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### **Teaching Vocabulary – what techniques should we use?**

**Key words:** teaching vocabulary, techniques, lexis, communication, practicing, consolidation.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauczanie słownictwa, techniki, leksykf, komunikacja, ćwiczenia, utrwalanie.

**Summary:**

In this paper some useful techniques for teaching vocabulary are discussed. Being aware of about the variety of different possibilities is crucial not only for teachers, but also for students and their parents. The whole teaching process should have specific order. Only in this case learning vocabulary might be effective. Some students think that the only one way to learn lexis is memorization. Nothing could be further from the truth. What is more, there are given some useful tips that may be useful in remembering better the new lexical material. Thanks to them, students are not discouraged by learning failures.

**Abstrakt:**

W artykule omówiono przydatne techniki nauczania słownictwa. Świadomość różnorodności różnych możliwości jest kluczowa nie tylko dla nauczycieli, ale także dla uczniów i ich rodziców. Cały proces nauczania powinien mieć określoną kolejność. Tylko w tym przypadku nauka słownictwa może być skuteczna. Niektórzy uczniowie uważają, że jedynym sposobem nauczania się leksyki jest zapamiętywanie. Nic nie może być dalej od prawdy. Co więcej, podano kilka przydatnych wskazówek, które mogą być przydatne w lepszym zapamiętaniu nowego materiału leksykalnego. Dzięki nim uczniów nie zrażają niepowodzenia w nauce.

### **Introduction**

English is one of the most popular and widely used foreign language in the world. Many countries, such as Finland, pay great attention to teaching this language to children. All skills, i.e. speaking, reading, listening and writing are

extremely important and necessary for the correct use not only of English, but of any foreign language. Teachers' opinion has always been divided on the subject of teaching vocabulary. There is a great variety of different methods that are worth looking at. Maybe, they can be used to add variety to the lessons?

In the past, the teaching of a foreign language was more focused on grammatical correctness and vocabulary was not the most important thing. Nowadays, a different method is used - the audio-lingual one, which mainly focuses on the ability to communicate. Taking into account the assumptions of this method, the focus should also be on vocabulary. The lack of knowledge of the vocabulary causes problems in the transmission of information. The cognisance of the grammar is not the most crucial issue here because the most significant goal is to convey information in a way that is as comprehensible as possible for the recipient. For this reason, it is necessary to constantly introduce and repeat new lexical material. As Hanna Komorowska notes (2009, p. 151-152), without this knowledge it is not possible to develop other skills such as listening, reading, writing or speaking. In all of them, vocabulary plays a significant role. Therefore, learning lexis should be taught in several stages. The first is to introduce new vocabulary, the next is repetition, and the last is repetition and consolidation of vocabulary that has been mastered earlier.

### **Different Ways of Introducing New Vocabulary**

As has already been mentioned, the first stage of learning vocabulary is to introduce new material. There are several ways to familiarize students with the new words effectively and in an interesting way. Their variety allows the teacher to diversify the classes and to use other ways than translation. The important issue is to prepare the tasks in such a way that only new vocabulary is new. The ambiguities caused by the use of too advanced a grammar should have no place. The introduction of vocabulary should focus only on lexis. It is also significant to show students words in simple and understanding way. Only by fulfilling these issues the learning can be effective.

Using the objects in the learning of vocabulary is the first way to indicate new lexis. This is a very suitable method when pupils make use of their sense of

sight during learning. This enables the students to remember and make them curious. Accordingly, it is possible to use objects that are available in the classroom, or objects that do not cause any difficulty in bringing them into the school.

The use of pictures is another interesting way that can be used in the teaching process. It is possible to use all kinds of maps, cards, photographs, postcards, pictures or boards. However, it is a good alternative to the above described method because it is not always possible to prepare objects such as furniture or equipment. One should remember that this method is not universal. It can be used in vocabulary that can be shown; abstract expressions will not be explained with this method.

