

## **EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS ON TEACHING PRODUCTIVE VOCABULARY: THE CASE OF TWO EFL TEACHERS IN ETHIOPIA**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to observe EFL teachers' practices in promoting students' productive vocabulary skills. Within this framework, teachers' insights about the importance of teaching vocabulary, teaching different aspects of vocabulary knowledge, and way of assessing their teaching were investigated. To address these issues, qualitative single case study as a methodology and classroom observation with pre and post teaching observation interviews as methods of data collection were employed. Based on purposive sampling, two grade nine EFL teachers were chosen from Fasilo Secondary School. The data were analyzed thematically to understand the general tendency of the practice of teaching different aspects of vocabulary knowledge.*

*The analyzed data revealed that the respondents perceived teaching vocabulary as an important element of learning English as a foreign language in improving students' communication. They were also teaching different aspects of vocabulary knowledge: meaning, form and use in an integrated manner. However, their assessment of students failed to make sure whether students' learning inclusive or not because only few students were dominating the practice of learning different aspects of vocabulary. To remedial it, participants were recommended to apply instructional differentiation in their teaching learning processes.*

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## **1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1. The Importance of Learning Vocabulary**

The importance of vocabulary is recognized by many scholars. Knowledge of vocabulary is seen as a base for students to speak, write, listen and read a language. Richard (2005), for instance, stated that vocabulary is the basic component of listening, speaking, writing and reading skills because learning vocabulary is a significant facet that is inseparable from learning other skills in English.

Similarly, some scholars explained its importance in comparison to other language skills. Thornbury (2002) argue that “If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words” (p. 378). In line with that, Nunan (1999) also argues: “Most of us who live and work in a foreign country, and who attempt to function in the target language, find that we can get by more readily by learning vocabulary than grammatical structures” (p.103).

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### **1.2. Aspects of Vocabulary Knowledge**

The development of vocabulary is dynamic and passed different stages. Classification of vocabulary knowledge began in 1917 when Palmer suggested a three-part model for word knowledge and afterward improved further by other scholars. Cronbach (1942) built upon Palmer’s ideas by distinguishing further components of word knowledge as well as drawing attention to the polysemy of words. In seeking to distinguish and define word knowledge into a theoretical frame. He classified word knowledge as such: the denotation of a word, connotation, and breadth of meaning /various implications of words, a correct application and production.

The second move toward used to comprehend the acquisition of language was in 1965. It was presented as a four-stage developmental model that established how developmental stages of componential features of word knowledge classified into four categories:

Stage 1: I never saw the word before

Stage 2: I've heard the word before but don't know what it means

Stage 3: I recognize the word in context; it has something to do with

Stage 4: I know the word

(Milton & Fitzpatrick, 2014, p. 8)

The development approach demonstrates the stages of how individual components of word knowledge are acquired before others.

Finally, the third approach, the component approach, seeks to determine several aspects of knowing a word, as well as contrasting features of word knowledge. This approach describes how vocabulary depth of knowledge is conceptualized by dividing word knowledge into individual components (Read, 2000). It also distinguishes between the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening: features frequently. Currently, most scholars agree that vocabulary learning is continuum consisting of several levels starting from superficial acquaintance with vocabulary to the capacity to use the vocabulary appropriately for production purpose. Nation (2001), for example, described that receptive and productive word knowledge is sometimes called active and passive. It is seen as a continuum with different degrees of vocabulary awareness or described in terms of accessibility of vocabulary retrieval or selection in vocabulary usage.

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In short, the vocabularies and turn of phrases students can understand when they are reading or listening is called receptive vocabulary. The vocabularies and turn of phrases the students can use correctly when producing oral or written language is called productive vocabulary. Therefore, to activate students' first level of word knowledge, teachers need to make a watchful endeavor to generate activities that consent to students to build up their vocabulary to the highest level.

