

Effective ELT Practices Across Turkey

Editors: Yusuf DEMİR · Cahit ERDEM · Hüseyin SERÇE



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FOREWORD

As in many different subject areas, it is a historical reality that global practitioners have been facing problems in teaching English mainly as a foreign language, resulting in lack of target language proficiency on the part of students. This bundle of problems has turned out to be chronic despite the changing winds and shifting sands of foreign language pedagogy and concomitant classroom techniques and practices. So, why is this so-called failure still alive? No doubt, this is a multi-dimensional issue. However, perhaps we can start by changing our perspectives on learning and teaching. There are about eight billion people in the world. Just like snowflakes, no two of us are exactly the same, both physically and in terms of personality traits. Not even two fingerprints are alike. So, can we suggest that everybody learns the same way? The answer would be a simple no. We have long known that there are individual differences in learning. If we consider that every country, region, school, subject area and teacher has unique characteristics, one can better envisage the immense diversity of the variables that can impact on learning. With this diversity in mind, one size does not fit all, meaning that a single approach, method or technique would not be equally effective in solving the unique problems encountered in countless learning and teaching contexts. This reality requires a practical perspective of pedagogy that foregrounds contextual and situational dynamics, with apt solutions to peculiar problems and difficulties. This way, sorting out each issue that is part of the larger problem can lead to a positive change and development in teaching in a bottom-up fashion. Overall, this kind of there-and-then approach can ignite the solutions to the main challenges we are facing in teaching English as a foreign language. The adoption of this approach also requires a significant change in the traditional role of the teacher. Within this framework, teaching through a centralized curriculum and other-imposed coursebooks will not effectively cover learner needs. Therefore, it is necessary for practitioners to undertake the role of 'teacher-as-researcher', which includes diagnosing and defining the contextual challenges experienced, researching, and trying out strategies for improvement in learning gains. While this role also contributes to teachers' professional development, a more worthwhile undertaking would probably be for teachers to share and disseminate their unique context-bound practices, which could, if not generalizable, shed light on the philosophy and methodology of problem-solving, or at least serve as exemplar-based mechanisms. Ideas do not arise spontaneously, and they are often inspired by different experiences lived and shared, which was the very reason we came up with this book.

Undoubtedly, teachers informally share their valuable experiences with others in their daily lives. However, publications such as books, academic and non-academic articles, teaching magazines can also be effective resources for researching teachers in their efforts to keep track of practices of others. Setting out with such an objective, this book includes a total of 17 chapters, documenting the micro and macro-level practices of Turkish EFL practitioners teaching in different educational institutions and geographical locations across Turkey. As a collection of effective ELT practices, we believe that this book will primarily benefit in-service teachers, teacher candidates and teacher trainers, as well as other parties interested in ELT research and pedagogy.

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CHAPTER 1

VOCABULARY ACQUISITION THROUGH ONLINE GAMES AND WRITING STORIES

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Abstract

This study aims to help students acquire new vocabulary easily and in a fun way. As an English teacher who has been teaching at different schools and different grades for 18 years, my impression is that students have the most difficulty in vocabulary acquisition and hence speaking and writing skills. One of the main reasons for this situation is that students do not have the chance to encounter new words they have learned outside of the school environment. For this reason, we should give students the opportunity to encounter the words they have just learned, and furthermore, we should make them use these words. So I thought it would be a good way to prepare online games to expose students to new words and to give them a story writing task to use those words. The procedures and steps of the practice, the pedagogical benefits and proved effects of the activities are presented in the study in detail.

