

Improving English Reading Skill of Intermediate Level Engineering Students through the Teaching Vocabularies

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Abstract - Reading is one of the most important skills that should be measured English ability of intermediate level students in Technological Universities. It also has a positive effect on students' vocabulary knowledge. So, teaching vocabularies is one of the most important parts for engineering students. And then, how to teach vocabularies is one of the challenges for some novice teachers. The aim of the research paper is to improve the English ability of engineering students in their reading skill through teaching vocabularies and to suggest some effective teaching strategies of teaching vocabularies. This research was done by using descriptive quantitative method. Data are collected by using questionnaires for the students and discussed with English language teachers. The finding of the study shows that it is rather simple and easy to teach the vocabularies.

Keywords - Reading, English ability, vocabulary knowledge, teaching vocabularies, Method

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, reading is the primary goal of foreign a language program as well as an educational field. It is claimed that reading knowledge can be achieved through the gradual introduction of words. Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. The vocabulary in reading is controlled for all levels and chosen according to their frequency and usefulness. The acquisition of vocabulary is more important than grammatical skills. Approach and its lack of emphasis on oral skills give rise to language learners who cannot communicate in the target language. In engineering education, many kinds of reference books are written by English language and vocabulary knowledge of the students is very essential. This paper shows some strategies of teaching vocabularies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary represents one of most important skills necessary for teaching and learning a foreign language. It is the basis for the development of all the other skills: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, writing, spelling and pronunciation. Vocabulary is the main tool for the students in their attempt to use English effectively. When confronted with a native English speaker, when watching a movie without subtitle or when listening to a favorite English song, when reading a text or when writing a letter to a friend, students will always need to operate with words.

A. Why is Vocabulary Important?

Talking about the importance of vocabulary, the linguist David Wilkins argued that: "without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." Indeed, people need to use words in order to express themselves in any language. Most learners understand the

importance of vocabulary acquisition. The learners, students, usually find it difficult to speak English fluently. They usually consider speaking and writing activities are exhausting because they keep on using the same expressions and words and very soon their conversation is abruptly interrupted due to missing words. And the main reason for such communication problems is the lack of vocabulary. Other students are confronted with the problem of forgetting the words immediately after the teacher has elicited their meaning or after they have looked them in the dictionary, and this also a cause of the lack of vocabulary. The more words students learn, the easier they memorize them.

The teacher has an essential role in helping students to improve their vocabulary. Unfortunately, vocabulary teaching has not been enough responsive to such problems, and teachers have not recognized the tremendous importance of helping their students to develop an extensive vocabulary. English is used as teaching approaches such as Direct Method and Audiolingualism which emphasized the primary importance of teaching grammatical structures. Since the accent was on grammar, few words were introduced in such courses and most often, they were limited and related to the grammar structures taught.

At the beginning of 1970s, there was a major change in teaching English. The focus turned from the Direct Method and Audiolingualism to the Communicative Approach which emphasized the importance of teaching vocabulary. Students were exposed to diverse vocabulary and speaking activities. Many words began to be introduced during such courses and students were encouraged to express themselves as much as possible.

Nowadays, there is more freedom in choosing the methods to be used during English classes. The English syllabus is organized around both vocabulary and grammar structures. Since there is a certain number of classes allotted for each item in the syllabus, teachers usually have the necessary time to insist on teaching and practising vocabulary. Vocabulary is no longer treated as an add-on and teachers become more aware of the importance of vocabulary and attention is paid to the grammar of words, to collocations and to word frequency. Nevertheless, students still have difficulties in expressing themselves fluently and still consider speaking tasks are exhausting.

B. Some Activities for Teaching Vocabulary

There are many techniques and strategies how to teach new vocabularies. Some teachers use activities for teaching new vocabularies.

1) **Same Word, Different Subject**: The teachers must explain to students that each subject consists of technical vocabulary words and specialized words. Technical words are those that usually have only one meaning and are discussed in only one subject. For example:

English – verb, gerund
 mathematics – rhombus

biology–mitosis

And then, the teachers must tell students that specialized vocabulary words are those that are used in different subjects and usually have different meanings in each subject. For example, the word “division” could be used differently in history, mathematics, and science classes. They encourage the students to identify and discuss other specialized vocabulary words. They must create a class list that can be added to regularly as new words are encountered and discussed.

