ANALYSIS OF DIFFICULTIES IN VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

*Written by **Sardor Surmanov* & Maftuna Azimova*****

* Teacher of English, Language training department, Tashkent State University of Law

* Language and Literature, Tashkent State University, Uzbek

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition and retention is considered one of the most influential factors of language learning. However, there are some factors that prevents language learners from better vocabulary acquisition and retention. Vocabulary is considered as an essential part of developing good fluency, and lexical ability plays important role in language learning. This research analysis possible obstacles faced by five ninth grade school pupils in one of the public schools in Sirdarya region. This study aims to examine what kind of difficulties five school pupils facing in vocabulary learning.

***Keywords**: vocabulary acquisition, retention, case study, second language acquisition, difficulties, fluency, analysis, spelling.*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is an essential part in foreign language learning as the meanings of new words are very often emphasized, whether in books or in classrooms. It is also central to language teaching and is of paramount importance to a language learner. Recent research indicates that learning vocabulary may be problematic because many learners are not confident about best practice in vocabulary learning and at times don't know where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning.

In this case study the author intended to find the out the challenges in the process of vocabulary learning faced by five ninth grade school pupils in one of the public schools in Sirdarya region.

In any language, vocabulary plays an important role in developing good fluency. That's why lexical competence is considered as the central part of language learning. Furthermore, vocabulary is important factor for language learning because inadequate vocabulary knowledge leads the learners to encounter difficulties in language learning. By developing ability to use vocabulary learning strategies learners can significantly increase their general English level. The objective of the case study is to examine what kind of difficulties five school pupils facing in vocabulary learning. The participants were given a list of one thousand words in English along with their translation in the Russian language. The words were selected "English Unlimited" that was published the Cambridge University Press. The participants were asked to learn the vocabulary by heart in the given period. Some of the pupils have completed learning the given vocabulary, but some of the have not finished learning the given task. When the deadline come I checked how well they learned the vocabulary, and then I took questionnaire from every participant.

To obtain data, the researcher used the interview and questionnaire. All data was analyzed descriptively. The results showed that students still face problems or difficulties in learning vocabulary. The kinds of difficulties that students face in learning vocabulary were different. The kinds of difficulties faced by students were almost all students who had difficulties with pronouncing words, writing and spells, a different grammatical form of the word, known as exaggerations, was one of the reasons for the students' difficulty in learning vocabulary. In addition, students have found difficulty in choosing the appropriate meaning of words, and also still confuse the use of words based on context. Last, students are also still confused when they found words or expressions that were idiomatic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge of the vocabulary is often considered an important tool for second language learners, because limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful communication.

Emphasizing the importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (Schmitt, 2000) emphasizes that "lexical knowledge plays a central role in communicative competence and the acquisition of a second language". Nation (2001) further describes the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and the use of language as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary allows the use of language and, conversely, the use of language leads to an increase in knowledge of vocabulary.

The importance of vocabulary is demonstrated daily in and out of school. In a class, students with sufficient vocabulary have a sufficient number of dictionaries.

Acquisition of vocabulary is important for the successful use of a second language and plays an important role in the formation of complete oral and written texts. In English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), vocabulary subjects play a vital role in all language skills (for example, when listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In addition, the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for the successful use of a second language, because without an extensive vocabulary we cannot use the structures and functions that we may have learned for comprehensible communication.

Research has shown that second-language readers rely heavily on vocabulary knowledge, and the lack of this knowledge is the main and biggest obstacle to overcoming L2 readers. In production, when we have a meaning or concept that we want to express, we need to have a stock of words from which we can choose to express this meaning or concept. "When students travel, they have no grammar books, they contain dictionaries" (Lewis, 1993, p. 25). Many researchers argue that vocabulary is one of the most important, if not the most important, component of learning a foreign language, and curricula in a foreign language should reflect this. Wilkins (1972) argues that "There are not many advantages in being able to develop grammatical sentences if you do not have the vocabulary that is necessary to convey what can be said ... Although very little can be conveyed without grammar , nothing can be transmitted without a dictionary "(p. 97). Other scholars, such as Richards (1980) and Krashen (1989), as quoted in Maksimo (2000), contain many reasons for paying attention to vocabulary. "First, the big lexicon, of course, is necessary for mastering the language. They know a second

language; they carry dictionaries, not grammar books, and regularly report that lack of vocabulary is a serious problem. ''

