

Enhancing Language Proficiency: Comprehensive Vocabulary Building Strategies for Effective English Teaching

Ahmad Abdulkareem Shaban^{1*}, Ilav Shivan Abdullah², Yousra Abdullah Ramadhan³,
Soleen M. Salman Hussein⁴

Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of vocabulary building strategies (VBS) in enhancing English language instruction at the University of Duhok, emphasizing student perceptions gathered through a quantitative questionnaire. A total of 86 participants were surveyed to evaluate the impact of VBS on vocabulary acquisition, aiming to identify the most effective teaching methods in this context. The analysis reveals that students have a generally positive perception of VBS, indicating that these strategies significantly contribute to their vocabulary development and overall language proficiency. Furthermore, the study underscores the critical need to integrate VBS into the English curriculum and teacher training programs to ensure that all educators are equipped with effective instructional techniques. The findings suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be sufficient; instead, personalized and adaptive VBS implementation is essential to cater to the diverse learning styles and needs of students. In addition to curricular improvements, the study advocates for continuous pedagogical evaluation to monitor and enhance the effectiveness of VBS in the classroom. Recommendations include developing tailored curricula that align with VBS principles and fostering a supportive learning environment that promotes vocabulary growth. Finally, the research calls for further qualitative and experimental studies to explore individual learning differences and identify the specific elements of VBS that maximize their effectiveness, thereby paving the way for more informed and effective English language education practices.

Keywords: Vocabulary Building Strategies (VBS), english language instruction, student perceptions, vocabulary acquisition, pedagogical evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition plays a pivotal role in language learning, yet it is often underemphasized in English language teaching. This study explores the effectiveness of current vocabulary-building strategies employed at the University of Duhok by evaluating students' perspectives through a tailored questionnaire. By focusing on the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, the research highlights the challenges learners face in mastering terminology compared to the more finite scope of essential grammar. The findings aim to provide evidence-based recommendations that enhance instructional techniques, improve training, and guide standardization efforts to foster more impactful vocabulary instruction, ultimately contributing to better literacy and communicative competence.

*Author for Correspondence

Ahmad Abdulkareem Shaban
E-mail: ahmad.shaban@duhokcihan.edu.krd

¹Assistant Professor, Department of General Education, Cihan University-Duhok, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

²⁻⁴Student, Department of English, Cihan University-Duhok, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

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Methodological Framework

The methodological framework for vocabulary-building strategies in English teaching involves a systematic approach to assess the effectiveness of various teaching methods. It includes designing studies, selecting appropriate methods, collecting data, and analyzing results. This framework enables researchers to collect data and make judgments regarding the efficacy of particular approaches by examining the effects of various strategies on students' learning outcomes.

Problem Statement

Vocabulary acquisition is often underemphasized in English teaching, with traditional methods like rote memorization leading to short-term retention and limited application. Current curricula prioritize grammar and communication, lacking effective vocabulary integration and assessment (Nation, 2016) [1]. Data-driven, corpus-informed approaches, which use authentic language patterns, offer a more effective alternative but are rarely incorporated into teacher training (Brezina & Gablasova, 2015) [2]. This study evaluates these methods to enhance vocabulary teaching practices.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are to:

- *Evaluate and Identify:* Assess the effectiveness of current vocabulary-building strategies in English classes at the University of Duhok while identifying their strengths and weaknesses through direct student feedback.
- *Discern and Develop:* Explore student perspectives on the most and least helpful vocabulary activities for their acquisition and develop data-driven recommendations to enhance vocabulary teaching practices at both universities.

