TEACHING VOCABULARY IN SECONDARY LEVELS

Máster en Formación del Profesorado de Educación Secundaria, Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanza de Idiomas

Author: Virginia Hernández Betancor

Tutor: Sally Burgess

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"While without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed"

David Wilkins, UK linguist (1972: 111-112)

ABSTRACT

The present project aims at reviewing some of the most important aspects of vocabulary teaching and learning. The first sections deal with vocabulary teaching, covering the teacher's role and a revision of some of the most common techniques to teach vocabulary in the EFL classroom. The present work also includes a section on how to integrate vocabulary teaching and learning in the different language skills and how ICTs can be used in the EFL classroom. Finally, this work includes some practical experience when implementing some of the activities and resources mentioned in the different sections of the project.

Keywords: teaching and learning, vocabulary, vocabulary learning strategies, ICTs

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo describir algunos de los aspectos más importantes de la enseñanza y aprendizaje del vocabulario. Las primeras secciones tratan la teoría sobre la enseñanza del vocabulario, incluido el papel del profesor y un repaso de las técnicas de enseñanza de vocabulario más comunes. Además, se ha incluido una sección acerca de cómo integrar la enseñanza del vocabulario en las diferentes destrezas y cómo se pueden utilizar las nuevas tecnologías para enseñar vocabulario. Finalmente, se describe la experiencia de la autora durante el periodo de prácticas con respecto a la implementación de algunas de las actividades y recursos mencionados en el trabajo.

Palabras clave: *enseñanza y aprendizaje, vocabulario, estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario, TICs*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, foreign language teaching focused mainly on the teaching and acquisition of grammatical structures, which was probably a reflection of the idea that grammar was much more important than other aspects of language. Therefore, other skills such as oral production and interaction, listening, reading and written production and interaction used to be ignored by both teachers and learners. Thus, students, in the best of cases, acquired a very deep knowledge of grammar rules and structures but were in most cases unable to produce any language, especially in oral production situations.

More recently, foreign language teaching methods have changed and these now focus much more on teaching the different skills, thus adopting a holistic approach towards language teaching and learning. These new methods are probably in part the reflection of the action-oriented approach adopted by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) of the Council of Europe which "views users and learners of a language primarily as *social agents*, i.e. members of a society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action." (CEFR, 2001:9)

The adoption of this action-oriented approach may be the reason behind the changes in foreign language teaching and learning. In this sense, nowadays teachers focus on teaching language skills such as speaking, listening, reading and writing; although the CEFR identifies up to six skills since written and speaking skills are divided into production and interaction respectively.

However, and regardless of the number of skills they teach, whether these are four or six, during my teacher training placement, I witnessed something which continues being a reality in most classrooms in Spain. Despite focusing on teaching language skills, secondary school teachers still seem to consider grammar and vocabulary an isolated syllabus element which should be taught separately, as if learners could acquire grammatical structures and lexical items out of context. This is even reflected in the assessment systems and normally students have to take exams where there is a separated section dedicated to decontextualized grammar and vocabulary exercises apart from the other traditional skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). Why does this continue

to be the methodology followed by most teachers and schools? Is vocabulary recognition not included in a conversation when students face a speaking task? Is it not necessary to understand grammatical structures to understand a written text? The answer to these questions might seem quite obvious, but still, teachers continue to teach these two aspects of language separately as if the answer to these questions was different to what is obvious. From the answer to these questions it can be concluded that grammar and vocabulary should not be taught in isolation from the rest, but as an integrated part of language which should therefore be learnt and taught integrated in the six main skills. This, however, still remains one of the greatest challenges in foreign language teaching and learning.

However, while grammar and vocabulary continue to be taught separately as if they were a syllabus element on their own, it is true that vocabulary has clearly gained importance in language teaching nowadays. This is mainly due to the fact that many linguists have claimed that vocabulary seems to be more relevant than grammar. In the words of British linguist David Wilkins, "while without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (1972: 111), which is a way of saying that without words we cannot communicate or express our ideas. Despite this, learners seem to continue putting grammar before vocabulary and limiting the study and acquisition of vocabulary to memorizing decontextualized lists of words that they will remember for some time but which they will forget before they realize it. Consequently, many authors have suggested new methods and approaches to vocabulary teaching and acquisition in an attempt to make both learners and teachers aware of the importance of vocabulary acquisition and teaching.

As mentioned above, even though vocabulary teaching has gained importance in recent years, the integration of vocabulary teaching and learning in the different language skills still remains a challenge in most classrooms. It is known that,

> for every contextualized utterance, there are two types of meaning. The first relates to the essential and intrinsic meaning of each of the structures and lexis which make up the constituents of the utterance, as if that utterance where decontextualized. The second relates to the meaning that is intended by the speaker and understood by the hearer as the "message" of the utterance. (RSA Diploma (TEFLA), 1990: unit 3, p. 6)

Therefore, we could conclude that teaching vocabulary or lexical structures should be done adopting not just a decontextualized approach but also a contextualized one.

Taking into account that foreign language users are "members of a society who have tasks to accomplish in a given set of circumstances" (CEFR, 2001:9), both vocabulary and grammar are always going to be produced and received in a context. Therefore, teachers should dedicate more time in the classroom to teaching vocabulary adopting a contextualized approach and less time to teaching vocabulary using decontextualizing techniques. It is important to highlight that the use of techniques like vocabulary lists out of context should not be completely rejected but used only when the circumstances of language learning require it, like for example when teachers are "faced with learners with a small vocabulary who wish to go on to academic study in a few months' time, in which case this last approach is very effective." (Nation, 1990: 2).

The present project aims at reviewing some of the most important aspects of vocabulary teaching and learning. To this end, the project is organized in three "parts". Some sections deal with vocabulary teaching, covering the teacher's role in vocabulary teaching and learning and a revision of some of the most common techniques to teach vocabulary in the EFL classroom. In addition, since this still remains a challenge for most secondary school teachers of English, I have also included a section on how to integrate vocabulary teaching and learning in the different language skills.

Finally, this project also includes a section on vocabulary learning strategies and the importance for teachers to both teach strategies and assess them in class. The project concludes with a section on how ICTs can be used to teach vocabulary in the EFL classroom and some of my experience when implementing some of the activities and resources mentioned in the project during my teacher training placement.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY AND WHY VOCABULARY SHOULD BE TAUGHT

As mentioned before, it is clear that vocabulary is a very important element in any language, since the vast majority of meanings is conveyed lexically. However, vocabulary is not the only element that carries meaning. Obviously, there are other elements that convey meaning such as grammar, stress, intonation, pauses or silences, as well as the innumerable non-verbal elements which constitute body language. Therefore, we cannot reduce language learning to only learning vocabulary but, it is true that "no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way" (McCarthy, 1990: VIII as cited by Campillo, 1995: 35).

Despite all this, and even though nowadays there is a tendency to focus more on vocabulary teaching than in the past, "there are still teachers who think that vocabulary can be left to take care of itself" (Nation, 1990: 1). However, and given the importance of this element in language teaching there are numerous reasons to adopt a systematic and principled approach to vocabulary both by teachers and learners. According to Nation (1990), one of these reasons is the amount of vocabulary research, thanks to which we nowadays have a great deal of information about what to do about vocabulary and about what vocabulary to focus on. The second reason to justify vocabulary teaching that Nation points out is that there is a wide range of ways to deal with vocabulary in foreign language learning. Some of these ways of dealing with vocabulary might be more appealing to some teachers and less to others, but not being satisfied with one of the approaches to teaching vocabulary should not be the reason to ignore all the others ways for dealing with vocabulary. In the words of Nation (1990),

> there should always be a reason behind a teacher's choice not to deal with vocabulary in a certain way and these reasons should always be based on a good understanding of the way of dealing with vocabulary, the principles behind it, and its theoretical and experimental justification.

The third reason Nation gives for having a systematic and principled approach to vocabulary is precisely the recognition by both teachers and learners that vocabulary is a very important element if not one of the most important elements in foreign language

teaching and learning. Many foreign language students have the feeling that most of their communication break downs and difficulties come from an inadequate vocabulary and this is reflected in Krashen's words at the British Council Conference in Milan (1987), explaining why "when students travel, they do not carry grammar books, they carry dictionaries."

