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Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary Effectively to ESL Students: Identifying and Resolving Challenges : An Emperical Study

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Abstract:

There are no language studies that do not include lexical understanding as an essential component. The purpose of this research is to investigate effective methods of teaching vocabulary in English for Academic Purposes (ESL) classrooms. Drawing on the results obtained from the study of three English for Academic Purposes ESL classrooms at RISE Krishna Sai Group of Institutions, Ongole, Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh, and the author's personal experience as a teacher and learner, the author discusses various effective vocabulary teaching strategies in the English for Academic Purposes classroom. These strategies have the potential to greatly assist English language learners in their journey towards the realisation of their language abilities and to further the progression of the language. The field of engineering is constantly evolving, with new technologies, materials, and techniques emerging regularly. Lexical study equips engineering students with the skills to continuously expand their vocabulary and adapt to the changing landscape, enabling them to stay informed and up-to-date throughout their careers. Lexical study is crucial for engineering students to enhance their vocabulary, improve their comprehension and communication skills, and better navigate the technical and complex nature of the engineering discipline. Encouraging and supporting lexical study should be an integral part of engineering education to ensure the success and adaptability of future engineers. In the academic setting, a strong vocabulary can contribute to higher grades and better performance in exams and assignments. In the professional realm, it can lead to more effective collaboration, more persuasive presentations, and better career advancement opportunities. The present study explores on how students learn vocabulary in the ESL classroom and what are the factors contribute to their interest in learning.

Key words: Lexis, ESL, Academic Purposes etc

Introduction

In the past, teachers and students have persistently struggled with vocabulary instruction in the ESL classroom. Therefore, it is essential to place greater importance on the growth of vocabulary for individuals learning the English language. Native speakers consistently acquire new vocabulary, while English language learners must simultaneously establish a solid linguistic foundation and bridge the language barrier.

Another key factor is the duration required for English language learners (ELLs) to acquire English proficiency and get prepared for school. What are the reasons why English Language Learners (ELLs) have difficulty with academic material? English language learners are simultaneously acquiring proficiency in the language and assimilating new intellectual concepts. They are physically transitioning between two distinct realms. Additionally, English Language Learners (ELLs) must exert greater effort and require additional support compared to native English-speaking students who possess a suitable command of the English language that aligns with their age and proficiency level. Furthermore, academic vocabulary frequently consists of highly specialised terminology that is commonly employed in the context of English language instruction.

Given the significant and concerning disparity between proficiency in everyday English and academic English, it is crucial for instructors in the English for Academic Purposes ESL classroom to possess expertise in the most efficient and up-to-date teaching methods for vocabulary instruction, as well as consistently offer academic support to English language learners. The English for Academic Purpose classroom requires students to have a high level of language proficiency in order to understand academic content and actively participate in activities and assignments. Additionally, it is crucial for the teacher to use effective and dynamic teaching strategies to help students excel in their tasks. The linguistic requirements for academic learning are substantial. The teacher's utilisation of diverse, creative, and effective teaching strategies in the English for Academic Purposes classroom directly correlates with the enhancement of students' academic language proficiency. Furthermore, this approach increases their chances of succeeding in comprehending the content and effectively communicating across different registers. This research examines the different teaching tactics currently used by teachers in the English for Academic Purposes classroom and their impact on successful vocabulary acquisition. The text discusses the process of acquiring vocabulary and examines effective methods of teaching vocabulary employed at the RISE Krishna Sai Group of Institutions in Ongole. It discusses the new insight. Explored are the difficulties encountered in the English for Academic Purposes classroom, along with potential resolutions for these issues. It offers recommendations on how ESOL teachers can enhance the academic language development of ELLs more efficient.

What is Vocabulary?

According to Gardener (2009, as cited in Adger, 2002) vocabulary is not only confined to the meaning of words but also includes how vocabulary in a language is structured: how people use and store words and how they learn words and the relationship between words, phrases, categories of words and phrases (Graves, 2000, as cited in Taylor, 1990)

Cummins (1999, as cited in Herrel, 2004) states that there are different types of vocabulary:

Reading vocabulary

Listening vocabulary

Writing vocabulary

Speaking vocabulary

Nations and Waring (2000, as cited in Adger, 2002) on the other hand, classify vocabulary into three categories: high frequency words, general academic words and technical or specialized words. When students have a great vocabulary, the latter can improve all areas of communication, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing. Reading in the English for Academic Purposes ESL class room considers vocabulary knowledge an important source of variation in reading comprehension, because it affects higher level language processes such as grammatical processing, construction of schemata and text models (Adams and Collins, 1977 as cited in Zimmerman, 2007).

