

Using Vocabulary as An Instructional Scaffolding Technique to Boost English Language Skills

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ABSTRACT

In the current trends of communication and globalization, the knowledge of vocabulary is of paramount importance. With a vocabulary package, people can read any texts and understand them. Additionally, it is easy to communicate when people have enough vocabulary. The present study is a class enquiry. It involved 30 students doing English for Specific Purposes at the University of Rwanda, College of Business and Economics, Business Administration option. Facing the challenge of getting students to effectively communicate in English and understand reading materials, the purpose of the study was to investigate into the role of vocabulary to the understanding of reading texts, speaking and writing activities. Data collection tools were individual evaluations, debates, a questionnaire and class observations. Findings revealed that vocabulary activities prior to reading provide students with many benefits. As students reported, vocabulary increased their understanding of the text and helps them exchange ideas and increase language skills while discussing vocabulary related exercises. Findings also indicated that the vocabulary activities helped students write in an effective way, applying new terms and writing freely. Therefore, it is recommended that vocabulary should be worked on thoroughly in order to foster reading comprehension, speaking and writing.

Introduction

The knowledge of vocabulary is deemed important in communication. With it, one can convey a message in an effective way. Communication in any form is made possible when the communicator has a good command of vocabulary. In order to be effective in spoken or written communication people need enough vocabulary. Similarly, to decode the message from language utterances, one needs to be equipped with a good vocabulary. In this regard, Sultan (2016) highlighted the importance of vocabulary. He considered vocabulary as an essential part in new language learning. For him, *the more learners learn new vocabulary, the more likely they are to be able to use the new language effectively* (Sultan 2016, 1).

Language vocabulary is also important in the current trends of globalisation. In this regard, the whole world is nowadays being compared to a village, people need to exchange ideas in different ways using foreign languages. Stephanie (2016) stated that vocabulary helps to achieve literacy in a foreign language. Similarly, (Grabe, 2009; Hudson, 2007; Koda, 2005) cited in Norbet et al. (n.d) mentioned that students should be equipped with enough vocabulary in order to learn a target language. This is true especially in modern international languages, including English. In fact, people need to communicate when they are on business, be online or in person or via the media. In addition, travelling, ordering and other forms of social interconnections need vocabulary in international languages like English. In few word, the

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knowledge of vocabulary helps people express themselves easily. Gass & Selinker (2008) cited in Stephanie (2012) stated that none can understand an oral message without the knowledge of vocabulary.

1.2. Context

Since 2008 English has been used as a language of instruction at all levels of education in Rwanda. From that time the School for Foundation Language Skills, one of the schools of the then National University of Rwanda-currently the University of Rwanda-was tasked to teach General English and other English related subjects. Since 2016 the school changed into the Centre for Language Enhancement now assigned to teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP) first years and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in second years in the whole university. Despite the two modules, English has remained unfamiliar language to our students. Many of them still have difficulty in communicating in this language.

Class teaching and examinations in our classes always prove that students are not proficient enough. This can result in adverse consequences in terms of academic performance and subsequently in poor professional performance. For example, in one class 18 out of 38 standing for 47.3% students failed in reading section in the first trimester, academic year 2018-2019. Similarly, 14 students representing 36.8% failed the writing section and many of them cannot communicate effectively. The reason why we decide to carry out a class inquiry in relation to vocabulary and English language learning. The purpose of the inquiry was to assess whether vocabulary can contribute in equipping students with language skills and practising them.

Many researches on vocabulary were carried out for many years. For example, Uchihara (2018) carried out a study on ‘the role of vocabulary size in second language speaking ability and found out that there is a relationship between vocabulary knowledge and L2 speaking proficiency. Similarly, Khan et al. (2018) conducted a study on ‘The Role of Vocabulary Knowledge in Speaking Development of Saudi EFL Learners’. They found out that there are relationships between vocabulary and oral skills. Despite numerous studies on the importance of vocabulary in language learning, the ways it contributes in learning and practising several language skills in the classroom at a time was not dealt with in deep.