This idea that students usually believe that lack of vocabulary is their greatest barrier to comprehension is connected to the fact that learners need to comprehend much more vocabulary than they can produce. A great deal of the listening and reading skills involves precisely the recognition of the main lexical content of the text. Therefore, EFL teachers should take into account that learners will need a passive vocabulary which is significantly greater than their active vocabulary.

2.1 Different approaches to vocabulary teaching and learning

Taking into account all of the above, we may conclude that giving relevance to vocabulary in foreign language teaching and learning is unavoidable, and even the most formal or communication-oriented approaches to language teaching requires dealing with vocabulary in one way or another, but how can we deal with vocabulary? There are many different approaches to vocabulary teaching and learning. Nation (1990), for example, makes a distinction between to major approaches: direct and indirect vocabulary learning.

According to Nation (1990), direct vocabulary learning consists mainly of doing exercises like word-building exercises, fill-in-the-gaps or learning lists of words. All of these are exercises in which the learners are totally aware of the vocabulary they are learning. In other words, in direct vocabulary learning, the learners' attention is focused on the vocabulary itself.

Contrarily, in indirect vocabulary learning the learner's attention is focused on something else, usually on the message that someone is trying to convey either speaking or in writing. In these activities, the amount of unknown vocabulary becomes a relevant aspect to take into account because if the number of unknown words is low, "considerable vocabulary learning can occur even though the learners' attention is not directed towards vocabulary learning" (Nation, 1990: 2).

It might be interesting to point out that the indirect approach to learning vocabulary is very closely related to what Krashen (1981) as cited by Nation (1990) referred to as the input theory of language learning. Regarding vocabulary learning, this theory claims that for it to occur, certain conditions need to apply like for example that there must be an interest from the learner in understanding unknown words. Secondly, the message should always contain some amount of unknown vocabulary but this amount shall be easily understandable from the context. Finally, learners should not feel worried or threatened when facing the foreign language. If all this happens, it is when, according to Krashen, not just language learning occurs, but language acquisition takes place.

Therefore, it can be concluded that whereas there should be time in the EFL classroom for both approaches, indirect vocabulary learning should occupy much more time in a language learning class than direct vocabulary learning exercises (Nation, 1990: 3).

Regarding other vocabulary teaching methods, Oxford and Crookhall (1990), as cited by Shen (2003: 191), classified common techniques into four categories: *de-*contextualising (word lists, flashcards and dictionary use); *semi-contextualising* (word grouping, association, visual imagery, aural imaginary, keywords, physical response, physical sensation and semantic mapping); *fully contextualising* (reading, listening, speaking and writing); and *adaptable* (structured reviewing). Taking a closer look at all these categories, it may be concluded that contextual, semi-contextual and de-contextual strategies of teaching vocabulary are all needed to help learners learn words (Shen, 2003: 191).

2.2. The challenge of vocabulary learning for EFL students

Another relevant aspect of vocabulary learning we should take into account before designing vocabulary programs for students, is that we, the teachers, first need to become aware of the vocabulary challenge faced by learners of English. This section aims at contextualizing and understanding what it means to learn English vocabulary for EFL students and the size of vocabulary EFL students need to learn.

English is a language which, according to Schmitt (2007: 745), "probably contains the greatest number of words of any major language, which makes learning a sufficient amount of its vocabulary a formidable task." Many other languages, however, use

routine techniques to create new words, which means that learners can normally create and understand a large number of new words just by learning and knowing these construction systems and lexical rules. Despite the fact that English also has rules and systems for word formation, the amount of words we can form in English following these rules is much lower than in other languages. Besides, there are other aspects we should take into account to understand the difficulty underlying the task of learning English vocabulary.

In this sense, many authors (Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997) have discussed and carried out research to answer the following questions:

A. How many words are there in the English language?
B. How many words do native speakers know?
C. How many words are needed to do the things a language user needs to do?

Regarding the first question, according to Schmitt (2007: 746), the *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (1963) has a vocabulary of around 54,000 word families. However, this is a learning goal which is far beyond the reaches of second language learners and of many native speakers. As for the second question and as happens in most languages, native speakers of English do not know or use all the words in the English language and obviously, this varies from person to person depending on different aspects such as education, intelligence or how well-read a person is. Despite the large variation between individuals, a native university graduate has a vocabulary of around 20,000 word families (Goulden, Nation and Read, 1990 as cited by Schmitt, 2007: 746).

The third question is probably the most interesting and relevant to take into account when teaching EFL students. It seems obvious that knowing and learning all the words in a language is an almost impossible task and a learning goal that not even native speakers achieve. Even educated native speakers only get to having a vocabulary of 20,000 words as we mentioned before. But, is it necessary for foreign language learners to achieve that same goal? According to Schmitt (2007: 746), "it is possible to function in English with vocabularies far smaller [than those of native speakers']". On average, it is necessary to know the most frequent 2,000-3,000 word families in English to be able to communicate in basic everyday situations and it has been found that knowledge of

around 5,000 word families allows learners to start reading original texts. Furthermore, most research suggests that when learners of English as a foreign language get to such level of vocabulary knowledge, they are able to guess or infer the meaning of many words out of context which makes them able to understand most of the content of the text. Interestingly, Schmitt (2008) concludes in one of his studies that a large vocabulary is necessary to function in English, around 8,000-9,000 word families for reading and probably between 5,000-7,000 word families for oral communication. Knowledge of the most frequent 10,000 word families is considered a wide vocabulary knowledge for foreign language learners.

These three questions are very relevant and should therefore be taken into account when establishing learning goals regarding the amount of vocabulary language learners need. However, there is one more question we could add as question number four, which is as important as the three ones above and that is, *which* vocabulary EFL students need to know.

Obviously, the choice of which words are important for learners depends in most cases on the field of study. In this sense, students who are learning English to function in the field of medicine will obviously have to learn vocabulary connected with that field, whereas students who are learning English to function in business will focus on learning other very different vocabulary. However, it is probably less obvious to choose which vocabulary students should learn in much more general contexts or, in the words of Schmitt (2007: 746), “when the vocabulary learning goal is simply a general increase in vocabulary size”. When trying to answer this question, most studies have found that the best criterion to guide the vocabulary selection is frequency of use.

3. LEARNING A WORD

Now that we have reflected on the challenge faced by EFL students when they have to learn English vocabulary, it might be interesting to start taking a closer look at vocabulary teaching and learning more in detail. However, before doing so, it might also be interesting to elicit what we understand by "learning a word". When can we say that we know a word? When do we really learn a word and what does the process of learning a word involve? In this section I will try to answer these and some other questions related to the process of learning a word and the difficulty that this process entails.

When trying to give an answer to the question "when can we say that we know a word?", it is sometimes said that we know a word when the meaning of the word is known and when the word can be recognized. Actually, this is, according to Schmitt (2010) "not a bad answer for *initial* knowledge of a word. If one thinks about it, a form-meaning linkage is the most basic vocabulary knowledge possible." (Schmitt, 2010: 5) However, according to Nation (1990), there is much more we need to know about a word to say that we really "know" it. This is obviously because if we think about it, when learners simply know or remember the meaning of a word (usually in their own language, i.e. Spanish in this case), they are still very likely to make mistakes when using the word in context, precisely because there are many other aspects to a word than just its meaning. Why do foreign language learners make mistakes when they use a word in a written text? Learners may know the meaning, but the problem is they do not know "how to use the word". So, can we say that we know a word if we do not know how to use it? What is the point of learning the meaning of a word if then we cannot make use of it because we do not know, among other things, how to write it or use it in a sentence? The answer to this question might seem quite obvious: learners still make mistakes even if they know meaning of a word because they still do not know many other aspects about the word.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in order to know a word, other things need to be learnt such as the pronunciation of the word, the spelling, its position in the sentence, how frequent the word is and when it is common to use it (context and register), etc. These are all aspects which Nation (1990: 31) groups in four different categories,

including *form*, *position*, *function* and *meaning*. Nation also divides each of these four aspects of a word into two parts, one of them dealing with receptive knowledge (linked to reading and listening skills) and the other dealing with productive knowledge (linked to writing and speaking skills). The difference made by Nation between receptive and productive knowledge of a word is relevant since it might be possible that learners have different goals when learning a foreign language and, depending on the use they are going to give the foreign language, one aspect of the word might be more relevant than the other. For example, if we were teaching an academic writing course, our students would probably say that they know a word when they can write it and spell it correctly, when they can use it in the correct position in a sentence, and when they know the written context where they can use it and its register. That is the same as saying that these learners would probably pay less attention to other aspects such as how the word sounds.