The fact being vocabulary acquisition, semantic development and growth of word knowledge are currently being studied in several interesting ways, hence the research that is presented here is to complement and augment these studies by introducing effective vocabulary teaching strategies in the English for academic purposes ESL classroom that will expedite the vocabulary development in ELLs. Vocabulary knowledge can be possible when teachers employ effective vocabulary teaching and learning strategies which are the objectives of this research.

What is Academic Vocabulary?

Academic vocabulary is the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills which includes learning new information, describing abstract ideas and developing student's conceptual understanding. (Chamot and O'Malley, 2007 as cited in Herrel, 2004) The main barrier to student comprehension of texts and lectures is low academic vocabulary knowledge, due to the sub-technicality of the academic language. Academic vocabulary is based on more Latin and Greek roots. Moreover academic lectures and texts use longer and more complex sentences. Academic vocabulary contributes to the development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in ELLs which enables them to apply the language, using abstractions in a sophisticated manner. Learning Vocabulary: What does it mean to know a word?

Dale (1989, as cited in Taylor, 1990) provides a description of the extent of word knowledge in terms of 5 stages:

The student has no knowledge about the word.

The student has a general sense of the word.

The student has a narrow, context-bound knowledge about the word.

The student has a basic knowledge of the word and is able to use it in many appropriate situations.

The student has a rich, de-contextualized knowledge of the word and can use it in various appropriate situations.

Research questions

How students have received the approaches taught by the teacher?

What is the feedback of the students after applying the approaches of improving lexis?

Research Methodology

The proposed research gathered data from learners using a quantitative manner. A standardized questionnaire was distributed to two sections of Computer Science Engineering first-year students. Along with the structured questionnaire, informal interviews with students and classroom observations were conducted to gain a holistic perspective on the topic.

Knowing a word implies knowing many things about the word: Its literal meaning, its various connotations, its spelling, derivations, collocations, frequency, pronunciation, the sort of syntactic

constructions into which it enters, the morphological options it offers and a rich variety of semantic associates. Factors involved in knowing a word: recall difficulty and inter-language factors such as storage of these lexical items in appropriate context and the ability to recall vocabulary for active usage in speaking and writing.

For every vocabulary dimension there is a knowledge dimension and a skill dimension. Evidence suggests that the knowledge aspect requires conscious and explicit learning mechanisms whereas the skill aspect involves mostly implicit learning and memory. Vocabulary learning strategies include strategies for using as well as for knowing a word. Bybee (1985, as cited in Taylor, 1990) states that words are stored in a network of items linked by shared phonological, morpho-syntactic and semantic properties and that the relative strength of any given item and its relationship to other items in the network are directly determined by the speaker's experience both using and perceiving the word. Bonvillian also emphasizes that learners need a deeper and more complete knowledge of syntactic information in particular the sub-categorization of words—that is, the syntactic frames that words fit into. Besides, one must have knowledge of the used syntactic frame. In order to gain syntactic information, subjects are asked to write a sentence using the specific vocabulary item, e.g. the words fetch and carry. Production information may provide us with at best partial information about linguistic knowledge, but doesn't inform learner's knowledge of what is not possible.

Concentration on grammatical information in vocabulary is important as it helps in inferencing. The results of the study provide that syntactic and lexical knowledge are related. So, the effort of this research is to understand the specific relationship in life with the vocabulary acquisition process over a specific period. The observation is that low level learners lacked the ability to differentiate sentence such as, *"The teacher demonstrated the students the new machine and The teacher showed the students the new machine"*.

However, high proficiency learners differentiated the two sentences and the learning happened in the following manner:

Learners learn a particular syntactic pattern to account for all cases of what appears to them to be a particular structural type.

When a second pattern becomes available, they either alternate these patterns or replace the first with the second until the correct pattern is established. In fact learners get syntactic information through the lexicon. The point is that lexical acquisition needs to be considered broadly and needs to include the semantics of lexical items as well as syntactic information. In addition one needs to learn to build appropriate networks being dynamic processes that continue as vocabulary learning continues and one's lexicon matures.