It is worth paying attention to the conveyance of vocabulary by means of non-verbal speech. The use of facial expressions, gestures or poses in an interesting way diversifies the introduction of vocabulary. Including movement in learning, the attention of students is drawn and they willingly take part in exercises. Higher concentration enables better memorization. With the use of the pantomimic method it is possible to acquaint students with many verbs, for example, opening a window, getting up, sitting down, writing. What is more, by means of a gesture, it is possible to show features, for instance, colours and shapes. Poses can be used to introduce character features, such as modest or self-confident. Adjectives that interfere with space can be used to introduce a change of location: behind, next to, at, in front of, etc. (Komorowska, 2009, p. 153).

The method with the use of synonyms is rather suitable for students who already have some knowledge of the language. It is about giving words which are very close to each other in meaning and can be used interchangeably. The given synonyms are simple words, which have already been very well mastered by students. It is a very effective method because it broadens the lexical knowledge and prevents the repetition in oral or written statements.

What is even more interesting is the form of antonym. The aim of this method is to explain vocabulary by means of expressions of opposite meaning, e.g. large - small. In order to prevent complications and ambiguities, negation must be explicitly taken into account.

When discussing how to introduce new vocabulary in lessons, one cannot overlook the following way, which is explanation. It consists of conveying the vocabulary by means of a story about it in English. It is worthwhile to use this method as students who focus on storytelling are more involved in the exercise. In cases where the description is not sufficiently understandable, one can use the mother tongue and direct students to the answer.

In English, there are words in which a definition makes best sense. It is worth noting that explanations do not have to be complicated; those that can be found in a dictionary are sufficient. Moreover, a knowledge of how to use dictionaries on one's own is also significant skill. Pupils often have a problem with it, and thus it is worth to use the dictionary from time to time in order to explain a lexicon. In case of difficulties in understanding the meaning, it is possible to give the equivalent in native language.

Another great way of introducing new vocabulary is giving the context. The point is to give a sentence or a short story with a new word, which clearly explains its meaning. It is preferable to use context with people who have been dealing with a foreign language for a longer time and have reached a certain level.

The last mentioned way of introducing vocabulary is to give the equivalent in the mother tongue. It is used mainly because of the time saving. This way is also useful when the discussed words are abstract or difficult. Then it is tough to choose another method, which in a clear way would explain the meaning of a word. Unfortunately, the translation method has many disadvantages. Pupils are discouraged by the lesson, when the teacher does not introduce other possible methods. What is more, it can lead to many lexical and grammatical mistakes. Among other things, pupils are deterred from reading even short texts. If other methods were used, pupils would certainly understand the text without knowing all the words. Afterwards, learning is much slower and the words are quickly forgotten because they are not repeated. By using associations or pictures, it is easier for children to assimilate knowledge and keep it in their memories for a longer time.

Komorowska gives an interesting way of introducing vocabulary with the use of translation. It is a technique which is called "sandwich". It is based on giving a sentence, which will take the new word and the word is marked. Then, it is

necessary to give a one-word equivalent of the sentence but it is already more delicately marked. Finally, it is necessary to repeat the earlier foreign language sentence. The author points out that it is worth combining translation methods with others. Then, learning will be much more effective (2009, p. 154-155).

Taking into account all the mentioned techniques, it is possible to introduce a lexicon in an interesting way, which will develop the knowledge of a foreign language. The method chosen by the teacher should be carefully considered. It is worth noting that depending on the level of knowledge of the foreign language (beginner, less advanced, more advanced), age and type of vocabulary, the appropriate techniques are used. It is worth remembering that they are not universal and their use will not always be effective.

### **Useful Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary**

After the appropriate introduction of vocabulary, it is important that it is preserved in an interesting way so that it can be remembered as soon as possible. This is a crucial element in teaching vocabulary.

The use of association is a great technique for teaching vocabulary. It requires the use of greater imagination and a more precise focus on a given material. As a result, vocabulary is remembered for a longer time. There are really many ways of using associations. Hanna Komorowska in her publication gives 3 of them (Komorowska, 2009, p. 155-156). The first one consists in associating a word with a name on a given letter. The student is supposed to match the word with the appropriate name. An example of this can be 'Paul' and 'play'. They should then mark the first letters and create a simple sentence; for example, 'Paul is playing'. This method uses graphic association for better memorization.

