

## Strategies in Primary School Vocabulary Teaching

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### Abstract

Vocabulary teaching is supposed to be an extremely significant part in language teaching in Primary school, which is always neglected prevalently. In this paper, the author discusses problems and strategies to cope with current vocabulary teaching issues, so as to offer some solutions for teachers in primary school English teaching.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary; Primary school; Strategies.



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### 1. Introduction

There are a series of problems in vocabulary teaching in primary school, which could cause the loss of interest for young English learners. *New curriculum* stipulates the goals of vocabulary for students of Grade six are: “learn 600-700 words and about 50 expressions for daily greetings”, “read the simple words according to spelling rules”, “read and understand simple stories or short passages with awareness of sense group” ([Chinese Ministry of Education, 2011](#)). And vocabulary in current textbooks are of great numbers, while it is a great challenge for teachers to deal with vocabulary teaching, for it is directly related to the habit of word memorizing in students’ further study.

### 2. Problems in the Process of Vocabulary Teaching

#### 2.1. Outdated Teaching Models

Currently, many teachers tend to teach words in an isolated way: explaining the Chinese meaning of the words without contexts. One typical example is to ask students to read the words in the vocabulary list attached to the textbooks. In this way, teachers’ explanations will occupy most of the class hour, while with no consideration of students’ capacity to absorb the packs of vocabulary. In fact, words are combinations of context, form, pronunciation and culture, so the learning time should be given back to students.

#### 2.2. Incomplete Pronunciation Teaching

Pronunciation should be a solid foundation for the existence of a language, and it should be the starting point of all the whole language teaching. If teachers can give students a good impression that language learning is a sound system of voice, form and usage, students would learn English in a much more easier way; while some primary school English teachers are not qualified in terms of their pronunciation, for they are not strictly trained as a professional English major or they are not perfectly a teacher with solid qualifications, or some teachers do not have the awareness to combine intonation into vocabulary teaching. As a result, the incorrect or nonstandard pronunciations will definitely influence word memorizing and accumulation, while furthermore, lack of words would sooner or later cause difficulties in reading and listening in Junior high school.

#### 2.3. Insufficient Time for Consolidating

As mentioned forward, the outdated teaching models and mechanical way of memorizing words has taken up the majority of class hour. Even instantly, primary school students can remember the words on the spot, they will forget the vocabulary day after day because of no in-time consolidation, less self exploration of the word rules, and lack of cultural context. The *New Curriculum* stipulates that word teaching should be carried out through multiple ways of acting, singing, games, competitions, riddles and other approaches for primary school students to accept. Even the teachers can present new vocabulary with flashcards, or ways mentioned here, students will still forget the words because of no effective activities for students to use and comprehend the word after class.

### 3. Principles

#### 3.1. Interest First

Interest as an important factor in stimulating young learners to learn English can help a teacher reach the goal of vocabulary teaching ([Jarvis, 2003](#)) The *New Curriculum* prescribes that all the activities should be interesting enough and related to the daily life of children. Children always learn English based on whether they like it or not, because they haven’t developed a mature ability to control themselves and their cognition is not strong enough to cope with distractions. Therefore, the key point in motivating them to learn efficiently is to design more activities to their hobbies and games stimulating their curiosity. Once the students want to know more about the topic, they will try to focus in the process of learning the necessary words, and they will be more likely to be involved in the tasks

designed with application of the key sentences and words. Therefore, the teaching process can be made attractive to young learners through various presentation methods like: objects related to young learners life, pictures , videos, and games.

### 3.2. Audiovisual Methods

In our daily life, people always communicate not only just with words but also with the assistance of our senses at the same time. One can point to the objects and make some gestures if there are some misunderstandings, one can touch if they want to draw attention. Vocabulary teaching in primary school is also a kind of communication and a means to transmit information. The young learners are curious about objects they can feel, and interesting sounds (Houcan, 2002). Comparing with the dull mechanical reading words aloud in the classroom, the application of objects can appeal to the majority of students. For example, when teaching animals, teachers can prepare the sounds of the animals: after presenting the animal words, students can be invited to guess the animals by listening to the sounds of animals; when teaching fruits, it is not a challenge for a teacher to bring the common fruits into the classroom, and students can also try to guess the fruits by touching and smelling, then a big dish of fruit salad is a good way for teachers to encourage students to say the words out aloud if they want to enjoy the fruits.