Knowing the importance of vocabulary activation, different scholars suggest what aspects and strategies of vocabulary improvement help students to communicate. They pointed out that

knowing a vocabulary involves the proficiency to choose situations in which it is properly used, evoke diverse meanings of the vocabulary, and recognize precisely in which situations the vocabulary is and not applied. For example, according to Ur (1996) learners' vocabulary knowledge considers the dimensions of pronunciation and spelling, grammar, collocation, aspects of meaning including denotation, connotation, appropriateness, and meaning relationships as synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, co-hyponyms, super ordinates, translation, and word formation.

In line with this, Seal (1991) explained that vocabulary knowledge is an essential part of communicative competence, and it is essential for both production and understanding in a foreign language. Knowing a vocabulary involves knowing vocabulary aspects like: frequency of use, syntactic and situational limitations on its use; its essential form; the association of its semantic features and, the various meanings associated with the vocabulary. Therefore, Nation (2001), the most important advantage put on from vocabulary learning strategies enables learners to manage their own learning so that students can get more responsibility for their learning because a large amount of vocabulary could be acquired with the help of vocabulary learning strategies.

In supporting the idea, Gass (1988) frame for language acquisition to the realm of vocabulary improvement and the scaffold specify the steps of vocabulary attainment from initial exposure to output. Apperceived input is noticing the vocabulary and then connects it to past learning; comprehended input is assuring that the student has understood it; intake is when the student uses the vocabulary in various situations; integration is the internalization of the new vocabulary; and output is the use of the lexical items in the student's production. A framework clearly defines the progressions needed to progress students from the receptive stage to the productive stage.

In all the literatures reviewed, there is a clear consent that vocabulary knowledge should comprise depth quality of vocabulary knowledge. Depth of vocabulary knowledge refers to a learner's level knowledge of various features of a given vocabulary, or how well the learner knows this word. As an EFL teacher in the university, the researcher observed that vocabulary instruction has been paid less attention than it should have been. Students have to learn so many

new vocabularies every week. By the time they learn the new words in the new lesson, they have forgotten most of the words they have learned in previous lessons. Consequently, word retention has always been a difficult problem for the students.

As an EFL teacher, the researcher found out that one of the major reasons for which the students were not successful users of English was their vocabulary deficiency resulted from learning in the same trend in Secondary Schools. This motivated the researcher to conduct this study in an attempt to find out how well the learner knows these vocabularies learned. In other words, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research question:

- What aspects of vocabulary do EFL teachers teach for the improvement of students' vocabulary knowledge?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted at Fasilo Secondary School, located in Bahir Dar city. The study is qualitative in nature. Moreover, the study was limited to the boundaries of one specific school and the two grade nine EFL teachers working in the school; it is a case study, which normally brings about a detailed description of the situation under focus. A case study is “intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system” (Merriam, 1992, p. 19).

### 2.1. Participants

The selection of participants for this study was based on a strategy referred to as purposeful selection which, by one definition (Maxwell, 2005), stated that “a selection strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that could not be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). Using the strategy, two grade nine EFL teacher participants were selected. Not to mention their names in the analysis, they were represented as T1 and T2.

- a. T1 is a male teacher who has 31 years teaching experience. Besides, he has been practicing a CPD in each year; he told me that he took more than six language short term trainings from different institutions.
- b. T2 is a female teacher who has 23 years teaching experience. Besides, she has been practicing a CPD in each year; she told me as she took three short term trainings from different institutions.

### 2.2. Instruments and Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher collected data by conducting pre teaching interviews, observations, and post-observation interviews. Before observing teachers, the researcher conducted short interviews with the teachers. The purpose of the interview was to obtain the teachers’ views about the importance of vocabulary. Then, the researcher observed the classroom in order to take detailed notes of the key events that occurred in the classroom. Finally, the researcher carried out post observation interviews to triangulate the consistency and inconsistency between teachers’ pre

observation response and classroom practice regarding actual teaching as well as justification of teachers' practices.

