VOCABULARY TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN AN OMANI
GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER
LANGUAGES

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by
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VOCABULARY TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN AN OMANI
GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary teaching has been the subject of much discussion among the

community of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in government schools in

Oman. It is considered to be one of the causes of the general weakness of students'

levels of proficiency in English. This encouraged me to find out the answers to two

basic questions: What are the vocabulary teaching techniques which a selected sample

of ESL teachers in AbdulRahman bin Auff for Basic Education School, an Omani

government school, use in their classrooms? Do the techniques that they use in their

classrooms reflect the various methods of teaching vocabulary discussed in the recent

literature on vocabulary instruction?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative case study in

which I collected data through interviews, observations, and follow-up interviews.

The participants in the qualitative case study were six EFL teachers who have

different experiences and teach different grade levels. I based the analysis of the

collected data on the constant comparison method of analysis in order to establish

semantic themes or categories. The study shed light on the role that methods of

vocabulary instruction play in explaining the general weakness of EFL learners'

English language competence in AbdulRahman bin Auff School.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of language which makes it very plausible to at least acquire the most frequently occurring words in a language to able to communicate in that language (Carl, 2003a; Nunan, 1999). Thus, it is ESL teachers' responsibility to make sure that learners are exposed to a good amount of vocabulary in class using the various teaching techniques in that area. However, many teachers in Oman do not seem to give it much attention in EFL classes because they tend to think that it will be acquired implicitly through the different activities in class. The fact is that implicit acquisition of vocabulary has only a minor role in increasing learners' vocabulary knowledge (Coomber, Peet, & Carl, 1998). Furthermore, many teachers themselves complain that most students do not understand what goes on in their EFL classes regardless of the focus of the lesson. This, students' weakness, is something I have noticed in the school at which I teach (AbdulRahman bin Auff for Basic Education School), and I have heard similar complaints from teachers at other government schools. It appears that many English language teachers in Omani government schools do not provide their students with the main tool for communicating in a language, which is vocabulary.

As an EFL teacher in an Omani government school, I noticed that many of the students are unable to understand simple sentences which are constructed of high frequency words although some of the students have been learning the English language for several years. Therefore, it can be argued that the low level proficiency of EFL learners in government schools in Oman may be partially attributed to the

methods of vocabulary instruction being used at these schools, which I will try to investigate in this study. This explanation can be very plausible when we realize that a number of studies indicate that students need to possess good vocabulary knowledge in order to perform well in the four language skills (e.g. Carl, 2003a; Nation, 1990; Nunan, 1999).

I hypothesize that the way in which the EFL teacher participants address vocabulary in their classes may have an effect on their students' acquisition of new words. However, it should be clarified that it is not the aim of this study to ascertain the level of proficiency of the participants' EFL students. Rather, I decided to conduct this study to primarily shed light on how the element of vocabulary is being treated in one particular Omani government school, the school where I am teaching, which can serve as a sample of government schools in Oman. Thus, this study attempts to gauge whether or not EFL teachers in AbdulRahman bin Auff School are indeed aware of the significant role of vocabulary instruction in their classrooms. The secondary goal of the study is to compare the findings of the study to the effective vocabulary teaching techniques that are being discussed in current research on teaching vocabulary in the EFL classroom. In other words, the purpose of this qualitative case study research is to answer the following questions:

1- What are the vocabulary teaching techniques which a selected sample of EFL teachers in AbdulRahman bin Auff for Basic Education School, an Omani government school, use in their classrooms?

2- Do the techniques that they use in their classrooms reflect the various methods of teaching vocabulary discussed in the recent literature on vocabulary instruction?

This study is the first to address this issue within the context of Oman as there are no published research studies that explore EFL vocabulary instruction in Omani government schools. Therefore, this case study may encourage other teacher-researchers to investigate their vocabulary teaching practices (and the effectiveness of said methods), which ultimately could serve to benefit English language teachers and students in Oman.

CAHPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Many papers have been produced to address the different facets of vocabulary as the main component of a language. Some of them talk about the essential role that vocabulary takes in a communicative situation, and how it can impede comprehension when it is misunderstood. Others address the reasons that clarify the need to set well-planned lessons to teach vocabulary throughout a language course. Yet there are other studies that tackle the effect of vocabulary on the different skills of a language and how learners' performance improve when they have a good vocabulary knowledge. To add to that, there are studies which deal with the various strategies that can be used to teach and learn vocabulary, and what characteristics an educator needs to detect when choosing a strategy to use in a class. In the following section, I will present the gist of some of those studies.

The Importance of Learning Vocabulary

The importance of vocabulary has been acknowledged by many scholars. Fan (2003) clarifies this by quoting Michael McCarthy's words in an interview for *Cambridge Connection* ("interview," 2001):

> Vocabulary forms the biggest part of the meaning of any language, and vocabulary is the biggest problems for most learners. So I've always been interested in ways of helping learners in building up a big vocabulary as fast and as efficiently as possible. (p. 222)

McCarthy, in the same interview, goes further than that by connecting between the strength of learners' vocabulary and their independence and success language learning process:

> The successful learners are those who develop techniques and disciplines for learning vocabulary: it might be just a question of keeping a notebook, or using a dictionary properly or perhaps disciplining yourself to look over your notes or to read a lot outside of class. The more independent you become as a learner, the better and stronger your vocabulary becomes, I think. (p. 222)

In addition, Amer (2002) argues that "vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner" (p. 1). Bogaards (2001) adds that "vocabulary knowledge constitutes an essential part of competence in a second or foreign language" (p. 321). Moreover, Atay and Ozbulgan (2007) discuss that "development of lexical knowledge occupies an important position in the learners' struggle to master a second/foreign language" (p. 40). Not only that, learning a second language has been tied up with acquiring a good amount of the learned language vocabulary. Regarding this, Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) say that "learning a second language (L2) involves the learning of large numbers of words" (p. 1). This, learning words, is very significant to equip the learner with the main tool to convey their verbal massages in a second language (L2).

Vocabulary is the main component for effective communication in the language of interaction, many researchers and academics agree. Croll (1971) states that "a full vocabulary is essential to adequate self expression" (p. 378). Furthermore, Jarvis and Stephens (1994) maintain that "one of the most obvious linguistic factors affecting communicative effectiveness is vocabulary" (p. 2). Moreover, Ediger (1999)

argues that "conversations carried on with other persons require a rich vocabulary" (p. 1). There is no doubt that many of those who learn a second language have been in situations in which they found themselves helpless for not possessing the right vocabulary to verbalize what they wanted to say. A number of them are surely very competent in utilizing grammatical rules, but alas, the empty slots in a well-structured sentence are not compensated for by the mere application of correct grammatical rules. Meaning is thoroughly conveyed by the use of the right vocabulary. In contrast, one can manage in a communicative situation without correct use of grammatical rules when vocabulary is available. That is not to say that grammar has no role in effective communication, but it is secondary to the role of vocabulary. Nunan (1999) supports this argument: "Most of us who live and work in a foreign country, and who attempt to function in the target language, find that we can get by more readily by learning vocabulary than grammatical structures" (p.103).

The Insufficiency of Implicit Vocabulary Learning

Vocabulary cannot be learned solely by encountering it in context, necessitates focusing on it in classrooms. Some scholars argue that learners will acquire vocabulary through extensive reading about different topics because "they will encounter a wealth of new words and their vocabularies will grow naturally, without direct teaching" (Coomber, Peet, & Carl, 1998, p.12). However, this is not always the case, as many L2 learners have noticed that encountering new words in context does not in itself serve to add these novel words to their vocabulary except when the learners search for their meanings and try to use them in some way. For example, Hunt and Beglar (2005) say regarding this point: "Implicit instructional and learning

tasks – such as narrow reading …, task cycles that require learners to approach texts in multiple ways and reading extensively – promote small incremental gains in vocabulary growth" (p. 28). Additionally, Fuente (2006) claims that "research on the role of implicit and explicit focus on form indicates that explicit learning conditions and classroom-based tasks designed to focus learners' attention on specific forms may be more effective for FL classrooms" (p. 266). Thus, there is a need for teachers to engage their students in a variety of methods that make them interact with the words that first appear in context. In fact, leaving learners to learn new words only through context could make learners arrive at the wrong meanings for those words. Coomber, Peet, and Carl (1998) explain that "without teacher instruction, context clues might actually mislead learners as they deal with some of the most important words in a passage" (p. 12). Moreover, Hunt and Beglar (2005) claim that "successfully inferring vocabulary from context is problematic for a variety of reasons" (p. 27). One of them, as they clarify, is that learners need to know not less than 98% of the words that could give clues to guess the meaning of new words from context in a certain text. For weak learners, this may lead to the "beginners' paradox" which is "a vicious cycle in which limited lexical knowledge discourages reading and, simultaneously, a lack of reading restricts vocabulary growth" (Hunt & Beglar, 2005, p. 27). A second reason for not only dealing with words in context is that the ability to memorize words is improved when learners look at words out of their context and deal more deeply with their different facets (Hunt & Beglar, 2005). A third reason is that contexts with scarce clues, more than one reasonable guess, illusory simplicity, numerous definitions , and unsuccessful use of morphological and syntactic hints "can lead to partially or fully incorrect inferences and attributes, which can require years to unlearn" (Hunt &

Beglar, 2005, p. 27). So, context by itself, as a form of introducing vocabulary implicitly, is not enough to guarantee learners' acquisition of vocabulary. This why Hunt and Beglar (2005) recommend explicit vocabulary teaching and learning:

First, SLVA [Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition] research shows that the explicit temporary study of decontextualized vocabulary is valuable in the EFL reading classroom and early studies of decontextualized vocabulary learning…have been replicated by a variety of contemporary researchers and the results have consistently shown explicit learning to be effective. First language (L1) research undertaken in the US from the late 1960s to the 1980s (e.g., Anderson, Heibert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985; Chall, 1967; Perfetti, 1985) confirmed that "…an early and explicit emphasis on the medium (on word recognition and decoding) was more effective for reading comprehension as well" (Chall, 1987: 10). In addition, programs that incorporate direct vocabulary instruction have been found to be more effective for vocabulary development than those that rely exclusively on indirect means. (p.27)

Having presented those points, Hunt and Beglar (2005) reached a consensus, which I advocate, "that the most efficient learning involves a carefully selected combination of both explicit and implicit instruction and learning" (p. 28).