The Partial – Precise Knowledge Dimension

Quantitative studies such as vocabulary size or breadth and different types of achievement tests define vocabulary knowledge as precise understanding. For measuring vocabulary size in the L2 word recognition tasks and check lists were used. Lexicon decision tasks do not differentiate between what the learner precisely or vaguely knows. The method where learners be requested to pronounce words, explained the meaning and provided various word association. This showed that there are definite levels of knowledge along the partial to precise knowledge dimension.

The Depth of Knowledge Dimension

The depth of the learner's vocabulary knowledge is the learner's ability to apply syntactic and

morphological meaning to words they know. Suggestions are to use a vocabulary knowledge scale to measure levels of lexical knowledge like meaning, use and accuracy. In fact, a learner's lexical competence can only be measured by a combination of test formats that measure the various word knowledge dimensions.

The Receptive Productive Dimension

There is a difference between word mastering and its use. As most of the vocabulary test concentrate on receptive and productive vocabulary there is a need for the definitions of concepts 'reception' and 'production'. Melka (1997) presents that it is difficult to find tasks that test production and reception but a variety of tests usage could measure inter language development.

Focus on mapping meaning onto form and network building

According to Hatch and Brown (1995) the process of mapping meaning onto form should not be considered more important than the learner's ongoing struggle to construct and reorganize his/her inter-language because it is a complex process that involves network building. It is difficult for learners to attain word meaning through the process of labeling, packaging and network building. Labeling is a brief description for identifying the description attached to an object. Packaging is the process of learning in which objects are grouped under one main topic. Network building is the process of learning the relationship between words. It is linking words together according to meaning. It is difficult to determine, test and evaluate the progress of the learner's inter-language semantic development.

Development from partial to precise comprehension

Research states that English language learners should be allowed to have a vague understanding of word meaning before developing accuracy. Learner's knowledge of a specific vocabulary item moves from partial to precise knowledge as they expand their communication world (Brown, 1994). Miller and Fellbaum (1991) point out that knowledge of how verbs, adjectives and nouns function in relation to another is important in acquiring word meaning.

Development from Receptive to Productive Control

Vocabulary items in the learners' receptive vocabulary might not become readily available for productive purposes, since vocabulary reception does not guarantee production. It is difficult to draw a line between reception and production, since it is not clear at what point receptive word knowledge becomes productive. Maera (1997) suggests that vocabulary learning is to be viewed as the learning of items and changing of systems when teachers employ the following vocabulary learning strategy.

Teaching lexical chunks

Learning of lexical chunks serves two objectives: it enables the student to have chunks of language available for immediate use and it also provides the student with information that has to be analyzed at a later stage. The main advantage of this is that they build on the fluency of the English language learner. They can also be associated with certain communication rituals such as —To whom am I speaking? Lexical chunks are related to typical functional language use. They provide clear, relevant and concise language use and are stored as individual whole units.

Teaching collocations

Vocabulary knowledge doesn't only involve just knowing the meaning of a word in isolation, but includes knowing the word that usually co-occurs with it. These words that co-occur with high frequency are called collocations, e.g. heavy rain, strong coffee but not powerful coffee, a brief discussion but a short man. Collocations help students to define the semantic area of a word such as: Synonyms- words

with identical meaning; however, that absolute substitutability is not possible, since factors such as register and style determine the usage of synonymous words.

Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition (IVA) Teaching word family

Recycling content

Keeping a vocabulary journal Eliciting

Contextualization Labeling Personalization

Learning vocabulary by identifying productive pre-fixes and post-fixes Association

Semantic mapping

Character trait vocabulary chart Learning vocabulary via analogy

Using Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) to teach vocabulary

Learning vocabulary through story innovation

Categorizing words Vocabulary finder

Use of bilingual dictionaries

It is important for teachers in the English for Academic Purposes ESL classroom to focus on the Difficulty and quality of the semantization process in order to enhance the structure of the learners' lexicon. Effective vocabulary teaching strategies enhance word retention, broaden the depth and breadth of word knowledge and therefore expedite the vocabulary development of the learner.

Survey Methods

The survey at Rise Krishna Sai Groups for B.Tech students how they learnt vocabulary through approaches taught in the classroom

The aim was to investigate and observe effective and current methods and strategies in the English for Academic Purpose, ESL classroom. The following methods and strategies were successfully employed by on our campus

The researcher has used survey method focusing on **form, meaning** and **use** of words based on the questionnaire he has prepared to **Learn vocabulary in I B.Tech, CSE two sections ESL classroom.**

Contextual vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, inflections, and derivations of the word are taken as elements for the survey.