1.3. Importance of vocabulary in language learning

There is no doubt to affirm that without some knowledge of vocabulary, neither language production nor language comprehension would be possible. Vocabulary is a crucial tool to successful communication in any language. Highlighting the importance of vocabulary in the acquisition of other language skills, Nation (2011) stated that in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning vocabulary items plays a vital role in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Schmitt (2000) as cited in Mofareh (2015), lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language. Similarly, in Lewis’s (1993, 89) views, “*lexis is the core or heart of language*”. This view was supported by Schmitt (2010) consideration on how vocabulary matters to EFL learners when they carry around dictionaries and not grammar books. Comparing vocabulary with grammar, which is also crucial as it bears the rules and functions of a language, Wilkins (1972) as quoted in Lessard- Clouston (2013) stressed that while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.

1.4. Instructional scaffolding: meaning and its importance in learning process

Learning a language requires a number of stages and approaches to enhance communication. This is justified by the fact the language production and use demand an integration of language skills. Thus, students always need support while learning. Providing support to students is very crucial in a Second Language (SL) or a Foreign Language (FL) learning where almost everything seems new to them. The most current strategy to support learners is known as

‘instructional scaffolding’. The term originated from Vygotsky’s theory. For him, language is learnt through social interaction. With his theory, it is clear that interactions are made possible with the presence of vocabulary to use while communicating in a language. In a wide sense of the term, Rasmussen (2001) as cited in Verenikina (2008) view the term ‘scaffolding’ as a form of support for the development and learning of children and young people. As for Jacobs (2001) also cited in Verenikina (2008), the term can be used as an umbrella metaphor to describe the way that teachers or peers supply students with the tools they need in order to learn. Similarly, Skene & Fedko (2014) define scaffolding as a technique for an assignment and a course design that provides the necessary supports for students while still fostering independent learning and a deeper understanding of the material. This term is frequently used by tertiary educators and especially in the field of Academic Language and Learning (Wilson, 2013).

1.5. Reasons to use an instructional scaffolding

Scholars have shown several purposes of instructional scaffolding in language learning. In this paper the focus was on the role of scaffolding in language teaching and learning using a student-centred approach. As a dynamic element of teaching and learning, and provided by the teacher, proficient learners or a group of peers, scaffolding provides a platform from which learners can construct the next level of understanding and knowledge (Theodorou, n.d.). Similarly, according to other scholars like Donato (1994); De Guerrero & Villamil (2000), Walqui (2006) as cited in Liontas (2018), learners are more likely to succeed in learning a language when their teachers, as well as their peers, provide targeted support when necessary. Therefore, in situations similar to our context where English is learnt as a second language, students’ needs a vocabulary scaffolding technique in order to allow them to communicate effectively.

2. Methods

The present study was a Classroom-Based Teaching Inquiry (CBTI). The objective was to examine whether starting the class with vocabulary would allow students to practice other language skills, namely speaking, reading and writing. In this study students did writing activities and expressed their feelings about the new approach. It was carried out in a class of 30 students doing Business Administration, college of Business and Economics at University of Rwanda in Rwanda.

2.1. Study population and sample

Around 150 students were taking English for Specific Purposes in the College of Business and Economics at University of Rwanda in the first year. Students who study Business Administration, year I in 2018-2019 academic year. It was expected that 38 who were in the same class would participate in the study. However, only 30 students who were present when the inquiry started were involved. These students’ sample represented other students who took the same module at University of Rwanda in that academic year. The design of the inquiry is qualitative and quantitative. For the sake of ethics in research, students were explained the purpose of the class inquiry and signed a consent.

2.2. Data collection tools and procedures

2.2.1. The questionnaire

Data for the inquiry using a questionnaire was collected in two stages. The first one (on the first day of the inquiry) involved a lot of activities. To start with, students picked vocabulary words we had selected from a business-related text, one each. Then they discussed the meaning of the chosen vocabulary, standing square with the walls in the class. The purpose of this class setting was to allow students speak in public facing their fellows. They used expressions like *I think this word means ..., I don't think it means...; actually, the word means...; I think the word means...; the word might mean...; the word does not mean....; it means....*

