VOCABULARY ROLE PLAY: AN ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGY FOR VOCABULARY TEACHING

Erhan Yavaşlar[1i],
Cavide Demirci[2],
[1]Lecturer, School of Foreign Languages,
Anadolu University, Turkey
[2]Associate Professor Dr., Faculty of Education,
Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Turkey

Abstract:

Today, vocabulary has a great importance on language learning. Thus, teachers start looking for new ways to teach vocabulary in order to help their students retain new words in target language. Active learning approach has offered teachers a wide range of strategies they can use while teaching vocabulary. "Vocabulary Role Play" is also one of these strategies. In this study, vocabulary role play strategy was conducted with 11th grade students studying at a public music school in Eskisehir, Turkey. The pre-test and post-test results of students were compared in order to see whether a significant change in retention occurred or not. The results of pre-test and post-test indicated that vocabulary role play strategy helped students store the new words. In addition, students expressed that vocabulary role play strategy contributed to their creativity and vocabulary retention. They also said that they had a lot of fun during the activity and found a great opportunity to practice speaking English. All in all, by using this active learning strategy, a better learning environment was provided to the students in an English class.

Keywords: active learning, vocabulary role play, vocabulary retention, group work

1. Introduction

English is spoken by many people although it is not their first language. Therefore, it can be said that English is a lingua franca, which refers to a language adopted for communication between two speakers whose native languages are different from each other. In other words, English is a language widely used for international communication. This is mainly because of the economic and cultural influence of the

---

[1] Correspondence: email eyavaslar@anadolu.edu.tr

United States (Harmer, 2004, p. 1). Therefore, many people start to learn English as a second or foreign language at a very early age.

Learning a language is not an easy thing. Actually, learning a language is a cognitively challenging task a person goes through because you always keep learning vocabulary. Grammar, for instance, is made up of a limited set of rules and all rules can be learned if you want to learn. However, there is always some vocabulary you need to learn. That is, vocabulary continues to be learned throughout one's lifetime and it is not possible to learn all vocabulary exist in the language (Schmitt, 2000, p. 4).

Words are learned gradually over a period of time by exposing them numerous times. Mostly, we experience that we are able to recognize and understand a word when we see it in a text or hear it in a conversation. However, we are not able to use it ourselves. This situation is called passive vocabulary knowledge and normally connected with listening and reading. If we are able to use a word when speaking or writing, then it becomes active for us, and this situation is called active vocabulary knowledge (Schmitt, 2000, p.4).

The sound, spelling and meaning of words are usually consolidated when we store them in our brain. When we see a word on a printed page, we access the sound, spelling and meaning simultaneously and immediately. Therefore, the best way of teaching a word is to give learners the spelling, sound and meaning at the same time. When we teach learners how to sound out a word, we have a chance of discussing how the word is spelled and what it means (Rasinski & Zutell, 2010, pp. 6-7).

Knowing a word means being able to recognize the spoken form of the word, pronounce, spell and write the word (Nation, 1994, p.121). That is, if students are given the opportunity to hear and to view the words, then they are able to learn them (Barcroft, 2015, p. 34). In addition, repetition of new vocabulary is also important for students learning new words. Repetition is achieved as students perform an action and also make sentences containing the word (Nation, 1994, p.59). Therefore, new vocabulary can be better met in activities where the students work in pair or small groups (Nation, 1994).

Today, vocabulary has had a more important role in learning a second language. Thus, teachers are faced with the challenge how best to help students store words in target language (Sökmen, 1997, p. 237). How can teachers cope with this challenge? Probably the answer is to use active learning strategies. Active learning is a dynamic type of learning where students intensely interact with each other, education materials and teachers (Demirci, 2017). Students actively participate in learning process and act independently. Under the guidance of teacher, students take over the responsibility of their learning (Weikart 1993 as cited in Şahinel, 2003, p.8).

In classroom interaction, active learners make similar contributions to those of teachers. They try to organize new words with the ones they have already known. In addition, they define and paraphrase words and use them in examples. That is, success in vocabulary lessons depends not only on the interaction between teacher and learners but also on the works of learners practicing new words (McCarthy, 2008, s. 121-122).

In this study, by using an active learning strategy called "Vocabulary Role Play", we aimed at determining both the retention of new words taught in a reading class and students' view about this strategy.