Presentation

Teacher has provided a description, explanation or example of a new term. Students are asked to restate the description, contextual vocabulary used in the description. Explanation or example of the new term. Students then construct a picture, symbol or graphic design of the term. The students are engaged in activities that will help in mastering the new concepts. Students are asked to discuss the new terms often in class.

Practice and Consolidation

I used games when teaching vocabulary and employ semantic field and semantic mapping strategies. Used the key word method to reinforce important concepts and provided sufficient practice.

Lexical and Semantic Development

Employed extensive reading activities in and out of the classroom and facilitated communicative activities such as role-play and debates to enhance fluency and confidence in speech.

Vocabulary teaching strategies used in I B.Tech, ECE ESL classroom:

Used the criteria mentioned below to select vocabulary items:

Range Coverage Frequency Learnability Language needs

Academic vocabulary journal

A vocabulary journal is recommended in which students write word pairs and semantic maps that helps students to understand the relationship between words. The main idea here is *input flooding*. The more the learners are exposed to a specific word, the higher the retention and usage of the word.

Academic vocabulary word lists

A master academic word list is used to teach specific lexical items. I perceive word lists to be ineffective in teaching academic vocabulary, due to the following reasons:

Wordlists do not contain all the words that students need to know because students must still learn many words from oral language and from extensive reading in order to be academically successful. Moreover, the definitions on many wordlists are not learner-friendly. Through my personal teaching experience, I discovered that teaching vocabulary in context is more meaningful than just teaching with wordlists because students have a better understanding of a word when they see and hear how the word is used in daily life or how its meaning is related to their own reality.

Scaffolding

Used the following methods for scaffolding academic vocabulary learning:

Graphic organizers are used to explain concepts and related words. New vocabulary is posted on a word wall and reviewed daily. Drawings and pictures are labeled to help students make the connection between oral and written English.

Focus on cognates

The identification and use of cognates can be a building block in vocabulary learning. Students look at the words and discuss how they are alike and different by focusing on word roots, endings and affixes. It is crucial for students to be aware of false cognates - words that have similar spelling and pronunciation but don't share the same meaning. To overcome this I pre-selected words from an upcoming text or conversation and explained meaning with student-friendly definitions.

Teaching word maps

Teaching productive prefixes and suffixes

Semantic feature analysis

Word sorts activities

Oral presentations and academic discussions

Model correct usage of language

These are the additional approaches taken for imprinting the vocabulary learned.

Vocabulary teaching strategies implemented in I B.Tech, Mechanical ESL Classroom: Word awareness

The target vocabulary is placed on posters pasted to the wall and constantly referred to the vocabulary for reinforcement. Students were instructed to create a weekly vocabulary poster as the lesson progresses.

Use of audio visual equipment and computers Use of corpus linguistics

The main aim and focus of Corpus Linguistics is to discover patterns of authentic language use through analysis of actual usage. A corpus and concordance can be used in the English classroom to:

Compare language use

Compile exercises and student activities.

Analyze usage

The following problems might occur when using corpus and concordances:

Usefulness

Corpus bias

Comprehensibility

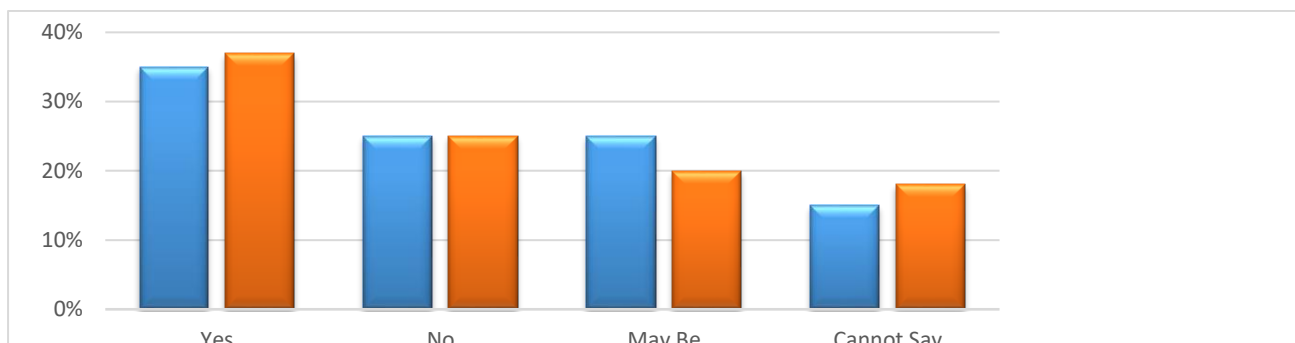
Learning differences

It is clear that there are many vocabulary teaching strategies.

