

Directions. Read the following passage, briefly summarize it, and write an original essay in response to what you read. In the essay you can, for example, criticize the ideas in part or in general, further develop aspects of what the author says, apply the ideas to English teaching in Taiwan or to your own experience as English learner and/or teacher, or possibly combine these approaches. 100 points.

Approaches to Vocabulary Learning

It is useful to make a distinction between direct and indirect vocabulary learning. In direct vocabulary learning the learners do exercises and activities that focus their attention on vocabulary. Such exercises include word-building exercises, guessing words from context when this is done as a class exercise, learning words in lists, and vocabulary games. In indirect vocabulary learning the learners' attention is focused on some other feature, usually the message that is conveyed by a speaker or writer. If the amount of unknown vocabulary is low in such messages, considerable vocabulary learning can occur even though the learners' attention is not directed toward vocabulary learning. Krashen (1981a) calls this the input theory of language learning. He believes that certain conditions must apply for such learning to occur. First, the learners must be interested in understanding the message. From the point of view of vocabulary learning, this interest creates a need to understand the unknown words in the message. Second, the message should contain some items that are just outside the learners' present level of achievement. These items, however, should be understandable from the context in which they occur. This includes both language and nonlanguage contexts.... Third, the learners should not feel worried or threatened by their contact with the foreign language.

One of the basic ideas in this book is that there is a place for both direct and indirect vocabulary learning. Opportunities for indirect vocabulary learning should occupy much more time in a language learning course than direct vocabulary learning activities. This is in fact just another way of saying that contact with language in use should be given more time than decontextualized activities. The range of contextualized activities of course covers the range of the uses of language. As long as suitable conditions for language learning apply, such as those described by Krashen (1981a), then indirect vocabulary learning can take place.

Vocabulary teaching can fit into a language learning course in any of four ways. Most courses make use of all four, but the amount of time spent on each of these ways depends on the teacher's judgment in relation to a large number of factors, such as the time available, the age of the learners, the amount of contact with English outside school hours, and the teacher's theory of how language is best learned. The four ways described below are listed from the most indirect to the most direct.

1. Material is prepared with vocabulary learning as a consideration. The most common examples of this are the preparation of simplified material and the careful vocabulary grading of the first lessons of learning English. To an observer of such an English course it might appear as if no attention is being

國 立 清 華 大 學 命 題 紙

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given to vocabulary, but in fact the selection and grading of vocabulary has been given a lot of attention before the course begins.

2. Words are dealt with as they happen to occur. This means that if an unknown word appears in a reading passage, the teacher gives some attention to it at the moment it causes a problem. A lot of vocabulary teaching is done in this way. Although the selection of vocabulary seems unplanned, the way it is treated need not be. Teachers may follow principles when dealing with such words. For example, they draw attention to the underlying concept of the word rather than just giving a contextual definition. They point out regular features of the spelling and grammar so that the learning of this word will help the learning of other words. They focus attention on the learning burden of the word, and they carefully avoid “unteaching”. They consider the frequency and usefulness of a word when deciding how much time to spend on it.

3. Vocabulary is taught in connection with other language activities. For example, the vocabulary of a reading passage is dealt with before the learners read the passage. Sarawit (1980) describes the teaching of vocabulary a few days before a type of debate. Through direct teaching and reading the learners become familiar with the topic vocabulary before they need to use it in the formal speaking activity. Johnson (1980) suggests similar preteaching as a preparation for listening exercises which give further practice in the vocabulary. Another possibility is to have vocabulary exercises following reading or listening texts. “Find the words in the passage which mean...” is the most common example of this. In all the activities described in this part, the teaching of vocabulary is directly related to some other language activity.

4. Time is spent either in class or out of school on the study of vocabulary without an immediate connection with some other language activity. For example, time is spent on learning spelling rules or on activities like dictionary use, guessing words, the use of word parts, or list learning. Thus time can be spent on activities involving the whole class as in learning mnemonic techniques, using pair or group work as in paraphrase activities or combining arrangement exercises, or individually as in the use of vocabulary puzzles or code exercises. Such vocabulary work can have the aim of establishing previous learning or increasing vocabulary so that future language use can go more smoothly.

Taken from

Nation, I.S.P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.