2) **Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy:** The teachers ask students to identify two words they believe and everyone should learn that are related to specific topics the group is studying. And then, they encourage students to write their words on the board and to present their words to the group by defining them, explaining why the group should learn them, and telling where the words were found. They also moderate a discussion through which the class reduces the list to a predetermined number of most important words by eliminating words already known by many. The final list becomes the focus of vocabulary activities for the next few days.

3) **Teaching vocabulary by using dictionary:** A great technique for students to develop and increase their vocabulary is to increase the availability and use of dictionaries in class and for homework assignments. It is important that students learn how to improve English vocabulary by themselves.

In order for students to see dictionaries as a valuable resource, they not only need to learn how to use them, but also, they need to make use of them for different activities during their course of studies on a regular basis. The more the students use this tool, the better they will be at using it and the more value they will find in it. What’s more, in the course of looking up a certain word, they might stumble upon other new words that catch their attention and they might be tempted to read the definitions.

It is important to remember that looking up a word in a dictionary and /or reading its definition does not guarantee that a student will learn this word and use it in their next writing or speaking assignment. It is important that students understand the word and its meaning in English, and see the word used correctly in an example. These are the minimum steps for students to develop the comprehension of the word.

4) **Word Map:** The word map technique is useful for helping students develop a general concept of *definition*. It focuses on three questions, “*What is it?*” “*What is it like?*,” and “*What are some examples?*” to make students aware of the types of information that make up a “definition” and how that information is organized.

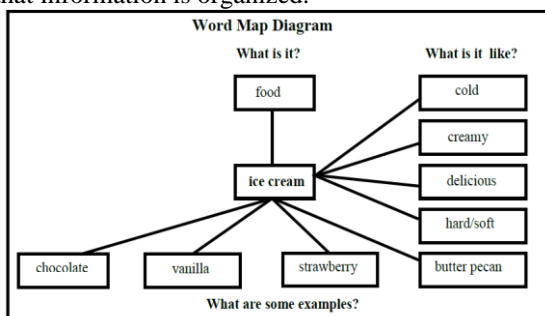


Fig. 1 Sample word map

5) **Word Web:** Before reading a passage, the teachers must share a list of words that students will encounter in their

reading and record these words in the center rectangles of word webs equal in number to the words on the list. They must encourage the students to pronounce each word and to share what they think each word means.

The students encounter a word that has been placed in the center of a word web and they record on one of the circles around each center circle words or phrases that will help them remember the meanings of the words.

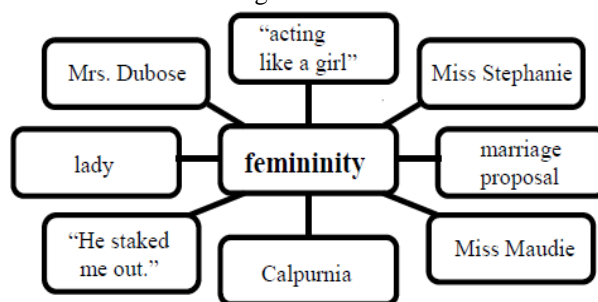


Fig.2 Sample Word Web

III. METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research was done by using descriptive quantitative method. Quantitative research relies on the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control variables and phenomena of interest. The goal of quantitative research studies is vastly different from the qualitative goal of gaining a better understanding of a situation or event.

A. Participants

Participants of this study were selected as second year and third year engineering students from the Technological University (Hmawbi). There were 300 students in this research and English is **regarded as** the foreign language for all the participants.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

The data has been collected using close-ended questions. All participants have to complete individually. They filled up the questionnaire form. The questions for students are prepared by using close-ended format because it is easier and quicker for respondents to answer and easy to compare with other respondents or questionnaires. This study has done at the second semester of 2018-2019 academic years. Data analysis will be conducted once all respondents have completed the questionnaires. All participants answered all questions and these answers were analysed by using descriptive method. There are “eight questions” for engineering students. Each question has five levels to be answered (from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”). The students have to choose one answer from these five levels. The questions are as follow:

1. Teaching vocabulary by playing games.is effective for the students.
2. Teaching vocabulary by using word parts (prefixes and suffixes) is effective for the students.
3. Teaching vocabulary by using pictures and visual materials is effective for students.
4. Teaching vocabulary by using dictionary is effective for students.
5. Teaching vocabulary by using word clusters or webs is effective for students.
6. Teaching vocabulary by using words in phrases or collocations is effective for students.
7. Teaching vocabulary by using a word map is effective for students.

8. Teaching vocabulary by using self-collection strategy is effective for students.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The first question is teaching vocabulary by playing games. Games are fun activities that promote interaction, thinking, learning, and problem solving strategies. Using games in language learning are able to give much contribution or benefits in the teaching and learning process.

