading alone. Biemiller (2005)

thinks that a child can develop some 6,000 words by the end of 2nd class at primary level. These vocabulary sizes are claimed for first language learners, and it is not justified to expect the same vocabulary from second language learners because L2 learning is entirely different from L1. Research shows that a minimum of 10,000 words vocabulary is required for L2 readers to understand an academic text without fluent reading (Schmitt, 2000). However, for being a fluent reader, L2 learners at secondary school level also need 40,000 words as claimed by Stahl (2005) for L1 learners of this stage. As L2 learners have to accomplish their vocabulary needs beyond academic requirements, Grabe (2009) suggests for L2 learners to learn 2,000 words annually i.e. 50 words per week for 40 weeks per year. The retention of this size of vocabulary is possible only through intensive learning program.

In Pakistan, English language occupies a very important position. It possesses the status of official language, medium of instruction at higher education level and the language for competitive examinations for civil services at national level in the country. However, the students at elementary and secondary school level are lagging behind in language competencies especially in English. These deficiencies are usually rooted in weak vocabulary growth, and Lewis (2000) has rightly stressed “the single most important task facing language learners is acquiring a sufficient large vocabulary” (p. 8). With reference to Pakistan, various text-books as well instructional techniques are being used in public and private sectors; hence students come with different level of language skills from both sectors. Consequently learners have to face inequalities at different stages of their career. In order to take research based remedial measures for improving this vital aspect of language learners, it is essential to investigate the focus of curriculum and instruction on providing opportunities to learners to develop a suitable size of vocabulary. With this intent, a study was conducted to explore the specification for vocabulary development in curriculum and instructions in grades one to five.

The objectives of the study were: i) to evaluate English specification of vocabulary development in text books in public private sector at primary level; ii) to investigate the techniques used by teachers for vocabulary development at primary level; iii) to compare the specification of vocabulary development in public and private sector at primary level; and iv) to find the views of teachers regarding their belief, and problems about vocabulary development at primary level.

Research Methodology

English text books of Textbook Board Peshawar (Khyber Pukhtunkhwa), for public sector and Oxford Modern English for private sector, and all the English teachers teaching at primary level in Abbottabad District constituted the population of

this study. At first stage, a sample of 20 schools (10 from public and 10 from private sector) was selected from 102 Boys Primary Schools (34 from private sector and 68 from Public sector) of Abbottabad City using convenient sampling technique. At Second stage, from these sample schools, one hundred English teachers (50 from public and 50 from private sector) were randomly selected as respondents for the study. A questionnaire probing the teaching problems and difficulties, and teaching techniques for developing vocabulary used by teachers, was developed. Vocabulary provided in English text-books in public and private sectors at primary level from class 1st up to class 5th was counted and compared. The vocabulary appearing in early childhood text-material was considered as base and these words were omitted in the counting of words at the next stage (Class I). The repeated words were also not included in the counting of new vocabulary. In this way, addition in new words at each stage was counted by omitting vocabulary appearing in earlier stages. For investigating teaching strategies and problems and views about vocabulary, the questionnaire was administered to respondents. The collected data through questionnaires and counted vocabulary was presented prominently in tally sheets to facilitate tabulation. The tabulated data was analyzed by using percentage and mean score as statistical tools. For calculating mean score, the responses SA (strongly agree), A (agree), UD (undecided), DA (disagree), and SDA (strongly disagree) were assigned scores 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Frequency of each response was multiplied by of respective score; and then sum of these multiples was divided by total number of respondents. Findings were drawn from the analyzed data.

Results

At first step, the vocabulary provided at early childhood was counted to form a base for comparison.

Table1: Comparison of provision of vocabulary at primary level in public and private sector

CLASS/ GRADE	public		Private	
	Total words	New words	Total words	New words
class 1	610	206	6800	624
class 2	1639	206	10815	468
class 3	2646	216	13322	432
class 4	4284	329	15875	256
class 5	4549	296	19112	323
Total words	13728	1253	65924	2103

Table 1 indicates the poor condition of public sector in which no significant vocabulary was provided while on the other hand private sector had almost double vocabulary than public sector. On the whole this study reflects that provision of vocabulary building in text books at primary level is not according to theoretical assumptions.

Table 2: Techniques used by teachers for vocabulary building

TECHNIQUES	sector	No of teachers	Frequency of responses			Mean Score
			Always	sometimes	Never	
Loud reading of text	Public	50	26 (52%)	21 (42%)	3 (6%)	2.6
	Private	50	35 (70%)	15 (30%)	-----	2.7
Repetition of words	Public	50	24 (48%)	26 (52%)	-----	2.44
	Private	50	26 (52%)	14 (28%)	-----	2.12
Words game	Public	50	9 (18%)	25 (50%)	16 (32%)	1.86
	Private	50	4 (8%)	38 (76%)	8 (16%)	1.92
Use of flash cards	Public	50	9 (18%)	30 (60%)	9 (18%)	2.6
	Private	50	3 (26%)	26 (52%)	11(22%)	2.04
Computer games	Public	50	-----	6 (12%)	44 (88%)	1.12
	Private	50	-----	20 (40%)	30 (60%)	1.4
Use of multimedia	Public	50	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	45(90%)	1.16
	Private	50	1 (2%)	17 (34%)	32 (64%)	1.38