Relation of Vocabulary to other Language Skills

A good base of vocabulary can enhance learners' performance in the main skills of a language. Carl (2003a) states, "Research indicates that in order for the students to perform well in speaking, reading, and writing they need to possess a rich

vocabulary" (p. 3). This is quite intuitive. When a person knows the vocabulary associated with a certain topic, it becomes obvious how this person outperforms others in the activities that are related to that topic. In contrast, when he/she encounters many unfamiliar words in a certain context, whether the words are low or high frequency words, the meanings of these words become obscured, and it is safe to assume that he/she will have a difficult time trying to understand what is going on. Nation (1990) elaborates that "learners feel that many of their difficulties in both receptive and productive language use result from an inadequate vocabulary" (p. 2).

When L2 learners read a text that contains a number of familiar vocabulary items, it becomes easy for the learners to understand the gist of the text even if they do not know all the words. When learners do not know many words in the text, however, they often find themselves confused and frustrated regardless of their competence in other aspects of the language. Regarding the effect of vocabulary on reading, Bromley (2007) declares that "fluent readers recognize and understand many words, and they read more quickly and easily than those with smaller vocabularies" (p. 528). Ediger (1999) states that "one reason that pupils do not read well is that they do not possess a functional vocabulary for reading" (p. 1). This reason is one of the eight reasons which Ediger (1999) suggests in his article as to why learners develop their vocabulary. He strongly advises language teachers to engage their students in activities that serve to develop their vocabulary.

The effect of vocabulary is most obvious in writing and speaking skills. The richer vocabulary we have, the more we find ourselves able to express what we want to say in a way that impresses our readers and listeners. This can be inferred from what Ediger (1999) claims: "Variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings

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is necessary in speaking and writing, the outages of the language arts, and use of diverse terms and concepts in speaking and writing adds variety to quality communication" (p. 1). Shedding light on the same point, Ratcliff (1994) argues that "they [writers] should use words that their audience understands and that are appropriate to the rhetorical problem" (p. 24). Of course, choosing the most suitable words to express an idea serves to convey the message with more ease and more accuracy. In addition, regarding the effect of vocabulary on writing, Carl (2003b) believes that "as writing is heavily dependent upon an author's ability to draw upon words to describe an event, vocabulary development must be taken seriously in the classroom" (p. 4).

Thus, the work of writers becomes much easier when they possess a portion of vocabulary that suffices to convey the meaning they want to express. Engber (1995) further clarifies, "While less-skilled writers were as concerned as skilled writers with getting their ideas down on paper, they were hampered by a lack of language, particularly vocabulary" (p. 140). This is one of the facets that Engber (1995) discusses regarding the effect of vocabulary on writing in a paper in which he examined the role of the lexical component in the scoring of sixty-six placement tests. He found that "error-free variations [using a variety of lexical resources]" are congruent with scores. So, if we, as ESL teachers, want to help our students to make good progress in their writing abilities, we should give vocabulary more attention in our classes. This is explicitly stated by Lee and Muncie (2006): "Focusing on vocabulary prior to writing significantly improved the production of higher level recognition vocabulary as well as impressive use of newly learned higher level vocabulary" (p. 296).

These studies indicate that vocabulary has a significant role in ESL classes, of which ESL teachers must be aware. Foil and Alber (2002) maintain that "with the recent focus in applied linguistics on lexical competence, and the impact this has had on language teaching, many language teachers are now aware of the necessity of making vocabulary a central part of their teaching practice" (p. 380). What seems to be a good sign is that a lot of language learners are sensitive to the value of learning vocabulary since it has been noticed that they use more approaches to deal with vocabulary than for other linguistic areas (Fan, 2003).

Techniques of Vocabulary Instruction

Many researchers have examined the effect of vocabulary learning techniques in order to find out those that better serve to develop L2 learners' vocabulary. One of these techniques that has been found to be very effective in this area is the translation technique despite the many arguments which have been raised against its use. Nation argues that "learning of vocabulary is faster for many learners if the meaning of the word is given through an L1 translation first" (as cited in Folse, 2004, p. 66). Moreover, in a study conducted by Grace (1998) on 181 native speakers of English studying beginner French, the researcher divided the participants into two groups: a group enrolled in a CALL (computer assisted language learning) program in French with the opportunity of using English translations and a group using a CALL program in French without translations in English. The researcher found that learners who had the option of using translations gained 42 percent more new words than those who did not. Furthermore, Luppescu and Day (1993) reported that "the Japanese learners who used bilingual dictionaries scored higher on a vocabulary posttest than the students

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who did not" (as cited in Fan, 2003, p. 224). Knight (1994) also reported that "students with access to a computerized dictionary demonstrated more vocabulary knowledge after reading than those without" (as cited in Fan, 2003, p. 224).

These points indicate the important role of the translation technique in developing L2 learners' vocabulary, which is something I believe in to a great extent due to my own experiences as an ESL learner. I will never forget the long hours I spent writing the new words I encountered in different English learning activities along with their translations in a notebook with the purpose of transferring them to my long-term memory. Each word, I wrote more than twenty times. This is what I think served the deep processing of new knowledge which Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) refer to when they say, "The chance that some piece of new information will be stored in long-term memory is not determined by the length of time that it is held in short-term memory but rather by the shallowness or depth with which it is initially processed" (p. 5). Therefore, broadening the knowledge kept in long-term memory should be taken into consideration since it could facilitate acquiring other knowledge in later stages. Reagarding this, Fan (2003) claims that "the information from long-term memory can be used to enrich the learner's understanding or retention of the new ideas by providing related information or schemata into which the new ideas can be organized" (p. 223). However, it should be kept in mind that research, so far, has proven that the translation technique is most effective with beginner-level L2 learners, so its effectiveness with higher levels still needs to be tested. Folse (2004) confirms: "Research should now move to more pertinent questions, such as whether the value of L1 translation is as effective for higher-proficiency students as it is for lower-proficiency students" (p.68).

However, knowing the meaning of a word is not enough to learn the different shades of meaning that a word may have, and here emerges the role of the context technique. Carl (2003b) says regarding the role of context in learning a new word:

> We can learn much about a word's meaning through different contexts in which it is used. And the more different contexts we encounter with that word, the more flexible we become with that word and its meaning and the more likely it is that we will remember it. (p. 2)

Other researchers and educators as well stress the importance of context in acquiring new words. For example, in a classroom guide for reading teachers, the authors of *Reading Comprehension Instruction in Grades 4 - 8* maintain that "context is crucial in helping children learn and understand new words" (North Central Regional Educational Lab, 2002, p. 7). That is, learning vocabulary in the "abstract" can be a waste of learners' time if it leads them to formulating a wrong perception or understanding of a word. Thus, it might be deduced that making use of both translation and context techniques together in learning new words has a deeper impact on developing L2 vocabulary rather than using each one in isolation from the other. A recent guide for implementing effective reading programs states that "several studies indicate that a blend of a direct-definition instruction, and vocabulary learning through context clues is more effective than one-method alone" (Literacy Coordinators Office of Reading/Language Arts, 2003, p. 20). It is important to note here the notion that translation is one form of a definition as Nation (2001) says, "First language translations are probably the simplest kind of definition in that they are short and draw directly on familiar experience" (p. 66).

Application of the context technique, of course, may take different forms like asking learners to use context to guess the meaning of words, and giving learners sentences with blank spaces that should be filled according to the context. Here, however, I am specifically referring to another form of context which provides the necessary repetitions of newly learned words to transfer them to long-term memory. Repetition is a recycling process that is essential to deepen understanding of words. Richards (2000) explains, "If recycling is neglected, many partially known words will be forgotten, wasting all the effort already put into learning them" (p. 137). This kind of context can be provided for L2 students by engaging them in different types of readings in and out of class.