Target Learner Group: 10th grade students

Introduction

Teaching vocabulary to language learners has always been accepted as a hard work by language teachers. It may be said to have often been neglected both in and outside the classroom because of this perception of hard work. Zimmerman (1997, p.5) argues that “the teaching and learning of vocabulary have been undervalued in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) throughout its varying stages and up to the present day”. Developing a strong vocabulary not only promotes reading comprehension and good writing skills but it also enables one to actively take part in daily speech. According to Biemiller (2001) a student’s oral vocabulary memory stays two years behind his/her reading vocabulary. Therefore, students should be exposed to rich vocabulary experiences and should be scaffolded with opportunities to use and get feedback on new vocabulary items in and out of the English classes. Saragi et al. (1978), found that if the students encountered new words six or more times, they would learn it by over 93%. According to Sokmen (1997) and Nation&Ming-tzu (1999) a number of exposures were necessary for a word to be considered a candidate for acquisition.

Although the most effective way for learners to acquire new vocabulary is considered through exposure to comprehensible input via reading (Krashen, 1989), acquiring new words via simple writing tasks though not widely used in the classroom recently, may essentially be more representative of current thinking about vocabulary acquisition (Craik&Lockhart, 1972). In his study about task-based vocabulary learning, Newton (1995) had important findings. According to the results of his study, using the new vocabulary in completing a task was a good predictor of learning a word and the learners who used the new vocabulary in new contexts or structures made the greatest development in learning a vocabulary. Similarly, Joe (1998) found that if learners used the words in new contexts, they were more likely to remember them later on. Vocabulary acquisition can be augmented more effectively when a reading or writing task mentioned above is accompanied by various vocabulary exercises. Teachers need to consider possible ways of developing exercises such as word matching games, crossword puzzles, finding the pairs, acting out the words, word hunt, spin the wheel, etc. which they can create on digital platforms like <https://wordwall.net/tr/>, <https://wheeldecide.com/>, <https://www.clAssistools.net/>.

On the basis of these highlights from the literature, I’d like to propose practices that educators can use to implement a comprehensive approach to vocabulary acquisition. But before that, I want to mention about my personal experience about vocabulary teaching. As an English teacher with 18 years of teaching experience

at all levels from primary school to high school, I can argue that the language skills students find most difficult are productive language skills, namely writing and speaking. I think the underlying reason is that students do not like to learn/memorize new words and hence the weakness of their vocabulary. When students are given assignments, they often do not want to search for the new vocabulary and often expect their teacher to tell the Turkish equivalents of the new words. Therefore, new words are often forgotten if they do not appear elsewhere in the book, and this is often the case. Students do not learn just by hearing or writing the new words as in traditional teaching methods. They need activities that appeal to many different senses at the same time. They quickly forget what they hear, read or write, but do not forget what they have experienced. Because the memories during the games help them remember the words they learned. It's fun to repeat. They may get bored reading an assignment or just writing but they, regardless of age, never get bored playing games over and over. However, due to the Covid 19 epidemic, online lessons made it impossible to carry out many entertaining classroom practices. Being unable to perform most of the fun activities (eg: Drama, Chinese Whispers, Taboo, Scrabble, Draw and Guess, Mime and Guess, etc.) online due to the time constraints pushed me to search for different and fun activities that would keep the students' attention alive and ensure the permanent learning of the new material, especially new vocabulary.

In the following parts of the study, procedures and steps of the practice, namely the context, students, practice tools and instruments are reported. The pedagogical benefits of the practice are represented depending on the learners' subjective opinions gathered by an open-ended questionnaire and on my own observations with regard to proved effects of the practice. Finally, the benefits of the practice, how and why it should be implemented and which learner group can benefit from this practice most are discussed.

The Steps of the Experience-Based Vocabulary Practices Any Teacher Can Use

In the introduction part of the paper I discussed the importance of vocabulary acquisition especially while developing productive skills. On the basis of highlights from the literature and my personal experiences, I'd like to propose practices that any teacher can use to implement a comprehensive approach to vocabulary acquisition. But before that I'd like to give some background information about the participants of the study.