After the discussion, students read the text, '*How companies advertise*', a text which was related to their field of study. After reading, they discussed and answered comprehension questions in groups. After the discussion, we proceeded to a correction as the whole class. Again, those who could not have the right answers in their groups could ask for clarifications regarding the answers provided. Furthermore, different topics for debate were provided and students in four groups selected their respective topic for debate. The topics were related to the text they had been reading. Statements they debated on were *advertising does not present a true picture of products; advertising often persuades people to buy things they don't want; advertising is essential for business especially for launching new consumer products; and high-quality production rather than advertisement should be used to attract many prospective buyers*. While debating students could use expressions such as *I agree with, I do not agree with ..., I think that..., as far as I am concerned, ..., for me, ..., I would say (that) ..., I am not sure..., as it has been said, ..., considering....* Also, students were given an activity in which they had to apply some of the vocabulary they had been discussing. In this regard, they were asked to use them in a sentence completion activity and in a paragraph afterwards.

Lastly, students filled out the questionnaire. The purpose of this data collection tool was to gather students' opinions on the approach. The questions on the questionnaire intended to gather data on whether discussion on vocabulary was helpful, whether there were still unfamiliar words after the discussion, and whether the text was easier to understand because they had discussed the vocabulary first. It also sought to know whether vocabulary discussion helped them in reading comprehension, debate questions, sentence completion and paragraph writing and whether they would like to have the same strategy in their language classes.

In the second stage (three weeks after the class inquiry) students were given a sentence completion exercise as in the first stage but with different sentences. The purpose was to come up with data on whether students could remember how to use the target vocabulary after a given time. We collected papers and marked them to see whether their scores could compare.

2.2.2. Observation

Class observations was done during the inquiry. In this regard, when students were discussing the vocabulary, we could check whether everyone was participating. We could make sure that no one has been skipped without saying what the selected word meant. Then, during class debates, we could check whether everyone was participating, listening and paying attention to what others were saying.

2.2.3. Evaluation

During the inquiry we gave students a sentence completion exercise in which they had to fill the gaps with the words they had been discussing the meanings. Their papers were marked with an objective to ensure they could fill them in the gaps correctly. Three weeks after the inquiry we gave an exercise of the same kind with different sentences. Subsequently, the papers were marked to see whether students could remember the meaning of the words and then fill them in the gaps correctly. In the end, we checked whether the marks in the two exercises could compare.

2.3. Data analysis

In the present class inquiry, we collected data which involved both qualitative and quantitative data. On the one hand, in order to find qualitative data, we considered some quotes from students' opinions and the observations we made in class. These quotes helped to interpret quantitative data. On the other hand, quantitative data came from the marks they had got in two sentence completion exercises and paragraph writing. Quantitative data also came from students' opinions on the questions regarding the approach. Common opinions were grouped in themes and quantified to have quantitative data.

3. Results

The present section is about the results from our class inquiry. It displays the findings from students' evaluation, class observation, and the questionnaire. The later was about students' views on the class inquiry.

Table 1.

Students' scores in the two evaluations

During the inquiry			After the inquiry		
Scores	Frequencies	%ages	Scores	Frequencies	%ages
Above 16/20	26	86.7	Above 16/20	27	90
Above 14 under 16/20	1	3.3	Above 14 under 16/20	1	3.3
under 14/20	3	10	under 14/20	2	6.7

Source: Class inquiry, May 2019

Table 1 above displays the summary of students' scores in the two evaluation, during and after the inquiry. The evaluations were about sentence completion using some of the words and expressions students had discussed during the class inquiry. As it is presented, 86.7% of students got 16/20 marks during the inquiry while 90% got the same mark range after the inquiry. In the same way, 3% of students got between 14 and 16 marks out of 20 during and after the inquiry. Results also show that 10% got under 14 marks during the inquiry as compared to 6.7% of students after the inquiry. Generally, it is clear the difference between students' marks before and after the inquiry was not significant.

Additionally, a general overview of students' marks in the two evaluations showed that they could remember the vocabulary they had discussed. In fact, 21 out of 30 students (70%) got the same scores. In addition, 7 out of 30, that is 23.3% improved while 2 out of 30 (6.7%) got lower scores. Overall, the same scores were common among many students.