Another technique that has been found to have a considerable role in increasing L2 learners' vocabulary and that has been widely discussed in the literature is the keyword technique. The keyword technique is "a mnemonic strategy for elaborating upon an unfamiliar word or concept by making it more meaningful and concrete" (Foil & Alber, 2002, p. 135). For instance, a learner might recall that "muck" means filth by rhyming it with "yuck." Regarding its effectiveness, Foil and Alber (2002) state that "students experience increased levels of academic success when teachers implement the Keyword Method [and this] has been well documented" (p. 135). Furthermore, Nation (1990) argues that "the keyword technique is an effective way of doing this [remembering a new word]" (p. 166). In addition, Hunt and Beglar (2005) point out that "it [the Keyword Method] may be most efficiently applied to consolidating words that have proven difficult to learn by other approaches" (p. 32). Fan (2003) adds, "This strategy [the Keyword Method], which associates the meaning, sound, and image of the L1 and L2, has been found to

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improve retention" (p. 224). To add to that, Sagarra and Alba (2006), in their study of three methods of learning vocabulary, examined the effectiveness of rote memorization, semantic mapping, and the keyword technique among 778 beginner L2 learners. They concluded that the use of the keyword technique to introduce vocabulary results in better L2 vocabulary learning at initial stages of acquisition. Thus, it might be inferred from the studies discussed above that the keyword method is very useful in teaching vocabulary although its implementation can consume a lot of time and effort.

A further technique for developing word knowledge is Word Links which is based on the characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction. That is, it engages learners in multifaceted activities. Yopp, Brigman, Wood, and Fink (2007) claim that:

> Word links offer students myriad opportunities to think and talk about the contexts in which words are used, to revisit words that they have been learning, to think about relationships among words as they connect with classmates, and to actively engage with words as they decide whether or not to link with peers who have different words. (p. 1)

The idea behind the Word Links method is as follows. After having introduced a list of chosen vocabulary items from a unit by providing simple definitions or instructional contexts, the teacher distributes cards with the words written on them to the students, one for each. The students' task is to walk around the classroom and find a partner whose word is related to theirs in some way. Then, the partners have to explain how their words are related. Likewise, this type of strategy provides students with the opportunity to think about and discuss the meanings of words with their partners as they are trying to find relations between the words which makes it a very

useful experience. "Reviewing the words in this way usually results in rich conversations about the meanings of the words and is a motivating and interesting experience for the students" (p. 1), as Yopp, Brigman, Wood, and Fink (2007), explain.

In addition to these techniques is semantic mapping. It presents words in a diagram that shows their relations with other words and has been remarkably beneficial in helping learners to acquire new words. One form of semantic mapping is to ask learners to write a newly introduced word in the middle of a paper and then lead them through answering three questions that could give details about the word. In another form the teacher writes a category on the board and asks learners to yell out all the words that fit in the category (Foil & Alber, 2002). This serves to connect between prior knowledge and new knowledge, which strengthens learner's acquisition of significant words.

Regardless of which vocabulary teaching techniques are adopted, there are four characteristics for effective vocabulary teaching which a number of researchers agree should be taken into consideration:

- The vocabulary teaching method exposes learners to contextual use besides the definition of the items under focus (Foil & Alber, 2002; Stahl, 1999; Tennenbaum, Torgesen, & Wagner, 2006; Yopp, Brigman, Wood, & Fink, 2007).

- It subsequently retrieves the items under focus and gives the learners the opportunity to apply and practice the words (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2006, Foil & Alber, 2002; NICHD 2000; Yopp, Brigman, Wood, & Fink, 2007).

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- It pushes the learners to figure out associations among word meanings (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2006, Foil & Alber, 2002; NICHD 2000; Yopp, Brigman, Wood, & Fink, 2007).

- It engages the learners in dynamic learning activities (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2002; Foil & Alber., 2002; Kamil & Hiebert, 2005; NICHD 2000; Yopp, Brigman, Wood, & Fink, 2007).

In addition, Atay and Ozbulgan (2007) assert that:

> In deciding which vocabulary learning strategies to recommend to L2 learners, one needs to consider the specific learning context as the effectiveness with which learning strategies can be both taught and used depends on a number of variables, i.e., the students' proficiency level, their motivation and purposes in learning the L2, the tasks and texts being used. (p. 40)

Conclusion

What I discussed above is considered a small sample of what has been produced in this area. However, it serves to give an overall view about why vocabulary is regarded to be a major constituent of a language, according to some language acquisition scholars. It also served to identify some strategies that are believed to be effective in the field of teaching and learning vocabulary which will help me to base my findings about the second question of my study, "Do the techniques that the selected sample of Omani ESL teachers use in their classrooms reflect the various methods of teaching vocabulary discussed in the recent literature on vocabulary instruction?"

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

What do ESL teachers in AbdulRahman bin Auff's School for Basic Education do to develop their students' vocabulary? Are teachers aware of the importance of vocabulary instruction in classrooms? Do teachers in Omani government schools use external resources to support vocabulary instruction? In order to approach these questions more closely and to look at them from different angles as recommended in qualitative research studies by use of triangulation (McDonough & McDonough, 1997), I collected data with the use of three methods: interviews, observations, and post-observation follow-up interviews. Thus, the study is qualitative in nature. Moreover, the study being limited to the boundaries of one specific school and the six language teachers at that school, it is a case study approach, which normally entails a detailed description of the situation under focus. A case study is "intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system" (Merriam, 1992, p. 19).

What urged me to base the study on qualitative research is that it is characterized by reflexivity which is essential especially for research connected to the field of education (Hammersley, 2000). That is, reflexivity enables researchers to get a deeper perspective of not only the issue at hand but also of themselves with regard to this issue. Qualitative research sheds light on "…deeper, richer meanings about personal, theoretical, and epistemological aspects of the research question" (Kleinasser, 2000, p. 155). Moreover, qualitative research stresses the idea of providing comprehensive and detailed descriptions of the different features included in a study. The availability of such descriptions in my research will make it feasible

for other EFL teachers, specifically in Omani government schools, to draw on their own teaching situations and reflect on what they have in common with the EFL teacher participants in the study. This could help them better avail themselves of the results once they have established such commonalities (Heinecke & Stohl Drier, 1998).

Context

The context in which I conducted the study is the school at which I am teaching, which is an all-male government school in Oman. The school is a one-floor building built about twenty years ago, but renovated a number of times. Although it is a one-floor building, it consists of thirty rooms, two learning resource centers, four administration offices, a first-aid room, an art hall, two staff rooms, two assembly grounds and two stores. The faculty, all males, includes seventy-two teachers who, depending on their major, teach social sciences, math, Arabic, Islamic studies, arts, English, and science subjects. They teach these subjects to one thousand students in grades 5-10.

Most classrooms contain up to thirty three tables, so they are pretty crowded. From grade 5-8 the tables are organized in groups of six or seven tables depending on the number of the students in each class, but from grade 9-10 the tables are organized in five rows, just like the old system. There are two boards; one is the whiteboard, of course, and the other is the notice board on the back wall. The classrooms are not equipped by an overhead projector, a VCR or a TV to show videos. However, the teachers could book the overhead and the TV projector before the lesson, or they could book one of the learning resource centers in order to use the VCR, or to give the

students read some of the available books. Of course, booking is always faced by the problem of clashes with other classes which makes the use of technology secondary to other traditional methods.

The curriculum provided by the Omani Ministry of Education to teach English, just to give an overview since it the focus of the study, contains exercises which a number of them presents more than 10 new words at a time, and that are mostly out of context and not recycled in later exercises. For example, figure 1 shows a vocabulary exercise from the text book for grade 6 which introduces 17 new words. Students are supposed to understand the meaning of the words from the pictures, and then listen to the tape and order the pictures accordingly. These words are not recycled or reviewed in later exercises. Another example is from grade 10 text book which introduces 6 new words using mere English definitions as figure 2 shows. These words also are not recycled or introduced in another way.
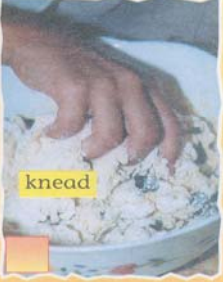
Figure 1. A Vocabulary Exercise from Grade 6
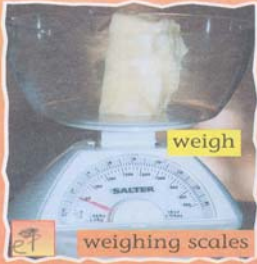
Figure 2. A Vocabulary Exercise from Grade 10 Text Book

Vocabulary Expansion

Task 1

First look at the activity on page 40 of the Pupil's Book, then complete the following task by reading the definitions and matching the definitions with the words. Write the number of the definition in the second column.

word	number
earrings	
bracelet	
khanjar	
nose stud	
brooch	
head dress	
belt	
ring	
nose ring	
Qur'an box	
necklace	
anklet	

DEFINITIONS

1. A little box of metal strung through a necklace.
2. Daggers worn by Arab men at the waist
3. A piece of jewellery with a pin to fasten on clothes.
4. A band usually made of leather worn around the waist.
5. A piece of jewellery that is fastened to the ears.
6. A round piece of jewellery worn at the nose.
7. A tiny piece of jewellery worn by women who have pierced noses.
8. A piece of jewellery worn on fingers.
9. A bracelet worn at the ankles.
10. A string of jewels, beads, or a thin gold or silver chain worn around the neck.
11. Worn on the head as part of decoration.
12. Jewellery worn on the wrist.

Participants

The participants whom my study included are all six teachers who teach EFL at AbdulRahman bin Auff's School for Basic Education. Thus, the only criterion for the selection of participants was that they belonged to the group of EFL teachers at the case study school. As I am also a member of this group, the six participants who

met the criterion are my friends. This reduced the tension that usually accompanies interviews and observations and motivated participants to express themselves more freely and to behave in their classrooms in a normal way. The section entitled, *Role of the Researcher* below, addresses some questions and concerns that may arise regarding having friends serve as participants in a research study.