2. Method

Both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used in this study. A single group pre-test post-test technique was used in the quantitative dimension of the study. The quantitative research method is the empirical research that gives the figures in the form of numbers (Punch, 2014, p. 6). That is, numerical data are collected and analyzed statistically in quantitative research method. (Yeşil, 2010, p. 72). Punch (2014, p. 6) defines qualitative research as empirical research that the data is not in numerical form. The qualitative research method is based on the interpretive post positivist and postmodern understanding of science. It is a scientific process in which qualitative data is collected, analyzed and thus a judgment is reached. (Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2016, s. 72).

2.1. Study Group

This study was carried out with 11th grade students studying at Music and Performing Arts High School (a public music school) in Eskisehir, Turkey. 10 students participated in the study. The students have been in the same class for almost 3 years and have known each other very well. They have been taught English by their teacher, who is the lead author of this study, for a year.

The study was conducted in spring semester of 2016-2017 academic year. Before applying the activity, students complained that they had difficulty of keeping new vocabulary in their mind. Student 2 said "*Sir, I learned some new words last week in the class. But now, I cannot remember any of them.*" Then, the teacher decided to apply a new way of teaching new vocabulary and came up with vocabulary role play strategy. By the guidance of co-author, new vocabulary was taught by using the active learning strategy called vocabulary role play in an English reading class.

2.2 Vocabulary Role Play Strategy

Herrell & Jordan (2002, p.2) define vocabulary role play "*as a strategy used to encourage learners to make connections between their past experiences, the content currently being studied, and vocabulary that is new or being used*". In this strategy, students are introduced to new vocabulary and given an opportunity to discuss and use the vocabulary in context. Then students physically act out the vocabulary in a way that is meaningful to them. Students make groups of three to five and are given the same vocabulary. They are asked to write and perform a short play called scene in which they use words and demonstrate their meaning. By including physical activity, students are given an opportunity to internalize the word and its meaning. Therefore, this strategy is a strong tool in improving students' understanding when they encounter new words (Herrell & Jordan, 2002, pp. 24-27)

Herrell & Jordan (2002, pp. 24-25) explain the steps to be followed when applying vocabulary role play strategy as follows:

First, the words that make the text difficult to understand or that students haven't encountered before are determined. Then, these words are written on the cards. These cards are shown one by one in the class and students are asked whether they meet these words before and how they meet with them. Students are asked to act out the words. This gives students the opportunity to show their physical performance. If students' past experiences do not provide contextual clues about the meaning of words, then students are introduced the context in which the words will be used in the reading. After that two or three words are chosen and students are demonstrated how they can create a scene using these words. Then, students are divided into groups. Students are given some of the words and they are asked to perform a scene they have created using the new words. After students perform their scene, they are given the opportunity to discuss the meaning of words.

2.3 Application

In order to determine whether this strategy provided vocabulary retention for the class, pre-test was used to decide if students acquired these words beforehand or not. Then, the strategy was applied in the class. One week later, post test was used to see how much the students retained the new vocabulary they learnt in the previous class. Following the post test, students were given a feedback form by the teacher to make an assessment of the learning process as a result of vocabulary role play strategy.

By looking at the difference between the results of pre-test and post-test, we intended to determine the vocabulary retention. By analyzing the data obtained from students' feedback forms, we aimed at determining the views of students regarding vocabulary role play strategy. As a result, we determined whether this strategy work for the class or not. The data collected through the feedback form was analyzed using content analysis technique.

3. Results

3.1. Pre-Test – Post-Test Results

The results of data obtained from students by pre-test and post-test are as follow:

Table 1: The Results of Pre-test and Post-test

New Words Tested	Pre - Test		Post - Test	
	Number of Correct Answers	Number of Wrong Answers	Number of Correct Answers	Number of Wrong Answers
Blow	2	8	10	0
Pick Up	3	7	10	0
Scream	4	6	6	4
Hug	3	7	9	1
Destroy	1	9	9	1
Tightly	2	8	9	1
Drop	0	10	8	2
Safe	3	7	10	0

Total Number of Students: 10

As can be seen on Table 1, according to the pre-test results, only two students gave the correct answer to the question we tested the word "*blow*". According to results of post-test all the students answered the question correctly.

As seen on Table 1, according to results of pre-test, only three students gave the correct answer to the question we tested the word "*pick-up*" before the application of vocabulary role play strategy. According to results of post-test, all the students answered the question correctly.