Furthermore, students' scores in paragraph writing showed that majority of them could use some of the words discussed correctly in their paragraphs. In this regard, while marking their written papers we checked whether they had used some of the vocabulary they had discussed during the previous session to produce meaningful sentences. To be specific, 10 out of 30 students; that is 33.3% got 8 marks and above. In addition, 16 out of 30 students corresponding to 53% scored between 5 and 7 marks out of 10. Finally, 4 students representing 13.3% got less than 5 marks.

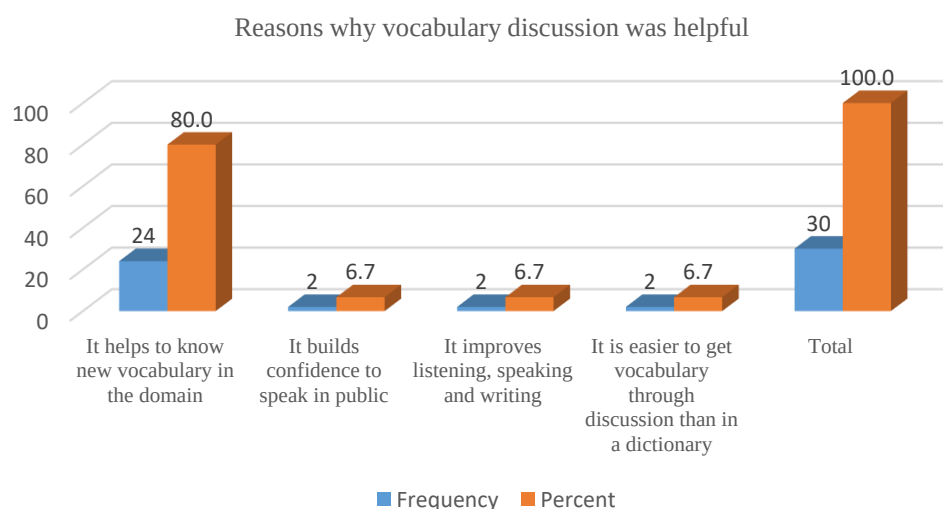


Figure 1. Students' views on how the vocabulary discussion was helpful (Source: Class inquiry, May 2019)

Figure 1 above shows students' views on how the vocabulary discussion helped them. Majority of students stated that the discussion helped them to know vocabulary in their field of study. This was common among 24 out of 30 students corresponding to 80 %. Building confidence about speaking in public; improving skills such as listening, speaking and writing and getting vocabulary easier than in a dictionary was common to 6.7 %, that is 2 students for each. It is important to note that students unanimously agreed that discussing vocabulary was helpful. Students were also asked whether there were still unfamiliar words in the reading text after they have discussed vocabulary. In this regard, many students stated that there was no unfamiliar words. This was common among 24 out of 30 corresponding to 80% of students. This resulted in finding the text easy. In fact, 28 out of 30 students equivalent to 93% attested that the text was not difficult. Those who still had difficulty understanding the text were 6 out of 30 students, which is 20 %. Two among these students said the text was not easy to understand. The reason, as they mentioned, was that there were still some difficult words to understand.

In addition, during the inquiry we asked students to give the reasons why the text was easier to understand. Majority of them said that unfamiliar words were discussed first. One student mentioned that it was easy to understand what he was reading. Two students did not give any reason. Furthermore, when asked whether the vocabulary discussion helped them in reading, students unanimously stated that it was helpful. The reading text was easy because the new words had been explained. This was common among 16 out of 30 students corresponding to 53.3%. In addition, 7 out of 30 (23.3%) students mentioned that the text was easy because discussing vocabulary helped them improve their reading skills. Also, the vocabulary discussion helped to know how to read the words. This was stated by 4 out of 30 (13.3%) students. Furthermore, 2 out of 30 students corresponding to 6.7% said that discussing vocabulary was a different approach from what students had been used to. Finally, one student did not give any explanation.

When asked whether vocabulary discussion helped them to carry out a debate, 90% of students (27 out of 30) said it was helpful. Only 3 students said it was not. Those who found vocabulary discussion helpful provided several reasons. First, having known the vocabulary to use while debating was the most common, the percentage being 40% (12 out of 30) of students. Second, reducing fear for speaking in public with a percentage of 23.3% (7 out of 30 students). Third, vocabulary discussion was an occasion to share ideas and getting others' opinions. This was a view of 2 students. Finally, 6 students did not provide any reasons why vocabulary discussion was helpful in debating. The 3 students who said that discussing vocabulary was not helpful expressed their views. In this regard, 2 of them said there was no need of vocabulary while discussing while the other one said s/he still did not understand the text.