### **2.3. Data Analysis Procedure**

The analysis was based entirely on the observation notes made by the observer and pre and post classroom observation interview: these provided an evidence of the teacher and student actions and interactions that took place in the classroom. The observed note was analyzed in relation to categories to understand the nature of the pedagogy in the sampled teaches' lessons. The analysis was based on observers' typed-up observations. The data from the lesson observations was analyzed in focusing upon particular cases to consider how lessons are viewed as a whole.

## **3. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION REPORT AND DISCUSSION**

This paper first describes the data gathered from two grade nine EFL teachers. Then, the researcher discusses the report by triangulating with deferent related literatures.

### **3.1. Classroom Observation Report**

This part of the report is organized by describing the scenery and the feature of the data, and when it is needed, the descriptions is supported by the primary data directly forwarded and/or acted by the teachers and/or students. It is structured based on three data collection phases: pre observation interview, observation and post observation interview.

#### **A. Teacher 1**

Under this part, the researcher describes and/or reports the response of T1 and behaviors seen in his classroom.

##### **a. Pre observation interview**

Before observing teachers, the researcher conducted little interviews with the teachers about his material preparation, lesson plan and his attitude about the selected session in order. The interview is explained as follows:

Researcher: *How do you prepare yourself before you enter to the class?*

T1: *Simply, before I enter to classroom, I always write lesson plan and submit for the department head. I prepare short note and activities for the topic of the discussion.*

Researcher: *what is the topic of session? Is it important for the improvement of students' language?*

T1: *vocabulary, it is important because students do other activities well, if they know words well.*

Then, the researcher requested the teacher to show the lesson plan; the teacher became volunteer and showed lesson plan that contains different parts. For further observation, sample lesson plan is attached in the appendix part.

#### **b. Observation**

The researcher, as observer, sat at a student desk and become part of the desk. That means, the researcher did not play a part in the activities going on, even when asked questions by students. Then, the researcher observed and took detailed notes of the key events that occurred in the classroom regarding whole-class participation, teacher questioning, students' response, classroom discussion which is detailed below. Coming to the observation, the teacher broke out the class by greeting and asking a question that is related to the previous lesson to the students. Then, the teacher tried to relate previous lesson with what the students were going to learn.

T1: *Good afternoon students!*

St: *Good afternoon teacher.*

T1: *Today we will introduce new chapter, before we introduce today's topic who can remember what we have learned in the previous class?*

St1: *last classes, we learn (ed) vocabulary and grammar.*

After continuing for few minutes, the teacher wrote the topic, '*Stigma and Discrimination*', and objectives of the lesson and read once for the class. Then, the teacher asked students what they knew about the topic of the discussion and related concepts. Sample question forwarded by the teacher were:

T1- *What do you know about stigma? What is discrimination for you?*

Few volunteer students raised their hand and forwarded their answer when the teacher gave the chance. Students were responded in the following way:

St- *It is segregating people.*

After listening to the responses of students for questions, the teacher wrote short note about the topic and explained that orally. Then, the teacher let students to form the usual group which was formed for every subject as rules of the school. Then, the teacher ordered them to read one paragraph text written in students textbook which is attached in appendix part for further observation and to do six questions given below the text.

Finishing it, the teacher gave five vocabularies, and ordered students as it is written below.

*Write sentences by using the following words: you have to write one sentence for each.*

1. *Discrimination*

4. *Stigma*

2. *Disability*

5. *Crawl*

3. *Health care*

Completing their individual work, the teacher let students to exchange their exercise book and to comment each other. Then, the teacher requested students to discuss comments with the comment giver student. As the observer observed most students were not discussing the issue rather they were whispering each other issues in Amharic; the teacher were moving in the class by helping few active students who asked help. Finally, the teacher confirmed as the students finished the work through questing. He gave chances for volunteers to reflect by writing a sentence constructed by using the first vocabulary on the board and read for the class. Then, he asked the class whether the student correct or not. The real interactions were as follows:

T1: *who can answer the first question?*

St: *I want to see no discrimination in the world.*

T1: *Is he correct?*

St: *Yes.*

T1: *Who can answer the second question?*

St: *There is many students disability with in Ethiopia.*

T1: *Is he correct?*

Sts: *No.*

T1: *Who can correct it?*

St: *There are many students with disability in Ethiopia.*

If the student was correct, he would continue. If she/he was not correct, he might give chance for other students.

