SETSCI Conference Indexing System,
Volume 3 (2018), 884-888

ISAS 2018-Winter
2nd International Symposium on Innovative Approaches in Scientific Studies
November 30 – December 2, 2018, Samsun, Turkey

Vocabulary learning and teaching beliefs of preservice EFL teachers in Turkey

Prof. Dr. Arif Sarıçoban[1*], Assoc. Prof. Dr. Özkan Kırmızı [2+]

[1]English Language and Literatue Department, Selcuk University, Konya, Turkey
[2]English Language and Literatue Department, Karabuk University, Karabuk, Turkey
[*]Corresponding author: ozkankirmizi@gmail.com
[+]Speaker: saricobanarif@gmail.com
Presentation/Paper Type: Oral

Abstract **–** Based on the crucial role of vocabulary in language education, the present study set out to examine pre-service EFL teachers views on learning and teaching vocabulary. The main aim in so doing is to enhance teacher education programs in terms of more effective teaching of vocabulary. In order to collect quantitative data, a questionnaire, prepared by Gao and Ma (2010) was used. The questionnaire contains both a Likert part and an open-ended part. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data. As for the qualitative part, content analysis was used to analyze the open-ended questions. Convenient sampling was used when selecting the participants of the study (n=50). The results indicate pre-service English teachers have different perspective on the acquisition of vocabulary. The results also highlighted the significance of empowering pre-service teachers in terms of awareness in learning and teaching vocabulary. In addition, as to the qualitative responses obtained in this study, using vocabulary notebook, contextual clues, and recycling play the utmost role in learning vocabulary.

Keywords – teaching vocabulary, EFL teachers, pre-service teachers, qualitative data, teacher education programs

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is an important component of linguistic competence. Therefore, the teaching of vocabulary also poses a challenge on the part of teachers as they are supposed to equip students with multiple forms, meanings, collocations, and usage of a word in order to develop their receptive and productive vocabulary skills (Nation, 1990, 2001; Read, 2004). Accordingly, vocabulary learning and teaching beliefs of both students and teachers assume great importance. However, according to Borg (2006), more studies are needed on teachers' cognition of vocabulary teaching and learning.

Vocabulary plays a central part in the process of language learning since it is hard to perform properly in other language skills i.e. speaking, listening, writing, or reading without sound vocabulary knowledge (Asgari & Mustapha, 2011, Boonkongsaen & Intaraprasert, 2014). Nation (2009) points out that for learners to perform adequately in reading skill, they need to have substantial vocabulary knowledge. Stæhr (2008, p. 1) also states that "vocabulary knowledge is generally assumed to be a good predictor of language proficiency in a second or a foreign language."

The ultimate aim of this paper is to present vocabulary learning and teaching beliefs held by pre-service teachers in Turkey. Pre-service teachers were included in the study. The reason behind investigating pre-service teachers' beliefs, especially in vocabulary, is essential in that they interact with their pedagogical practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Thompson, 1992). This means that pedagogical practices of teachers are shaped, motivated, or guided by their beliefs.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Data collection tool

This study is descriptive in nature and carries the features of mixed method in that both quantitative and qualitative method have been utilized. In order to understand the participants' views on vocabulary, for the quantitative data an adapted version of the questionnaire developed by Gu (2005), was used. The questionnaire contains 17 items with the following four sub-dimensions: (1) contextual use (9 items), (2) fixed meaning (2 items), (3) list meaning (3 items), and (4) repetition (3 items). The questionnaire also included open-ended questions. It is a Likert-type questionnaire with five options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. As for the reliability of the tool, the Cronbach's alpha values was calculated as ,74, indicating a high level of reliability. For the qualitative part of the questionnaire, two open ended questions have been added.

B. Participants

In this study, purposeful sampling method was used in order to select the participants. The study was conducted with 50 pre-service EFL teachers. They are actually English Language and Literature Department students, but enrolled in a teacher certificate program, which lasts for two semesters. Students who have taken all the courses were selected so that their ideas about teaching vocabulary would be mature enough.

C. Data analysis

In the present study, descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. As was stated, the questionnaire contains four sub-dimensions and participants views regarding each dimension were calculated. Content analysis was conducted to analyze the comments provided by the participants for the open-ended questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the coding process, the answers provided by the participants were compared and contrasted to find out emerging codes or themes. It was observed that the participants made frequent references to their goals and pedagogical efforts. The coding process indicated that there are four major categories that emerged from the participants answers: namely, teaching content, teaching approach, teaching aims, and teaching resources.

III. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the findings regarding contextual use. The general mean score has been calculated and given at the bottom of the table (M=3,99). The general mean score is used as a reference point. The general mean score indicates that the participants have a moderate level of beliefs as regards contextual use. The participants value paying attention to set phrases and collocations (M=4,06), guessing words in context (M=4,10), coming across a word several times in different contexts before knowing what it means (M=4,16), knowing a word's form, its meaning, and its basic usage (M=4,14), and using words to learn them (M=4,04). It is interesting to note that the participants do not seem to value reading a way of learning new words (M=3,72).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics about contextual use

items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
1. One can expand one's vocabulary simply through reading a lot.	50	2,00	5,00	3,9400	,91272
2. The meanings of a considerable number of words can be picked up through reading.	50	1,00	5,00	3,7200	,83397
3. Words studied should be put to use before they are finally learned.	50	2,00	5,00	3,9600	,85619
4. One should pay attention to set phrases and collocations that go with a word.	50	2,00	5,00	4,0600	,84298
5. Guessing words in context is one of the best ways to learn vocabulary.	50	1,00	5,00	4,1000	,90914
6. When you come across a word several times in different contexts, you will know what it means.	50	1,00	5,00	4,1600	,99714
7. At least a learner should know a word's form, its meaning, and its basic usage.	50	3,00	5,00	4,1400	,67036
8. Using the language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is more important than memorizing words	50	1,00	5,00	3,8200	1,18992
9. Words are learned after you use them.	50	1,00	5,00	4,0400	1,00934
total				3,99	

Table 2 presents the descriptive findings about fixed meaning. There are two items here. For the first one, namely whether English words have fixed meanings or not, the participants believe that they do not. Most of the participants stated that English words do not have fixed meaning (M=3,04). As for the second item here, it was found that the participants do not believe that knowing the dictionary meaning of a word is not enough (M=2,76).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics about fixed meaning

items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. English words have fixed meanings.	50	1,00	5,00	3,0400	1,15987
2. It is only necessary to remember one dictionary definition for each word.	50	1,00	5,00	2,7600	1,22157
total				2,90	

The findings abour list meaning can be found in Table 3. The general mean score for this sub-scale is 2,88, indicating a low level. It seems that the participants do not value memorization as a way of vocabulary learning (M=2,88), or using the L1 equivalent (M=2,82), or solely remembering a word (M=2,94).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics about list meaning

items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The best way to remember words is to memorise word lists or dictionaries.	50	1,00	5,00	2,8800	1,02300
2. Once the Turkish equivalents of all Turkish words have been remembered, English is learned.	50	1,00	5,00	2,8200	1,06311
3. Remembering the meaning of a word is an end in itself.	50	1,00	5,00	2,9400	,86685
total				2,88	

We can see the descriptive findigs about repetition. The general mean score is 3,58, which indicates a moderate level of acceptance on the part of the participants. Most of the participants believe that repetition is the best way to remember words (M=4,14). A moderate level of the participants believe that words can only be learned through memorization (M=3,12) and a good memory is a pre-requisite for learning vocabulary (M=3,50).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics about repetition

items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Repetition is the best way to remember words.	50	2,00	5,00	4,1400	,83324
2. You can only acquire a large vocabulary by memorizing individual words.	50	1,00	5,00	3,1200	1,00285
3. A good memory is all you need to learn a foreign language well.	50	1,00	5,00	3,5000	1,05463
total				3,58	

D. The analysis of open-ended questions

Within the context of the study, two open-ended questions were presented to the participants. Content analysis was conducted to analyze these questions. Emerging themes and codes were identified, and sample answers provided by the participants were included. The results for the first question, which inquired how the participants learn vocabulary, are given in Table 5. We can understand from the table that the most frequently occurring items is using vocabulary notebook (n=13), followed by context (n=9) and recycling (n=8). In regard to context, most of the participants stated that newly learned words must be used in sentences. Few participants stated that stories should be included. Another frequently stated code was semantic relations (n=7). In terms of semantic, relation most participants stated that they focus on synonyms or antonyms. Only very few participants stated that they focused on connotations or other semantic relations. Five of the participants stressed the importance of reading (n=5). Reading in this context encompasses reading articles, reading novels or short stories. The other codes were dictionary use (n=3), watching movies (n=3), exams (n=3), pronunciation (n=3), and coding (n=1). One sample answer provided by one of the participants is as follows:

When I was at high school, we used to write creative, interesting, different, and memorable stories. Our teacher used to say that we needed to see a word 5 or 6 times. Instead of giving the Turkish equivalents of words, our teacher used to give English definitions of words. Demonstrations can be used in teaching words, as well.

Table 5. How do you learn vocabulary?

theme / code	**n**
vocabulary notebook	13
context	9
recycling	8
semantic relations	7
reading	5
dictionary use	3

watching movies	3
exams	3
pronunciation	2
coding	1

The second open-ended questions inquired whether the participants believed that vocabulary is taught effectively at schools. The codes and themes that emerged from the answers provided by the participants are given in Table 6.

Table 6. The effectiveness of vocabulary teaching at schools

theme / code	**n**
not sufficient	8
teacher	2
sufficient	2
adherence to the book	1
school type	1

As we can understand from Table 6, the most frequent theme is not sufficient (n=8). It seems that most participants do not believe that vocabulary teaching is not effective at schools. Two of the participants stated that teacher was a determining factor and two of them stated it was sufficient. One of the participants thought that adherence to course books was an inhibitory factor in vocabulary learning. One of the participants stated that school type was important. Sample answers provided by the participants are as follows:

Vocabulary learning, to me, is highly personal endeavor and is related to one's own interests. It should be interesting and attractive.