Before interviewing the participants, I spoke to the six teachers mentioned above in order to make sure that they do not mind participating in the study. All of them showed interest and willingness to participate in the study. These teachers, who are all Omanis, have different experiences, and, no doubt, different styles of teaching. They are, also, teaching different grades. Because the teachers preferred that they remain anonymous, I gave them pseudonyms. Daoud has fourteen years of EFL teaching experience and teaches grades eight and nine at the school. Rashid has five years of experience and teaches grades nine and ten. Younis has three years of experience and teaches grades six and ten. Mazin has also three years of experience, but he teaches grades six and seven. Othman has two years of experience and teaches grades five and ten. Ali has only one year of experience and teaches grades five and six. All of these teachers have a bachelor's degree in English teaching from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in Oman except Daoud who has fourteen years of experience, and who received a degree from a higher institute in Oman, but he has recently acquired his bachelor's degree from Leeds University in the UK. (See Table 1 below for a summary of information about the six participants.)

Table1: ESL Teacher Participants.

Teacher	Years of ESL Teaching Experience	Grades Taught	Age	Qualifications
Daoud	14	8 + 9	36	BA from Leeds University
Rashid	5	9 + 10	28	BA from SQU
Younis	3	6 + 10	26	BA from SQU
Mazin	3	6 + 7	26	BA from SQU
Othman	2	5 + 10	25	BA from SQU
Ali	1	5 + 6	24	BA from SQU

What follows is a detailed description of the procedures that I followed to gather data through the three collection methods mentioned above.

Role of the Researcher

As mentioned above, the participants in this research study are ESL teachers teaching at AbdulRahman bin Auff School with whom I have established friendships. This may raise concerns for some in terms of the validity of the data collection methods since the participants in the study are also friends of the researcher. Therefore, in this section I address these concerns by clarifying the importance of rapport and reciprocity in qualitative research studies and how my relationship with the participants can and does, in fact, serve to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the research.

Many qualitative researchers have stressed the value of achieving rapport with participants in research studies, especially when interviewing is the primary method of data collection (Burns & Grove, 1993; Nieswiadomy, 1994). Berg (2001) explains, "One dominant theme in the literature on interviewing centers on the interviewer's

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ability to develop rapport with an interview subject" (p. 86). This stems from the principle that the better researchers know their participants, the more prepared they are to help respondents to relax during interviews and to openly share their perceptions, ideas or opinions about the issue at hand. This includes knowing, for example, participants' customs, interests, and values. Researcher-participant rapport is reinforced when participants know the researcher, have dealt with him/her in some way, and understand the aim of the research and how it could benefit all parties involved (Berg, 2001). Moreover, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) argue that in order for qualitative research interviews to be deemed effective, honest, and ethical, the establishment of rapport between interviewers and interviewees is essential. Rapport can be achieved by extending ample reciprocity which is very important in qualitative research and during interviews as qualitative research interviews are participatory and intimate in nature (Weiss, 1994). However, many qualitative researchers find it difficult to ascertain whether or not they are able to adequately reciprocate. As Glesne (1999) explains:

> As research participants willingly open up their lives to researchers- giving time, sharing intimate stories, and frequently including them in both public and private events and activities– researchers become ambivalent, alternatively overjoyed with the data they are gathering, but worried by their perceived inability to adequately reciprocate. (p.126)

Although I did not compensate my participants monetarily for the time that they contributed to this study, I know that I will have many opportunities to reciprocate in the future, as the participants and I often help each other, particularly at work.

Furthermore, some qualitative researchers recommend matching researchers (or interviewers) to respondents (or interviewees) on such factors as gender, race, class, and ethnicity (Weiss, 1994). Participants are more likely to consider the researcher to be an "insider" rather than an outsider (and are thus more willing to reveal and share information) when they match the researcher on one or more attribute (Weiss, 1994). As I share many attributes with my participants, such as gender, class, age, nationality, and occupation. I believe that I met one of the valuable requisites for establishing and maintaining rapport with interviewees. Thus, by having selected participants with whom I have already established good rapport, I addressed the above concerns and overcame some of the hurdles that many researchers involved in qualitative research face. I also strived to clarify to the participants that their honest responses would help me to arrive at conclusions that would potentially serve all of us as EFL teachers at AbdulRahman bin Auff School. A further thing that I did to insure that the participants expressed their ideas without any intervention is that I did not say anything which could give a clue about my own beliefs during the interviews. In fact, none of the main questions, at least, in the interview guides, pushes the interviewees to quote the interviewers' beliefs, if they actually have come to know them by any chance, or those of the other participants, which gives their responses more credibility.

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

Interviews

I chose this method of data collection because conducting one-on-one interviews would require the researcher to be directly involved in the process of data

gathering, which enabled me to attend closely to the responses of the interviewees, both verbal and non-verbal as recommended by Seidman (1998). This, in itself, gave me the opportunity to reach a deeper perspective about the issue under focus through reordering and reformulating interview questions according to the initial responses of interviewees, while, at the same time, taking into account the different context and circumstances of each interview (Herod, 1993).

In the initial interviewing phase, I interviewed one teacher every other day over a period of two weeks. I left it to the teachers to choose the place and time in which they liked to be interviewed. This was determined a few days before each interview. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour which was within the time limit suggested by Seidman (1998) for conducting interviews in qualitative research studies. Although my native language and the native language of the participants is Arabic, we agreed to use the English language in the interviews because we, most of the time, use English when we meet to discuss something about English as a subject in the school. The interviewed teachers were asked seven major questions. Each of those questions had sub-questions depending on the answers of the interviewees. The teachers were given a copy of these questions in advance, so that they had a chance to think about the questions and perhaps start to recall some of their experiences and practices in teaching vocabulary (see Appendix A for initial interview questions).

With regard to the post-observations follow-up interviews phase, I followed the same procedure which I used with the initial interviews explained above. Follow-up interviews took place after classroom observations (described below) had been completed. During follow-up interviews, I asked the interviewees questions to clarify points that they made in the initial interviews and asked them about things I had

observed in their classrooms (see Appendix B for some of the follow-up interview questions).

The interviews, whether initial or follow-up interviews, were tape-recorded so that the maximum amount of useful data could be obtained from them after transcribing the interviews. This was feasible since I transcribed each recorded-interview the day after the interview, which ensured that the actual interview was still fresh in my mind. This implies that the analysis of the collected data was instant and continuous, which helped me to avoid being overwhelmed by accumulated data which could have resulted in a less accurate analysis. In each transcribed interview, I tried to find systematic patterns on which I based my analysis and that I could use to compare the responses of the teachers involved in the study. These patterns were identified using the constant comparative method of data analysis (Merriam, 1992). The comparison of the derived patterns enabled me to find out how these teachers generally dealt with vocabulary in their classes. This was compared with the data collected by the other methods of data collection at a later point of analysis, in order to attain more credibility and accurateness as Guba and Lincolin (1982) suggest.

Observations

In the observation phase, I observed each of the six teachers three times over a period of six weeks. The time lapse between the observations of each teacher was two weeks, so that the teacher whom I observed on Saturday of the first week was observed again on Saturday of the third week, and so on. Since there were six teachers whom I needed to observe each week of observation (week 1, week 3, and week 6 of the observation period) I had to do two observations in one of the five working days

of those weeks. I wrote a reflection for each observation within twenty-four hours from the end of the observations, as recommended by Merriam (1992). Writing reflections helped me to keep more details of how teachers went over explaining vocabulary in their lessons. For instance, while analyzing the gathered data, these details were useful in noting anything special or different about the way in which teachers used the same technique, which I believe resulted in a more accurate analysis of the collected data.

While observing, I noted the type of techniques that the teachers used to teach vocabulary and the number of times these techniques were used, without intervening by any means in the teaching materials or the style of the teachers. I was also looking at the kinds of words taught and the purpose of teaching them. For example, were new words taught for the purpose of expanding vocabulary or clarifying a point? The collected data via observations was compared with what has been found in recent studies as the most useful methods in teaching vocabulary. This analysis also revealed whether the participating government school teachers have in mind constructing a strong vocabulary base for their students when they teach vocabulary or whether they just introduce vocabulary to get through the materials they have to teach. In order to collect data related to what I was investigating, I included all of those aspects, techniques used, kinds of words, and the purpose of teaching the words, in the observation sheet that I designed specifically for this purpose (see sample observation sheet in Appendix C).

To identify patterns in the decisions made by the participating teachers with regard to (1) the vocabulary teaching techniques they adopt in class, (2) the types of new vocabulary items they choose to teach, and (3) the purposes behind teaching

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chosen words, was the main tool that I used in analyzing the data gathered from observations. The following diagram represents the timeline of the data collection period.

Figure 3. The Data Collection Timeline

Week 1 & 2 Jan 12th 2008	Week 3 Jan 26th 2008	Week4 Feb 2th 2007	Week 5 Feb 9th 2008	Week 6 Feb 16th 2008	Week 7 Feb 23th 2008	Week 8 & 9 Mar 1rt 2008
Initial Interviews	Observation 1	Break	Observation 2	Break	Observation 3	Follow-up Interviews
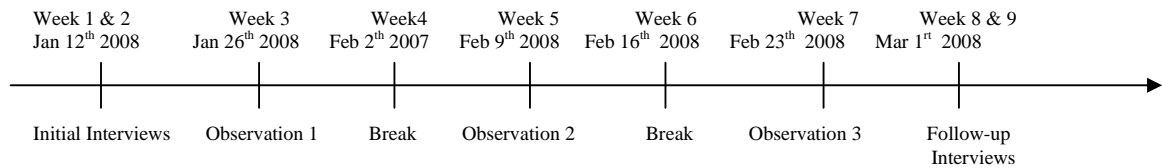
The data collected from the combination of interviews and observations provided me with a wealth of data to analyze in order to answer my research questions.