A questionnaire is prepared to find out based upon the strategies the researcher has taught in the classroom. The researcher has taken 200 students for this study.

Was the technical vocabulary chart helped you to present your topic effectively in recent seminars?

Category	CSE –SEC-1		CSE SEC-2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	35	35%	37	37%
No	25	25%	25	25%
May be	25	25%	20	20%
Can't Say	15	15%	18	18%
Total	100	100%	100	100%



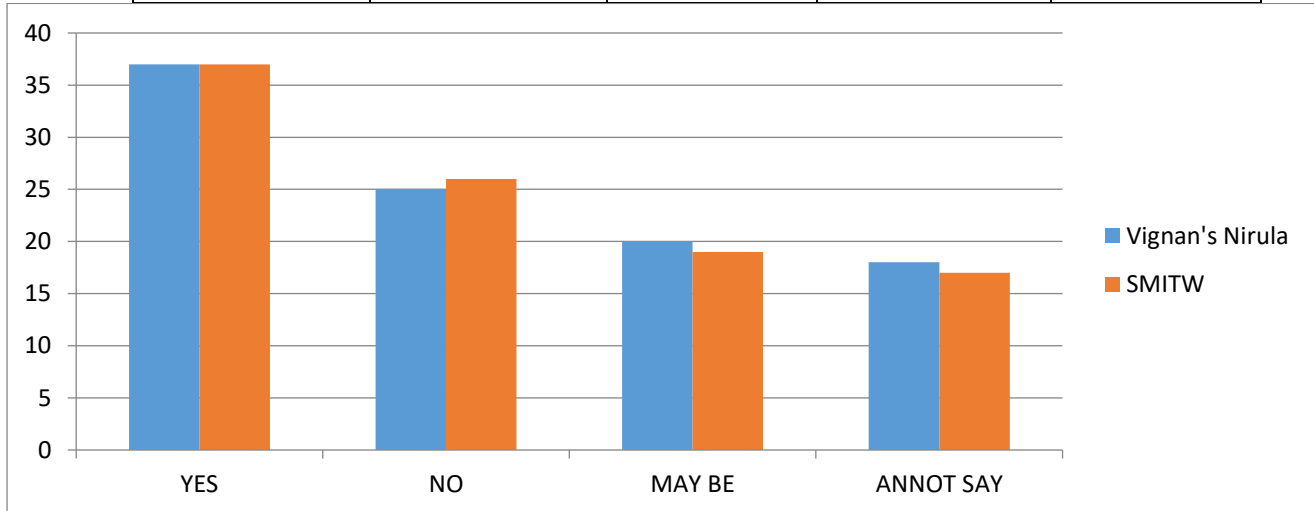
Students from both the sections have positively responded for utilizing the chart of vocabulary to enhance their speaking skills during the seminars conducted in the college. 25% of the students replied that the chart is not helpful for them whereas 25% and 25% of the students from both the sections have assumed that the chart may be helpful for them. 15% and 18% of the students are unable to answer for this question. The researcher has understood that students who have replied 'No' might not have practiced that chart and shown interest.

2. Are you able to write effectively after learning 'Contextual Vocabulary' taught by your teacher in the classroom?

A) Yes b) No c) May be d) Can't say.

Category	CSE- SEC-1		CSE- SEC-2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	37	37%	37	37%