The difficulty in learning a word is represented by the learning burden of the word to be learnt, in the words of Nation, "the amount of effort needed to learn and remember the word." (1990: 33). According to Nation (1990: 33) this depends on three main aspects: the learner's previous experience of English and their mother tongue, how the word is taught and learned, and the intrinsic difficulty of the word itself.

One interesting question regarding the process of learning a word is what makes this process difficult and how can the teacher reduce the difficulty of learning a word. So, regarding the first aspect mentioned above, Nation (1990) points out that when learning vocabulary there is normally interference from the learner's mother tongue. As mentioned by Nation (1990), it has been found that at low levels foreign language learners classify second foreign language meanings according to the mother tongue, but interestingly, as learners get to know more about the second language culture those meanings change. Likewise, it has also been found that learners of English at low levels have a tendency to connect words which sound or are written in a similar way like *cat* and *cow*. However, students with a high proficiency level tend much more to connect and learn words according to meaning, so they are more likely to associate words like *pig* and *cow* (farm animals). Therefore, a possible way to reduce the learning burden of a word would be not to introduce words which sound similar or look similar at low

levels. “If [these words] are introduced early, they will be stored together and will interfere with each other.” (Nation, 1990: 35)

Obviously, another important aspect here is how similar to English the learners’ mother tongue is. Learners might sometimes find it easy to learn vocabulary which looks similar or is used or pronounced in a similar way in their mother tongue and it is obvious that the distance between the foreign language and the mother tongue determines in a lot of cases the level of proficiency that the learners are likely to achieve in the foreign language. Taking all this into account, Nation concludes that “if many of the features of a word are predictable because the learners already know some English, or because of their mother tongue, the word will be easy to learn.” (1990: 35)

In addition, as mentioned above, the learning burden of a word also depends on the way the word is taught and learned. This might seem quite obvious but I would like to add here that, while Nation seems to focus only on the difficulties caused by the way a word is taught, we may also want to wonder how the way learners learn the word affects the learning burden of the word. By this, I mean how the vocabulary learning strategies developed by learners or the learners’ autonomy affect the way they learn the word.

Finally, the intrinsic difficulty of the word is also relevant when learning a word in a foreign language and, according to Nation (1990), this is where teachers can do the least to teach vocabulary effectively.

4. THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN VOCABULARY TEACHING AND LEARNING

While there is a great deal of research on vocabulary learning, there is little written about how we should teach vocabulary. In this sense, there are several general assumptions on how we should teach vocabulary like for example the general thought that the teacher's main role is to teach words. Besides, it is commonly believed that the more words we teach, the better and that if we do so in the least time possible, even better for us and for our students.

The reality is, however, that there are many things to consider when teaching vocabulary and that the time teachers need to do so is not just the class time. Actually, most of the teacher's work occurs before the program begins. Therefore, preparation and planning are essential to help students make efficient progress in vocabulary acquisition and language learning.

The first step every teacher should take when teaching vocabulary is to select the words to be learned. A very interesting question which comes after identifying this is *how do we choose what vocabulary to teach?* According to Webb & Nation (2013: 1), those unknown words which have the greatest value to the students deserve attention in the classroom. Words with value are those which are used more often as opposed to those which are used less often. If we take the words *house* and *dwelling*, we would always teach the first one instead of the second one since it is used more often. According to Webb (2016), the value of words is not necessarily indicated by their inclusion in language learning materials. Therefore, it is always the teacher's responsibility to decide which are the words of greatest value for our students.

At the same time, we should start by setting vocabulary learning goals. Setting learning goals is always necessary because by doing so we ensure the focus on vocabulary growth and we make it possible to evaluate the learning progress of our students. According to Webb and Nation (2013: 2), having clear vocabulary learning goals is particularly important in the early stages of vocabulary development when increasing vocabulary size will have a significant effect on the degree to which learners can use and understand language. These vocabulary learning goals will always depend on the

time available for vocabulary learning inside and outside the classroom and the methods used for learning.

Regarding learning goals, there is a general thought that it is the teacher's responsibility to set these goals and evaluate learners' progress without letting learners know about the goals they are supposed to achieve. Webb & Nation (2013) claim that learners should be aware of the vocabulary learning goals because if learners know for example the number of words they should learn a week, knowledge of these goals may encourage learning.

The second step is related to how this vocabulary will be learned in the course. It is precisely here where teachers' planning is essential because it is essential that teachers dedicate time to planning how the words selected will be learned throughout the course before the course starts. The most common method that teachers use to do this is testing their students. Teachers plan to teach meaning of a certain number of words per lesson and then they test their students to check comprehension and whether students can remember the words they have learnt. However, taking into account that learning a word involves much more than just knowing its meaning, completing a single activity will probably not be enough (Webb & Nation, 2013: 3). Obviously, gaining deep knowledge of a word is not something we can achieve just with one piece of teaching or learning, but it is knowledge that is gradually acquired.

In this sense, Nation (2001), as cited by Webb and Nation (2013), developed the *four strands* as a framework for planning an effective vocabulary program (see Table 1). The four strands that Nation described are the meaning-focused input, the meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development. According to Nation (2001) as cited by Webb and Nation (2013: 3), the notion of the four strands is that vocabulary development will be optimal only if there is a similar amount of time given to learning in each strand. Nation (1996: 7) believes that there is a tendency for language courses not to balance the four strands and, indeed, to give almost no attention to some of them. In the words of Nation (1996),

> courses which have a very strong communicative focus normally do not include the formal language focused learning […]. At the other extreme, there are courses that seem to do little else but focus on formal features of the language with little or no opportunity to use what has been learned to receive and produce real messages.

We may conclude then that the key is to balance these four strands throughout the course, allowing students to spend time doing different types of activities which require different efforts from them.

The meaning-focused input refers to learning through listening and reading. The main goal in this strand would be comprehension and having students enjoy what they are reading or listening to. To this end, it is very important to get students interested in what they are reading or listening to, there must always be some interest from students to understand the content. This strand is therefore connected with activities where the majority of words are known to learners. According to Nation (2001), when learners know 98% of the words in a reading or listening activity they are very capable of guessing the meaning of the unknown words from the context successfully. On the contrary, in the meaning-focused output strand it is where learners need to strengthen and deepen their vocabulary by using words in writing and speaking which they have just learned or which they are not very familiar with yet.

In the language-focused strand the main objective is to focus students' attention on the vocabulary itself in an explicit way. In this strand is when teachers dedicate time in the class to explain the different aspects of high frequency words. Obviously, depending on the time available and lesson goals teachers will spend more or less time explaining all aspects of the word or they may just focus on some of them, typically form and meaning (Webb & Nation, 2013: 4). It is also important for teachers to teach vocabulary learning strategies in this strand, for example telling students how to face unknown words or how to study vocabulary to retain it in the long-term memory. This is something which might sound quite obvious, and in fact it is included as assessment criteria in the Spanish curriculum, which means that teachers should assess how students apply those learning strategies. Unfortunately, the reality is that many teachers do not dedicate time to teaching strategies and that most of them do not assess their students on learning strategies.

Finally, the last of Nation's strands is fluency development. In this strand, the aim is for learners to use or understand known words in a more native-like manner (Webb & Nation, 2013: 5). As we mentioned before, it is not enough to know the meaning of the word and it is precisely here where students find vocabulary acquisition difficult. The

main objective is therefore to help students use the vocabulary fluently. In order to do this, teachers should design activities which involve using very easy material with familiar content that does not contain any unknown vocabulary, grammatical features and discourse features. However, there should be some pressure to achieve a higher speed like for example in speed reading activities (Webb & Nation, 2013: 5).