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### **c. Post observation interview**

The aim of the post-observation interview was to find out the consistency and inconsistency between teachers' self-reports and actual practice regarding vocabulary teaching as well as the rationale of teachers' actual behaviors in the classroom. For this aim, all post observation interviews were unstructured and conducted as follows: The researcher put the real conversation transcription in the following way:

Researcher: *What did you expect your students to learn by the end of the lesson?*

T1: *I expect simply the lesson I plan in the lesson plan.*

Researcher: *How do you check that?*

T1: *As you saw, I was asking different questions at the end of each pace of the lesson of the day.*

Researcher: *If you were teaching the lesson again, what variation would you make?*

T1: *I don't change, but if you have any suggestion I am willing to take your comment.*

Researcher: *I found your teaching very inspiring particularly in considering students' prior knowledge in your teaching, explain objective of the lesson and new concepts as well as making students participant, but I saw following only few active students in the teaching learning process as areas of improvement.*

T1: *Yes, I have understood that very well, most students are not interested in English class, because of feeling learning English is difficult, learning in general not important and some are lack of background knowledge.*

Researcher: *How do you know? Have you read/done research regarding this problem?*

T1: *I did not read and do any research, but I know it from both my experience, and colloques formal and informal discussion.*

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## **A. Teacher 2**

### **i. Pre-observation interview**

Like he did with T1, the researcher conducted little interviews with the teachers about his material preparation, lesson plan and his attitude about the selected session in order before observing teachers. The interview is explained as follows:

Researcher: *How do you prepare yourself before you enter to the class?*

T2: *Before classes, I always prepare lesson plan and give for the department head and I prepare explanations and activities about the topic of the discussion.*

Researcher: *What is the topic of session? Is it important for the improvement of students' language?*

T1: *Vocabulary which is very crucial key to develop other skills of language.*

Then, the researcher requested the teacher to show the lesson plan; the teacher became volunteer and showed lesson plan prepared by the same format used by T1.

## ii. Observation

Having the same seat position and observation ethics he did in T1 classroom, the researcher observed L2's class. After greeting students with smiling face, the teacher started the lesson writing the topic of the lesson on the blackboard and reading once. Following that, he asked few questions that were related to the lesson to the students sequentially. Questions forwarded by the teacher were:

*T2: Well students, what is the difference between stigma and discrimination? What do you know about those vocabularies?*

*St: Stigma courses dishonor, but discrimination is inequity due some unique identity.*

Listening students' responses, wrote summarized lecture note on the board about the topic and related concepts and most students took the note. In this stage, the teacher encouraged students to emphasize what they were going to learn: students reminded what they have known before.

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Finishing the affirmation stage, the teacher let students to form the usual group. Then, the teacher ordered them to read one paragraph text written in students' textbook given in the appendix part and to do five questions given below the text within five minutes.

Having the situation that most students in each group were participating in the discussion, the teacher was facilitating the class in moving across groups. During the discussion most students were seen whispering in Amharic each other, whereas few active students were asking different question of clarifying the task. Then, students finished the task within the given time. Confirming task completion, the teacher asked reflection on each question to the whole class, and few active students reacted and transformed to the next task.

After that, the teacher gave five vocabularies selected from the reading text and ordered students to construct their own sentences at least one for each within ten minute individually. The instructions were given as follows:

*Write sentences based on the following word/vocabularies.*

1. *Discrimination*
2. *Health care*
3. *Disability*
4. *Stigma*
5. *Crawl*

The teacher confirmed the completion of the task by asking as follows:

T2: have you finished your work?