Another technique is thematic association. For this purpose, the knowledge of lexis about job names can be used. This exercise is intended to sustain the newly learned material with names of professions. The student's task is to match the appropriate words to the job names. An example could be the word 'smell' associated with a cook. This is a very good method because at the same time a new portion of vocabulary is recorded and remembered. The exercise can be performed

in a very similar way using room names. For instance, the adjective 'sour' can be assigned to the kitchen.

The last but not least technique is drawing. This is another great idea to make learning more effective. The point is to draw even small pictures next to the new presented vocabulary. If the vocabulary comes from the same topic, it is worth grouping the words around one drawing. An example can be a picture of a village and all words connected with it around.

To sum up, it is important to be aware of the possibility of choosing from a variety of techniques for introducing vocabulary. What is more, it is worthwhile to support them with additional methods that will make students achieve better results. In a good combination, learning vocabulary will be pleasant and interesting.

### **Some Ideas for Learning and Checking the Knowledge Concerning Vocabulary**

The next steps in teaching vocabulary are repetition and consolidation of the learned material. It is important to return to the previously introduced lexical stuff regularly. Without these activities, all the effort will be lost. Therefore, it is worthwhile to prepare interesting exercises, which encourage students to further learning and deepening of knowledge.

The first exercise might be 'the multiple choice'. It is an excellent way of repeating and practice vocabulary. Students can also practice another portion of vocabulary at the same time. It can be tricky, yet easy to mark. It is preferable to use this type of exercises for practicing rather than checking the knowledge due to the fact that students can choose random answers or cheat.

Secondly, matching can be used. In this exercise learners are supposed to match the word with the appropriate meaning. This task is quick and easy to compose. Therefore, only meaning is tested. When the teacher wants to prepare this task, he/she should add more options of meanings. Thanks to this, students will be focused on completing it until the very end.

Furthermore, the next interesting task is 'odd one out'. As in the previous exercise, the knowledge of definitions and meanings is checked here as well. The point of this exercise is to cross inappropriate word which does not match to the

rest. This might be tricky because one has to know the exact meaning of all expressions in order to handle the task correctly.

The next idea is about writing sentences or sentence completion definitely can be used at test. In this task students have to know the meaning of given vocabulary. Pronunciation and spelling are not tested here. Only with a great knowledge of vocabulary one can write sentences correctly. What is more, it is quite a creative exercise because each pupil will have the answers written in a bit different way, and as a result, each attempt of cheating from a colleague will be easily visible.

When considering the various types of tasks that should be taken into account while practicing a newly learned portion of vocabulary dictation is worth remembering. This is another good way to check and practice the knowledge of vocabulary. The teacher will speak a word that needs to be written down. By doing this exercise, pupils record the pronunciation of the word. This is a very effective exercise which can be used in the form of a short test, when the teacher checks the spelling. What is more, this form of checking the knowledge is simple to prepare and verify by the teacher. Concerning dictation, it is also worth mentioning a dictation combined with a translation of vocabulary. The teacher pronounces the word in the mother tongue and the students' task is to write the equivalent in English next to it. In this activity not only the spelling is checked by the teacher, but also the knowledge of the meaning of given words. This is a common method used in foreign language classes when the teacher wants to check whether students have mastered the material. Mainly, this is because the exercise is quite easy to prepare and then to check. Of course, it all depends on the teacher how the grading will be done. Moreover, this technique can be varied by the use of synonyms and antonyms. This action will make the exercise more advanced and the native tongue will be eliminated. The teacher will give a word in a foreign language and the student will have to write a synonym or antonym to it. There are various techniques that are worth combining and diversifying.

Another type of task can be gap filling. This is quite a universal technique because not only vocabulary but also meaning, spelling, grammar, collocations and other expressions can be checked. The student's task is to insert the appropriate word in the gap so that the whole sentence has the right meaning. In this type of

activity the student must guess which word should be used. What is worth noting is that the teacher ought to specify exactly what will be taken into account while checking at the beginning of the assignment. For instance, whether or not to put the word in the gap in the right form. The second form of this activity could be to complete the gaps with the words given in the box. Here, knowledge of the meaning is also important. As in the previous mentioned technique, the teacher should determine whether or not the correct grammar should be applied.