All participants answered this question. 212 students strongly agreed this teaching method and 26 students answered that they strongly disagreed this question. 10 students answered level 2 (agree) and other students answer level 3 and 4.

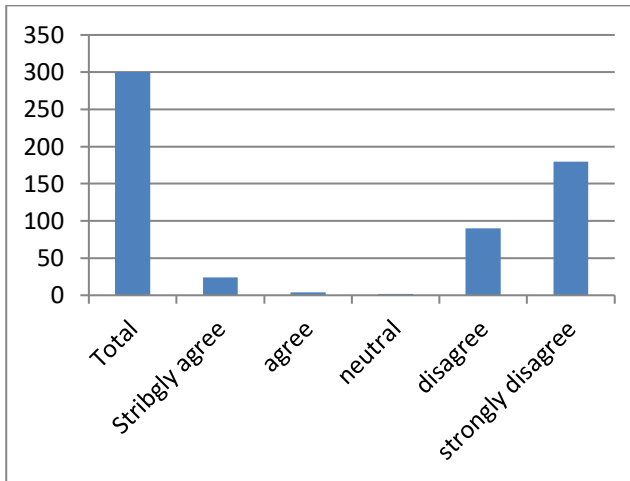


Fig.3 Demographic information of question 1

The second survey question is using word parts (prefixes and suffixes). The teachers teach the students the different parts of a word, prefixes and suffixes, to figure out what it means. In this case, some words have a prefix only (reread), a suffix only (reading), both a prefix and a suffix (prereading), a combination (unreadableness), or neither (read).

It is essential to repeat or practice a new set of words immediately after being exposed to them. Repetition is highly valued for not only the teachers but also their students. The teachers should encourage their students to be repeating vocabulary, grammar conjugations, sounds or phrases after teaching how the new words are used.

Over half of the participants (167 students) strongly agreed this question and one-third of the participants also answered level two (agree). There was no student who answered level four and level five.

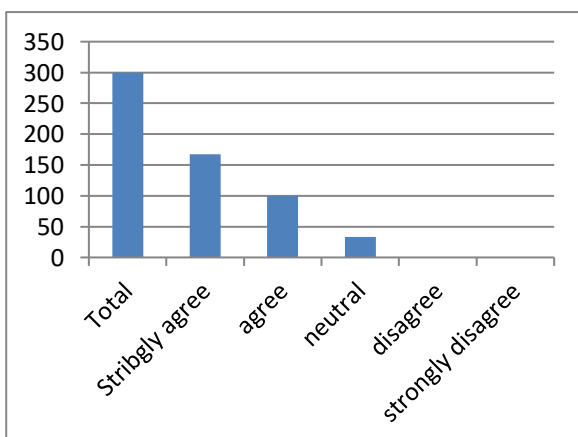


Fig.4 Demographic information of question 2

The third question is that teaching vocabulary by using pictures and visual materials is effective for students. Using pictures in teaching vocabulary are appropriate technique to apply in class because pictures are one kind of media that can help teacher draw students' interest and arouse their motivation in the teaching learning process more effective. This method is very essential for lower level of language learners. The teachers should use flash cards, magazine images, online pictures, picture dictionaries or photographs. For intermediate level students, especially engineering students, the teachers should use online pictures that they have never seen.

Over two-third of all participants showed they were strongly interested this teaching methods and other participants answered level 2 (agreed) and level 3 (neutral). There was no student who disagreed or strongly disagreed this question.