As seen on Table 1, the question tested the word "*scream*" was done correctly by four students according to results of pre-test. After the application, six students gave the correct answer to the question testing the word "*scream*".

As can be seen on Table 1, the question we tested the word "*hug*" was done correctly by three students according to results of pre-test. After the application, nine students gave the correct answer to the question according the results of post-test.

As seen on Table 1, only one student could give the correct answer to the question we tested the word "*destroy*" before the application. When we look at the results of post-test, it is seen that nine students gave the correct answer to the question we tested the word "*destroy*".

When we look at the results of pre-test, we saw that the question we tested the word "*tightly*" was done correctly by two students. After we applied the activity, eight students gave the correct answer to the question.

As seen on Table 1, according the results of pre-test, none of the students gave the correct answer to the question we tested the word "*drop*". However, after the activity was implemented, eight students did the question correctly according to results of post-test.

As can be seen on Table 1, according to results of pre-test, three students gave the correct answer to question we tested the word "*safe*". When we looked at the results of post-test, we saw that seven students did the question correctly after the application.

3.2 Results Obtained from Feedback Form

In the qualitative part of the research, students were asked about their opinions regarding the activity. The answers given by the students were subjected to content analysis. As a result of content analysis, the following themes were reached.

Table 2: Themes emerged from the study

Themes	f
1. I could remember the new words more easily.	10
2. I could remember how to pronounce the words.	7
3. I had a lot of fun during the lesson.	8
4. The activity helped me to recognize my creativity while acting out a scene.	5
5. I found the opportunity to practice English conversation in the class.	7

Total number of students: 10.

1. *I could remember the new words more easily:* All of the students expressed that they could remember the meaning of the words even in the next class. Student 1 said *"While reading a text, if I don't know the meaning of a word, I look it up in a dictionary but I cannot remember the meaning of that word next day. However, I could remember the meanings*

of the new words in the next lesson thanks to vocabulary role play activity. Also, I can use it while talking. I remembered how funny it was that I pronounced the word "hug". Student 4 said: *"I felt very happy when I saw that I could remember the words we studied last week."* Student 5 said *"When I was answering the questions (talking about post-test), our scene came to my mind. I both remembered the meanings of the words easily and laughed while answering."*

2. *I could remember how to pronounce the words*: Students expressed that they could easily remember how to pronounce the word beside their meanings. Students 2 said *" I exposed to the pronunciation of the words at least three times. First, I heard it from my teacher, then from my friends who were acting out their scene, finally from my group. I felt like the pronunciations of words were imprinted on my mind."*

3. *I had a lot of fun during the lesson*: Students expressed that they had a lot of fun during the class we applied vocabulary role play strategy. Student 8 said *"We had a lot of fun when the teacher first introduced the new words and also when we acted out our seen as a group. Actually, we laughed a lot while we were preparing for our scene with my group.* Student 6 said *"The scene of our group was very funny. But the first group was far more funny. I really had a lot of fun."*

4. *The activity helped me to recognize my creativity while acting out a scene*: Students expressed that they all came up with interesting ideas, which positively affect their creativity. Student 7 said *"I thought how creative our group was while working on our scene. But when I saw performances of other groups, I thought that they were at least as creative as my group.* Student 9 said *"I didn't know we were creative that much. Scenes were great. But the most creative of all was ours."*

5. *I found the opportunity to practice speaking English in the class:* Students expressed that they could practice speaking. Student 10 said *"we practiced speaking very much while we were both preparing for our scene and acting it out. It was great."* Student 2 said *"At first, I found the activity difficult, but we talked a lot of English. Actually I realized that I could speak English. It was great to practice conversational English during the class."*

4. Conclusion

Following conclusions were reached by this study, which we aimed at determining the retention of vocabulary and views of students regarding vocabulary role play strategy. By looking at the students pre-test and post-test results, it is obvious that vocabulary role play strategy help students retain new words. Students also expressed that they could remember almost all the words they learnt a week ago. Duffelmayer & Duffelmayer (1979) proved that dramatization of words are more effective than traditional vocabulary analysis in their studies (as cited in Herrell ve Jordan, 2002, p. 24). Similarly, Demirci (2003) reached the conclusion that active learning is effective on retention in her doctoral thesis. Coelho (1998, p. 38) asserts that as students find more opportunities to talk and practice in the class, new information will retain better. Also, Aksu & Keşan (2011) indicated that active learning had an important role in increasing retention of learning.