On the other hand, vocabulary was recognized as the best source of problems for L2 students. This remark may perhaps reflect the fact that the openness of the vocabulary system is perceived by students as the cause of difficulties. Another possible reason is that, unlike syntax and phonology, the dictionary does not have rules that students can follow to acquire and develop their knowledge. In other words, in L2 it is not clear which rules apply or which vocabulary items should be studied first. Oxford (1990) also claims that vocabulary "is the most significant and unmanageable component in learning any language, be it foreign or native, due to tens of thousands of different meanings." Despite these difficulties faced by people learning the L2 language they still have to deal with this in exams, since "the dictionary has traditionally been one of the components of a language measured in language tests" (Schmitt, 1999, 189). In addition, many learners consider the acquisition of a second language (SLA) as a matter of fact, the question of learning vocabulary, and therefore they spend a lot of time memorizing the lists of L2 words and rely on their bilingual vocabulary as the main communication resource. As a result, language teachers and applied linguists now generally recognize the importance of vocabulary learning and exploring ways to promote it more effectively. Some of these studies take the form of research strategies that students use specifically for vocabulary (VLS), which is our focus.

According to Thornbury (2004: 27) the most common difficulties in vocabulary learning are follows:

a. Pronunciation

Research shows that words that are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn.

b. Spelling

Sounds-spelling mismatches are likely to be the cause of errors, either of pronunciation or of spelling, and can contribute to a word's difficulty. While most English spelling is fairly lawabiding, there are also some glaring irregularities. Words that contain silent letters are particularly problematic: foreign, listen, headache, climbing, bored, honest, cupboard, muscle, etc.

a. **Length and complexity**

Long words seem to be no more difficult to learn than short ones. But, as a rule of thumb, high frequency words tend to be short in English, and therefore the learner is likely to meet them more often, a factor favoring their "learnability".

b. **Grammar**

Also problematic is the grammar associated with the word, especially if this differs from that of its L1 equivalent. Remembering whether a verb like enjoy, love, or hope is followed by an infinitive (to swim) or an -ing form (swimming) can add to its difficulty.

c. **Meaning**

When two words overlap in meaning, learners are likely to confuse them. Make and do are a case in point: you make breakfast and make an appointment, but you do the housework and do a questionnaire.

d. **Range, connotation and idiomaticity**

Words that can be used in a wide range of contexts will generally be perceived as easier than their synonyms with a narrower range. Thus, put is a very wide- ranging verb, compared to impose, place, position, etc. Likewise, thin is a safer bet than skinny, slim, slender. Uncertainty as to the connotations of some words may cause problems too. Thus, propaganda has negative connotations in English, but its equivalent may simply mean publicity. On the other hand, eccentric does not have negative connotations in English, but its nearest equivalent in other languages may be deviant. Finally, words or expression that are idiomatic (like make up your mind, keep an eye on....) will generally be more difficult than words whose meaning is transparent (decide, watch).

PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

Subjects of this case study are five school pupils in the Syrdarya region. All of them had previously classes from the fifth grade, and they have been learning English for the last four years. Two of them were female students, and other ones were males. The level of the pupils was more or less pre-intermediate.

The first student (Student A) is 15 years old schoolgirl, she had an extra classes on English Grammar in the last year. Student A has learned more vocabulary items than the rest of the group.

The second student (Student B) is also 15 years old schoolgirl, but she had only English classes in the school. The third student (Student S) (the letter out of alphabetical order which he wanted to choose as initial letter of his name is "S") is 14 years old schoolboy, and also she had only English classes in the public school. The next pupil (Student D) is 15 years old schoolboy, and he had only English classes in the public school.

Finally, the last student (Student E) is also the same age as their classmates and also he had English classes in the same school with his peers.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to investigate the students' difficulties in learning vocabulary I gave them a list of one thousand wordlist from the course book "English Unlimited" The book is very suitable to intermediate level students; this was the level of some participants. Every word has its translation in Russian, but they do not have transcription of an example sentence using in context.

I gave the participants more than one month in order to learn the new vocabulary. Hovever, Student A and Student D have not finished learning all of the given vocabulary items. I made special table in order to record what kind of mistakes is the most common in vocabulary learning. The table based on Thornbury's view in difficulties of vocabulary learning. Some of these difficulties mentioned in Literature review section. This is how table was organized, and I marked each mistake when I questioned the participants.