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CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Introduction

What techniques each teacher uses should reflect the teacher's philosophy and awareness of how to best avail themselves of the most recent techniques in class. Thus, I start this section by shedding light on the participating teachers' philosophies regarding the role of vocabulary. Then, I describe the reported vocabulary teaching techniques which the teachers claimed to use during interviews. I then give a description of the observed techniques that the participating teachers appeared to employ in their classrooms. Next, I clarify some discrepancies between reported and observed techniques and the reasons that the teachers gave as explanations for their occurrence, thus answering my first research question. I after that compare between the vocabulary teaching style of the participating teachers as it appears through analyzing the collected data, and what has been declared to be the most useful vocabulary teaching methods according to recent literature, thus answering my second research question.

Participants' Views of Vocabulary

All of the participants[1] asserted that vocabulary is at the core of language instruction in their philosophy of teaching. They argued that the acquisition of a good amount of vocabulary helps students to develop all of the language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. For instance, Rashid affirmed that "it [vocabulary] is

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The participants' words have not been edited [1]

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very important for contributing for the other skills. For example, the students can write [a] better piece of writing if they know more words and, of course, they can read quickly and understand a reading text or passage if they have more vocabulary." Abdullah stated that "it [vocabulary] is more important than other things because students have to start collecting vocabulary to start understanding English…" Mazin claimed that "vocabulary is a very important aspect of English … because if pupils know a lot of vocabulary, they can understand what they read and hear, and then write and speak."

Moreover, the acquisition of a good amount of vocabulary moves students from the stage of dealing with the language in pieces to the stage of dealing with it as a whole which contributes to enhancing their language production. All of this results in improving the academic performance of the students, as the participants' responses to the question "How do you think that vocabulary affects the improvement of your students' English level?" seem to imply. For example, Mazin said, "I have a student in my class who knows lots of vocabulary, so when I ask any questions, he answers most of them and he always tries to participate. This clearly affects his level." These factors urge the participants to give vocabulary priority in their philosophy of teaching as is clear from their responses. This emphasis given to vocabulary in EFL teaching by the participants is congruent with the prominence given to it by many researchers as discussed in the literature review. In spite of this, the weight given by the participants to vocabulary in their teaching philosophy, they all reached a consensus regarding the general weakness of their students' vocabulary knowledge.

This, students' weakness, is apparent through analyzing the participating teachers' responses to the question in the initial interview which elicited responses

about teachers' beliefs about their students' vocabulary. All of the teachers mentioned something about the general weakness of their students' vocabulary level despite the effort which they thought that they have put into teaching vocabulary. Some of the responses were:

Othman: They [the students] are weak; whatever you do for them, whatever you teach, whatever you say for them to review the words.

Rashid: You can say, through my experience, that they are poor.

Daoud: Maybe 2 or 3 are good in remembering and using vocabulary. Some of them are average, and the rest are weak.

Mazin: In each class, you have one or two students who have a good amount of vocabulary, the rest are very weak.

Some of the teachers attributed the weakness of their students to the students' negative attitude towards the English language which stands, as they claim, as a great barrier to their acquisition of the language. Ali said, "I think that they are not interested in English because it is difficult for them and it is not their first language." Other teachers attributed the weakness to the length of the syllabus which restrains them from setting an appropriate plan to develop students' vocabulary. Regarding this point, Mazin maintained that "our students don't have a good base in vocabulary; this is because of the syllabus." These reasons could be part of the problem; however, the teachers did not seem to realize that the problem behind the low level of the students' vocabulary could also stem from their style of teaching, what techniques they use and how they use them. None of the participating teachers mentioned or even entertained the thought that the students' inability to grasp new vocabulary items may be partially

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an outcome of the vocabulary teaching approaches used in the classroom, as it will be obvious from the following analysis.

Reported and Observed Methods of Vocabulary Instruction

In response to the initial interview question regarding the way in which the participants teach vocabulary, each participant, as expected, had something different to say. As explained above, three observations of each participant's class were completed in order to compare what the teachers reported doing in their classrooms to teach vocabulary and what they actually do during class time. Mismatches (or discrepancies) between reported methods of instruction and observed methods of instruction are discussed below thus answering the research question: What are the vocabulary teaching techniques which a selected sample of ESL teachers in AbdulRahman bin Auff for Basic Education School, an Omani government school, use in their classrooms?

To begin with, Daoud said that he normally writes the words that he wants to explain on the board to direct students' attention to those words. Then, he tries to explain them by giving examples and miming words that can be mimed. If the words are difficult and the students show no signs of understanding, he provides them with the meaning in Arabic. In other words, for Daoud, the last resort is translating the new vocabulary word into Arabic. This, according to him, saves time. The three observations of Daoud's class showed a sequence in using vocabulary techniques that is somewhat in keeping with the sequence which he described in the interview. For example, to explain the word "excited," he first wrote it on the board and read it out loud. When no student appeared to know its meaning, he mimed it, and that's when

the students managed to guess its meaning. It was obvious that the students had grasped the meaning of the word because most of them raised their hands, and some of them were already yelling out the answer. However, one discrepancy between what he reported doing and what he actually did was that he did not use any of the taught words -even the ones being reviewed- once in sentences as he implied. Moreover, he used the translation technique often. Either he himself translated the words or asked students to translate for others, right from the beginning. The translation technique was used by Dauod as the first method of teaching about half of the words that were taught during the three observed classes. Among these translated words were "replied," "demand," and "enquire".

Younis's response to the same question showed that he believes that he uses the same methods that Daoud reported using following the same sequence. However, in practice, this sequence rarely appeared while Younis was teaching. He used it only with two of the thirty-six words which he taught in the three observed classes. The prevailing technique in his style of teaching vocabulary was the translation technique. He used it right from the beginning to explain sixteen words, including "announced," "advised," and "shouted." He also used it as a last resort to explain three words only: "nose stud," "brooch," and "whispered," which he previously tried to explain by miming and defining them in English. All of the other words, i.e. "bracelets," "necklace," and "earrings," were taught by the use of pictures from the students' textbook. There was no situation in which he presented any of the taught words in a useful context, which contradicts what he said during the interview.

Rashid had something different to say. He commented that teaching vocabulary could take different forms depending on the level of the students. Thus, he

explained that when he introduces new vocabulary items to students, he uses vague vocabulary words in sentences that give clues to their meaning when he deals with upper-level students. He also reported that he tries to draw students' attention to the position of the vocabulary word under focus within the sentence as another hint to help students figure out its meaning. With lower-level students, he said that he uses techniques that are different from those mentioned above. He explained that with these students, he makes use of miming, illustration, visual stimulus cards, and finally, the translation technique as the last resort if students are still unable to comprehend the meaning of the new words. However, through observing his class, it appeared that using context to help students to guess the meaning of new words was a very rare occurrence in his class; it did not seem to be a priority. He only used it to explain two of the twenty-eight words which he taught during the three observed classes. One of them was the word "tomb" which he embedded in the sentence: "Sometimes Salim goes to visit his father's tomb who died two years ago" and the other word was "ancient" which was embedded in "This house is very ancient. It tells us a lot about the ninth century which is the time in which it was built." For the first word, three students only raised their hand to volunteer the meaning of the word, but for the second, the teacher had to give the meaning in Arabic after a few trials had been given attempts by the students to translate the word.

Thus, the technique of vocabulary instruction that Rashid was observed to use the most was the translation method which he used right away with no differentiation between new or reviewed words, and between upper-level and lower-level students. Furthermore, his use of the translation technique took different forms, such as teacher translations, students translating to each other, and directing students to their English-

Arabic glossaries. For example, he translated the word "archeologist," asked students who knew the meaning of "pharaoh" to translate it to others in class, and directed students to look up words like "valley," "coffin," and "mask" in the glossary. Nonetheless, there were some occasions during which he defined words in the target language and other occasions when he used miming, drawing, and visual stimulus cards. Some of the words that were taught using these methods include "limp," "hook," "harbor," and "jetty."

Moving to another teacher, Mazin reported that when he introduces new vocabulary items to his students, he relies on miming, book pictures, and flash cards in order to teach concrete words and he resorts to the translation technique when teaching abstract words which are difficult for students to understand through context. The classes observed did not show that Mazin keeps in mind whether a new vocabulary item is a concrete or abstract word when choosing the appropriate vocabulary teaching technique to employ. For example, he used the translation technique right from the beginning to explain the words "factual" and "leaflet." He could have used the context technique to explain "factual" and realia or pictures to explain "leaflet," which would have been more in keeping with his reported methods of instruction for abstract versus concrete words. The other techniques that he mentioned using during the interview matched those that he used during the observed classes. Among those is the context technique which he used to review two words at the beginning of the first observed class: the first was the word "interesting," which was reviewed in the sentence: "I watched a very interesting movie, I enjoyed it very much" and the word "horrible" which he used in the sentence: "Two people died in the car accident which was on the news last night, it was very horrible." He also used

flash cards to explain the words: "rectangular" and "triangle." The students appeared to comprehend the meanings of these words and did not need to have them translated into Arabic by the teacher as they were able to say the meaning in Arabic.