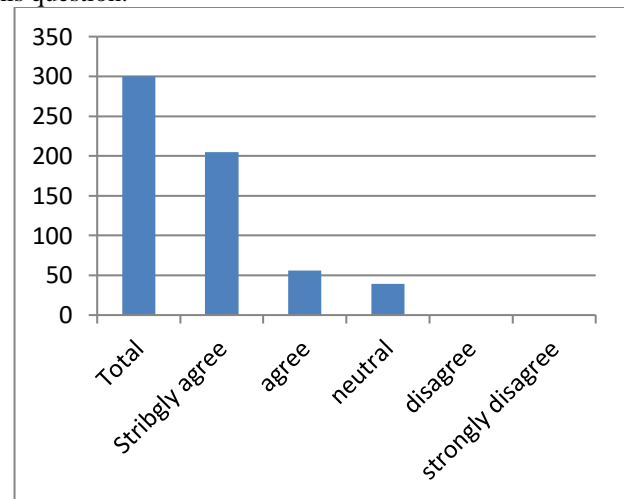


Fig.5 Demographic information of question 3

The next survey question concerns with using dictionary. A great technique for students to develop and increase their vocabulary is to increase the availability and use of dictionaries. It is important that the teachers should give guideline to the students how to use the dictionary and what kinds of dictionaries are suitable for them. For example, beginner students will benefit with any dictionary that has pictures and examples. Lower Intermediate to Intermediate level students should have dictionaries that have simple word definitions and clear examples. For certain words, having a picture available would be very useful for this level as well, even though it is not indispensable. Advanced level students should use regular dictionaries that have not been edited or changed for English language learners, or dictionaries that provide information about proper collocations as well as complete definitions. A thesaurus would also be very helpful for students at this level, as well as information on words that are usually confused or misused.

Using dictionary is very essential for all level of students and over 80% of the participants answered strongly agreed this question and over 18 % of the participants answered level 2 (agree). There was no student who answered other levels.

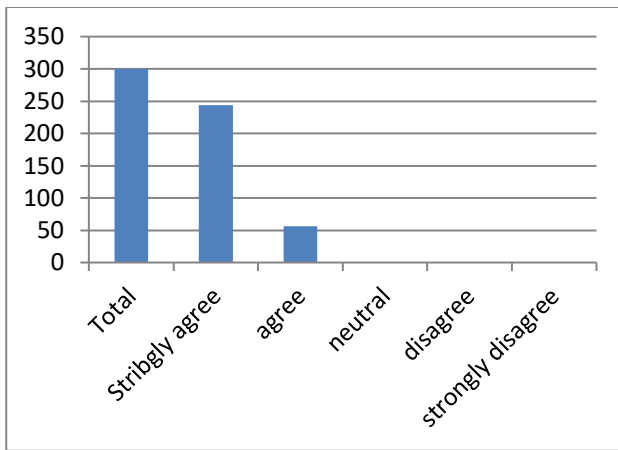


Fig.6 Demographic information of question 4

The fifth question is by using word clusters or webs. Using word webs in class can be a great way to give students a visual of a particular vocabulary word and the words closely associated with it as it might be stored in one's mind. It is a great way to help students expand their vocabulary. The teacher should encourage the students to organize the words into word cluster, and it will help them create associations between words.

This method is popular and over 75 % of the participants strongly agreed this method. About 15 % answered level 2 (agree) and only 10% of the participants answered level 3 (neutral). There is no participant who answered level 4 and 5.

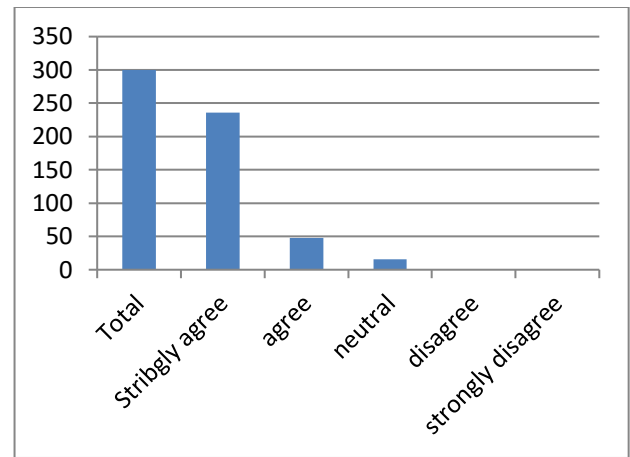


Fig. 8 Demographic information of question 6

The next question is using a word map. Word map is graphic organizer and it helps the students learn new word by associating with its antonyms and synonyms. Word map activities allows students to think about vocabulary in several ways, and further make connections with each word in relation to other words they already know.

But, half of the participants do not like this teaching technique. They answered strongly disagreed this question. And 30 % of the participants also disagreed it. Other participant answered level 1 and 2. There was no student who answered level 3.