No	25	25%	26	26%
May be	20	20%	19	19%
Can't Say	18	18%	18	18%

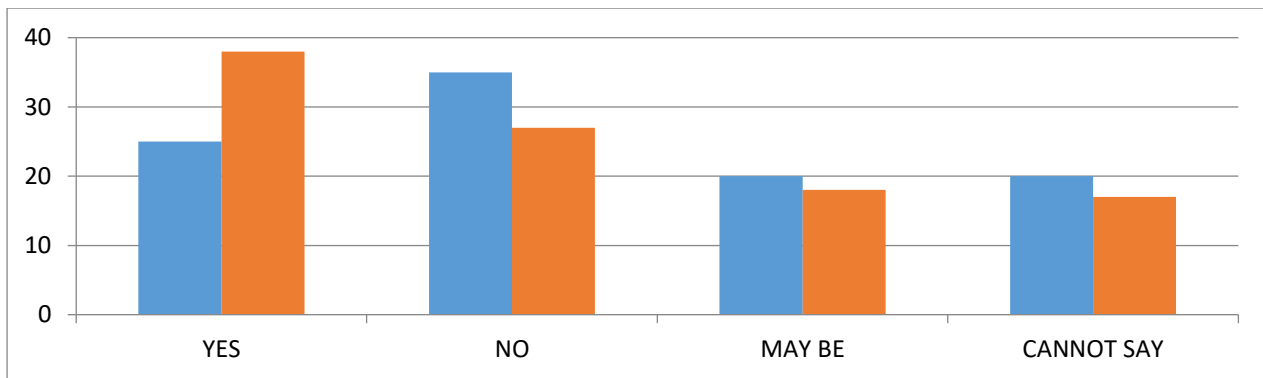


An awareness about contextual vocabulary is brought by the teacher in the classroom during the academic syllabus discussions and also through activities conducted in the classroom. In view of this, students are posed a question related to contextual vocabulary. Majority of the students from both the sections have positively asserted that they are able to write effectively after learning techniques of enriching contextual vocabulary whereas 25% and 26% of students from both the sections have responded that they are not yet into effective writing. 20% and 19% of the students are in dilemma and marked for the option 'May be'. 18% of the students from both the sections have opted the option 'can't say'. The teacher cum researcher has confirmed that students who selected the option of 'No' might not have involved in group activities conducted in the class room as well they did not practice individual tasks. Students who have marked 'might be' still in need to understand their learning and their part in the classroom.

3. Have you found the difference in your pronunciation?

- a) Yes b) No c) May be d) Can't say

Category	CSE SEC-1		CSE SEC-2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	25	25%	38	38%
No	35	35%	27	27%
May be	20	20%	18	18%
Can't Say	20	20%	17	17%
Total	100	100%	100	100%

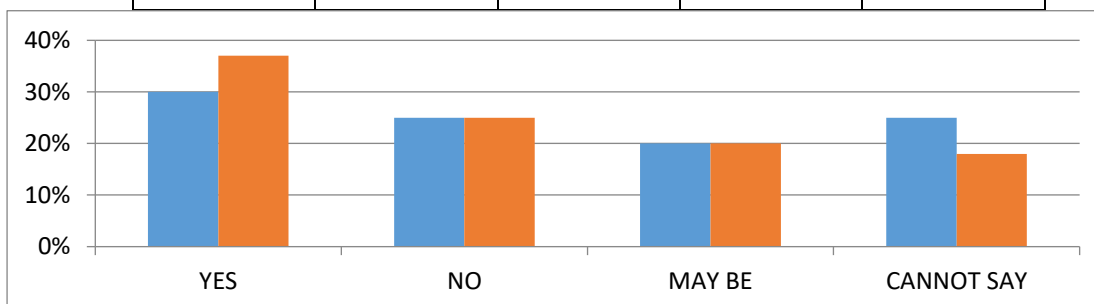


It is an undeniable fact that pronunciation plays a significant role in learning or acquiring any language. In the same way, the researcher emphasized pronunciation. The teacher has availed them videos of different contexts to pronounce them without having much influence of the mother tongue. 25% and 38% of the students are successful whereas 35% and 27% of the students from both the sections responded to option 'No' and 20% and 18% of the students are not certain of their pronunciation improvement. 20% and 17% are unable to find out the difference. The researcher has learnt that students who ever have responded positively practiced the tasks given by the teacher. Students whoever opted options of "may be" and "can't say" are frequently absent for language classes and also their attention levels are poor.

4. Are you able to write spelt errors free?

a) Yes b) No c) May be d) Can't say

Category	CSE SEC-1		CSE SEC-2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	30	30%	37	37%
No	25	25%	25	25%
May be	20	20%	20	20%
Can't Say	25	25%	18	18%
Total	100	100%	100	100%