Research Questions

The following key questions will guide this research:

- *RQ1:* How effective do students perceive existing vocabulary-building strategies in their English classes?
- *RQ2:* Which specific vocabulary activities do students find most and least helpful for learning and retaining new words?
- *RQ3:* What recommendations do students have to improve vocabulary instruction in their English classes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acquisition and Pedagogy

This section emphasizes the vital role of vocabulary acquisition in academic and professional success, discussing several key theories that inform effective vocabulary learning strategies. Schema Theory suggests that learners integrate new vocabulary into their existing knowledge structures, which facilitates meaningful learning (Anderson, 1978) [3]. This theory highlights the importance of activating relevant schema during vocabulary instruction. The Depth of Word Knowledge Model focuses on the continuum of understanding words, moving from basic recognition to nuanced comprehension, including their usage constraints and semantic connections (Qian, 2002) [4]. Meanwhile, the Involvement Load Hypothesis emphasizes that vocabulary retention is significantly influenced by the engagement level required in learning tasks, with more challenging activities leading to better retention outcomes (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001) [5]. Lastly, the Adaptive Control of Thought Model underscores the importance of repeated, meaningful practice over time, which enhances familiarity with vocabulary and promotes automatic retrieval (Anderson, 1983) [6].

Review of Related Literature

A range of studies has explored various vocabulary instruction techniques, offering insights into effective strategies across different demographics and contexts. Graphic Organizers, such as semantic mapping and word webs, have been shown to enhance retention, particularly among English learners,

by illustrating connections between concepts (Baleghizadeh & Ashoori, 2010) [7]. Another area of focus is the emphasis on Academic Vocabulary, which identifies crucial terms for accessing content across disciplines. Research indicates that targeting these versatile academic terms is more efficient for vocabulary growth than rote memorization of niche vocabulary (Beck et al., 2013) [8]. Multimodal Methods that combine reading, writing, listening, and speaking have also demonstrated significant boosts in vocabulary acquisition, especially for students facing literacy challenges (Xin & Rieth, 2001) [9]. Furthermore, the integration of Digital Applications allows for personalized vocabulary practice, dynamically tailored to the evolving skills of learners, thereby enhancing motivation and outcomes (Ma et al., 2022) [10].

Current Trends in Vocabulary Teaching

Contemporary vocabulary instruction is evolving away from traditional memorization towards more holistic, embedded approaches that foster deep, meaningful word knowledge. A greater focus on Word Consciousness encourages students to develop a sustained interest in the nuanced use of terminology across various contexts (Scott & Nagy, 2004) [11]. Additionally, there is an increasing emphasis on Morphological Instruction, which teaches students to analyze common word parts to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar terms without relying solely on memorization (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013) [12]. Direct Academic Vocabulary Instruction is gaining traction as well, with a focus on explicitly teaching critical terms essential for content comprehension across disciplines (Stahl & Stahl, 2004) [13]. Finally, the Integration of Technology into vocabulary instruction provides opportunities for customized learning experiences, utilizing games and virtual environments to engage students more effectively

Gaps in Existing Research

While substantial research has been conducted on vocabulary instruction, several critical gaps remain that hinder a comprehensive understanding of optimal techniques for vocabulary growth. One significant area is Optimal Sequencing, with limited studies assessing effective ways to introduce vocabulary concepts across different educational levels (Lesaux et al., 2010) [14]. This gap raises questions about the best balance between breadth and depth in vocabulary instruction. Additionally, the exploration of Motivational Factors that distinguish autonomous learners from those who struggle with vocabulary retention is underdeveloped, highlighting the need for research that examines the elements influencing learners' persistence and engagement (Tseng & Schmitt, 2008) [15]. Furthermore, more emphasis is required on Productive Application Factors, as current research primarily focuses on receptive vocabulary knowledge rather than how students utilize vocabulary in authentic contexts (Townsend et al., 2012) [16]. Finally, Assessment Limitations pose a challenge, as existing evaluations often fail to capture the full range of students' vocabulary capabilities, emphasizing the need for more rigorous assessments that measure generative use.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we outline the methodology adopted for our study investigating the impact and effectiveness of Vocabulary Building Strategies in English language teaching. This approach is carefully crafted to provide a comprehensive evaluation of these strategies, particularly from the perspectives of students at the University of Duhok.