Strand	General conditions	Vocabulary requirements	Activities and techniques
Meaning-focused input	Focus on the message Some unfamiliar items Understanding Noticing [facilitates incidental learning]	95%+ coverage (preferably 98%) Skill at guessing from context Opportunity to negotiate Incidental opportunities to define and draw attention to items	Reading and listening to lexical items in meaningful and interesting contexts
Meaning-focused output	Focus on the message Some unfamiliar items Understanding Noticing [facilitates incidental learning]	95%+ coverage (preferably 98%) Encouragement to use unfamiliar items Supportive input	Learners try to communicate messages to others using the targeted lexical items (speaking and writing) – fits well with task-based language teaching
Language-focused learning	Focus on language items	Development of vocabulary learning strategies Appropriate teacher focus on high-frequency words, and strategies for low-frequency words	Direct teaching of vocabulary Direct learning Intensive reading (class text) Training in vocabulary strategies
Fluency development	Focus on the message Little or no unfamiliar language Pressure to perform faster	99%+ coverage Repetition Automatic vocabulary recognition Fast lexical retrieval	Reading easy graded readers Repeated reading Speed reading (see Asia Pacific passages) Listening to easy input 4/3/2 speaking exercise 10 minute writing

Table 1. *The four strands of vocabulary teaching* (adapted from Nation, 2001: 390)
Source: https://eslsecondarynetworkceom.wikispaces.com/file/view/Four+strands+of+vocabulary+teaching.pdf

Apart from selecting the words, establishing vocabulary learning goals and deciding how the words will be learned it is also very important for teachers to select the materials accordingly taking into account the learning context, students' level and background and of course, the learning goals previously established.

In addition, another essential step to take once we have done all this would be to make sure that we, as teachers, provide real opportunities for students to use the target vocabulary in speech and writing throughout the course. How can we get students to learn how to use the target vocabulary if we do not give them the opportunity to do it? We will therefore have to design activities where students can put that vocabulary into practice. Unfortunately, designing activities to use words repeatedly throughout a course represents a major challenge since the time to use words in class is often very limited

and it is difficult to ensure that new words are used. Therefore, teachers will need to plan ahead carefully and take all this into account so that the activities designed include not just vocabulary learning, but real opportunities for students to use most of the target vocabulary. In further sections I will mention some suggestions on how we can design this type of activities.

To conclude, the last two steps are also very important. The first of these two last steps involves something that is probably the most known task when we think of the work of a teacher, which is assessing students' learning. The last step, which is also a crucial one, and one which is normally not implemented by teachers, is to train students to use vocabulary learning strategies. Learner autonomy can only be achieved if we teach students how to apply strategies, what to do when they encounter a word they do not know, among other things. Believing that students can learn enough vocabulary inside the classroom is an enormous mistake and only by training students to use learning strategies will they become effective and efficient learners outside the classroom.

5. TECHNIQUES TO TEACH VOCABULARY

Every language teacher knows that the meaning of words can be communicated or taught in many different ways. However, while many teachers have probably developed their own way, there are some techniques which are commonly used by the vast majority of language teachers. According to Alqahtani (2015), foreign language teachers do not just want their students to learn vocabulary but also to remember it, which makes it necessary for teachers not just to present new vocabulary but also to practice and revise it in order for students not to forget it.

Despite the fact that there are several different techniques to teach vocabulary, we should bear in mind that none of these techniques is valid for all learning situations nor is it one better than the rest. Some of these techniques may be more useful or convenient in one learning situation or another which is why, according to Takač (2008) as cited by Alqahtani (2015), "techniques employed by teachers depend on some factors, such as the content, time availability, and their value for the learners". Furthermore, it seems obvious that a foreign language teacher should always have a reason to employ certain techniques and in many cases, they will probably employ not just one technique but a combination of some of them, depending on the learning situation. The following section aims at reviewing some of the most common techniques to teach vocabulary in the EFL classroom focusing on their advantages and disadvantages.

Nation (1990) divided the most common techniques to teach vocabulary into two categories: *by demonstration or pictures* or *by verbal explanation*. These two categories include a series of techniques which, according to Nation (1990), constitute most of the possible techniques used by foreign language teachers.

5.1. By demonstration or using pictures

In this category Nation (1990) includes several techniques to teach vocabulary such as using an object, performing an action, using photographs or using gestures, among others. In all these cases the teacher communicates the meaning of the word by "translating" the idea of the word into something that learners can see or touch. (Nation, 1990: 52).

Using visual aids to communicate meaning is a technique that can work very well, especially at low levels, because it helps learners remember the words and associate them with real objects or things that they are familiar with. However, every foreign language teacher has probably realized that this technique is not so effective or easy to employ when trying to communicate abstract concepts instead of concrete ones and while abstract concepts like feelings (i.e. *sadness, anger* or *love*) might be easy to communicate with pictures of people showing those emotions, other abstract concepts might be more challenging (i.e. *pride*, *anxiety*). In other cases, as mentioned above, it might be even necessary to give learners more information about the word like its function in the sentence, i.e. whether it is a noun, adjective, verb, etc.

Many teachers are fond of these demonstration techniques because by using them, they avoid using the L1 in class. While in the past translation into the mother tongue was a common technique among foreign language teachers in Spain, in the recent years there are every time more and more teachers who reject the idea of using the L1 in the EFL classroom. According to Nation (1990), those who criticize translation into the mother tongue do it because they claim that there is usually no exact equivalent in the mother tongue, because translation into the mother tongue is indirect or because the use of the mother tongue takes time which could be better spent in using English. (Nation, 1990: 52-53)

While I agree with the statements above regarding the use of the mother tongue to communicate meaning, our learners' mother tongue should always be taken into account when teaching foreign language students. It seems quite obvious to think that we would not teach Chinese and Spanish students in the same way, mainly because they come from two very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the latter being closer to the English than the first one. As secondary education teachers, our students will always have a mother tongue that they understand much better than the foreign language (English in the case of Spanish secondary education) and it might be interesting to wonder whether we could use this knowledge of the L1 to learn the L2. I am not defending the idea of using the L1 as language of instruction in the EFL classroom, but teaching students how to identify the similarities between the mother tongue and the foreign language might be a very useful strategy that teachers sometimes forget to employ in their classes, such as making students aware of cognates (words which a

similar to their mother tongue in English). In any case, I will focus more on the use of translation to teach vocabulary in a different section of this project.

5.2. By verbal explanation

In this category Nation (1990) includes three different techniques like giving an analytical definition of the word, putting the new word in a defining context or translating the word into another language. As opposed to the techniques mentioned above, these techniques require more complex explanations which is why these are normally used at higher levels. This is precisely the disadvantage of most of these techniques, we would normally need to use the L2 to give a verbal explanation that students may not understand because the vocabulary we use in those explanations is unknown to them. However, some of these techniques, like translating the word into another language, usually the L1, may be useful when the teacher needs to save time in class.

Another disadvantage pointed out by Nation (1990) regarding translation as a technique to teach meaning is that the teacher limits the meaning of the word to just one equivalent. Obviously, when translating a word, we do it within a context and we normally want to teach the meaning of a word according to the context it is presented in. However, it is worth remembering that most words have more than just one meaning and in many cases, by using an equivalent in the L2 we may be leaving out many other meanings the word has. Nation (1990) uses the example of the word *fork* to explain this. While the word *fork* in English is used for many different nouns, in other languages, for example in Spanish, if we translate it as *tenedor* we would not be including other meanings such as the fork of a bike, a fork in the road or a fork in a branch.

5.3. Teaching groups of words together

Teaching words together, taking advantage of the similarities between words is a very common technique. It is widely known that organized information is easier to learn than unorganized information. Nation (1990) points out that it might be easy for learners to understand the word *meaningful* once they already know the word *meaning* and *helpful*. This is why many teachers sometimes use the technique of teaching groups of words together, being the most common the teaching of opposites like *short* and *long*. According to different authors (Schmitt, 2007; Nation, 1990), this technique might be

beneficial for learners but only when the words are already partially known (Schmitt, 2007: 753). The problem is that when teachers teach groups of words together, learners will hopefully learn the words and the meaning but may confuse which goes with which. This is the so-called *cross-association*, which basically consists on confusing which word goes with which concept. This is something that happens even among native speakers which may sometimes confuse the meanings of *affect* and *effect* or other similar pairs of words (Schmitt, 2007: 753).