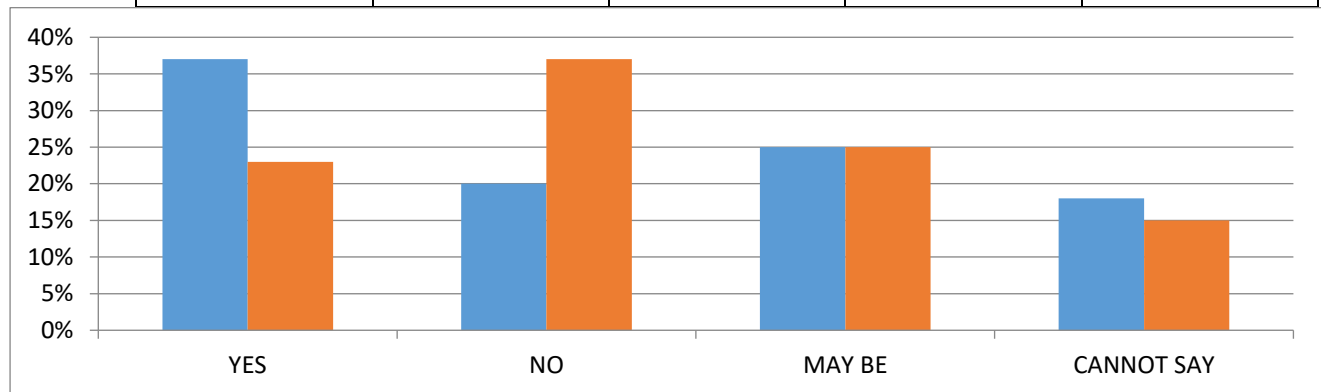
It is observed by the teacher that majority of the students from these two sections generally make spelt errors. The teacher has given them approaches to reduce spelling errors in their writings. 30% and 37% of the students are happy with the approaches and found their writing is spelt error free. 25% of each in

both the sections selected the option of 'No' as they have not practiced the approaches many times and also as per the instructions of the teacher. Students whoever have opted the options of 'May be' and 'can't say' have not shown interest in writing.

5. Do you think this special training help you to improve your lexical ability?

A) Yes b) No c) May be d) Can't say

Category	CSE SEC-1		CSE SEC-2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	30	30%	23	23%
No	20	20%	37	37%
May be	25	25%	25	25%
Can't Say	18	18%	15	15%
Total	100	100%	100	100%

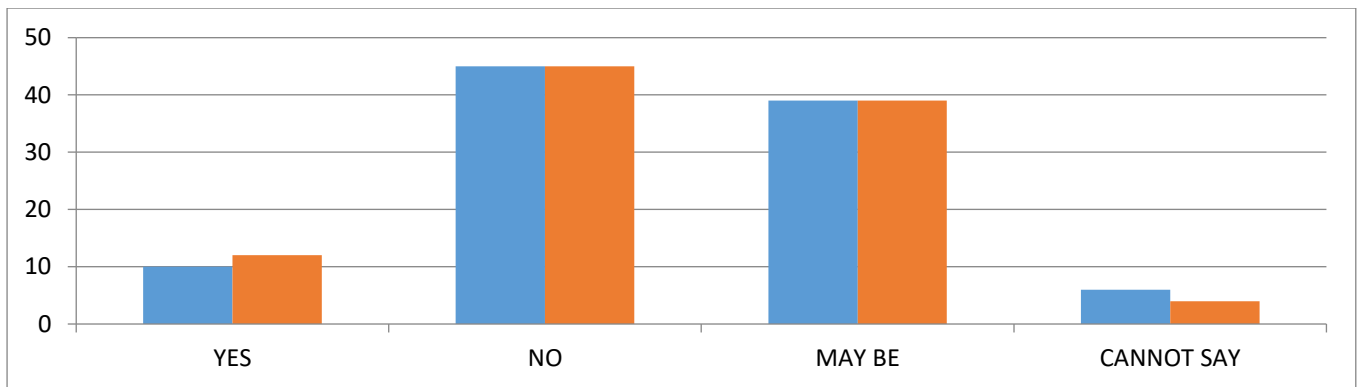


The students are elicited to give their opinion about the special training for the betterment of their lexis. The teacher has received mixed responses for this question. 30% and 25% of the students in both the section are satisfied with the training. On the contrary, 25% and 18% of the students from both the sections are not satisfied with the training. 18% and 15% of the students are unable to answer for the question.