Moreover, Othman asserted that the main technique that he uses in explaining new words is miming. If students were not able to get the meaning through miming, he provides contextualized examples using the new words to clarify their meaning. Much like the other participating teachers, Othman also claimed that he makes use of the translation technique when students cannot get the meaning of the new words from other methods of instruction. The observations of Othman's classes, however, showed that he used the translation technique intensively to explain most of the words which he taught, and there were no occasions in which he embedded new words in meaningful sentences from which students can guess their meanings. Some of the translated words in this teacher's classes were "van," "traffic jam," "bundle," and "envelope."

Considering Ali's response to the initial interview question about the ways in which he teaches vocabulary, he said that he uses context first to explain new words. Then, he uses one of the following: book pictures, realia, and drawing to help students to get the meanings of the words under focus. If students are still not able to understand the new words, he, as the other teachers reported, resorts to the translation technique. The analysis of the collected data through observations showed that Ali relied heavily on the translation technique which he used directly to explain twelve out of the twenty words that he taught during the observed classes. Some of these words were "chase," "advice," "net," "bite," and "look down." There were no instances in which he used direct translation as the last resort as he mentioned in the

initial interview. The other words were taught through the use of miming and book pictures (as he reported), such as "roar" and "lion," respectively. The observations also revealed that Ali did not give examples to provide context to any of the taught words which does not support what he claimed about his vocabulary teaching style in the initial interview.

It is apparent that there are some clear discrepancies between the participating teachers' perceptions regarding the vocabulary teaching methods they believe they employ and the observed techniques that they actually use in their EFL classrooms. To begin with, Daoud, Younis, Othman and Ali all reported that they put new words in contextualized examples to help students to guess the meanings of the words, but there were no occasions in which they employed this technique in the observed classes. What is more is that Younis did not follow the same sequence of teaching vocabulary that he said that he follows when he teaches vocabulary, and Ali used the translation technique right from the beginning and not as a last resort as he claimed. Another teacher, Rashid mentioned that he takes students' level into consideration when he chooses which vocabulary technique to use and that the context technique is the one which he uses the most. However, neither considering students' level nor prioritizing the context technique appeared to be part of the methods which the teacher used in the three observed classes. Lastly, Mazin noted that differentiating between concrete and abstract words is very crucial when choosing which vocabulary technique to be employed. This was not apparent in the observed classes as concrete and abstract words were taught with the same techniques. See Table 2 below for a summary of the reported and observed techniques.

Table2: Reported and Observed Techniques.

Teacher	Reported Techniques	Observed Techniques	Discrepancies
Daoud	- Writes on board - Give examples - Miming - Translation as a last resort	- Write on board - Miming - Translation as the first method	- Give examples - Translation as the first method
Younis	- Writes on board - Give examples - Miming - Translation as a last resort	- Writes on board - Miming - Translation as a last resort - Translation as the first method - Book pictures	- Give examples - Translation as the first method - book pictures
Rashid	- Sentences - Miming - Illustration - Visual stimulus cards - Translation as the last resort	- Sentences (rare) - Translation as the first method - Defining in the target language - Miming - Drawing - Visual stimulus cards	- Translation as the first method - Defining in the target language
Mazin	- Miming - Book pictures - Flash cards - Context - Translation as the last resort	- Translation as the first method - Context - Flash cards - Book pictures	- Translation as the first method
Othman	- Miming - Give examples - Translation as the last resort	- Translation as the first method - Miming	- Translation as the first method - Give examples
Ali	- Context - Book pictures - Realia - Drawing - Translation as the last resort	- Translation as the first method - Miming - Book pictures	- Translation as the first method

It is important to note here that the existence of the above mentioned

mismatches does not mean that the various methods mentioned by the participating

teachers are totally neglected in their classrooms. Rather, the discrepancies confirm

that the reported techniques are not as integral to the teachers' vocabulary teaching style as they claimed. Thus, the questions that come to mind are: what are the possible explanations of these mismatches between teachers' perceptions and the reality of their classrooms? Why do the participating teachers veer away from their vocabulary teaching philosophies? In order to answer these questions, the participants were asked during post-observation follow-up interviews to comment on the observed mismatches. The following section presents these clarifications.

Teachers' Explanations of the Discrepancies

All of the participating teachers mentioned something about being "stressed" or "over stressed" when they tried to justify the discrepancies discussed above. Being in such a state, the participants argued, is what makes the teachers unable to apply what they think are the most suitable methods for teaching vocabulary. "Stress" appeared when the teachers talked about the reasons behind the discrepancies, with the exception of Ali who said that he believes that not enough experience is another reason behind the mismatches.

The participating teachers attributed their stress to two main reasons. One of these factors is the restriction which the Omani Ministry of Education imposes on teachers to use its curriculum as the only resource to teach English. For instance, regarding this point Othman said, while responding to the question regarding whether or not the situation in Omani government schools helps teachers to apply their philosophy of teaching, "We are completely restricted to follow the curriculum; this is the policy of the ministry."

In addition, Younis explained that:

The obligation of hav[ing] to stick and teach everything in the Ministry's curriculum pressurize[s] us. We don't have a separate class for vocabulary, so we don't have the opportunity to only focus on teaching vocabulary. This make[s] us give the meaning in Arabic most of the time so that we can move to other things.

Moreover, the teachers discussed how the Ministry of Education sends supervisors to schools from time to time to check whether they are following the syllabus assigned or not, and whether or not they are teaching what they are expected to teach according to a pre-planned schedule. Of course, teachers understand that concentrating on the assigned materials is very crucial for their students to pass exams, and accordingly, move to the next grade level. This is very important for every Omani school teacher because, unfortunately, teachers are judged to be effective or ineffective according to their students' results. Thus, one explanation as to why the participating teachers did not make use of the vocabulary teaching techniques they perceive as the most effective in their EFL classrooms is that teachers feel that they must rush through teaching vocabulary in order to cover the Ministry of Education assigned curriculum to which they are restricted.

The other factor that leads to teachers' stress is time which appeared to be a major concern for all of the participants. They explained that the amount of vocabulary in the curriculum can hardly be covered by the allotted time for each English course. Not teaching any of those words could hinder students' understanding whenever those words reappear in the curriculum. Thus, covering the assigned materials by the Ministry of Education on time is very important to ensure that

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students are ready for their EFL exams, especially in secondary school when exams are prepared and administered by the Ministry of Education, not by the school. This makes the teachers go over most of the vocabulary rapidly, just to introduce all the words without being really satisfied as to how well the students acquired them. Therefore, the teachers cannot do anything about it for the time and the syllabus are out of their hands. Some examples of teachers' responses to the post-observation question: "To what extent do you think that the time given to the syllabus assigned is enough? Why?" include:

Mazin: Time limits us, so we don't give them words outside the curriculum.

Othman: We can't teach all words thoroughly because of time.

Daoud: Because of the time we have, it's difficult to finish sometimes.

Trying to teach under such conditions could over stress any teacher, not only the participating teachers, and make him/her unable to concentrate. So, another explanation for the mismatches between what the teachers reported that they do in class and what they did in the observed classes is the allotted time for their English courses which is too short to teach all the vocabulary in the curriculum.

Techniques Used vs. Suggested Techniques

The collected data indicates that the teachers used very basic techniques that only serve to provide the meaning of the words without providing the opportunity to use them. These techniques are miming, book pictures, realia, flash cards, drawing, defining in English and the translation technique. All of these techniques are very useful in introducing the basic meaning of newly taught words, but they do not assure

that students develop a good mastery of vocabulary without using another technique to guarantee that they understand and retain the new vocabulary items in the long run. For example, a review of literature shows how important it is to use the context technique to clarify the different shades of meaning after having introduced words with the translation technique (Literacy Coordinators Office of Reading/Language Arts, 2003).

The analysis of the data suggests that none of the teachers used context to further explain any word in later lessons which could imply that the teachers rarely come back (except in the case of exams) to previously taught words in order to check whether they have been acquired or not. Almost all of the words that the teachers taught were explained one time only. It is probable that some teachers use homework to review and expand acquisition of new words, but none of the participants mentioned doing so. Regarding this, Nation (2001) says, "We should expect only limited learning from single meetings with a word and should bear this in mind when we plan or carry out those meetings" (p. 82). He justified this with the fact that a number of facets need to be known about a word: its form, its meaning, and its use, versus learners' ability to deal with a small portion of information at each exposure. All of these points do not seem to be taken into consideration by the participants in this study which implies that their style does not really serve to develop learners' vocabulary.

Another thing that the collected data indicates is that none of the teachers seemed to teach their students strategies to learn vocabulary outside class. This is supported by their responses to the post-observation follow-up interview question which investigates whether teachers teach their students strategies to learn vocabulary

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at their own pace or not. All of the teachers said that they do indeed teach their students such strategies. When I asked them how they did this, the participating teachers responded that I must have noticed their use of the translation technique, miming, pictures, realia and drawing during observations. When I explained that I observed them using these techniques, which is not necessarily the same thing as overtly teaching students how to use these methods themselves, the participants' responses indicated that they cannot differentiate between using strategies to teach vocabulary and teaching strategies for learning vocabulary. Some of their responses were:

> Daoud*:* I can't see any difference between using and teaching
>
> techniques … when I use a technique to teach vocabulary, the
>
> student[s] should know how to use it by themselves because I
>
> set an example for them.
>
> Rashid*:* When we use techniques, we actually teach using them at the
>
> same time, it doesn't have to be direct.
>
> Younis*:* I use different techniques to teach vocabulary, so the students
>
> when they see me use a technique a number of times, they
>
> should be able to use it when they need it.