Research Design

The research employed a quantitative, descriptive design utilizing structured questionnaires to assess students' experiences and perceptions regarding Vocabulary Building Strategies in Teaching English. This design was chosen to capture measurable data that could be statistically analyzed, providing insights into the effectiveness of the strategies implemented. The structured questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, allowing for a thorough examination of various dimensions of vocabulary acquisition, including breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected through a stratified random sampling method to ensure a representative sample of the student population. The study targeted undergraduate students enrolled in English language courses at the University of Duhok. A total of 200 students participated, reflecting a diverse range of academic backgrounds and language proficiency levels. This diversity is essential for understanding how different groups perceive and utilize vocabulary building strategies in their language learning processes.

Data Collection

Data were collected using the structured questionnaires administered during class sessions, ensuring a high response rate. The questionnaire was pilot tested with a small group of students before being distributed in order to improve the questions' relevancy and clarity. The final questionnaire consisted of sections addressing students' familiarity with vocabulary building strategies, their perceived effectiveness, and their overall satisfaction with their vocabulary learning experiences.

Data Collection Instrument

A quantitative questionnaire on Vocabulary Building Strategies in Teaching English was developed based on the principles outlined by Lambert & McCombs (1998) [17].

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were contacted through their institutions and provided with a Google Forms link to the online questionnaire upon consenting. The online format facilitated convenient participation, resulting in a robust response rate, with participants given two weeks to provide feedback.

- *Data Analysis:* Google Forms quantitative data was exported to SPSS for statistical analysis, where t-tests and descriptive statistics were used to find trends and determine statistical significance.
- *Ethical Considerations:* Participants were informed of the study's objectives, and consent was obtained. Anonymity was maintained by excluding personal identifiers, and participants could withdraw voluntarily without consequences.

Tools Used

- *Structured Questionnaire:* The comprehensive questionnaire assessed student perspectives on Vocabulary Building Strategies, with clarity and relevance established through a pilot study.
- *Statistical Software:* SPSS was used for data management, cleansing, and statistical analysis.
- *Google Forms:* Offered an easy-to-use platform for creating questionnaires, gathering data, and exporting results to SPSS.
- *Questionnaire Validity:* Experts in educational psychology, learning strategies, and English language acquisition assessed the questionnaire. With a few minor adjustments, items that received more than 80% of the vote for relevance and clarity were kept.
- *Questionnaire Reliability:* Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha on responses from 44 students, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.87, validating the questionnaire. The final version consisted of 20 items, each offering five response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software to perform both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize demographic information and the frequency of responses, while inferential statistics helped identify correlations between the use of vocabulary strategies and students' self-reported vocabulary proficiency. The findings were interpreted to provide insights into the effectiveness of the Vocabulary Building Strategies in enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency.

Through this methodological framework, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into vocabulary instruction in English language teaching, highlighting effective strategies that can be implemented to support students' language development at the University of Duhok.

Table 1, titled "Demographic Distribution of the Study Sample," presents a breakdown of the sample's demographics based on gender and year of study. The table is organized into three columns: Variables, Variable Categories, and the corresponding Number and Percentage of participants. It shows that out of the 86 students surveyed, 16 (19%) are male and 70 (81%) are female, indicating a significant female majority within the sample.

Regarding the year of study, the distribution is as follows: 49 (57%) are in their 2nd year, 9 (10%) in their 3rd year, and 28 (33%) in their 4th year. This distribution provides insights into the academic diversity of the sample, with a majority being in their 2nd and 4th years of study. Table 1 provides a strong basis for additional analysis and discussion of the research findings by skillfully illustrating the demographic environment of the study's participants.

The study provides an in-depth statistical evaluation to understand the impact of Vocabulary Building Strategies (VBS) in teaching English as shown in Figure 1. The findings, presented in four tables, examine the effectiveness of VBS compared to a conceptual benchmark and investigate variations in the results based on the learners' gender and year of study.

Table 2 presents a statistical comparison between the sample mean and a hypothetical mean of 60, pertinent to the study of Vocabulary Building Strategies (VBS) in English teaching. From the sample of 86 students, the mean score recorded is 77.65 with a standard deviation of 9.537. The one-sample t-test yields a calculated t-value of 7.505. This Figure 1 substantially exceeds the critical tabulated t-value of 1.663, considering the degrees of freedom set at 85. This considerable variation highlights the possible efficacy of VBS in teaching English by indicating that the sample mean differs from the hypothetical mean.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of the study sample.