In table 2, percentage of responses and mean frequency for teachers in the public sector (Always=56%, sometimes=42%, never=6% and mean= 2.6) and private sector (Always=70%, sometimes=30%, never=0% and mean= 2.7) shows that teachers in both sectors were always in practice to use loud reading as a strategy to teach vocabulary. For the strategy,(repetition of words) percentage of responses and mean frequency for the teachers in public sector (Always=48%, sometimes=52%, never=0% and mean= 2.44) and private sector (Always=52%, sometimes=28%, never=0% and mean= 2.12) shows that teachers in public sectors were sometimes and teachers in private schools were in practice of repetition of words while teaching vocabulary. The percentage of responses and mean frequency for teachers in the public sector (Always=18%, sometimes=50%, never=32% and mean= 1.86) and private sector (Always=8%, sometimes=76%, never=16% and mean= 1.92) shows that teachers both sector were sometimes in practice to use words games for students' vocabulary building.

Statistical value regarding the use of flash card i.e. percentage and mean frequency of responses for the teachers in public sector (Always=20%, sometimes = 60%, never = 20% and mean = 2.6) and private sector (Always = 26%, sometimes = 52%, never = 22% and mean = 2.04) show that teachers in public sector were always and teachers in private schools were sometimes in practice to use flash cards for vocabulary building.

The percentage of responses and mean frequency for teachers in the public sector (Always = 0%, sometimes = 12%, never = 88% and mean = 1.12) and private sector (Always = 0%, sometimes = 40%, never = 60% and mean = 1.4) shows that teachers in both sectors were never in practice to use computer games for teaching vocabulary.

The percentage of responses and mean frequency for the teachers in public sector (Always = 6%, sometimes = 4%, never = 90% and mean = 1.16) and private sector (Always = 2%, sometimes = 34%, never = 64% and mean = 1.38) shows that teachers in both sectors were never in practice to use multimedia for students' vocabulary building.

Table 3: Teachers views about the importance of vocabulary and problems for its development

Statements	Sector	No of Teacher	Frequency of responses					Mean Score
			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	
			30 (60%)	20 (40%)	---	---	---	4.6
	Private	50	42 (84%)	8 (16%)	---	---	---	4.84
English text books at primary level provide material sufficient for vocabulary building	Public	50	12 (24%)	21 (42%)	4 (8%)	13 (26%)	---	3.64
	Private	50	9 (18%)	30 (60%)	---	10 (20%)	1 (2%)	3.52
Text books at primary level cover all the words related to daily life that a student must know at this level.	Public	50	3 (6%)	23 (46%)	8 (16%)	13 (26%)	3 (6%)	3.3
	Private	50	18 (36%)	22 (44%)	5 (10%)	13 (26%)	2 (4%)	3.22

The synthesis of vocabulary in each class at primary level is up to mark.	Public	50	1 (2%)	25 (50%)	6 (12%)	17 (34%)	1 (2%)	3.16
	Private	50	3 (6%)	20 (40%)	10 (20%)	16 (32%)	1 (2%)	3.16
Provision of vocabulary building in text books at primary is according to the mental of students.	Public	50	6 (12%)	18 (36%)	10 (20%)	13 (26%)	2 (4%)	3
	Private	50	8 (16%)	27 (54%)	1 (2%)	13 (26%)	1 (2%)	3.32
Teachers have been provided sufficient training to use different techniques for vocabulary building.	Public	50	10 (20%)	21 (42%)	6 (12%)	9 (18%)	4 (8%)	3.48
	Private	50	10 (20%)	9 (18%)	8 (16%)	19 (38%)	4 (8%)	3.04
Teachers are provided sufficient resources to use different techniques for developing students' vocabulary.	Public	50	5 (10%)	11 (22%)	4 (8%)	27 (54%)	2 (4%)	2.614
	Private	50	21 (42%)	21 (42%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	4.06
In English class students are not allowed to use language other than English.	Public	50	5 (10%)	11 (22%)	4 (8%)	27 (54%)	2 (4%)	2.614
	Private	50	21 (42%)	21 (42%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	4.06
Vocabulary building is a natural process and it requires no techniques.	Public	50	---	11 (22%)	2 (4%)	30 (60%)	7 (14%)	2.34
	Private	50	2 (4%)	6 (12%)	5 (10%)	26 (52%)	11 (22%)	2.24