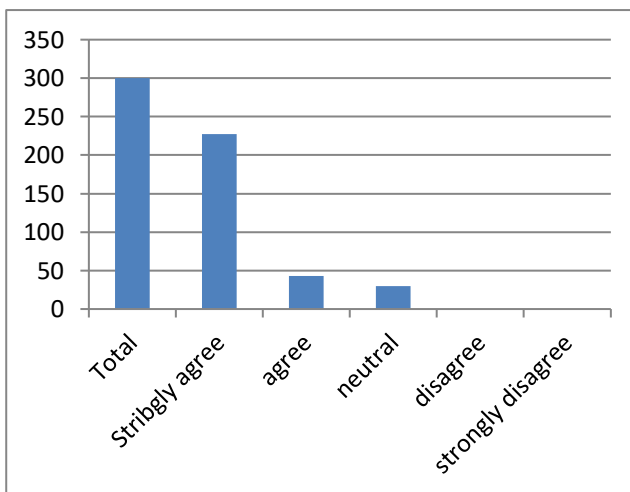


Fig.7 Demographic information of question 5

The next one is that teaching vocabulary by using words in phrases and collocations is effective for students. Phrases and collocation are the important aspect in vocabulary acquisition. Free combinations are easy to acquire because they come from the structure of extra-linguistic reality.

This teaching method also provides a good way to memorize new words and over 78 % of the participants (236 students) strongly agreed. 40% of the participants (48 students) answered level 2 (agreed) and 16 students answered level 3 (neutral). There is no student who answered level 4 and level 5.

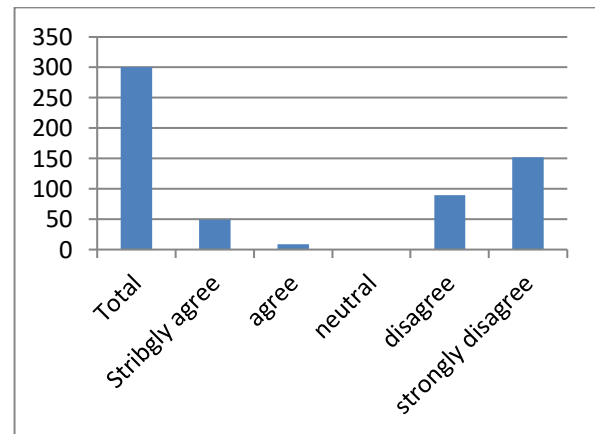


Fig.9 Demographic information of question 7

The last question is concerned with using self-collection strategy. This strategy is an interactive-learning instructional strategy that promotes word consciousness, as students are actively engaged in identifying important words from their reading to share with members of their class

Over half of the participants (60 % of participants) strongly disagreed this teaching technique. And 10 % of the participants also disagreed it. 24 students strongly agreed this question and only 4 students answered level 2 (agree) and two students answered level 3 (neutral).

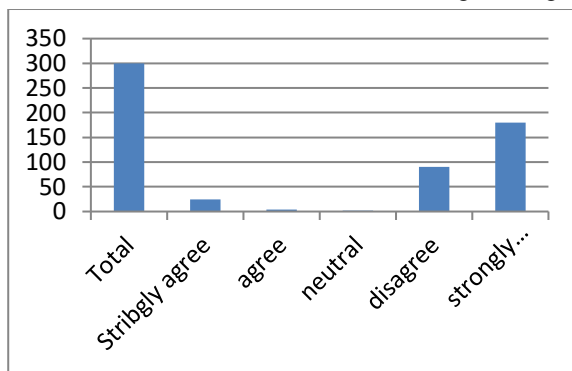


Fig.10 Demographic information of question 8

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF ALL THE QUESTIONS

	L.1	L.2	L.3	L.4	L.5	T
Q1	212	10	26	26	26	300
Q2	167	100	33	0	0	300
Q3	205	56	39	0	0	300
Q4	244	56	0	0	0	300
Q5	227	43	30	0	0	300
Q6	236	48	16	0	0	300
Q7	49	9	0	90	152	300
Q8	24	4	2	90	180	300

According to the research, Q 4 using dictionary is the most effective for the students. There are 244 students that strongly agreed and 56 students agreed. Most of the students want to use various kinds of the dictionaries while they are learning. So, the teachers should teach their students how to use dictionary. Root analysis is the last effective methods for the students. It seems that it is difficult methods for them. Most of the students strongly disagreed. Q.7, using word-map is also less popular method. This survey shows Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 and Q5 are more suitable and more effective than other techniques.

V. CONCLUSIONS

To be skillful in reading skill, teaching vocabulary is very essential and it involves a number of different components. As there are millions of words in the English language and many, teaching vocabulary correctly is about more than helping students memorize words. It is about giving students the coping skills necessary to understand what to do if they don't know a vocabulary word, and about installing a lifelong curiosity for learning words and a desire to always know more about the language. This research paper shows some techniques of teaching vocabulary. According to the research, the students presented that some are more effective and some are less effective techniques for them. This paper can also help some novice teachers how to teach new vocabulary to their students.

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