Taking this into account and in order to avoid this cross-association, several authors have suggested teaching these pairs of words separately. That is, for example teaching the word *deep* and only when it is fully understood and well established, introduce its partner(s), like for example *shallow* (Schmitt, 2007: 753). When choosing which word of the word pair to teach first, the frequency criteria should apply, which is why in the example mentioned before, we would always teach first the word *deep* which is probably much more frequent than the word *shallow*.

5.4.Teaching word families instead of words

Teaching word families instead of just individual words is a technique used by many teachers to maximize vocabulary learning. We, as teachers, can therefore use this technique as a habit when introducing a new word in order to mention the other members of its word family. By doing this, learners will probably become aware of how the English language works when forming new words. Besides, by implementing this technique teachers could also ask students to guess a new word's derivatives at the time of introduction and even include a derivation section as part of assessment (Schmitt, 2007: 754).

5.5. Translation into the L1

Using translation into the L1 to teach vocabulary (not to be confused with using L1 as language of instruction in the EFL classroom) is a technique which has been controversial for linguists and foreign language teachers. While I personally do not support the idea of using the L1 as language of instruction, using it to teach vocabulary is a completely different issue which has both advantages and disadvantages.

As I mentioned before, translation into the L1 was probably a much more extended practice among foreign language teachers in the past. It was very common practice to include translation exercises in exams where students had to translate complete sentences from Spanish into English or vice versa, in order for teachers to assess language acquisition. This is definitely not so common nowadays.

Some years ago, many teachers started rejecting more and more the idea of using the L1 in the EFL classroom to teach vocabulary or even to explain grammar rules which led to a foreign language classroom in which the medium of instruction was exclusively English, no matter the level or the type of students. This was known as the communicative approach to foreign language teaching. The emergence of this approach led to the general thought that translation had very little to contribute to L2 acquisition. Nowadays, however, there is controversy whether to use the L1 or not, since an increasing number of authors and experts argue that this general thought is unfounded. Therefore, many teachers are nowadays experimenting with taking advantage of student's knowledge of the L1 to teach the L2 and how this could be beneficial for foreign language learners. We may conclude that the tendency nowadays is to adopt a combination of the two approaches regarding the use of the L1.

More specifically, learning vocabulary through translation to L1 has received implicit support in the recommendation that learners use word cards on which the learner had the target L2 word on one side and the L1 translation on the back (Nation & Webb, 2011) as cited by Alroe & Reinders (2015). Many authors claim that this practice is acceptable in the EFL classroom.

I personally believe that, more than asking ourselves whether we should use the L1 or not to teach vocabulary, we should probably ask ourselves other questions such as: *will my students find it easier or more difficult? Will this be effective?* Carrying out some action-research in the classroom would be useful here, or even taking into account other considerations such as students' level and exposure to the English language outside the classroom. Some studies have found that teaching vocabulary through translation into the L1 was more effective than doing it through the context of an L2 sentence, but it is also true that many of these studies indicated that learning was more effective especially for weaker learners (Alroe & Reinders, 2015: 41). This may suggest that translation

might be a useful technique for lower levels or weaker students but not so much for more advanced learners, with whom we could use the opportunity to teach vocabulary in English by paraphrasing or giving verbal explanations using the L2.

Another thing we should also think of when assessing which technique is more effective is whether students have been taught on how to use the context to learn vocabulary. This is connected to teaching and learning strategies, which most secondary school teachers in Spain forget to teach and which are essential for learners to become autonomous learners in the future. If students have never been taught on how to use the context to guess the meaning of unknown words, it is obvious that they are going to find this approach much more difficult than just giving them the translation of the word into the L1.

Taking advantage of students' knowledge of the L1 is another similar technique which should also be considered. Foreign language teachers must always take into account their learners' cultural and language background when teaching a foreign language and it seems obvious that we would not expect to achieve the same level of proficiency in English when teaching Spanish students than when teaching Japanese or Chinese students. In this sense, when teaching English to Spanish students, pointing out to learners that 58% of English is Latin-based may be useful and even asking them to spot *cognates* (words which sound similar to a Spanish word which means the same) in reading texts or in listening activities might be quite a useful idea not just to relieve students from becoming overwhelmed with a text they find difficult to understand because they only focus on the lexical items they do not know, but also to teach students some strategies on how to learn vocabulary in context.

5.6. The *inductive vs.* the *deductive* approach

Nation (1990) points out other ways of teaching meaning by using a different approach. He claims that it is important to distinguish between the concept of a word from the particular uses of the word. In order to do this, Nation (1990) suggests presenting several examples of the word and helping learners see what these examples have in common. When doing this it might therefore be useful to present positive examples of the word (examples of the concept) and negative examples (those which do not correspond to the concept), then ask the learners to describe the most important features

that make up the concept and finish by checking understanding translating into the L1. However, using translation here to check understanding may not be useful if the English concept does not have an exact equivalent in the L1.

One approach to teaching meaning is the *inductive approach* where, in the words of Nation (1990), "the examples *lead* the learners *into* the concept." (Nation, 1990: 55) For example if we are teaching a verb, we could give students examples of contexts where they could use that verb and tell them to complete the gaps without telling them which words they have to use so that they read the examples carefully. Finally, by reading the paragraphs learners will understand the meaning of the word. This means that, by understanding the context, learners guess the word which best fits. The other approach that Nation (1990) mentions to is the *deductive approach* in which learners do exactly the opposite. They are given the concept and then they are guided through the examples so they identify the concept in them.

Sometimes we, as teachers, may ask ourselves when to use the inductive and deductive approaches to teach meaning. According to Nation (1990), this choice depends on which approach will suit a particular word and where the teacher wants to direct the learners' attention. In some cases, there are words which are difficult to define in a satisfactory way which means that an inductive approach is the most suitable. In other cases, the opposite will happen. The inductive approach allows repetition of the word and encourages the learners to make an effort to get the meaning, whereas a deductive approach communicates the meaning quickly and gives the teacher the possibility of arranging some practice for collocations of the word. Therefore, the choice between one approach or the other depends on many different factors, such as the word itself, the teacher's learning goal, students' level, etc. However, it is essential to always have founded reasons to choose one approach or another.

Looking at all these techniques, we could now ask ourselves the following question: *what are we teaching when we use these techniques?* The obvious answer would be that we are teaching vocabulary, but that is probably not totally true if we take a closer look at what we are *really* teaching. Taking into account what we mentioned above regarding what it means to know a word, we may conclude that the techniques above cover only ways to teach the meaning of words and maybe the spelling of the word, but what about

teaching other aspects such as the way it sounds or how it is used in a sentence? Therefore, it is important to remember that, in order to teach all aspects of vocabulary, we will have to combine these techniques with other ways of teaching vocabulary which cover all aspects of the word which are necessary for students to use lexical items efficiently.

6. INTEGRATING VOCABULARY LEARNING IN THE DIFFERENT LANGUAGE SKILLS

As mentioned above, one of the major challenges for teachers nowadays is how to integrate vocabulary teaching in the different language skills. Even though teachers now have a tendency to teach the different language skills adopting a holistic approach to language teaching and learning, teachers still seem to teach and assess vocabulary and grammar as an isolated part of language as if reading, listening, writing or speaking did not involve recognizing and understanding the lexical content of the text or conversation.

Why should we assess the comprehension of lexical items using lists of words and their translation into the L1 or by using other techniques such as having learners give synonyms of those words to check understanding of the vocabulary? Why not design activities where we can assess students' comprehension of lexical items by reading a text and checking understanding of words, for example, by guessing from the context?

I personally believe that designing these type of activities is much more difficult and requires much more time from the teacher than just giving learners a list of words and asking them to produce a definition of the word or giving a synonym word or phrase. This may be the reason why secondary school teachers feel the need to assess vocabulary using activities or exercises which are simpler to design. Anyway, whether it is because of time and effort constraints or because of other reasons, the consequence is that this is normally not done in secondary schools when teaching and assessing vocabulary.

In this section, I will try to suggest some ideas on how we can integrate the teaching and learning of vocabulary in the four main language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing.