We asked students whether discussing vocabulary helped them in sentence completion exercise. To this question, 27 out of 30 (90%) students said it was helpful. Only 3 students did not find it helpful. Regarding those who considered the exercise helpful, two reasons were provided. In fact, 21 out of 30 standing for 70% of students said that the discussion of vocabulary helped to know where the words fit. Another reason was that the vocabulary discussion helped understand the sentences well. One student did not provide any reason why the vocabulary discussion was helpful. The 3 students who said that the discussion did not help them while completing the sentences did not give any reasons as well.

We asked students whether the words they discussed helped them in writing their paragraphs and they expressed their views. In this regard, almost everyone agreed that it was helpful. In this regard, 96.7% (29 out of 30) of students found it useful. Among these students, 25 corresponding to 83.3% said they were able to write sentences for the paragraph. One student said s/he managed to get words for customer attraction while three students did not give any reasons. Similarly, someone who said it was not helpful did not provide any reason.

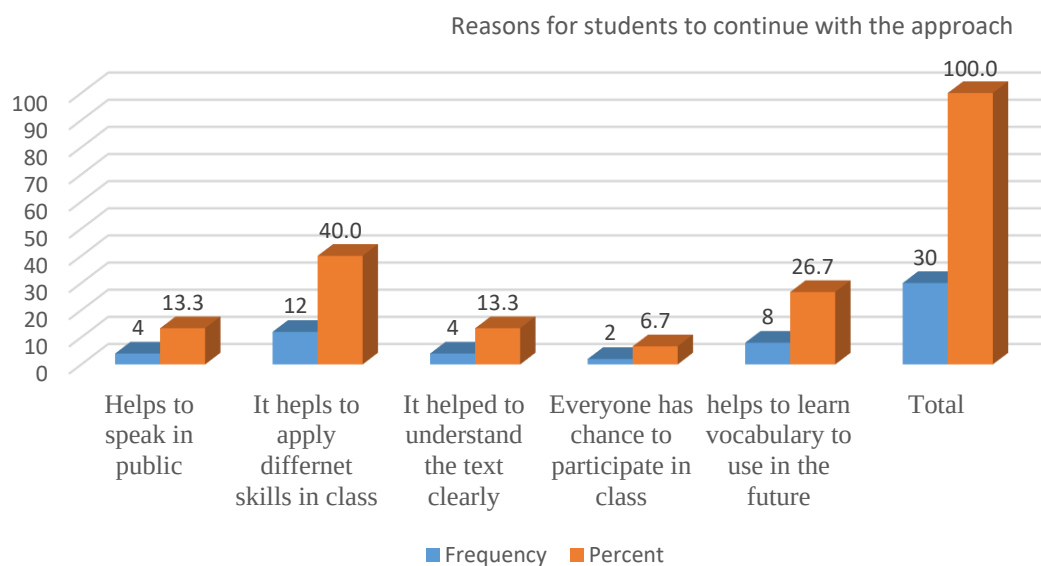


Figure 2. Whether they wanted to continue with the same approach and reasons (Source: Class inquiry, May 2019)

When we asked students whether they wanted to continue with the same approach while learning English, they unanimously stated that they would prefer to use it in their English classes. Among the reasons, applying different skills in class came first. This was common among 12 out of 30 students corresponding to 40%. The second reason was to learn new vocabulary to use in the future. This was a common view among 8 out of 30 standing for 26.7% of students. The third common reasons were helping in speaking in the public and understanding the text clearly. These were on equal footing as both were among 4 out of students representing 13.3%. Finally, 2 out of 30 (6.7%) students said that with the approach everyone had chance to participate in class.