Sts: Yes.

T2: Now, discuss sentences in group.

Finally, the teacher ordered students to write answer on the blackboard and read for the class. Then, the teacher asked students whether the sentence written on the board was correct or not. If the answerer were correct, the teacher continued to give chance to other volunteer students to answer the next question. If the student did not answer correctly, she gave chance for other student to correct the errors made by the first student.

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### **iii. Post-observation interview**

The aim of the post-observation interview was to find out the consistency and inconsistency between teachers' self-reports and actual practice regarding vocabulary teaching as well as the rationale of teachers' actual behaviors in the classroom. For this aim all post observation interviews were unstructured. The research found that almost consistent with interview responses. The researcher put the real conversation transcription in the following way:

Researcher: *What did you expect your students to learn by the end of the lesson?*

T2: *I guess, I achieved the objective of my teaching learning process.*

Researcher: *how do you check that?*

T2: *I was asking different questions repeatedly at the end of each sets of activities.*

Researcher: *if you were teaching the lesson again, what variation would you make?*

T2: *I do not know. I may teach in the same way. Do you see any way that can help me to teach in a different and better way?*

Researcher: *I found your teaching very inspiring particularly in considering students' prior knowledge in your teaching, explain objective of the lesson and new concepts as well as making students participant, but I saw following only few active students in the teaching learning process as areas of improvement.*

T2: *Yes, I know that, but few students disregard English class, because of feeling learning English and lack of background knowledge.*

Researcher: *how do you know? Have you read/done research regarding this problem?*

T2: *I understand it from my experience of teaching*

From what his observation, the researcher asked that only few students were participating in the classroom, whereas most students were not participating actively. They explained as most students were weak in background and disinterested generally in education.

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### **3.2. Discussion**

To ease the discussion, the researcher categorized it thematically as preparation stage and teaching stage.

#### **3.2.1 Pre-teaching stage**

EFL teachers proved that vocabulary knowledge is a precondition for communication in an L2 (Nation, 2001). They consider vocabulary is an important section for successful communication in the foreign language classroom. This is because vocabulary is fundamental to every language skills, including reading, writing, listening and speaking skill. To realize their thought, ELT teachers prepared lesson plan to guide the teaching learning process because the lesson planning

process allows teachers to assess their own knowledge with regards to the content to be taught (Reed & Michaud, 2010).

### **3.2.2. Teaching stage**

In beginning of the class, ELT teachers initiated students' learning through letting them to reflect their prior knowledge about vocabularies selected for the session because Schmitt (1997) relating the vocabularies with some previously learned knowledge by using some form of imagery or grouping is the simplest way of acquiring vocabulary.

On the top of that, both teachers gave short note about vocabularies selected for the session and gave comprehension question related to it. This strategy helped students to guess meanings of words from context because Nation (2001) depicted that context can connect the vocabulary knowledge to the knowledge that learners already have. Learning from guessing vocabulary meanings from context is the most important strategy of all the sources of vocabulary learning. It can contribute to the learning progression directly.

EFL teachers gave chance for students to practice the vocabulary by defining, guessing their meaning from reading text, writing sentences with selected vocabulary and reading it for other classmates the same vocabularies. Repetition was a practicing process that was crucial to intensify students' understanding of words "If recycling is neglected, many partially known words will be forgotten, wasting all the effort already put into learning them" (Richards 2000, p. 137).

This implies that the practice exposed learners to learn different aspects of vocabularies that might help students to improve their vocabulary to the highest level. Regarding this, Richards (1976) identified that learning vocabulary is learning different aspects of word knowledge like syntactic behavior, associations, semantic value, different meanings, underlying form and derivations. Thus, students were learning use, form and meaning of vocabulary because knowing vocabulary refers Nation (1990) spelling, pronunciation, collocations, and appropriateness of vocabularies.

Though teachers were good in understanding the importance of vocabulary, preparing themselves for teaching and try to teach different aspects of vocabulary, teachers' successes is determined by the extent of achieving the set objectives.