6.1. Vocabulary learning through reading

Reading consists mainly on recognizing and understanding vocabulary which is why vocabulary learning is one of the essential aspects involved in this skill. In addition, presenting new words in meaningful texts is probably preferable for most linguists and foreign language teaching experts because of many reasons, one of the most important

being the fact that isolated words do not present a linguistic reality, as the meaning of a word is in most cases partly defined by the context (Beheydt 1987) as cited by Van Parreren, 1989: 77).

Besides vocabulary recognition and knowledge there are other factors that also influence reading comprehension such as the learners' cultural knowledge and their previous reading experiences. Another important issue we should take into account in reading is obviously students' level. In this sense, low level learners should always begin by reading simplified texts, which will be more adequate for their level.

When foreign language learners face a text in the L2, there are several techniques that can be implemented. One of the most common ones is guessing the meaning of unknown words from context. However, the level of our students should also be taken into account here since, according to Nation (1990), this will be possible when the unknown vocabulary load is low and it will be much more difficult to do when there is a large number of unknown words.

An interesting question that Nation (1990) poses refers to what teachers should do when learners do not have enough vocabulary to read their set texts. This is quite a common problem, sometimes we could face a classroom where there are students with a higher level than others, some may have the level they should have but others are weaker and have less vocabulary knowledge and this makes it complicated for them to read texts even if these are adapted to their course level. When this happens, Nation (1990: 119) suggests adopting individualized techniques like doing vocabulary exercises on their own. It is also worth teaching students what to do when they face a word they do not understand and ultimately, it should be the teacher the one deciding whether the word is worth spending time on or not. With more advanced learners, it is always useful to teach them to be selective with the unknown vocabulary. Learners should try and guess the meaning of words from context, but when that is not possible they may use other solutions such as checking dictionaries or websites. The risk here however is that learners sometimes tend to look up too many words in the dictionary and teachers should probably try to help them be selective with the words that they look up. We, as teachers, should guide learners to not look up words which are meaningless like prepositions or articles, but rather advise them to look up words like nouns or verbs

which are very difficult to guess from context and which are important to understand the content in the text.

Another possible technique pointed out by Nation (1990: 133) is the pre-teaching of vocabulary. This is obviously something we teachers could do in order to avoid interrupting reading. This can be a useful procedure when, for example the purpose of the lesson is not exactly to develop reading skills but maybe the reading activity constitutes an introduction to another type of activity. By doing this the teacher may save time in the class. On the other hand, using this technique when leaners have to face a text may also be useful when the purpose of the lesson is to develop reading skills, but, according to Nation (1990), there are also several difficulties associated with it. Firstly, there is no research to support that pre-teaching vocabulary results in better comprehension of written texts and secondly, pre-teaching takes away the opportunity for learners to use and practice their guessing skills (Nation, 1990: 134).

In addition to these strategies to implement in class to teach vocabulary through reading texts, it might also be interesting to briefly comment on what we can do as teachers in order to check understanding of the vocabulary included in written texts or to assess vocabulary comprehension with reading activities.

As mentioned in the introduction of this project and in several other sections, the objective of designing these activities is to avoid having separated activities or exercises to assess vocabulary acquisition through decontextualized activities. The objective is therefore to integrate the assessment of the vocabulary in reading activities. If we were to design a reading activity with a text and multiple choice questions on the text content, teachers could for example include questions in which they use synonyms of the vocabulary included in the text so that learners do not just have to understand the context but work with the meaning of some words in it. However, we should always take into account that the difficulty should always be in the text and not in the questions. That is, learners should be able to understand the questions but work with the text and the vocabulary in it to answer the question or choose the correct option.

Another example of an activity to integrate assessment of vocabulary in reading activities could be for example to highlight some words in the text and ask learners to

match them with a given list of synonyms. By doing this (obviously without using a dictionary), we could assess students' ability to guess the meaning of words from the context. In the same way, another example of an activity could be to have students produce a sentence in English using some of the words in the text. By doing this we could also assess how well learners know the word and whether they are able to actually use the word correctly in a sentence.

6.2. Vocabulary learning through listening

In the same way as in reading, vocabulary is also an essential aspect of listening, since it is essential to recognize and understand the vocabulary used by the speakers in a conversation for communication to happen successfully. However, similarly to what happens in reading, other aspects also play an important role such as speed, accent, pronunciation, etc. which may pose some difficulty for learners to follow a conversation with native or non-native speakers of English.

According to Nation (1990: 85), it seems that about half the words needed to understand written English are necessary to understand spoken English. This is mainly due to the fact that there is a larger proportion of low frequency words in spoken English than in written English. Despite this, it is interesting how many Spanish speaking learners of English have a large reading vocabulary and read well in the L2 but have great difficulty in following spoken English. One of the most important issues here is probably practice. If students do not have contact with the English language outside the classroom, listening activities in the EFL classroom are the only opportunity students have to practice this skill, which is why they find it difficult or challenging in many cases. This could probably serve as another reason to justify how important it is for teachers to use the L2 as language of instruction in the classroom as much as possible, because it is a great opportunity for students to listen to the English language for a whole hour several times a week, which is of course, very useful practice for them as well.

Regarding the vocabulary needed to understand spoken English, Nation (1990: 87) once again asks the same question we mentioned in the reading skills section: *what can we do if our learners do not have enough vocabulary to understand spoken English?* In this case Nation (1990) suggests some interesting ideas like for example turning a reading

vocabulary into a listening vocabulary activity. The idea is to choose a simplified reading text which is at a vocabulary level well below learners' reading level and read it out loud to students for 10 or 15 minutes each day trying to keep learners interested in the story. While doing this, the teacher would write all those words which he/she thinks students will not understand on the board and will repeat the sentence containing said word. If the word appears again the teacher simply points to it on the board and then continues reading the story without interrupting the flow. The context and the storyline will help students guess the meaning of the unknown words from context, they will identify both the written form of the word and the sound of it. As the story progresses, there is every day less and less need to write words on the board and the teacher will be able to speed up the storytelling (Nation, 1990: 87-88).

Another interesting activity which could be implemented in class is dictation. Especially with lower level learners, it is very useful to do dictation activities with them in order to help them identify words and not just understand them but identify them with how these words are spelt and how they sound. There are many activities which could be turned into dictation ones and we could implement these as a second part of another activity by using the material that students produce to do dictation activities with them.

It is also highly important for teachers to control the vocabulary input they use in their classes while teaching. Given that the actual instruction of the classroom is carried out in the L2, the class itself becomes a listening practice for learners, which is why vocabulary control while speaking is an important skill for teachers to master (Nation, 1990: 88). Using synonyms, repeating the same by paraphrasing or even using synonym cognates when giving explanations in English are techniques which will help students guess the meaning of unknown words from the context while they are listening.

Regarding the assessment of vocabulary in listening activities, teachers can more or less follow the same suggestions given in the previous section about reading. An example of an activity could be to include lexical load in the questions we ask in a listening activity. In this sense, if we want to check comprehension of the word *free* in a specific context, we could include in the question something like *what activities don't cost any money?* By doing this we would be asking students to understand the content of the conversation

(the name of the activities which are *free*) but we would also be indirectly checking whether students know that *free* is a synonym of *no cost* or *zero cost*.

As it happens in reading, designing these activities take time and effort from the teacher because we would have to select the listening activities very carefully not just making sure that the level is appropriate for our students, but also paying attention to the vocabulary included in the listening track and whether our students have seen that vocabulary in class or if it is possible for them to guess it from the context according to what we have done with them in class or how we have prepared them to face that kind of activity.

6.3.Vocabulary learning through speaking

Speaking is said to be one of the language skills that teachers dedicate least time to in the EFL classroom in secondary levels in Spain. I personally believe that this may be due to time constraints and also because of the large number of students in the classes, which makes it very difficult for teachers to dedicate time to assessing, monitoring and helping with the speaking skills of all students in the class equally. The most common consequence of this is that teachers normally have to split their time and dedicate each lesson to one or two groups of students, which means that in many cases, those students who are not being supervised by the teacher normally do not speak English in class but speak Spanish instead or they may talk about something else which is not connected with the class at all.