### 3.3. Systematic Teaching

If teachers can transmit the notion that words are meaningful only in a context and are related interactively, students would acquire a good habit of learning words systematically and quickly. This idea of memorizing words could form students a sense of sound strategy in learning a language. For example, the words on the word list attached to each textbooks are disordered, and teachers need to put the words together and analyze whether they can put them in a context in presentation stage meaningfully, which would help students to sense that words are used to express and fulfill a communicational function. Besides, words of similar meanings, opposite meanings, can be made to compare, so as to strengthen students' learning system of a word map. When teaching adjectives, teachers can give students pairs of words: hot-cold, young-old, white-black, thin-fat, long-short. If students learn words in this way, they will form a habit of observing, comparing, inducing, which is beneficial to future language learning.

## 4. Strategies

### 4.1. Updating Awareness of Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary, as the smallest unit in languages, is the basic tool for human beings to communicate. Without the basic units, human can never transmit idea in a concrete way, and every language is of this rule. Some Junior high school students who find difficulties in English learning, and these students nearly all have the same problem: they could not remember the words effectively. Primary school English learning is somewhat easy, however, it is the most crucial stage of English learning, for it will directly influence one's further English learning interest, efficiency and habit. So primary school English teachers should raise the awareness of teaching vocabulary in an interesting, scientific and efficient way. This is critical, because how a teacher handles the process of vocabulary teaching is decided by how he/she looks at the role of words in a language. For an instance, why the teachers ask the students to memorize words according to the words list isolated from the context? This type of teachers believe words are not so important in communication, instead, reading texts are more important than the words. And students in the class of this type will never be able to use the words flexibly and correctly; what's more, these students will easily forget the words even though they are asked to read the word many times and copy the words day by day after class. While, a teacher with a sound language concept of communication, will present the words in a meaningful context in multiple ways and consolidate the words with functions in daily life to be fulfilled.

### 4.2. Application of Games in Vocabulary Teaching

The most basic task for English learning in primary school is to make English learning interesting to students, so as to cultivate an atmosphere of good language learning sense and habit. And the vocabulary teaching in young learners' classroom should also be attractive and fun. Young learners' love for game can never be dropped in English class, and the learning process of vocabulary is also supposed to be fun at the same time. Games can be songs, quizzes, competitions and peer group work, which can stimulate students to consolidate the words to be and being learned effectively. The contents of games and words should be considered as a whole concept, in the process of playing around, word repetition and usage should be involved among most of the pupils in the language class. For example, music chair, after the words are presented together, pronunciation to be checked, the teacher can ask several students to stand beside the chairs, with one word card one chair, then music is played, randomly stopped by the teacher, and students should find a chair to sit. Then, each word flashcard is to be read out. Those who fail to read the words are out. Then the last one is the winner. Other games can be guessing game, bingo, swapping, learn and touch, parcel games and so on.

### 4.3. Combination of Spelling Rules

Like Pinyin in Chinese learning, the formations of English vocabulary have rules in itself, because English words are series of letters. In the process of word teaching, teachers can raise students the awareness of reading the words according to the spelling rules (Xin, 2015), which will make vocabulary memorizing easier. For example, words with the same combinations of letters could be put together, encouraging students to analyze and try to pronounce the groups of words: like, bike, Mike, pike, hike. In this way, when students learn the word "like", they

can get the learning chance to feel and form the English sense, which is beneficial to their further spelling ability. Besides, teachers can also make the words with same letter chunks into a sentence, for example, when teaching “a”:  
This is a rat./This is a mat./This is a hat./The rat sat./The rat sat on the mat./The cat sat./The cat sat on the mat./The rat sat./The rat sat on the hat. Primary school students would like to practice pronunciations in this way with pictures and sounds.

## 5. Conclusion

Vocabulary teaching in primary school is related to one’s future learning efficiency in further English learning, and it should be attached great importance. Once a teacher detects the problems in the process of word teaching, one is more likely to handle and explore more ways to enhance his/her teaching effectiveness. If the primary school teachers can design series of language activities in vocabulary teaching and consider the characteristics of young learners learning styles and language rules, vocabulary teaching will definitely boost students’ interest and ability in English learning.

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