This implies that the way in which the participants teach vocabulary is not congruent with the current trend in the field of teaching vocabulary, teaching vocabulary strategies for learner use. Atay and Ozbulgan (2007) argue that "they [learners] need to be given explicit instruction to become more aware of and proficient with the broad range of strategies that can be used through the learning process" (p. 2).

A further point that could be deduced from analyzing the results is that the teachers generally did not consider the difference in students' English language proficiency levels as a criterion when choosing vocabulary teaching techniques. All the teachers used the same techniques to teach vocabulary regardless of the level they were teaching, even when there was a huge gap between the students' levels as is the case with Younis and Othman who teach grades (6 and 10) and grades (5 and 10), respectively. Nation (2001), distinguishing between lists of translation pairs and context techniques in terms of learners' levels of competence says, "While advanced learners may benefit from learning vocabulary in context, beginning learners probably benefit the most from words that are presented in lists of translation pairs" (p. 39). This could bring into question the effectiveness of the participants' vocabulary teaching style especially when we know that teachers do not plan what techniques to use to teach most new words. This was evident in the teachers' responses to the post-observation follow-up interview question which elicits whether participating teachers plan what words exactly to teach and what strategies to employ to introduce them. Examples of their responses follow:

Mazin*:*   I don't have to plan which word[s] to teach because they are already planned in the teacher's book, but what strategies to use to teach them, I leave to lesson circumstances … Sometimes I feel [that the] translation technique is enough, and at other times I use available book pictures.

Ali*:*   What words to teach are there in [the] teacher's book, but sometimes in class, I feel that there is a need to teach other words not included in [the] teacher['s] book … If flash cards

[are] available, I use them to teach the words-- this is a strategy, but for other words I teach them in different ways depending on students' reaction.

Thus, the reasons which the teachers gave to justify students' weakness in vocabulary discussed at the beginning of this section above could not be the only factors. The teaching style of these teachers apparently plays a major role in compounding this problem, a role which goes unnoticed by the teachers. What's more, none of the techniques, which appeared in their teaching style, were used in a way that achieved the criteria for effective vocabulary teaching discussed in the literature review above. Accordingly, the answer to the second posited research question in this study (i.e., do the techniques that the participating teachers use in their classrooms reflect the various methods of teaching vocabulary discussed in the recent literature on vocabulary instruction?) is a definite 'no'. Although the participating teachers are aware to an extent of some of the effective vocabulary teaching methods addressed in the literature (i.e., the context and recycling techniques), they do not employ these methods in their classrooms for the various reasons discussed above.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this section I will start by summarizing the important findings which I arrived to through analyzing the collected data in the previous sections. Then, I will move to talk about the implications that could be inferred from the findings of the study for the different parties which constitute the educational dichotomy.

Summary of Findings

The participants in the study all grant vocabulary high significance in their philosophy of teaching which is compatible with the importance assigned vocabulary teaching in recent literature in the field of TESOL. However, they believe that their students' level of proficiency in vocabulary is far behind the required level in the grades which they are teaching despite the efforts they claimed to exert in that area. They justified this lack of proficiency by citing the students' negative attitude towards the English language and the length of the curriculum. Through the analysis of the data collected with initial interviews and observations, it became obvious that there are some discrepancies between what the teachers said that they do and what they actually do in their EFL classes. The discrepancies appeared in the following areas: the teachers claimed that they provided context for new words, used the translation method as the last resort, and took students' level of proficiency into consideration when choosing methods to teach abstract versus concrete words. In the post-observation interviews, the teachers attributed these discrepancies to being over

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stressed because of two factors: the restriction which the Ministry of Education places upon teachers to follow its curriculum solely and the time it takes to meet the curriculum requirements. Generally, the analysis showed that the techniques which are used by the participants to teach vocabulary items are miming, book pictures, realia, flash cards, drawing, defining in English and the translation method. Finally, the participants reported that they do not teach their students strategies to learn vocabulary outside of class, which does not reflect the norms set in the literature for teaching vocabulary.

Implications

This section discusses the practical implications of the study first for language teachers in Omani government schools, and second for the Ministry of Education in Oman. It is important to note here that some of the suggestions addressed to teachers hinge upon the implications for the Ministry of Education.

Implications for Teachers

The main implication for language teachers in Omani government schools is that these teachers should reassess some of their approaches to teaching vocabulary and expand their repertoire of vocabulary teaching techniques. Although the participating teachers appeared to be aware of some of the most effective methods of teaching new vocabulary items to their EFL students, some felt that they had to resort to less effective shortcut techniques (such as the translation method) in order to meet the requirements set by the Ministry of Education within the allotted time. However, if the English language proficiency of students in Omani government schools is to

improve significantly, these shortcut methods cannot be a staple in their EFL classrooms.

In addition, central to better vocabulary acquisition and retention is for teachers to keep in mind the proficiency levels of their students when deciding upon the vocabulary items to be taught and the methods of vocabulary teaching to be employed. In other words, what works for beginner students does not always work for higher level students and vice versa. For example, the Word Links technique is not effective if used with beginners because it presupposes a higher level of linguistic proficiency, which is vital for analyzing and discussing relationships between words. As well, teachers need to know when and how to reinforce the learning of these words since acquiring a word thoroughly does not happen from "single meetings" as noted above. New vocabulary words must be revisited a number of times using different examples to expose students to the various uses and connotations which words might have. This "recycling" is fundamental for providing the necessary repetitions to promote acquiring and retaining a word. "If recycling is neglected, many partially known words will be forgotten, wasting all the effort already put into learning them" (Richards, 2000, p. 137).

Furthermore, Omani government school language teachers must differentiate between using techniques to explain vocabulary items and teaching students useful techniques to learn vocabulary on their own. Teachers should strive to develop and encourage learner autonomy in order to help their students become active learners when it comes to dealing with any vocabulary quandaries without always having to rely on the presence and help of the teacher. Successful vocabulary learners are those who are able to take responsibility for their own learning and know how to utilize

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vocabulary learning strategies on their own (Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007). This is vital considering the short amount of time that these teachers can allocate to teaching English language vocabulary items to their students. Hence, it is the responsibility of teachers to employ and teach the most pertinent teaching and learning strategies for their teaching context and for their particular students, if their students are to develop their vocabulary independently, and accordingly improve their language proficiency.

Implications for the Ministry of Education

The Omani Ministry of Education is well-advised to conduct workshops and seminars for Omani government school EFL teachers aimed at providing these teachers with an overview of current and effective methods of teaching English language vocabulary as well as learner strategies for acquiring new vocabulary items. Only through the full support, flexibility, and understanding of the Ministry of Education will Omani government school language teachers truly be able to help their students to achieve proficiency in the English language.

In addition, the Ministry should consider adjusting its approach to the English language curriculum and its expectations of its government school teachers especially within the limited time given to teach English during academic years. To this end, the voices of the teachers should be taken into consideration because they have experienced teaching the assigned curriculum under the restrictions present in the government school context, such as curriculum length and the time allotted. Thus, they are more aware of the positive and negative aspects of its application. Furthermore, they are in direct contact with their students, which should yield specific and purposeful suggestions toward the improvement of the curriculum and their

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students' proficiency in English. The import of taking into account teachers' voices (as well as learners' voices conveyed by teachers) in the process of improving curricula has been widely discussed in recent literature (e.g., Bohn & Sleeter, 2000; Sleeter, 2000, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

Accordingly, the Ministry of Education should give its government school teachers more freedom in terms of the materials that can be used in class beyond the Ministry-approved curriculum. For example, teachers through interaction with their students might stumble upon topics which their students are eager to learn about. The teachers should have the freedom to introduce authentic teaching materials related to these topics in order to enhance their students' learning experiences and better engage them in the language learning process. For example, teachers can search for texts (from newspapers, magazines, …etc.) that includes the words they are planning to teach in order to introduce the words used in reality, the level of the learners has to be considered, of course. After discussing the meaning of those words, the teachers can ask the students to make use of those words in useful sentences, or the teachers can ask the learners to search for other texts in which the words are used and bring them to class. A further thing that teachers can do is to create a communicative situation, in class, that requires the use of the words under focus. Employing authentic materials relevant and of interest to students in order to arouse students' curiosity has been asserted by many scholars (e.g., Long, 2002; Larimer & Schleicher, 1999). As a result of adopting interesting authentic materials in Omani government schools, the attitudes of students in these schools towards the English language could improve, which in turn could help solve one of the problems that many Omani government school teachers appear to face in their ESL classrooms.

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To wrap up, conducting seminars and workshops aimed to enlighten the teachers about effective methods of vocabulary instruction as viewed in current literature, considering adjusting the approach to the English language curriculum, and giving school teachers more freedom in terms of the material that can be used in class are the main steps that the Omani Ministry of Education needs to take if tangible improvements are sought in the field of teaching English language vocabulary in Omani government schools.