Despite all these problems and challenges for teachers, in those classes where speaking activities are carried out successfully, the most common activities implemented by the teachers are normally problem-solving discussions, role plays, split information tasks, ranking activities and sometimes even debates in higher level groups. However, all these speaking tasks are not usually thought of as having vocabulary learning goals (Joe, Nation & Newton, 1996: 1). Contrarily, these activities are normally oriented to improving pronunciation, fluency and accuracy more than to learning vocabulary. In this section I will try to suggest some ideas on how we can integrate the learning, teaching and assessment of vocabulary through speaking activities in the EFL classroom.

According to research, a vocabulary learning goal can be effectively designed into many speaking activities and it is even possible to plan what vocabulary is likely to be learned

in particular activities (Joe, Nation & Newton, 1996: 1). Despite the fact that I will focus on the vocabulary learning goal, it is worth highlighting that this is not the only goal we can achieve with speaking activities. Actually, speaking activities can achieve a wide range of goals and several may be achieved in the same activity (Joe, Nation & Newton, 1996: 1).

Before designing these activities oriented to learning vocabulary through speaking we should probably ask ourselves how much vocabulary our learners need to speak English. According to West (1960), as cited by Nation (1990: 93), there is a minimum adequate speech vocabulary of 1,200 headwords that would be sufficient for learners of English to say most of the things they would need to say. The truth is that the frequency counts of spoken English indicates that in spoken English a small number of words accounts for a very large proportion of spoken language (Nation, 1990: 93).

When implementing a speaking activity, it is very useful to provide students with a worksheet. This worksheet will serve as the source of information about the words (the words' meanings), which may come mainly from the textual context on the worksheet. However, the learners in the group, who may already know something about the words, might also be a source of information about the words. Newton (1993) as cited by Joe, Nation & Newton (1996: 2), found that when learners discussed the meanings of words from the worksheet with each other, by far the majority of words discussed resulted in useful and accurate information being provided about the words. Besides, students could also use the context to guess the meaning of those words which are unknown for the majority or all members of the group, which means that once again, we should teach students how to guess the meaning of words from the context as we would do in a reading activity.

Once students have learned the meaning of the vocabulary it is highly important for the teacher to encourage retrieval of the words both productively and receptively. If this happens, then obviously, the memory of that word will be strengthened (Joe, Nation & Newton, 1996: 2). Receptive retrieval refers to the perception of the form and remembering its meaning when the word is found again in listening or reading. On the other hand, productive retrieval refers to the wish from the learner to use the words and

having to remember its written or spoken form to successfully use it in speaking or writing.

The question that arises now is, *how can teachers design retrieval into speaking activities?* According to Joe, Nation and Newton (1996), this could be done by making it necessary for learners to reuse the words that they met in the worksheet or other form of textual input. An example of this could be to have students discuss or present the same material several times in turns or making the solution to the task involve much of the information appearing in the textual input. In this sense, activities such as retelling stories might be examples of this. We could for example have students do an activity where they would have to read a sentence each and memorize it. Then students would have to decide which sentence goes first, second, and so on in order to tell a story. No writing or reading is allowed in this activity, which means that students need to memorize the sentence and repeat it many times for the other students to listen. In other words, learners would be retrieving their sentences each time they repeat them.

Other examples of activities into which we could design retrieval are role plays, ranking activities, among others. Probably the most important issue to take into account is how we design the activity and especially how we design the worksheet for the activity. In this sense, Joe, Nation & Newton (1996) suggest a few ideas on how we could improve a discussion activity. In the case that we were planning to do an activity where students have to choose what to do in a specific situation and where the teacher gives them a worksheet with a list of numbered options to choose from, these authors suggest a few modifications so that the activity becomes a favourable opportunity for vocabulary learning.

Firstly, they suggest that we could remove numbers from the list of choices so that learners cannot use phrases like "I think number 3 is the best option". Secondly, instead of giving students the choices in short sentences, we should give them more written input with additional useful words that learners can use in the discussion. Thirdly, in order to spread the discussion and ensure that more target vocabulary is used, instead of having students choose the best option we could turn the activity into a ranking activity. Finally, in an attempt to have students use the target vocabulary much more, we could

extend the activity by telling students to inform other groups in the class on their decision.

As for the assessment of vocabulary acquisition in speaking, we could also use some of these strategies to have students use the target vocabulary seen in the lessons and check how well they retrieve the vocabulary and how well they can use it in conversation. We would always have to carefully design and plan the material for speaking exams so that we maximize the opportunities for learners to use the target vocabulary.

6.4.Vocabulary learning through writing

As it happens in writing, research has shown that a small number of words (around 2,000 to 3,000) can be used effectively to express an enormous number of ideas (Nation, 1990: 147). Therefore, one of our main objectives as teachers when teaching vocabulary through writing activities should be to help learners be able to make the best use of a small productive vocabulary. Most of the problems of secondary school students with writing are the result of a large receptive vocabulary and a limited productive vocabulary or either due to a limited productive and receptive vocabulary (Nation, 1990: 147).

According to Nation (1990), another aspect we should pay attention to, besides the size of vocabulary needed to write in English, is that learning to use a word productively in writing involves learning aspects about the vocabulary that are not needed in listening, reading or speaking like for example the spelling, the use of the words in sentences and the organization and punctuation of written texts.

Since using vocabulary in writing involves the additional difficulty of spelling and sound patterns, teachers should dedicate time in the class to give students information on spelling rules concerning different aspects like for examples long and short vowel sounds. This will be very useful for learners since in a lot of cases the main problems they have when using vocabulary in writing is that the spelling of the word is different to how it is pronounced, which is why they are likely to make mistakes.

Reading is a skill which is very connected with writing and we should also take this into account when designing a lesson plan on writing. Having students read a passage on a

topic which is similar to what they have to write and having them work with the vocabulary might create more favourable opportunities for them to use the target vocabulary. Something we could do when designing writing activities, apart from giving students detailed instructions and maybe something to read beforehand, could be to give them a list of words (target vocabulary) that they have to include in their writing. This way, students would have to find out how to use the words in the sentence, make sure they spell them correctly and also check whether they know the meaning or not. This could obviously be done also in an activity to assess vocabulary acquisition through writing. Students' production could give the teacher very reliable information on whether the students know how to use the word in context and whether they remember their meaning or not.

Regarding the use of reading to help writing, Nation (1990) suggests activities like giving students some guidelines on what to do when they see a new word in a text. In this sense, Nation (1990: 153) suggests having students distinguish whether the word is a noun, a verb or an adjective and depending of the word category then focus on other aspects such as the word(s) which come after or in front of it, whether the nouns are countable or uncountable, among other things just by working with the context. By doing this type of activities, students will become aware of all those aspects they need to know before being able to use a word in writing.

Another activity which might also be very helpful for students to learn vocabulary or at least to get students interested in learning the vocabulary they need is creative writing. Secondary school students can be incredibly creative and since in these activities they are not restricted to a certain topic, their motivation will lead to effective learning. Learners will probably find themselves looking up words they need in dictionaries or finding out by themselves how to use those words in a text and will probably mix that with imagination, past experiences and with what they have learned in class. In addition, creative writing makes most people feel pride in their work and want it to be read, which also makes students put more effort in the task (Huang & Chen, 2011: 67).

7. VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

Learning strategies are essential in any teaching and learning process and language learning and teaching is no exception. As I mentioned in a previous section of this project, it is a mistake to believe that students can learn enough vocabulary inside the classroom, which is precisely why training learners to use learning strategies will make our students effective and efficient learners outside the classroom.

Teaching strategies in general, not just vocabulary learning strategies, is believed to be very important, not just by experts and researchers in language learning, but also by the education experts responsible for elaborating the Spanish national curriculum of English as first foreign language. In this sense, the assessment criteria elaborated by the Spanish Government includes three different dimensions of students, one of them being the dimension of the student as a strategic user. Since this is included in the assessment criteria, it means that teachers should assess how students apply strategies when facing a situation or a text in the foreign language. Obviously, if teachers need to assess the implementation of strategies, it seems obvious that teachers also need to dedicate time in class to teaching how to use these strategies. The reality in secondary education schools, however, is quite different.