The last idea for the task of practicing vocabulary is translation. It is also an interesting technique but it is preferred for more advanced groups who have already had contact with a foreign language. The translation checks all aspects of the language, including grammar. However, there may sometimes be problems in finding the right equivalent word or expression. When it comes to using this type of exercise as a testing of knowledge, it can be tricky to check and give an appropriate assessment. On the other hand, when the teacher sees that the group is already at a fairly good level, it is worthwhile to use this task even in the form of exercise in class.

To sum up, in order for the learning of vocabulary in a foreign language to be effective, it is necessary to take into account these 3 stages of teaching, which consisted of introducing new material, consolidating it and finally revising and remembering it. For the whole process to be effective, it must be well planned and supported by appropriate types of tasks. There is a wide range of possibilities as far as the types of tasks are concerned. The examples mentioned above can certainly be used in the teaching of vocabulary at various stages - from beginners to advanced. However, it is important to remember to choose the right types of tasks according to the level of the group in order not to discourage members from learning.

### **Useful Tips for Teaching Vocabulary**

Competent learning of vocabulary is very significant. The teacher should be familiar with and have a thorough knowledge of effective teaching so that students are not discouraged. This mainly happens in two cases: when the vocabulary and the content of the tasks are too complicated and advanced for the group, or when

the material is too simple and the students get bored. It is therefore very important to adapt the appropriate level of tasks to the class. In order to avoid various setbacks, the following rules should be taken into account.

Firstly, the meanings and context must be clear and understandable to students. They must fully grasp the specifics of the word or expression. Being uncertain about this may distract them, which will lead to discouragement of further learning.

Then, there should be a correlation of the new material with the previous one in vocabulary learning. In order to bring the expected results, it is necessary to create associations. “Even when learning happens quickly, the process of forgetting happens equally quickly” (Komorowska, 2009, p. 163). Certainly, this technique will facilitate remembering and improve the whole learning process.

The next issue is the regular repetition of the learned portion of vocabulary. It should take place frequently and regularly to consolidate it well. Not returning to the discussed lexis will lead the students to quickly forget all the news and there will be no effect. It is worthwhile to revise the vocabulary at the beginning of the class because students have more concentration and remember it best. What is more, after the introduction of a new lexicon, it should be repeated at the end of the same lesson and on the next ones. This can be done in short assignments. Thanks to this, the learned material will remain in the memory of the students for a longer time. “The consolidation of the vocabulary should take place in the course of pre-communication and communication exercises; therefore, both those focused on isolated words and those focused on statements containing those words” (Komorowska, 2009, p. 163). When repeating vocabulary, it is important to remember to change the order of the words. They should absolutely not be kept in alphabetical order. The words at the beginning of the list are easier to remember, so it is sometimes worth changing their order.

Furthermore, people remember words better if they have personal or emotional significance. The good idea is to ask learners some questions which concern to their family, friends, or lifestyle. Looking for emotions can bring great results in teaching vocabulary. What is more, people attempt to link items in sense units, or they find reasons to associate the lexis. Very often they also look for

personal significance. Vocabulary plays an important role in communication. For this reason, teachers should be attentive and well-prepared to conduct classes on vocabulary. Therefore, the main focus should not be on grammatical correctness. Without the right amount of knowledge concerning vocabulary it will not be possible to communicate properly (Komorowska, 2009, p. 163).

The last but not least tip is to be aware of the fact that there is no one the best and universal strategy for learning lexis. Every participant is different and has other preferences. The whole class cannot be taught in the same way. Teachers should present them how to learn. The various of different techniques enable them to find the most appropriate way.

Taking all tips into account, they definitely help to make the whole teaching process more effective. This knowledge is fairly important and teachers should be fully aware of it. By supporting the teaching of the above mentioned tricks, students will have no problem remembering and will have a richer resource of words, without worrying about possible gaps.

