Implementing a Learner Software for the Enhancement of Vocabulary Acquisition among Degree Level Students

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ABSTRACT

The vocabulary of an individual is commonly defined as "all the words known and used by a particular person." It can be also called 'the granary of words.' It is related to a set of familiar units within a person's language. Acquiring the nuances within the language learning conditions can be achieved only with the help of an adequate quantum of words and their use. Comprehending and enriching one's vocabulary is significant for the second language learner. The research reported here was aimed at directing the learners towards a tension-free use of new words and language items in real life situations. The learners who were involved in this study did not have enough knowledge about vocabulary learning techniques and most of them had difficulty in dealing with this problem themselves. For the present study, the researcher selected students from various degree colleges in Kerala as the sample and the study was successfully carried out with the preparation of the new software. The study was carried out as a Minor Research Project funded by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India.

Key words: *Vocabulary Acquisition; Learner Software; ICT for vocabulary development.*

Introduction

Acquiring new words and their usage and thereby enriching one's own vocabulary is regarded by most language teachers as one of the most important aspects of second language learning. Students learning English as a second language usually start learning the language through classroom work. Both learners and researchers see vocabulary as an integral component in language learning. Along with the strong backing of a learner-centered approach in the field, efforts have been taken by researchers as well as academicians to resolve the issues in language learning. Hence it becomes vital for learners to be aware of the possible strategies that they can adopt consciously during their language learning process. After a period of lull in vocabulary learning research, there is a renewed interest in lexical acquisition. Lexis is now recognized as central to any language

acquisition process, native or non-native. The acquisition of vocabulary has gained an important status as a fundamental dimension of language development. The central role of vocabulary in second language learning is being emphasized. Researchers have held that the lexical level is the most important one, as it makes basic communication possible.

The dream world of words cannot be always stored as discrete items of language in our rote memory, but could be analyzed and identified into vivified stores of identifiable units. That is why applied linguists usually agree with the fact that understanding and comprehending units in foreign language is much more than just making correspondences between form and meaning to simply pile up for later use. The following ideas seem to be fundamental to the understanding and analysis of lexis:

1. Spoken and written forms,

2. Word-structure,

3. Referential meaning,

4. Affective meaning,

5. Pragmatic meaning,

6. Lexical relations of a word with other words, and

7. Common collocations.

Significance of the study

a. Knowing a word is regarded as a complex and dynamic process and a complete mastery of a word consists of a number of types of word knowledge.

b. These varieties cannot be completely or simultaneously acquired.

c. In SLA situation the learner fails at times, for the knowledge of the word proves to be mostly partial.

d. Moreover in real life situations, each aspect of knowledge attributed along with a word is transcended to higher or lower degrees at any point of time.

Objectives of the study

i. To develop a software for improving vocabulary acquisition among degree level learners;

ii. To develop the right attitude among the degree level students towards learning new words and their usage;

iii. To enrich the knowledge level of the language learners in the contemporary context of real-world competition;

iv. To enable the learners to understand the value of words and give them an exposure to some of the world-famous literary artists and their contributions through word play.

Methodology

Making learners learn and acquire vocabulary in second language education has always been one of the main challenges for researchers and language teachers. For me, it seems important for students these days to have an extensive range of vocabulary in curriculum transactions and

other real life situations. Besides adopting new methods in second language teaching and learning, teachers should enable their learners to manage their own vocabulary learning outside the classroom situation. Rote memory or learning of difficult words continually does not prove to be the best method for students to be able to experience the world of letters. Comprehending and enriching vocabulary is of importance for the second language learner.

The experimental method was used for the present study. The researcher selected students from various degree colleges in Kollam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts in Kerala as the sample and the study was carried out with the preparation of the software. A sample of 400 to 600 students had been selected for the experimental course.

This study examined the attitude of the students towards and their ability for comprehending new words, phrases and sentences in their hunt for knowledge. The qualitative data collection method was used and a questionnaire was designed for the purpose.

Through this vocabulary learning software, the researcher created a platform for learning and getting exposed to words which are helpful for the students in their real life. An extensive list of about 2500 words can be maintained with the help of this software. For each word, we can provide a maximum of three illustrative sentences. In addition to this, if necessary, an image for the new word can be added along with the word. The software will be managed and also monitored by the admin user (who created the first set-up), and the rest of the users or members can use the software tool. No one can change the setup, for the email provided in the configuration file pertains to the the admin user.