Limitations of the Study

There are two main limitations to this study that readers should keep in mind when considering its results and implications. First, this study was a case study of the EFL teachers at a specific government school in Oman. Therefore, readers are cautioned to consider the boundaries of this study and the description of the context of the study when deciding whether or not the results and implications are applicable and/or meaningful to their context. More case studies tackling the same research focus are needed in order to solidify and verify the extent of this study's transferability. Second, the number of observations undertaken during the course of the study was limited to three classroom observations per participating teacher. Three observations may not be enough to reflect the full extent of the different participants' vocabulary teaching styles and methods. Researchers interested in conducting further studies regarding vocabulary teaching techniques in EFL classrooms should design more longitudinal (case or general) studies in which participants are observed over the course of at least one academic year rather than one semester. This could yield further and clearer explanations for any discrepancies found between what teachers report as

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their perceptions regarding the vocabulary teaching techniques they employ and their actual behavior and teaching methods in their EFL classrooms.

Final Thought

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the study could be a starting point that contributes in revealing whether the problem with vocabulary instruction in AbdulRahman bin Auff is a common problem with other government schools or it is just specific to the school under the study. Moreover, it could show the extent to which vocabulary instruction affects students' vocabulary proficiency by comparing schools which have good approaches for teaching vocabulary with less effective schools. In addition, the study could reveal with more prominence the difficulties that teachers go through within the context of government schools which will give the Ministry of Education no choice other than looking seriously for solutions to those difficulties.

For those obvious points, I strongly recommend conducting similar studies within a wider context. That is, more schools and teachers need to be included to know the extent in which the issues raised in this study present in government schools in Oman.

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Appendix A

Initial Interview Guide

Time started: Time ended: Teacher:
_____

1-

    A- Where does vocabulary teaching stand in your teaching philosophy? Do you give it priority, for example?

    B- Why does vocabulary teaching take that position in your philosophy?

2- How do you teach vocabulary in your classes?

3-

    A- How do you think that teaching vocabulary affects the improvement of

     your students' English level?

4-

    A- What are the sources of the vocabulary that you teach in your class?

    B- (if the teacher limits himself to the vocabulary in the curriculum) Why do you choose to teach the vocabulary available in the curriculum?

    C- (if the teacher uses other sources) On what bases do you choose that vocabulary?

5-

    A- How many new words do you usually teach in a lesson?

    B- Do you usually teach new vocabulary in a lesson assigned only to teach vocabulary, or you do that as part of a lesson?

    C- How do you feel about your students' vocabulary level?

    D- D- Do you think that you need to give vocabulary more time or what you are doing is enough? Why?

6-

    A- What are the techniques that you use to teach vocabulary?

    B- What is the technique that you use the most? Why?

7-

     A- What do you do with newly taught vocabulary in later lessons?

     B- How do you usually review it if you have a plan of any sort?

     C- When do you do that, the next lesson, for example?

8- What are the purposes that you have teaching vocabulary other than expanding vocabulary when you teach new words if any?

Appendix B

Post-observation Follow-up Interview Guide

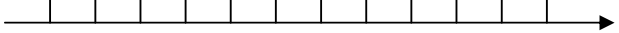Time started: Time ended: Teacher:
_____

1-   When I observed your class, I noticed that you taught 10 words. How does that
      match the importance you give to vocabulary in your philosophy of teaching?
      (if this applies to teacher)

2-
   A- Do you plan what words exactly to teach and what strategies to introduce
      them? How?

   B- In one (or more) of your lessons, you taught six (or more) new words. Does
      that correspond with the pace in which your students grasp the meaning of new
      words? (if the teacher teaches more than five words)

3-   I noticed that you lean more toward the ……… technique, you used with most
      of the new words that you taught. Why is that?

4-   In most cases, as I observed the purpose behind teaching new words was
      _____ . Why do you think is that?

5-   Do you teach your students strategies to be independent in learning
      vocabulary? How?

6-   Do you think that the situation in government school helps you apply your
      philosophy of teaching vocabulary? How?

7-   To what extent do you think that the time given to the syllabus assigned is
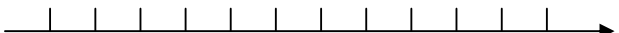   enough? Why?

Observation Sheet

Date: Place: Level: Teacher:

Lesson: Started: Ended: Number of students:

Techniques used to explain words: **Number of times technique is used:**

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11

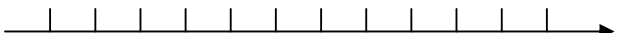* Teacher uses context: _____

Kinds of words: - nouns   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____   - verbs   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____
                              - adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____   - ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 ____

Purpose of   - Expanding vocabulary.   – Clarifying a point.   - _____
teaching words: - Facilitates understanding a text.   - _____

_____
_____

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11

* Teacher uses translation _____
 right from the beginning:

Kinds of words: - nouns   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____   - verbs   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____
                              - adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____   - ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 ____

Purpose of   - Expanding vocabulary.   – Clarifying a point.   - _____
teaching words: - Facilitates understanding a text.   - _____
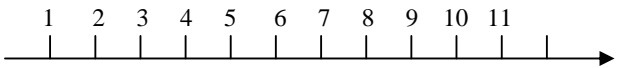
_____
_____

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11

* Teacher uses translation _____
as a last resort:

Kinds of words: - nouns   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____   - verbs   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____
                              - adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____   - ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 ____

Purpose of   - Expanding vocabulary.   – Clarifying a point.   - _____
teaching words: - Facilitates understanding a text.   - _____

_____

_____

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　1　2　3　4　5　6　7　8　9　10　11
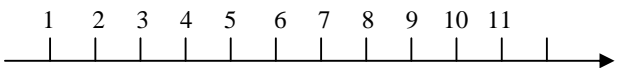
* Teacher uses miming: _____　　　|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___→

Kinds of words:　- nouns　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- verbs　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____
　　　　　　　　- adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 _____

Purpose of　　- Expanding vocabulary.　– Clarifying a point.　- _____
teaching words:　- Facilitates understanding a text.　　　　- _____

_____

_____

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　1　2　3　4　5　6　7　8　9　10　11
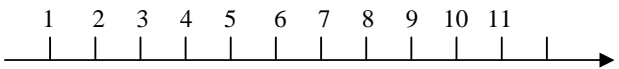
* Teacher uses drawing : _____　　|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___→

Kinds of words:　- nouns　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- verbs　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____
　　　　　　　　- adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 _____

Purpose of　　- Expanding vocabulary.　– Clarifying a point.　- _____
teaching words:　- Facilitates understanding a text.　　　　- _____

_____

_____

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　1　2　3　4　5　6　7　8　9　10　11
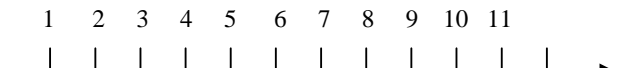
*Teacher uses flash cards: _____　|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___→

Kinds of words:　- nouns　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- verbs　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____
　　　　　　　　- adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 _____

Purpose of　　- Expanding vocabulary.　– Clarifying a point.　- _____
teaching words:　- Facilitates understanding a text.　　　　- _____

_____

_____

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　1　2　3　4　5　6　7　8　9　10　11
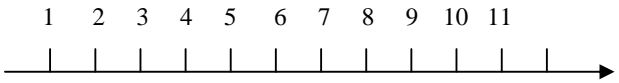
* Teacher uses a game:　　_____　|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___→

Kinds of words:　- nouns　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- verbs　　1 2 3 4 5 6 _____
　　　　　　　　- adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____　- ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 _____

Purpose of - Expanding vocabulary. – Clarifying a point. - _____
teaching words: - Facilitates understanding a text.   - _____

_____
_____

                                                1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 11

* Teacher uses _____ |—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|→

Kinds of words: - nouns   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____   - verbs   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____
                       - adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____   - ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 ____

Purpose of - Expanding vocabulary. – Clarifying a point. - _____
teaching words: - Facilitates understanding a text.   - _____

_____
_____

                                                  1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 11

* Teacher uses _____ |—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|→

Kinds of words: - nouns   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____   - verbs   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____
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Purpose of - Expanding vocabulary. – Clarifying a point. - _____
teaching words: - Facilitates understanding a text.   - _____

_____
_____

                                                  1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 11
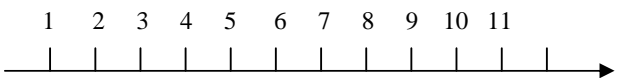
* Teacher uses _____ |—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|→

Kinds of words: - nouns   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____   - verbs   1 2 3 4 5 6 ____
                       - adjectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 _____   - ……………1 2 3 4 5 6 ____

Purpose of - Expanding vocabulary. – Clarifying a point. - _____
teaching words: - Facilitates understanding a text.   - _____

Words dealt with in the lesson:

                                                  1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 11

Number of reviewed words: |—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|→

                                                  1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 11

Number of new taught words: |—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|—|→

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Time allotted:

The words were taught:
- in the first third of the lesson
- In the second third of the lesson
- in the last third of the lesson
- in the whole class

VITA

Badr Al Jabri is a secondary school teacher in a government school in Oman. He has been teaching for four years. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Teaching English Language from Sultan Qaboos University in 2004. He presented a workshop entitled "Reading Startegies" in his school in 2006 and attended several workshops and seminars in English language teaching such as "Feedback to Improve Writing." He has been a school supervisor for student teachers from the College of Education in Sohar and from Sohar University in Al Batinah region. He participated in the annual English Conference which is held in Sultan Qaboos University.