4. Discussion

The results of the class inquiry revealed that students generally improved their scores in the vocabulary exercises. In fact, the scores they got in the vocabulary exercise they did during the inquiry and the one they did three weeks after later were almost the same. For example, those who scored 16/20 during the inquiry were 86.7 % compared to 90% after the inquiry. In addition, a general comparison of their scores in the two evaluation shows that they are not very different. Many of them got the same score while few improved. Only two students scored few as compared to the first evaluation. The reason is they mastered the words they had discussed at the beginning of the inquiry and they could use them in the sentence completion exercises or recall them at any time. This was due to the fact that the words were used in the text they read and it was therefore easy to retain their meanings. These words had become part of their learning environment. This finding is supported by some scholars. For example, (Gu and Johnson 1996 cited in Tumolo 2017) stated that vocabulary presented in contexts permits learners to learn words meanings and get information from their context. In addition, Biemiller and Boote carried out a similar study and found out that a test given after four weeks of a language session could reveal additional knowledge among students (Stephanie 2016).

Findings revealed that vocabulary discussion was helpful. Majority of students mentioned that the discussion helped them to know vocabulary in their field of study, build confidence in public and improve listening, speaking and writing. This is because they words, they discussed were related to business which is their field of study. These words included ‘*virtually, reputation, persuade, advertising agencies, buyer turnover, prospective*’, etc. In addition,

while discussing vocabulary students were standing square with the walls in the class looking at each other, a situation which provided them with much confidence. Finally, they gained vocabulary because whenever someone failed to provide the correct meaning of a word, colleagues would provide. They were also using expressions like *'I think this word means..., I don't think it means...; actually, the word means, etc.* In this regard, one student said, *'the discussion was helpful because everybody was attentive to get the meaning of the new words s/he did not know before'*. Several authors highlighted the role of vocabulary. For example, Baddeley (1990) cited in Sökmen (n.d) stated that motivation impacts on intention to learn. Similarly, discussion is a natural approach for students to learn vocabulary (Allen and Allen, 1985 cited in Sökmen (n.d).

Findings of the class inquiry showed that the reading text was easy to understand after the discussion session. The common reason they gave was that the words had been explained while others said reading was easy because of the vocabulary discussion. This was because students could get the message from the text after they have understood the meaning of many of the words in it. In our context, getting the meaning of the text resulted in the fact that students discussed the meaning of the words and answered the questions in groups, listening to each other and sharing ideas. One student mentioned, *'I would not have been able to understand the text if I had not known the vocabulary.'* This finding is supported by a number of scholars. For instance, Aviad-Levitzky (2017) stated that to come to success in reading one needs to have vocabulary knowledge in advance. In addition, Zhang (2008) found out a correlation between vocabulary and reading. Similarly, vocabulary contribute to language proficiency and language acquisition generally (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010; Leeming, 2014; Nation, 2006; Nguyen & Nation, 2011; Schmitt et al. (2015); Stahr (2008) cited in Aviad-Levitzky (2017). Finally, the lack of enough vocabulary impacts on reading comprehension and leads to the inability to make use of reading to gain knowledge (Curtis, 1987: 48 cited in Zhang, 2008). Most of participants in the inquiry stated that the text was easy to read after the vocabulary discussion. They said that they had discussed the new words and that the approach was different from what they had been used to. One student asserted, *'we were used to taking time to read and writing difficult words and asking their meanings to the teacher.'* Therefore, the approach was a new way to learn English. This finding is supported by Altalhab (2016). He stated that with vocabulary and reading students become autonomous, motivated and enjoy learning. In addition, Laufer (1992); Qian (1999); Qian (2002) cited in Norbert (n.d.) found a strong correlation between vocabulary and reading success. Having discussed some of the word contained in the text made it easier to understand it. In this regard, *readers inevitably come across words they do not know, which affects their Comprehension* (Norbert n.d, 1). In addition, the approach might have been new as they said since reading can usually start with a warm up or introductory questions rather than a discussion of the vocabulary.