Vocabulary learning at schools is not sufficient. Words are taught on a weekly basis and are not recycled. Another problem is that the pronunciation of words is not taught. Vocabulary notebooks must be kept, and recycling must be ensured.

Teaching vocabulary at schools is not effective because writing words five times is not enough. Giving word lists and making quizzes is effective way to teach vocabulary because when students know that they practice words.

It is partially effective. In fact, this depends on the activities the teacher does. Teachers should use more games and use more visuals.

There are schools where vocabulary is taught effectively and where it is not taught effectively. There are also teachers who do not focus on teaching vocabulary. In other schools, special attention is given to words; some posters are prepared and are hang on the walls of the classroom. However, as we observe in our practicum schools, teachers push vocabulary to the periphery. They only focus on words at the end of the lesson. Therefore, I don't think vocabulary is taught effectively at schools.

I think that the way teacher teach vocabulary is not enough especially because these teachers do not have a sufficient vocabulary stock. Some of them are not qualified in their field so they affect students in a negative way.

IV. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The present study focused on pre-service English teachers' views on teaching and learning vocabulary. The questionnaire surveyed the participants beliefs about vocabulary teaching in terms of contextual use, fixed meaning, list meaning, and repetition. In regard to contextual use, the participants stated that paying attention to set phrases and collocations, guessing words in context, coming across a word several times in different contexts before knowing what it means, knowing a word's form, its meaning, and its basic usage were important. As for the fixed meaning, the findings indicated that English words do not have fixed meaning and that the participants do not believe that knowing the dictionary meaning of a word is enough. When it comes to list meaning, the findings showed that the participants do not value memorization or or using the L1 equivalent as a way of vocabulary learning. Finally, the last sub-category examined was participant views on repetition. The participants stated that repetition is the best way to remember words. A moderate level of the participants believe that words can only be learned through memorization and a good memory is a pre-requisite for learning vocabulary.

According to Ghazal (2010, p. 84), "vocabulary learning is one of the major challenges that foreign language learners face during the process of learning a language". Hence, in order to help learners develop their vocabulary learning strategies, it is useful to carry out studies that focus on measuring vocabulary learning strategies in relation to different variables.

The findings above show that pre-service teachers' shared beliefs, similar practices, and consistencies between their beliefs and practices might be attributed to the Turkish EFL learning culture and teaching culture in general. Turkish education system is generally criticized as being highly dependent on memorization and rote learning. As such, the participants differing beliefs, different practices, and

inconsistencies between their beliefs and practices may have been formed from the conventional classroom culture. Now that teachers' beliefs guide their practices, teacher education programs must equip pre-service teachers with the effective means of teaching vocabulary and help them form viable cognitions about vocabulary learning and teaching.

Inevitably, the present small-scale study has some drawbacks. In the first place, it was conducted with a rather small number of participants. This was due to the limited number of participants in the institution. Secondly, the study relies on the self-reports of the participants in the form of the survey or open-ended questions. However, to collect more reflective data, observations should be conducted, and the actual teaching environments must be seen in order to form conclusions about the teaching of vocabulary.

V. REFERENCES

[1] Asgari, A., & Mustapha, B. G. (2011). The type of vocabulary learning strategies used by ESL students in University Putra Malaysia. *English Language Teaching*, *4*(2), 84-90.

[2] Boonkongsaen, N., and Intaraprasert, C. (2014). Use of English Vocabulary Learning Strategies by Thai Tertiary-Level Students in Relation to Fields of Study and Language-Learning Experiences, *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 7(5), 59-70.

[3] Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher cognition and language education*: *Research and practice*. London: Continuum.

[4] Clark, C. M., & Peterson, P. L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 255-296). New York: Macmillan.

[5] Ghazal, L. (2010) Learning vocabulary in EFL contexts through vocabulary learning strategies. *Novitas-Royal*, 1(2), 84-91.

[6] Gao, X. & Ma, Q. (2011). Vocabulary learning and teaching beliefs of preservice and in-service teachers in Hong Kong and mainland China, *Language Awareness*, 20:4, 327-342.

[7] Gu, Y. (2005). *Vocabulary learning strategies in the Chinese EFL context.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish

[8] Nation, P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[9] Nation, I. S. P. (2009). *Teaching ESL/ EFL Reading and Writing*. New York: Routledge.

[10] Phipps, S., & Borg, S. (2009). Exploring tensions between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. *System*, 37(3), 380-390.

[11] Read, J. (2004). Research in teaching vocabulary. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 146–161.

[12] Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[13] Stæhr, L. S. (2008). Vocabulary size and the skills of listening, reading and writing. *Language Learning Journal*, *36*(2), 139-152

[14] Thompson, A. G. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and conceptions: A synthesis of the research. In D. A. Grouws (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Mathematics Teaching and Learning* (pp. 127-146). New York: Macmillan.