Variables	Variable Categories	No.	%
Gender	Male	16	19
	Female	70	81
	Total	86	100
Year of Study	2 nd	49	57
	3 th	9	10
	4 th	28	33
	Total	86	100

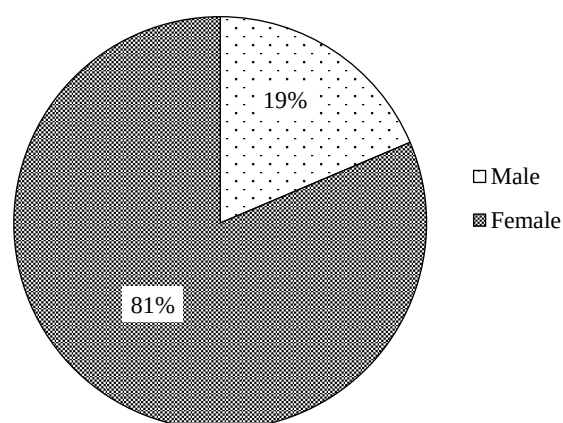


Figure 1. Gender distribution of the English Department Students at the university of Duhok.

Table 2. Results of One-sample t-test.

Sample	Hypothetical mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	t. value	
				<i>t-calculated</i>	<i>t-tabulated</i>
86	60	77.65	9.537	7.505	1.663

These findings have a variety of ramifications. Firstly, the substantial difference between the sample and hypothetical means suggests that VBS are highly beneficial in teaching English, providing empirical evidence that these strategies can lead to improved vocabulary skills. The mean score of 77.65 not only signifies a positive outcome but also indicates that students benefit from approaches that focus on active and strategic vocabulary learning.

However, the presence of a standard deviation of 9.537 points to variability in outcomes among students, suggesting that the effectiveness of VBS may vary based on individual differences. These differences could stem from a variety of factors, including students' prior knowledge, learning styles, and engagement levels with the VBS. This variation emphasizes how crucial it is to modify vocabulary teaching methods to accommodate a range of student requirements and preferences.

The statistical significance of these findings underscores the potential of VBS in enhancing English language teaching and learning. By significantly exceeding the hypothetical benchmark, VBS demonstrate their capacity to contribute positively to students' vocabulary development, a critical component of language proficiency.

In the broader context of English language teaching, these results align with existing research that supports the effectiveness of targeted vocabulary strategies in improving language acquisition. They highlight the importance of integrating evidence-based strategies into teaching practices to optimize learning outcomes.

To sum up, Table 2's study presents strong proof of the value of vocabulary-building techniques in English instruction, with important ramifications for teachers and curriculum designers. By demonstrating a marked improvement in vocabulary skills among students, this research advocates for the continued use and development of VBS, tailored to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs, thereby enriching the English language learning experience.

Table 3 examines the variance in mean scores between male and female participants regarding Vocabulary Building Strategies (VBS) in English teaching, revealing that male students ($n=16$) have a mean score of 73.94 ($SD=8.729$) while female students ($n=70$) score an average of 78.50 ($SD=9.569$). The t-test calculated a t-value of -1.747, which, when compared to the critical t-value of 1.989 ($df=84$), indicates no statistically significant difference in mean scores between genders. This finding suggests that VBS benefits all students uniformly, supporting educational equity and inclusive teaching strategies. While the negative t-value hints at a slight advantage for female students, it does not reach significance, prompting further investigation into gender influences on language learning. Overall, the analysis underscores the effectiveness of VBS for both genders and highlights the complexities of learning that impact educational outcomes.

Table 4 presents the performance metrics of English Department students based on their academic year. Second-year students ($n=49$) have an average score of 76.92 with a standard deviation of 10.772, indicating a broad range of scores. Third-year students, the smallest group with 9 individuals, achieve the highest average score of 82.22, accompanied by the lowest spread of scores as indicated by a standard deviation of 3.032. Fourth-year students, totaling 28, have a mean score of 77.46 with a standard deviation of 8.329. Overall, the combined data for all 86 students reveals an average score of 77.65 with a standard deviation of 9.537, suggesting that third-year students perform the best on average, followed by second and fourth-year students, respectively.