Almost all students said the vocabulary they discussed helped to carry out an effective debate. Their reasons were having the vocabulary to use, being confident to speak in public and sharing ideas with others and getting opinions from fellows. If students could speak in public it was because they had known the vocabulary to use. In this regard, one student said, *'I am able to hold a discussion and express my opinion than before.'* Additionally, class observations during the vocabulary discussion and debate sessions showed that students were listening to each other attentively. They were also applying the vocabulary, correcting and completing their fellows. During the debate particularly, students discussed their respective topics and came up with conclusions. This finding is similar to that of Khan et al. (2018). He considered students' inability to speak as a result of the lack of vocabulary. Similarly, August, Carlo, Dressler, and Snow (2005) cited in Khan et al. (2018) held the same view. They stated that students with limited vocabulary have poor performance and are unable to learn. The finding was corroborated by De Jong et al., 2012; Koizumi & In'nami, 2013 cited in Uchihara (2018). They

hold the view that *learners with larger receptive vocabulary sizes are more likely to be lexically proficient in speaking*. In addition, learners with a big number of vocabulary speak more proficiently (De Jong et al., 2012; Koizumi & In'nami, 2013 cited in Uchihara (2018).

Findings from the inquiry indicated that the vocabulary discussion helped students in the sentence completion exercises. Many of them succeeded both the exercises, during and after the inquiry. In addition, the majority of students found discussing the vocabulary helpful in sentence completion exercise. This was mainly because having understood the meanings of the words, they could easily know where the words would fit. These finding gains support from Coxhead (2012) who found vocabulary specifically important in writing and assessment.

Findings showed that almost all the students involved in the inquiry found it easy to write their paragraphs, saying that the vocabulary they discussed enabled them to write sentences. They also attested that they managed to learn words related to customer attraction. There are several reasons which may explain this. First, they had understood the words very well and the topic to write on (the topic was 'ways companies can use to attract customers'). They could also apply the words they had debated on. So, as they were asked to write paragraphs using some of those words, writing became easier for them. Second, the words they discussed as well as the text they read were related to their domain. Third, writing a paragraph was not a new notion. It had been dealt with in the previous trimester. What was new was writing a paragraph applying some of the new terms. A student mentioned, '*I have used some words in my paragraph because I have known their meanings*'. Finally, in their paragraphs, majority of students could use the words to write meaningful sentences. In the same way, Johnson et al. (2016) stated that the importance of vocabulary in writing is evident. Indeed, writers can have trouble in case they have limited vocabulary (Nation, 2001 cited in Johnson et al. 2016). Additionally, being able to use vocabulary in speaking and writing in a suitable way was viewed as an indication that students take part in an academic community (Coxhead, 2012).

The inquiry results revealed that students had a strong wish to continue with the same approach. As they mentioned, they were able to practise different skills in classroom; learn vocabulary which they would need to use and speak in front of the public. One reason is they had enough time to discuss the vocabulary and debate on topics, listening and replying to each other's views. Another reason is they managed to write paragraphs applying the vocabulary. Many students expressed their views about the new approach. For example, one student said, '*this strategy is more helpful and interesting one. It improves participation in the classroom and makes us have more confidence. So, I wish we would have the same strategy while learning English.*' Another stated, '*I would like to have the same strategy while learning English because now I am able to try to speak in front of people. I am not scared like before.*' Others viewed the approach as something to shape their career in the future. One said, '*The approach helps us learn new vocabularies that can be useful in our day to day lives.*' Another one mentioned, '*I would like to have the same strategy while learning English because it will help me to know and use the vocabulary, I can use during the job interview and in advertising my products in my business in the future.*' In few words, the inquiry allowed them to develop their speaking, listening and reading writing skills. This finding is corroborated by the view of Nation (1990). He stated, '*a rich vocabulary makes the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing easier to perform.*' (Nation (1990) cited in Khan et al. 2018: 9).