Students expressed that they could easily remembered the meanings of words as well as their pronunciation. Besides, the teacher observed that when he first introduced the words, they made some pronunciation mistakes. Then, while they were working on their scene, they were correcting their pronunciation mistakes on their own. Thus, it can be said that vocabulary role play strategy helps them not only retain the meanings of words but also their pronunciation as well.

Students expressed that they had a lot of fun while the teacher were introducing the new words and while they were working with their groups and also watching their friends' performances. The teacher also observed that as students had fun during the activity, their interest in the lesson increased. Similarly, Lumkin & Achen (2015) pointed out that students enjoyed taking part in active learning activities, and this positively affected students' learning.

Students stated that they saw how creative they could be during the group performances. The students who introduced a new scene by using the new words they learnt revealed their creativity. Thus, it can be said that this activity help students foster their creativity. Chiu & Chang (2017) also asserted that active learning strategies improve students' creativity.

The teacher noticed that students were constantly interacting with each other during the activity. This helps them practice spoken English. Students also expressed that they found better opportunity to talk to each other in English. Therefore, it can be said that vocabulary role play strategy offer students better opportunity to practice speaking English.

As a result, vocabulary role play strategy make great contribution to students in learning new vocabulary by providing them a chance to use the new words actively. Therefore, it can be said that this strategy contribute a lot to students active vocabulary knowledge. Also, this strategy helps students develop their creativity by providing them an opportunity to make a short scene.

References

1. Aksu, H. H., & Keşan, C. (2011). İlköğretimde aktif öğrenme modeli ile geometri öğretiminin başarı ve kalıcılık düzeyine etkisi. *Karadeniz Fen Bilimleri Dergisi*, *1(3)*: 94-113.
2. Barcroft, J. (2015). *Lexical input processing and vocabulary learning* (Vol. 43). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
3. Chiu, P. H. P., & Cheng, S. H. (2017). Effects of active learning classrooms on student learning: a two-year empirical investigation on student perceptions and academic performance. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *36*(2), 269-279.
4. Coelho, E. (1992). Cooperative learning: Foundation for a communicative curriculum. In C. Kessler, *Cooperative language learning: A teacher's resource book* (pp. 31-50). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

5. Demirci, Cavide. (2003). Effects of active learning approach on the achievement, retention and the attitude."PhD diss., Hacettepe University

6. Demirci, C. (2017). The effect of active learning approach on attitudes of 7th grade Students. *International Journal of Instruction*, 10(4): 129-144. https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2017.1048a

7. Harmer, J. (2004). *The practice of English language teaching*. Essex: Cambridge University Press.

8. Herrell, A. & Jordan M. (2002). *Active learning strategies for improving reading comprehension*. Ohio: Merrill Prentice Hall.

9. Lumpkin, A., & Achen, R. M. (2015). Flipping a Class: Active Learning and More of It. *Sport Management Education Journal*, *9*(2): 79-90.

10. McCarthy, M. (2008). *Vocabulary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

11. Nation, P. (1994). *New ways in teaching vocabulary. New ways in TESOL series: Innovative classroom techniques*. TESOL, 1600 Cameron Street, Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314.

12. Punch, K.F. (2014). *Sosyal araştırmalara giriş: Nicel ve nitel yaklaşımlar*. (Bayrak D., Arslan H.B. ve Akyüz, Z., Trans.). Ankara: Siyasal Kitapevi.

13. Rasinski, T. V., & Zutell, J. (2010). *Essential strategies for word study: Effective methods for improving decoding, spelling, and vocabulary*. Scholastic.

14. Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. NewYork: Cambridge University Press.

15. Sökmen, A. J. (1997). Current trends in teaching second language vocabulary. Schmitt, N., & McCarthy, M. (Ed) In *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition and pedagogy* (pp. 237-257). Cambridge University Press.

16. Sönmez, V. & Alacapınar, F. G. (2016). *Örneklendirilmiş bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri* (4. Baskı). Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.

17. Şahinel, Melek. (2003). *Etkin öğrenme (Active learning)*. Ankara: PegemA Yayıncılık.

18. Yeşil, R. (2010). Verilerin analizi. Kıncal, R. Y. (Ed), In *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (pp. 49-77). Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım.

.