### **Teaching Vocabulary in Practice**

In September 2020, I completed an work placement in one of the primary schools. It was a specialized practice, during which the attention was focused on English lessons in the second stage of education (classes IV-VIII). For the next 4 weeks I observed the classes as well as I was conducting them myself. This allowed me to use the knowledge gained during the classes in practice and to try my hand at running courses in different classes. The groups, as everyone knows, differed in terms of their level of knowledge or behaviour. This allowed me to feel like a teacher with more than 20 people in attendance at the same time.

### **Teacher's Performance**

Initially, I mainly made observations which allowed me to keep the students' behaviour and level of knowledge under observations; I knew who was apt and who had problems with English. Thanks to this, I could better prepare myself for my later activities. The English teacher knows her pupils very well and has many years of experience in the profession. Depending on the vocabulary, the teacher used

various methods. On one of the first classes the teacher decided to revise some parts of vocabulary from the previous school year. It was also caused by the fact that a considerable part of this was conducted remotely. These activities helped to retrieve the knowledge acquired earlier. Therefore, at the beginning, the teacher did brainstorming. Then, each pupil received a set of tasks of different type, for example, exercises to sign pictures, start or fill in gaps in a text could be encountered. With the use of an interactive whiteboard, the pupils played games, which were very popular with the rest. One of them was Kahoot. It is quite universal, because it is possible to find the right topic of the game and the level of the advancement. What is more, it is also possible to create a game on one's own which was quite an interesting experience. Children have often been very emotional about it and, as we all know, it helps to remember. In this way, vocabulary related to food, health, professional names, buildings in the city and wildlife were repeated and consolidated.

Another topic was human-related vocabulary. Issues such as external appearance or character traits were discussed. At the beginning, the teacher focused on this vocabulary with using flashcards. It is worthwhile to connect the different senses during learning to make it more effective. After presenting the picture, the pupils called different parts of the wardrobe. In discussing characteristics of the character, facial expressions and gestures were used. The pupils also pronounced the vocabulary using a different tone of voice. Thanks to it, the lesson was more interesting and varied. Pupils have also performed several tasks. The work in pairs was also previewed. As a result, the pupils interacted with each other by discussing and analysing some exercises. In case of any problems the teacher was glad to explain and help. At the end of the class everyone returned to the new material. Also, the homework, in which one had to write one's appearance in several sentences, could not be missing. What is important, the teacher during following classes returned to the discussed vocabulary, as Hanna Komorowska wrote in her book. Thanks to systematic repetition the learning of vocabulary will be a pleasure and will bring positive results. For example, the pupils had to describe the appearance of a certain person in the classroom and the rest had to guess who it

was. So, as one can see, the task which was to reproduce vocabulary was combined with practicing speaking skills.

In the upper classes, the teacher also used the dictionary to teach vocabulary. The pupils had to find the meaning of the words in the dictionary at the end of the handbook. Thanks to this, in the age of the Internet, they could practice using the paper version of the dictionary. Then, all the vocabulary was discussed with the teacher. The use of paper dictionaries should be used in the classroom, for the use of electronic devices, for example, is not possible on any exam.

Dictation and translation were used on sheets of paper. In quite a short time the teacher was able to check the knowledge of pupils. This type of tests do not have to be announced earlier, but the teacher always informed her learners about this. I had the opportunity to take part in checking these tests, which allowed me to draw conclusions as to whether the methods used for learning vocabulary were appropriate.

The teacher used a variety of tasks and methods of introduction in vocabulary classes. What is more, she often involved the latest technologies in order to make her classes more attractive. Of course, there is no one universal technique for all participants of the course, but certainly everyone could find something suitable for themselves. The technology has also made the whole task much easier. It attracts the attention of the students and using it increases motivation. Lessons were not conducted in a standard way which very often discourages further development, and this, in turn, leads to the destruction of discipline.

### **My Performance**

After some days I started preparing the lessons. During the preparation for the classes, I tried to consider all exercises and activities properly and thoroughly. This is a very important element, as the combination of material is conducive to effective learning of the language.