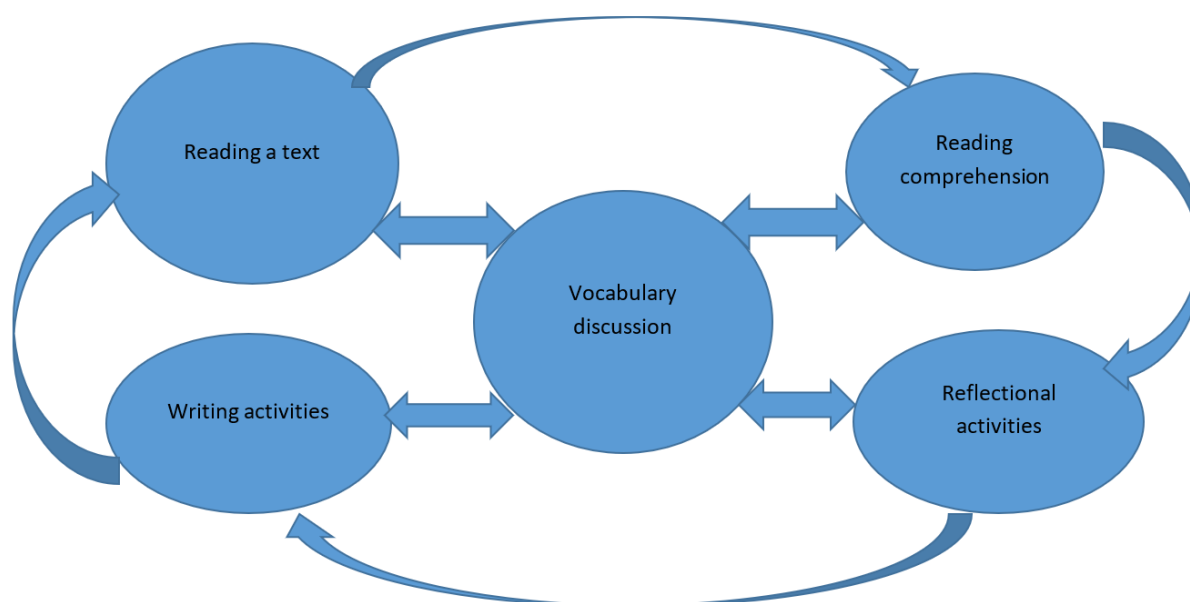


Figure 3. Model of vocabulary as a basis to language skills enhancement

The model above was devised to highlight the importance of vocabulary in teaching English language skills. According to this model, vocabulary discussion was at the centre of our approach. In the first-place students practised speaking and listening while talking to each other. Secondly, this prepared and took them to reading the text. While reading the text, they got the message and got to know other possible vocabulary. Thirdly, students went on with the reading comprehension in which they discussed the questions concerning the text, practising speaking. Then, there was a reflection on the text. After dealing with the text and related questions, speaking activities can be provided to students. In our context students formed groups and started debating on topics related to the text. Finally, they wrote paragraphs on a topic related to the text, applying some of the words they had discussed. This empowered them with confidence to speak in public and write freely while learning the language at the same time. In short, vocabulary can be a starting point for teaching different language skills. One student mentioned, *‘It is good because it helps to use English very much while reading, writing and speaking.’* Another one said, *‘Yes. I would like to use the same approach because it is the easiest and most knowledgeable way of studying English. It helps people learn more quickly about the language.’*

5. Conclusion

The present paper was about a class inquiry carried out at University of Rwanda where English is taught as a second language and has become a medium of instruction. The purpose was to assess whether vocabulary can contribute in providing students with language skills and practice them. In it, students expressed their views on the questions on the questionnaire. They provided information on whether discussion on vocabulary was helpful, whether there was still unfamiliar after the discussion, and whether the text easier to understand after the vocabulary discussion. They also provided their opinions on whether vocabulary discussion helped them in reading comprehension, debate questions, sentence completion and paragraph writing and whether they would like to continue with the same strategy while learning English.

The results from the evaluations, the questionnaire and their papers indicated that vocabulary can be a starting point for learning various language skills in the classroom. Speaking, reading and writing can emanate from vocabulary discussion especially in a multilevel class where students have to learn from each other. Various scholars held the same view. In this regard, Schmitt & Carter (2000) cite in Khan et al. (2018: 9) stated, *‘Vocabulary learning is an*

imperative part of learning foreign language'. Similarly, *'by mastering vocabulary learning one can concentrate fully on other advanced levels and features of developing foreign language learning more efficiently'* Nation (1990) cited in Khan et al. (2018: 9). Similarly, while learning English as a Second or foreign Language vocabulary items plays a central role in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nation, 2011) and *"lexis is the core or heart of the language"* (Lewis's 1993, 89). Therefore, we recommend that vocabulary be focused on in order to increase the mastery of language skills among students in the classroom.

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