The software was developed in **Java Swing** with **Postgresql** as backend server. The **JDK 8-131** would support the programme. The project was carried out using the Postgresql database. A brief leaflet was sent for proper understanding of the features. This document gave a brief introduction about how to create a Postgresql database and create tables and columns. It was divided into categories such as the following:

a. **COMMON WORDS OF USE**

b. **COMMON PHRASES OF USE**

c. **COMMON USAGES**

    i. Ten Ways to Ask How Someone Is

    ii. Ten Ways to Say How You Are

    iii. Ten Ways to Say "Thank You"

    iv. Ten Ways to Respond to "Thank You"

    v. Five Phrases for Apology

    vi. Five Ways to Respond to an Apology

d. **PLEASANT WORDS OF USE**

e. **FAMOUS QUOTES OF USE**

Steps to install the software

1. Check your computer configuration and choose appropriate JDK 1.8 java software.

2. My computer→Properties will give your system configuration like 32 bit or 64 bit.

3. After successful installation of JDK software, install postgresql (Pg Admin) database. Like JDK, select appropriate version 32 bit/ 64 bit.

4. Once the above steps are completed, create database, scheme and tables for running the software. The steps for performing STEP 4 are briefly explained in Postgresql.pdf.

5. The vocabulary store folder contains-SQL folder-SQL queries to create table and dat setup. INIT_data.sql should run first before executing other queries.

6. Exam kit folder also contains similar folder setup. Execute the queries in SQL folder for creating tables.

7. Open software and create user ID to proceed.

Note: Please do remember the password of postgresql database while installing the software. Otherwise, we need to install the software once again.

• Easy Exam is an objective-exam conducting simulator.

• The Student and Staff are the users in Easy Exam examination system.

• The Student can login to the system using their hall ticket number and password; the staff can login using their username and password.

Findings

It was found from the study that a significant focus on context-based learning and written exams along with learning and comprehending adequate vocabulary is vital for students as well as for the teaching community. The traditional methods that have been used in the classrooms should be done away with in the contemporary context for vocabulary enhancement. The societal and adjustment patterns of the learner concerned should also be taken into consideration so as to make his/her learning productive and effective in real life situations. Considerable optimism, vigour and interest should be shown on the part of the teacher so as to make this new life situation an inspiring one for the students.

Following are the findings of the study:

1. The students who have undergone pedagogical instruction along with the aid of the Vocabulary software (Experimental group) were found to be more successful in comprehending the words and ideas in a systematic manner than the students who were taught in the traditional manner (Control group).

2. The introduction of the vocabulary software was productive enough for the learners to comprehend new words and their usage. Because of the methods adopted in the software, even a novice himself could find it easy to understand and apply the once-unfamiliar words, phrases and sentences for daily use and reference.

3. The experimental group was more interested and thereby more motivated to find out the words and phrases for

reference. Both the students and the teachers agreed that focus should be placed on more varied vocabulary and the students expressed the need for more context-based learning.

4. It was also interesting to find that, the students preferred non-contextual testing methods.

5. The results of the study showed that the experiment was productive for the teachers who had already been working with degree level learners as well as 'teachers-to-be.'

6. The study could provide some guidance as to how students comprehend novel experiences in vocabulary learning. The knowledge of a new word creates pleasure as well as interest among the learners. However, the focus should be more on the impact of the words that the teacher selects for the students.

7. Some students were interested to find out the most difficult words in English language but some were more interested in acquiring words of compassion and desire. Some were too much interested in technical words but some were more interested in sweet-sounding words.

8. It should be the duty of the teacher to choose the apt vocabulary for the students to cater for their teenage interests.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study it may be concluded that students' vocabulary can be enriched with the help of software, as the present software helped in making the learning and understanding of new words, phrases and sentences for the students more systematic and fruitful.

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the present study:

1. Since the use of the vocabulary software facilitated learning better than the traditional method of rote learning, this can be followed up according to the needs of the students, in various educational institutions in our country.

2. Teacher can bring freshness into the second language classrooms by finding new learning and teaching software, which is necessary in the contemporary context of learner-oriented, global education.

3. Teaching and learning techniques should be available to individuals in the present-day academic environment. The technology-savvy attitude of the learners should be fruitfully exploited by contemporary educators.

4. In the future, studies can be carried out among students of different socio-economic status with regard to vocabulary acquisition.

5. Similar studies can be carried out among students at secondary and higher secondary levels provided that the selection of the material is made according to their level.

6. The impact of software can be analysed

and developed further according to the learners' needs among gifted students, advanced learners, slow learners, and so on.

7. The practical difficulties in implementing the vocabulary software or similar software among students from the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society should be studied and solutions should be found to overcome those obstacles.

8. A mobile app may be developed to incorporate vocabulary learning software in mobile phones where vocabulary learning materials can be accessed and used by the mobile-savvy students of the present age.

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Some useful web tools for speaking skills

Podcasting Tools
Podomatic (http://www.podomatic.com)
Spreaker (http://www.spreaker.com)
Audioboom (https://audioboom.com)
A podcast is an audio broadcast over the web. It is broken up into parts or episodes. Most podcasts are similar to news radio programs and deliver information on a regular basis, but they can also be comedy shows, special music broadcasts or talks. You as a teacher can set up a podcasting channel in Podomatic, Spreaker, or Audioboom.
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