During the lessons in fourth grade, we discussed the names of the seasons, months and days of the week. I also explained to them the rules when we write them in capital letters. The seasons were reminded by the use of pictures. By asking questions to students, they spoke about the days of the week. We also carried out

various tasks from the book and the handbook to consolidate the given vocabulary, such as signing pictures, matching and completing the gaps. We have also played a game - Memory. Children loved it and were very happy. During the next classes there was no lack of references to this vocabulary. The task of students was to complete a sentence on the right day of week, time of year or name of month. What is more, while writing down the subject of the lesson I asked questions about the day of the week and the month.

I also had the same opportunity as my mentor to discuss human-related vocabulary with seventh grade pupils. However, I decided to use other techniques to introduce and expose the vocabulary. I mainly used definitions in English and context, particularly to discuss various life events. This made the task of talking about a life event easier. Pupils knew how to do it. They could stimulate their imagination. The tasks that evoke emotions greatly facilitate effective learning which results in better memorization.

In discussing human-related vocabulary, in the seventh grade, we also did an exercise in which it was necessary to match appropriate clothing to life events and situations. It was quite an interesting exercise, as it sometimes required reflection. Sometimes the students had different opinions which provoked discussion and exchange of arguments.

The technique of flashcards was also often used by me during the English lessons. One of the examples was vocabulary connected to the names of clothes. Pupils were interested because most of them were displayed on an interactive board. Another exercise was to draw pictures in a notebook and sign them. Pupils in the fourth grade were interested in this activity. Each of them focused on drawing and signing correctly.

When I was teaching vocabulary, I paid great attention to pronunciation. I wanted students to pronounce words correctly and not make mistakes. That is why, we often listened to the recording and songs. In an interesting way it was possible to practice and consolidate not only vocabulary and its meaning, but also correct pronunciation.

While discussing the family members in the fourth grade, in addition to the above mentioned techniques, the students made a project in which they were

to prepare a family tree for their family. It was an interesting variety of activities. All works were evaluated and the best ones hung on a board in class. It was a good idea to combine learning vocabulary with manual activities because in the following lessons the students had no problem with distinguishing between family members. What is more, they could peek at the posters hanging in the classroom at any time, which certainly made them memorable.

The most problematic portion of the material in the vocabulary were phrasal verbs. These are quite complicated expressions. I used translation methods to introduce this vocabulary. I realized that it is not worth to make the task even more difficult and this will be appropriate. There are words in which it is difficult to apply more interesting methods. In order not to discourage students from learning them, we practiced using various exercises in a handbook and exercise book. Each time we repeated the meanings of these words so that they would be well remembered.

To sum up, participation in work placement allowed for a closer look at the teacher's work from his perspective. I tried to plan my classes in an interesting way, using various methods. In general, they were very suitable and the students were eager to take part in the classes. It is also worth having additional tasks prepared beforehand. What is very important is that the material should be systematically revised. This is extremely essential and only by returning to the topic will teaching be more effective. Personally, I have very good memories of my practice. I drew a lot of conclusions from it and realized that it is quite a challenge to give attention to all the students in 45 minutes. However, the training makes me a master and I just made sure that I would like to do the job in the future. It is quite difficult and requires a lot of effort but it is very satisfying.

### **Conclusions**

The use of various techniques in the teaching of vocabulary plays a very important role, as can be seen. The methods and techniques that have been brought closer together in this article are part of it. There are many other interesting possibilities which can be easily applied. What is extremely important is the observance and consideration of all three stages of learning. Particularly important is the repetition of the processed material. By taking part in the apprenticeship, I was able to compare the times with those in which I myself was a pupil of a primary

school. From my experience I know that the use of one method, usually translation of words into the mother tongue, was not the best solution. That is why, it is also worthwhile to broaden one's horizons and improve one's abilities to be able to prepare great classes. Technology is an extremely important element nowadays. Thanks to it, preparing interesting classes is much easier. However, the knowledge of appropriate tricks also greatly contributes to improving the process of teaching vocabulary.

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**Nauczanie słownictwa - jakich technik powinniśmy używać?**