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INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of research on teaching and learning vocabulary, with a large proportion of this research conducted in recent years. According to one estimate, about 30% of research on vocabulary in the last 100 years has been carried out since 2001 (Nation, 2013). With so much research on vocabulary learning, we might expect widespread agreement on how vocabulary should be taught and learned. Research findings have certainly influenced vocabulary learning. However, there are many approaches to learning words, a great deal of variation in how vocabulary is presented in materials, and large differences in the lexical development of learners. This suggests a lack of clarity on how vocabulary might best be learned.

Although language teachers and learners often place considerable emphasis on vocabulary learning, there is relatively little published material available to guide them towards designing an effective vocabulary learning programme. This may be due in part to the fact that there is still research to be done. However, we have also found that the answers to some important questions at the heart of this topic have not made their way from research to the classroom. This book aims to address some of these key questions.

ACTIVITY **Some key questions**

Can you answer these questions about vocabulary learning? Write brief responses for each question.

- 1 What is the teacher's role?
- 2 What is the student's role?
- 3 Why do some students make greater progress than others?
- 4 How much classroom time should be spent teaching vocabulary?
- 5 How many words should students learn at a time, and how often?
- 6 How much vocabulary should students learn per year?
- 7 What is the best way to group vocabulary for learning?
- 8 How should teachers select vocabulary activities?
- 9 When is meaning-focused input appropriate inside the classroom?
- 10 Is there value in language-focused learning?
- 11 Is it useful to provide students with the L1 translations of unknown words?
- 12 To what extent are words which are taught by teachers ever really known by students?

Each of these questions will be discussed within this book, and revisited and answered in detail in Chapter 10.

The central aim of this book is to introduce readers to the major ideas behind the teaching and learning of vocabulary, with a practical focus on using vocabulary learning techniques and designing a programme. The information in the book is strongly research-based. It does not promote any particular language teaching approach; rather, it stresses the need to balance the learning opportunities in a programme. We describe the conditions that are needed for vocabulary learning to occur, suggest how various activities can best be used and adapted to optimize vocabulary learning, and highlight a range of useful resources. After reading the book, teachers should be familiar with the major ideas and principles that relate to the teaching and learning of vocabulary, be able to evaluate a range of vocabulary-focused activities, and be ready to design a balanced vocabulary learning programme.

The book begins with a chapter looking at the value of different words for learning. This is central to answering the question of which words should be learned. Chapter 2 focuses on what is involved in learning words. This is usually a gradual process whereby information about a word's form, meaning, and use is gained through encountering it again and again. We highlight the fact that there is much to learn about each word.

Chapters 3 to 5 examine the different ways in which vocabulary tends to be learned. In Chapter 3, we look at how many words are generally learned by first language (L1) and second language (L2) learners, and consider the difference between **incidental learning**, which is how words are typically learned in the L1, and **deliberate learning**. In Chapter 4, we turn our attention to the complex conditions that contribute to vocabulary development. Building on the two preceding chapters, Chapter 5 provides an overview of a wide range of important and popular vocabulary activities, covering the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Chapters 6 to 10 examine practical aspects of teaching and learning vocabulary. In Chapter 6, we look at how vocabulary learning might be affected by the context in which it is learned. We examine how learning vocabulary may be different in the second and foreign language learning contexts, and how the proficiency or age of students affects teaching and learning. We also discuss how the number of students might influence how words are learned in the classroom. In Chapter 7, we outline the need for students to learn vocabulary on their own outside the classroom, and provide suggestions on how teachers can guide students towards becoming effective and efficient learners of vocabulary. The main focus of this chapter is on key strategies that should be taught to help learners maximize their lexical development.

Chapter 8 draws on much that has been discussed earlier in the book and applies it to the development of a vocabulary learning programme. At the heart of this chapter is the concept of creating a balanced programme for learning words on the basis of the **principle of the four strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development**. In Chapter 9, we look at some of the different resources that can be used for vocabulary learning; we highlight the research that supports their use, and provide guidelines on how different types of resource might be selected and used. The final chapter recaps the main topics addressed in the book by answering questions that are often asked about how vocabulary is learned.

Each chapter includes a number of activities to help readers evaluate their understanding of the discussion, and keys to these activities are provided at the end of the chapter where appropriate. We also round off the discussion in each chapter with several questions for reflection, followed by a list of suggestions for further reading for those who are interested in exploring the topic further.

At the back of the book, we have included four appendices of useful resources for teaching and learning vocabulary that have been developed in recent research. Appendix 1 presents a list of essential words for beginner-level students; Appendix 2 is a recent version of a widely used vocabulary test; Appendix 3 consists of a list of useful word stems; and Appendix 4 is the intermediate level of a test designed to measure knowledge of affixes. These are followed by a Glossary for any terms (in bold) which may be unfamiliar or have a specific meaning or significance in the field of vocabulary acquisition. The Website references section includes links to online resources mentioned in the book, and the Bibliography provides full details of referenced works.

There is also a companion website with additional resources you can use to engage further with the topics covered in this book. The website can be accessed at www.oup.com/elt/teacher/hvil.