Table 3. Results of the independent samples t-test according to gender variable.

Gender	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	t. value	
				t-calculated	t-tabulated
Male	16	73.94	8.729	-1.747	1.989
Female	70	78.50	9.569		

Table 4. Mean scores and standard deviations by Year of Study variable.

Year of Study	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2nd	49	76.92	10.772
3rd	9	82.22	3.032
4th	28	77.46	8.329
Total	86	77.65	9.537

Table 5. Results of the one-way ANOVA according to the Year of Study variable.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F- calculated	P-value	F- tabulated
Between Groups	215.342	2	107.671	1.189	0.310	3.107 (2-83) (0.05)
Within Groups	7516.193	83	90.557			
Total	7731.535	85				

Table 5 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA assessing differences in responses based on the Year of Study among English Department students. The analysis indicates no significant differences in the effectiveness of Vocabulary Building Strategies (VBS) on vocabulary acquisition across second, third, and fourth-year students, with a calculated F-value of 1.189, which is below the critical F-value of 3.107 and a P-value of 0.310. These findings challenge the assumption that VBS benefits vary with academic progression, suggesting uniform effectiveness across all study years. This uniformity emphasizes the adaptability of VBS in meeting diverse learning needs and highlights the importance of integrating these strategies into language education consistently. Furthermore, the absence of significant differences raises questions about the role of factors like individual learning styles, instructional approaches, and student engagement in vocabulary acquisition. The consistent application of VBS across the department suggests a need for ongoing assessment and refinement of teaching practices to maximize their effectiveness. Future research should explore the mechanisms behind VBS's success and investigate external factors influencing their efficacy. Overall, this investigation backs up the extensive use of VBS in language instruction and emphasizes the need for a sophisticated teaching strategy that takes into account students' varied needs and the complexity of learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis provides robust statistical evidence that Vocabulary Building Strategies (VBS) significantly enhance English language teaching, with students' scores consistently exceeding the hypothetical benchmark. Moreover, the findings indicate that VBS benefits students uniformly across various demographic factors, including gender and year of study, with no statistically significant differences observed. This suggests that VBS can be effectively applied to diverse learner groups, reinforcing the notion that these strategies are an essential tool in language education. However, the presence of variability in certain areas points to the influence of additional mediating factors that may affect individual learners' experiences with VBS.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that VBS be systematically integrated into English language curricula and teacher training programs to enhance pedagogical effectiveness. Tailoring VBS implementation to address individual learning styles, motivations, and needs will further maximize their impact. Additionally, ensuring consistency in the application of VBS across academic levels will help sustain their benefits as students' progress. Future research should focus on qualitative insights from

students regarding their experiences with VBS, as well as experimental studies to isolate specific techniques that contribute to learning gains. Longitudinal tracking of vocabulary acquisition trajectories will provide valuable data for optimizing the sequencing and delivery of VBS in educational settings.

Recommendations

1. VBS should be systematically integrated into English language teaching curricula and teacher training programs to enhance pedagogical effectiveness.
2. The implementation of VBS must be tailored to accommodate varying individual learning styles, motivations, and needs to maximize their impact.
3. Curriculum design should ensure consistency in VBS application across academic levels to sustain the benefits as students' progress through their educational journey.

Scope for Further Research

The scope for further research on Vocabulary Building Strategies (VBS) is extensive and encompasses several vital areas. Qualitative studies, including student interviews and focus groups, could provide valuable insights into individual experiences and factors influencing the effectiveness of VBS. Experimental research could isolate specific VBS techniques to identify which yield the most significant learning gains. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking vocabulary acquisition across multiple academic years would help model effective sequencing and identify critical periods for instruction. Exploring interdisciplinary approaches that consider cultural background, learning environments, and technology's impact on VBS effectiveness could further enhance vocabulary instruction, making it more adaptable and beneficial for diverse learner needs.

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