The participants of the study are 29 students aged 15 who are studying in the 10th grade of an Anatolian high school. According to the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), their language level is A2 which exactly doesn't seem so owing to the fact that they know the grammar rules only half-way, they mostly have difficulties in pronunciation, reading and writing tasks and they have poor vocabulary. However, despite the difficult conditions during the Covid 19 epidemic, all students attend the online classes enthusiastically. During this distance education period, I thought that what those enthusiastic students needed and deserved most was some fun learning. So, I started to design my classes accordingly.

Develop love of words through fun vocabulary games

As I mentioned above, the students mostly have difficulties acquiring the new vocabulary as it is a matter of exposure and repetition. However, when I examined the 10th grade English textbook, I found that the word in one theme is almost never repeated in other themes and is hardly included in the workbook exercises. Students who do not encounter new words over and over or are not exposed to these words are unfortunately condemned to forget them. I'd like to give an example from 10th grade English textbook which you can see in Figure 1. In one of the themes of the book, the concept of collocation is introduced which is followed by matching and filling tasks with the words that make up the collocations. After these activities, students are expected to perform a writing task using the new collocations.

8 A SPEAKING

Some words go together naturally. These are called collocations. Some verbs with certain words and phrases are also collocations as in 'play sports', 'make friends', 'do Maths'. Work in pairs. Match the verbs in A to the phrases in B to form collocations.

A	B
1. obey	<input type="checkbox"/> truant
2. stick	<input type="checkbox"/> to the timetable
3. do	<input type="checkbox"/> (for) exams
4. sit	<input type="checkbox"/> courses
5. play	<input type="checkbox"/> high scores
6. get	<input type="checkbox"/> the rules
7. skip	<input type="checkbox"/> revision

8 B

Fill in the blanks using the collocations from Part 8 A.

- I'm afraid I can't come to Sorin's birthday party. I have got a science exam tomorrow and I have to
- All students have to They are there to make school a safe place.
- School counselor: You should study hard and for a better school report, Tim. Those scores will make your CV better.
- If I have a major program for that day, I do not It is against the rules. I ask the school administration for permission. If I have a health problem, I will get a medical report.
- Mary: Come on, Helen. We only have two classes left. We should stay at school, not I'll get you some strong coffee.
Helen: That sounds nice.
- Students must learn to because they will have to work within a timetable at work in the future.
- Before you, do not forget to get a bottle of water. You may need it during the exam.

8 C

Use the collocations in Part 8 A to discuss the ways of being a good student with your friends.

E.g. Don't go to bed late or you may skip courses the following day.

Figure 1. A Vocabulary Exercise From 10th Grade English Textbook

I don't think there is a big problem so far, but when newly learned collocations are searched for in student's book and workbook, they hardly seem to be repeated. For this reason, there must be another way for students to repeat the new words without getting bored and learn them by heart. If vocabulary is taught in a boring way such as drilling, repetition and word lists, then they are condemned to be forgotten. Hence, teachers should teach vocabulary in a memorable way to stick the new words to the long-term memory of the learners. As language teachers we can create an online positive learning environment by using activities and games which enable students to play with words and see them as objects they can use. As the motivational value of play is proven by many of the research, why shan't we make use of it? To this end, I designed practices and competitions on the online platforms like <https://wordwall.net/tr/>, <https://wheeldecide.com/>, <https://www.clAssistools.net/>, <https://learningapps.org/>, <https://kahoot.com/schools-u/> where the students could study new vocabulary both during and after the class. After each lesson, I assigned the students with a vocabulary game which they could play as many times as they wished. I shared the game link on WhatsApp platform (in Figure 2.) and asked them to sign in with their real name to follow the statistics related to their results.



Figure 2. WhatsApp Posts Showing Game Links

At the end of the games, the statistics on the students' results showed me which words the students had the most difficulty in learning, so I had the opportunity to create different games about those words. We played these games a few more times as a whole class during online classes. After each theme the new vocabulary added to the list and the top ten words of the previous units were practiced with the new vocabulary of the following theme. I shared some of the online games I prepared below.