Pronunciation	

Length	
Complexity	
Meaning	
Connotation	
Idiomaticity	

Every time when participants made mistake I marked the mistakes on this table. For example, if a student mispronounce the word I marked that as a pronunciation mistake according to the table. The other types of the mistakes marked according to this table.

DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

The data collecting technique used in this case study were individual interview. Interview was done to know kinds and factors students' difficulties in learning vocabulary. Five participants were asked to come interview after one month passed. I questioned them individually in order to record all the mistakes they have made in the vocabulary learning. I randomly choose the word that I was asking. Sometimes I asked only English word, demanding students to say translation, and sometimes I have asked Russian translation of the word. This is because my mistakes evaluation table has various mistake types. Furthermore, I have not asked all 1000 words from the participants. Each participant was asked more or less 200 of the given words

The most common mistakes in vocabulary learning is pronunciation mistake. On average 60 words mispronounced by the participants.
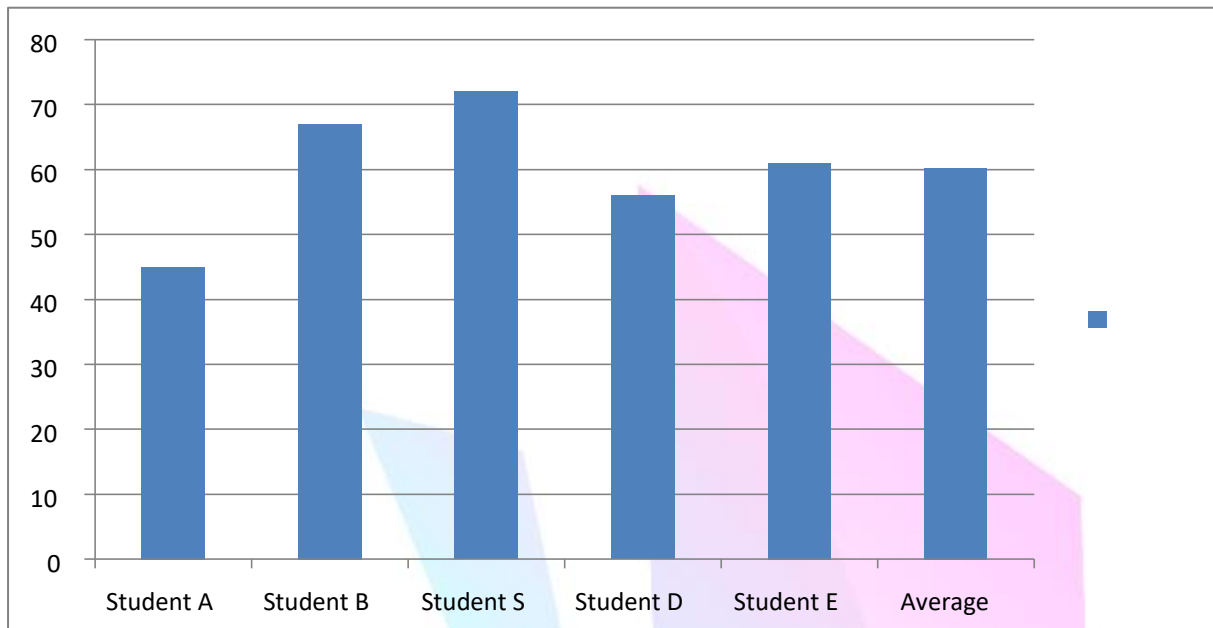
The next most common mistake was on words meaning. Sometimes the participants confused the word to the similar word in the English, and sometimes they said totally different meaning. On average nearly 40 word were confused by the participants.
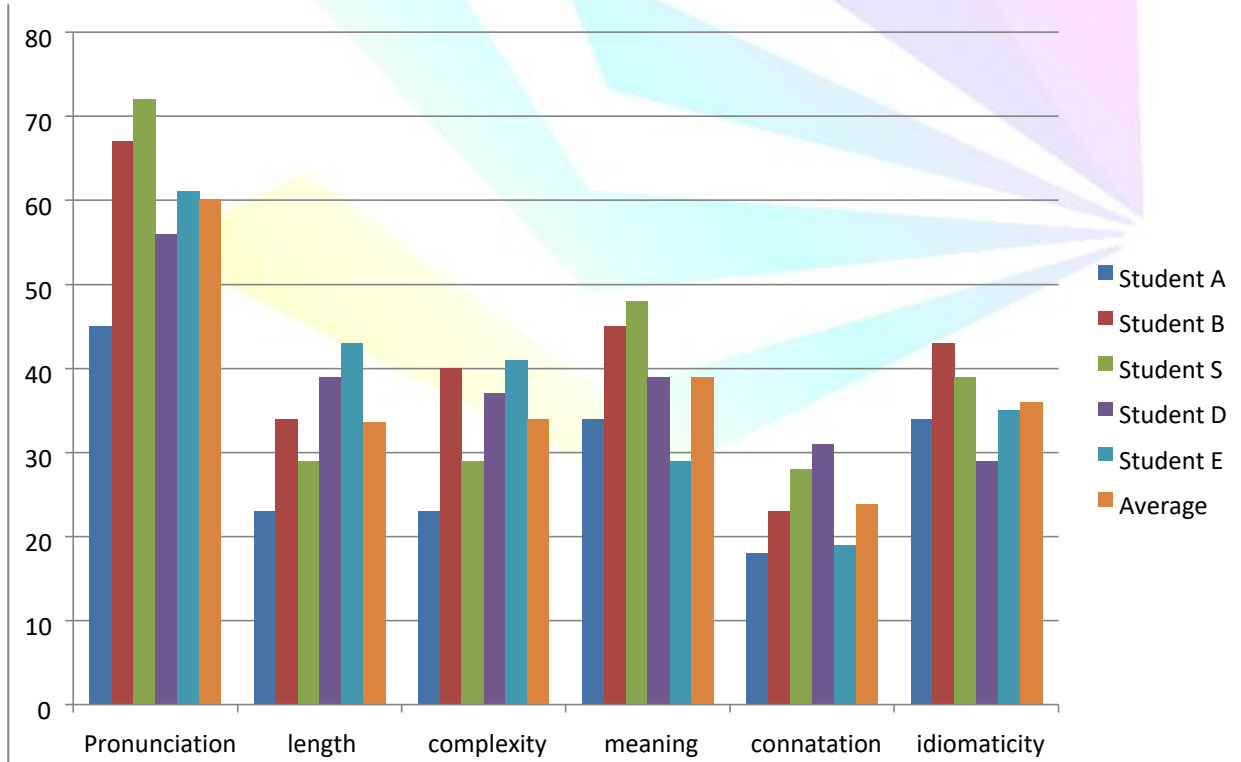
Another common mistake in vocabulary learning is in their idiomacity. Students sometimes can't differentiate how word makes collocation or phrasal verbs. For example, they can't understand why "karate" comes with "do", while other sport types come with "play". We can say "do karate" but why we can't say "do volleyball or football"? This kind of questions was asked a lot during the interview.