Understanding assessment as is an intrinsic part of the learning, both T1 and T2 undertaken it at the beginning of the class to assess the skills, abilities, interests, experiences, levels of achievement or difficulties of an individual student or a whole class asking different questions orally. There were also asking questions at the end of different activities to monitor students' ongoing progress and to provide immediate and meaningful feedback. When they gave actives done in cooperation, both teachers were conduction ongoing, informal observations throughout the term.

Besides that, T1 made students individually assess each other's contribution using a predetermined list of criteria by requiring students to provide feedback to their peers on a product or a performance (Falchikov, 200).

Regardless of the types of assessment they used, ELT teachers failed in making the assessment inclusive because only few students were participating in the classroom, whereas most students were not participating actively. Teachers were also aware of it, and they believed as most students were weak in background and disinterested generally in education.

Here teachers should see their delivery because "Effective differentiation will typically be proactively planned by the teacher to be robust enough to address a range of learner needs, in contrast with planning a single approach for everyone and reactively trying to adjust the plans when it becomes apparent that the lesson is not working for some learners for whom it was intended" (Tomlinson (2001, p.4). Supporting his idea, Flanigan & Greenwood, (2007) stated that teachers should keep four factors in mind when they consider strategies to teach vocabulary: the nature of students they are teaching; the nature of the vocabularies they selected to teach; their instructional purposes in teaching each of those words, and the strategies they employ to teach the words.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1. Conclusion**

1. The teachers in this study viewed vocabulary as an important element of learning English as a foreign language in improving students' communication and even in learning grammar effectively. Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of language which makes it plausible to attain the most frequently occurring words in a language to able to communicate in that language.
2. The teachers' selection of what of vocabulary teaching came into view to be good quality because teachers' considered vocabulary knowledge form, grammatical pattern, meaning, function, relation with other words, which were specified both for receptive and productive knowledge. However teachers had difficulties in getting involved most students to practice vocabulary actively.

### **4.1. Recommendations**

1. The findings in this study have suggested the implication which should be put into consideration is only few students were involved actively so that the success of the lesson would be in question in leaving the active involvement of most students. To make effective the lesson, those two EFL teachers should use instructional differentiation. That is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that advocates beginning where individuals are rather than with a prescribed plan of action, which ignores student readiness, interest, and learning profile.
2. Since this study was just carried out on two teachers within few weeks, it would have been better if further researches had been done on a large number of participants for a longer time.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1

#### Classroom Observation Format

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Teachers' Activity</b>	<b>Students' activities</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Pre observati on</b>				



## Appendix 3

### Comprehension questions taken from Ethiopia Grade Nine Text Book

• revise using the articles *a, an* and *the*  
• revise the demonstrative *there is / there are*.

**A12.1 Introduction:** How much do you know about disability?

It is estimated that 10 per cent of Ethiopia's population, about 8 million people, live with a disability. Many disabled Ethiopian children and adults face an isolated and uncertain future because of the stigma of mental or physical disability. Some are hidden out of sight by their ashamed families and very few will attend school. In addition, the lack of adequate healthcare in Ethiopia means mobility aids like wheelchairs and crutches are not widely available. Those who are unable to walk unassisted are left to crawl or drag themselves around on the floor.

**Work in pairs to answer the questions below. Write the answers in your exercise book.**

- 1 How many disabled people are there in Ethiopia?
- 2 What are the two main kinds of disability?
- 3 What does it mean if a person carries a white stick?
- 4 How can a blind person read a book?
- 5 What is another name for an artificial limb?
- 6 What is the name for a person who has difficulty in reading?
- 7 What do you use to help you walk if you have a broken leg?
- 8 How does someone who is unable to walk get around?
- 9 How can people who are deaf understand when you speak to them?
- 10 Schizophrenia is an illness that affects which part of the body?

**A12.2 Listening:** An orphan's...