

TEACHING FOOD VOCABULARY TO (YOUNG LEARNERS) THROUGH INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

Early vocabulary acquisition is crucial to language learning, particularly for young students who are still developing their linguistic and cognitive abilities. Food-related vocabulary is perfect for early vocabulary education since it is particularly relevant to children's everyday lives and is also simpler to visualise and contextualise. In this study, children ages 4 to 7 in a kindergarten setting will be taught food terminology through interactive activities, including games, songs, role-plays, visual aids, and physical reaction tasks. Using a qualitative classroom-based methodology, the study involves 15 preschoolers over a four-week period. Every week, students encountered a range of interactive exercises created especially to teach a certain group of vocabulary words related to food. Informal learner feedback, vocabulary checklists, and instructor observations were used to gather data. The results showed that interactive exercises greatly improved learner motivation, pronunciation accuracy, and vocabulary retention. Compared to typical rote-learning approaches, children showed improved memory, more confidence in utilising new terms, and more active engagement in classes. According to the study's findings, interactive teaching techniques are very successful and ought to be incorporated into early language education programs on a regular basis. For ESL teachers, curriculum designers, and educators working with young learners, this research offers insightful information and useful tactics for improving the effectiveness, engagement, and meaning of language learning.

Keywords: young learners, vocabulary acquisition, interactive learning, food vocabulary, language teaching, ESL, kindergarten education

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of learning a language is vocabulary. For young students, learning new words serves as the foundation for improving their reading, speaking, and listening abilities. Teachers must use more tangible, entertaining, and visual teaching strategies because young children frequently lack the abstract thinking abilities of older students.

Food is one of the most significant and applicable vocabulary subjects for kids because it is connected to their everyday lives. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate how interactive teaching strategies can effectively teach food vocabulary and how they affect early childhood education learning results.

The significance of teaching vocabulary in context has been underlined by language educators and academics (Cameron, 2001; Nation, 2001). Learning that is enjoyable, memorable, and applicable to their everyday lives is beneficial to young students. While Murphey (1992) demonstrates the value of employing music and songs to enhance pronunciation and retention, Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response (TPR) technique promotes physical movement and action to reinforce language learning. Brewster et al. (2002) assert that role-playing, games, and storytelling enable kids to utilise language in meaningful, real-world contexts. Active, hands-on learning is encouraged by Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which holds that children acquire new ideas most effectively when they engage with their surroundings. Food vocabulary is particularly well-suited for interactive learning because it is concrete and visible. According to Linse (2005), using games, pictures, and real things (realia) greatly improves young children's word retention. Fifteen students (ages five to six) from a private kindergarten in Tashkent participated in the study. Every participant was a beginning English learner who had never received any official vocabulary training in the language. Students took part in three 30-minute sessions every week for four weeks. Three to five food vocabulary terms, such as apple, banana, bread, milk, cake, juice, etc., were the emphasis of each session.

Interactive activities used included:

Flashcard games (e.g., "What's Missing?", "Touch the Food")

Role-play activities (e.g., "At the Restaurant")

Food songs with gestures (e.g., "I Like to Eat Apples and Bananas")

Drawing and coloring favorite foods

Real object identification and sorting (e.g., healthy/unhealthy food categories)

Teacher observation notebooks, pre- and post-study vocabulary checklists, and casual interviews with kids on their favourite hobbies were used to gather data. Thirteen out of fifteen students were able to accurately recollect and pronounce over fifteen food-related words at the end of the study. In contrast, just five students were able to recall more than five objects throughout the first week. This demonstrates a considerable increase in language learning. Increased excitement and participation during interactive sessions were noted in the observation notes. Kids were excited to participate in activities and music, and some of them started speaking words out of the blue during snack breaks (e.g., "I eat banana!"). The majority of students selected singing and role-playing as their favourite activities when asked. Additionally, they took satisfaction in their ability to list their favourite dishes in English. Long-term

retention seems to have been aided by this emotional bond. When educating young students, teachers should emphasise the importance of movement, repetition, and visual signals. Language acquisition should be aided by visual, tactile, and aural experiences; abstract explanations should be avoided. Younger pupils and older students process language in different ways. Vygotsky's social development theory states that children learn best when they are emotionally and socially attached to the content. By connecting food language to feelings like joy, wonder, and humour, interactive activities like role-playing grocery shopping or meal preparation help students remember the material. Children also depend largely on routine and repetition. Vocabulary naturally becomes ingrained in their memory when it is introduced frequently through songs, daily activities ("What did you eat today?"), or conversations during snack time. Engaging in emotionally stimulating activities facilitates the more effective encoding of language into long-term memory. The following particular interactive teaching exercises have worked well in actual ESL classrooms:

Food Bingo: Students are given bingo cards featuring images of various dishes. Students mark the matching image while the teacher shouts out the names of the foods. This game improves language recognition and listening comprehension.

"I Spy" with Food Items: The teacher uses photos or realia scattered throughout the classroom to remark, "I spy with my little eye something red and sweet," which leads the students to determine what the food is (strawberry, for example).

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that teaching and acquiring food vocabulary to young students is greatly improved by interactive activities. These exercises not only increase vocabulary memory but also foster a positive and inspiring learning atmosphere in the classroom. Instructors are urged to incorporate interactive components into their daily class plans, such as games, songs, role-plays, and realia. The long-term effects of such approaches on kids' overall language development, including grammar and sentence structure, may be the subject of future studies.

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