6. Do you feel that it is necessary to learn Lexis in first year in your engineering course?

A) Yes b) No c) May be d) Cannot say

Category	CSE- SEC-1		CSE SEC-2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	45	45%	45	45%
No	12	12%	12	12%
May be	39	39%	39	39%
Can't Say	06	06%	04	04%
Total	100	100%	100	100%

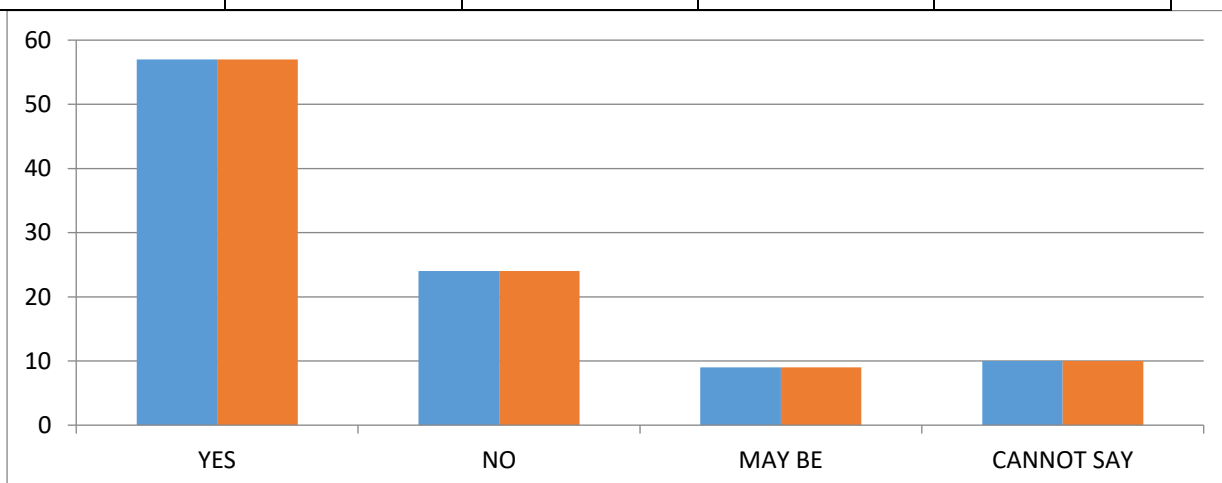


Students are asked to elicit their opinion about learning lexis in the first year of engineering itself. Majority of the students from both the sections have given their consent positively whereas 12% from both sections have said 'No'. 39% of the students from each of the sections selected the option of 'May be' as they are not accurate to express their opinion. 6% and 4% of the students are unable to elicit their opinion.

7. How far the practical methods of learning vocabulary support you to improve your reading skills?

A) Yes b) No c) May be d) Can't say

Category	CSE SEC-1		CSE SEC-2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	57	57%	57	57%
No	24	24%	24	24%
May be	09	09%	09	09%
Can't Say	10	10%	10	10%
Total	100	100%	100	100%



The part of vocabulary is essential in any language. The role of vocabulary is inevitable in LSRW skills. In this regard, students are posed a question how far the practical methods of vocabulary supported them to enhance their reading skills. 57% of the students have responded positively whereas 24% of the

students said 'No'. 9% and 10% of the students from both the section have opted 'Might be' and 'Can't say' options. The researcher has understood that students who have opted the options preceded by 'yes' are failed to interconnect vocabulary in reading.

Conclusion

During this research the researcher cum teacher discovered new insights, challenges and possible solutions to the problems experienced by the ESL teacher in the English for academic purposes classroom. Firstly, most ELLs have a deficit in second language vocabulary and teachers have a limited time for direct instruction. Secondly, some ESL teachers have a difficulty in choosing whether to concentrate on developing vocabulary or promoting extensive reading. Thirdly, it is discovered that there was a lack of formative assessment in one of the ESL classes that the researcher attended during his research. It is important that lexicon is a part of the evaluation component of the English for academic purposes classroom. Finally, It is learnt to realize the importance for English language learners to have an extensive knowledge of the breadth and depth of words through personal experience the researcher discovered that many of my students became confident because they believed that they were making progress in their vocabulary learning journey. As much as the teacher aware of the fact that academic English vocabulary is generally difficult to understand for the average ELL it takes time to get assimilated with the vocabulary. These teaching strategies have their advantages and disadvantages and it is the responsibility of an English teacher to implement vocabulary teaching strategies that will expedite the learning process of my learners. The teacher must have an awareness that the level of proficiency of the class determines how the teacher will implement specific teaching strategies. The teacher has learned that in order for ELLs to communicate more effectively within their immediate communities they must have a certain level of vocabulary. The teachers have to reconsider the way they had taught English in the past, evaluate their past teaching strategies and implement more effective new strategies that they observed in various English for Academic Purposes classrooms.

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