The next type of mistakes is the length and complexity of the word. Usually participants find a little bit difficult to remember longer and complex words than shorter and simple one or two syllable words. For example, "continue", "different" was a bit harder than learning "keep" or "same".

CONCLUSION

Based on the theories, the findings and the analysis, the present study arrives at the conclusions. This study revealed that problems or difficulties faced by the students in vocabulary learning were various. The difficulties that students face were almost all students who found it difficult to pronounce words, the different grammatical form of the word, known as exaggerations, was one of the reasons for the students' difficulty in learning vocabulary. In addition, students have found difficulty in choosing the appropriate meaning of words, and also still confuse the use of words based on context. Lastly, students are also still confused when they find words or expressions that are idiomatic.

A lack of vocabulary can be the cause of poor reading skills and makes learning every subject challenging. Luckily this is easy to improve. Students can quickly understand a wide range of words and get better grades with a great vocabulary. Vocabulary learning can be fun, easy and fast with a software computer vocabulary program. A good vocabulary makes a better writer and communicator.

REFERENCES

1.   Lewis, M. (1993). The Lexical Approach. Language Teaching Publications.

2.   Maximo, R. (2000). Effects if rote, context, keyword, and context/ keyword method on retention of vocabulary in EFL classroom, Language Learning, 50, 2, 385-412.

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

4. Oxford, R. L. (1990). Language Learning Strategies. What Every Teacher should know. Boston:

5. Heinle and 323 Heinle

6. Schmitt, N. (1997). Vocabulary learning strategies. In Schmitt, N. and McCarthy, M. (eds.) Vocabulary: Descriptive, Acquisition and Pedagogy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

7. Schmitt, N. (2000). Vocabulary in language teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8. Thornbury, Scott. 2002. How to Teach Vocabulary. London: Longman