Table 3 shows that 60% teachers of public sector strongly agreed and 40% agreed (mean frequency= 4.6) while 84% teachers of private schools strongly agreed and 16% teachers agreed (mean frequency =4.84) with the statement “vocabulary plays vital role in language learning”. In response to the statement “English text

books at primary level provide material sufficient for vocabulary building” , 24% teachers of public sector strongly agreed, 42% agreed, 8% undecided, and 26% disagreed (mean frequency=3.64) whereas 78% teachers of private sector agreed and 22% teachers disagreed (mean frequency=3.52). In response to the statement “Text books at primary level cover all the words related to daily life that a student must know at this level” 52% public sector teachers agreed, 16% were undecided 32% disagreed (mean frequency=4.5) while 80% teachers of private sector agreed with the statement(mean frequency=4.42). The data indicates that 52% teachers of public schools agreed 12% were undecided and 36% teachers disagreed (mean frequency=3.16) with the statement “The synthesis of vocabulary in each class at primary level is up to mark” as compared to 46% teachers agreed 20% were undecided and 34%teachers disagreed (mean frequency=3.16) with the statement. The data reflects that 48% public sector teachers agreed 20% were undecided and 30% teachers disagreed (mean frequency=3.36)with the statement “Provision of vocabulary building in text books at primary is according to the mental of students” whereas 70% teachers of private sector agreed 2% undecided and 28% teachers disagreed (mean frequency =3.35) with the statement. In response to the statement “Teachers have been provided sufficient training to use different techniques for vocabulary building” 20% teachers of public sector strongly agreed 42% agreed 12% were undecided and 26% disagreed (mean frequency=3.48) while 38% teachers of private sector agreed 16% were undecided and 46% disagreed (mean frequency=3) with the statement.

The data shows that 32% teachers of public sector agreed 8% were undecided and 58% disagreed (mean frequency 2.74) with the statement “Teachers are provided sufficient resources to use different techniques for developing students’ vocabulary” whereas 84% teachers of private schools agreed 6% were undecided and 10% disagreed (mean frequency= 4.12) with the statement. In response to the statement “In English class students are not allowed to use language other than English” 32% teachers of public sector agreed 8% were undecided and 58% disagreed (mean frequency=2.14) while 84% teachers of private schools agreed 6% were undecided and only 10% teachers disagreed (mean frequency=4.12) with the statement. The data indicates that 22% teachers of public sector agreed and 74% disagreed (mean frequency=2.34) with the statement “Vocabulary building is a natural process and it requires no techniques” while 16% teachers of private sector agreed 10% were undecided and 74% teachers disagreed (mean frequency=2.24) with the statement.

Discussion

The findings of the study show that provision of vocabulary building at primary level particularly in public sector was not reasonable. There were total 13728 words and only 1253 new words for students up to 5th class in public schools as compared to total 65924 words and 2103 new words for students up to 5th class in private schools. Both sectors are not fulfilling the criteria/perceptions of experts about vocabulary growth. Grabe (2009) suggests 2,000 new words annually for second language learners.

Teachers from both sectors (public and private) mostly used loud reading, repetition of words, modern techniques like computer games, multimedia were almost ignored by both sector for students' vocabulary building although modern techniques for vocabulary building play vital roles in one's vocabulary growth. According to experts there are eight different instructional approaches that teachers can utilize while teaching vocabulary to students: alphaboxes, linear array, word questioning, story impressions, polar opposites, anticipation guides, word sorts for narrative, and expository texts (Bintz, 2011).

The study shows that most teachers viewed that vocabulary plays vital role in language learning. Majority of the respondents perceived that English text books at primary level provide material sufficient for students' vocabulary building. The respondents thought that text books at primary level cover all the words related to daily life that a student must know at this level. Majority of the teachers agreed that the synthesis of vocabulary in each class at primary level is up to mark. Most of the respondents viewed that vocabulary at primary level was according to the mental level of students. Almost half of total teachers responded that teachers have been provided sufficient training to use different techniques for students' vocabulary building. The study showed that in public sector teachers were not provided sufficient resources for vocabulary building.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, provision of vocabulary development in text-books at primary level is not according to theoretical assumptions and research-based standards. As compared to private sector, the public sector is lagging behind in providing sufficient vocabulary in literature/ text-books as well as in instructional strategies. In public sector, there are no sufficient resources for teachers in terms of literature/text-books and instructional tools for vocabulary building. Furthermore, pre-service and in-

service trainings were less focused on vocabulary building for the teachers in both sectors. Teachers in both sectors were not satisfied with the level of vocabulary that the books provide at primary level. In public sector schools, most of the teachers allow the students to use mother tongue or national language while teaching English in the classroom. Teachers in both sectors believed vocabulary building not as a natural process rather it required lots of techniques.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that same curriculum be made compulsory for both public and private sectors. Besides this, curriculum planners must revise the English course and text-books at primary level so as to provide sufficient material for vocabulary building according to established standards.
2. The teachers at primary level be strengthened with in-service training and sufficient instructional resources for vocabulary building. Furthermore, English teachers' training course be updated to integrate sufficient techniques and strategies for vocabulary building.
3. There is a need to investigate the adequacy of vocabulary building at different levels in school education. Therefore, the researchers in this field may conduct research at Elementary and Secondary school level on multiple aspects of vocabulary building.

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