Teaching students how to use learning strategies is directly related with encouraging learner autonomy. But *what do we mean by learner autonomy?* Learner autonomy does not exactly mean that learners do those tasks which are supposed to be done by teachers. Learner autonomy means that students should be the ones taking responsibility for their own learning, becoming aware of their learning progress and learning how to take action in order to improve. In other words, learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher has less to do or a less important role, but a different role. When there is no learner autonomy, the teacher makes all decisions, relies on a textbook and other learning material, is the one deciding on the program, etc. Basically, in 0 learner autonomy environment, it is the teachers who decides every single issue and students simply assume that is what the teacher has to do.

According to Schmitt (1997), the appreciation of the importance of both the area of vocabulary and the aspect of learner strategies has led to considerable research in each

but the place where they intersect (vocabulary learning strategies) has attracted much less attention (Schmitt, 1997).

In the following section, I will try to give an overview of the different types of vocabulary learning strategies and how these can be taught to secondary school students, and I will also include some information on how teachers can assess how students apply these learning strategies.

7.1. Vocabulary learning strategies and how to teach them

Instruction of strategies in general has been found to be beneficial for foreign language learners. As for how to teach these strategies, Oxford (2003: 13) says that "the most effective strategy instruction appears to include demonstrating when a given strategy might be useful, as well as how to use and evaluate it, and how to transfer it to other related tasks and situations".

According to Schmitt (1997), many learners use strategies for learning vocabulary and, in fact, they apparently do it more for vocabulary learning than for any other language learning activity, including listening, speaking and social communication. Schmitt (1997) believes that this high use of vocabulary learning strategies from students might be due to the fact that many students think that one of the most important aspects of learning a foreign language is learning the vocabulary (Horwitz, 1988, as cited by Schmitt, 1997).

As for the most commonly used strategies used by students, research has shown that students prefer to use mechanical strategies than complex ones. This means that strategies like memorizing, taking notes or repetition are more common among students than other more complex strategies like inferencing, imagery, etc.

Schmitt (1997) in his taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies organized vocabulary learning strategies into two big categories. On the one hand, strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning and, on the other hand, strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered. This organization of strategies is similar to the taxonomy described by Oxford (2003), who describes up to six different types of strategies: *meta-*

cognitive strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, social strategies and *communication strategies* (Oxford, 2003: 12-14).
In his first category Schmitt (1997) included some of the strategies mentioned by Nation (1990) like guessing from textual context and others like checking for L1 cognates, using dictionaries (either bilingual or monolingual) and analyzing the different parts of speech. In the second category, Schmitt (1997) included other strategies like using semantic maps, using the keyword method, word lists, flash cards, verbal repetition, among others.

It may be concluded although there are many different strategies to teach, each one of them might be more suitable than the rest depending on the learning goals of the course, the time availability and other aspects. Since going through each and every vocabulary learning strategy would require extensive research and explanation, in the next few lines I would like to focus on just some of the most common and interesting strategies to teach foreign language learners.

Guessing words in context

Guessing the meaning of unknown words in context is probably one of the most useful strategies to train and probably one that has been widely promoted in the last decades as it has been seen to fit in more comfortably with the communicative approach (Schmitt, 1997: 12). According to Nation (1990), guessing the meaning of words from context is especially useful for teachers to help learners cope with low-frequency words. Since there is a large number of low-frequency words in the English language (of a lower value than high-frequency words) and students are likely to encounter these words maybe just once or twice, it might be interesting to spend much more time on strategies that the learners can use to deal with these words than to spend time on the individual words (Nation, 1990: 159). However, this strategy is probably not suitable for all types of learners since learners need to meet certain requirements in order to be able to use it. Firstly, the learner must have a certain level of language proficiency, which means that this strategy might not be suitable for beginners or very low level students. In the words of Nation, "once learners know around two or three thousand words, they can use the reading skills they have developed to infer the meanings of the unknown words that they meet" (Nation, 1990: 160). Secondly, in the words of Schmitt, the learner must also have adequate background knowledge of the subject and the strategic knowledge of how

to effectively go through the inferring process (Schmitt, 1997: 12). With regard to this, it is true that some learners may be able to do this without being taught but if they cannot do it on their own they can be easily taught a strategy with which they will be quickly be able to guess the meaning of most unknown words they meet (Nation, 1990: 160). Finally, the contest must be rich enough with clues to enable guessing, and the most easily utilizable clues should be close to the target word (Schmitt, 19997: 12).

The question that arises now is obvious, *how can we teach students to guess the meaning of words from the context?* Nation (1990) and other authors have suggested a few steps to follow when guiding students through the process of guessing the meaning of unknown words. The strategy proposed by Nation begins by getting learners focus on the target word, then look at the immediate context and then take a much broader view of how the clause containing the word related to other clauses, sentences or paragraphs (Nation, 1990: 162). The objective is to end up having students go through the steps automatically, without being conscious of the process, of course after they have practiced going through the steps consciously several times.

Using prefixes, roots and suffixes

This strategy is another example of discovery strategies which learners can use to discover or guess the meaning of unknown words by looking at the form of the word. In the case of Spanish native speakers, recognizing Latin prefixes might be something our learners may be able to do without having to direct their attention to the Latin-based part of the word but if this is not the case, we should teach them how to do it. The similarity between these Latin parts of many words in English might something our students could very easily use to guess the meaning of new words, but there are other things we could teach our students about word formation in English which could be useful too.

This type of strategies can be used normally with upper-intermediate or advanced level students of English and probably the best way to teach students how to become aware of the different parts of a word is to do word-building exercises. According to Nation (1990: 169),

> to make use of prefixes and roots, learners need three skills. They need to be able to break new words into parts so that the affixes and roots are revealed, they need to know the

> meanings of the parts, and they need to be able to see a connection between the meaning of the parts and the dictionary meaning of the new word.

Therefore, we may conclude that we, as teachers, should focus on teaching each of these skills described by Nation. We can easily teach these skills by using games, exercises, flash cards with prefixes and their meanings, etc. but the main idea is to remember that we are not exactly teaching new words but teaching students how to identify the different word parts and their meaning so they can do the same to guess the meaning of many unknown words that they might encounter future occasions.

Interestingly, we should remember that when guessing words from context it is not wise to use prefixes and roots as a guide for guessing but rather a way of checking whether the guessing is accurate or not. This means that when learners are guessing from context they should follow the steps of focusing on the word, on the immediate context and so on, and only break the word into parts at the end to check whether the meaning of the prefix and root agree with the guess (Nation, 1990: 173).

Using mnemonic techniques

These techniques would be included in the consolidation strategies group since learners will be trained on how to consolidate, memorize and retrieve words they have recently learned. The keyword technique is an example this and it is a very effective way to help students remember words. In this technique students associate the word they want to remember (either its form or its sound) with another word in their language which sounds similar or has a similar written form (the keyword). By associating these two words through an image, students will easily remember the word in the foreign language. Mnemonic techniques always work by using some known principles of psychology. The idea is that learners develop a retrieval plan for the during the encoding process in which mental imagery is used, both verbal and visual.

Let us take an example using the most common learning context we will find in Spanish secondary schools: Spanish native speakers who are learning English as a foreign language. If we dealing with the word *battle* and our students have problems remembering its meaning, we could suggest students to come up with a word in Spanish which sound similar and we could come up with the word *bate* (keyword) and now we would have to tell students to form a mental image of a battle and a baseball bat

interacting with each other. For example, we could picture a mental image of people fighting a battle with baseball bats.

Nation mentions that in a study carried out by Pressley et. al (1982) authors admit that one of the main difficulties of the keyword technique is that it is often difficult to think of keywords that sound like the foreign word and students' imagination plays an important role to use the technique; the more imagination learners have, the more useful the technique (Nation, 1990: 168).

7.2. Assessment of the use of vocabulary learning strategies

I have personally decided to include this section in the present project, mainly because I believe it is one of the most forgotten part in secondary school programs. It is true that assessment of how students use learning strategies is something included in the Spanish National curriculum but there is little information on how this should be done. During my teacher training placement, not one of the teachers I worked with knew how to assess learning strategies, nor did they have information on how to design activities in which they could get students make use of these learning strategies to assess how well they could use these. I understand that assessing the use of learning strategies is a difficult task to do, or at least that is what it seems to me but, we, as teachers, definitely need to come up with ways to do it and definitely make the effort to effectively and accurately assess how students apply these strategies in more or less real contexts.

Strategic learning is mainly driven by mental processes that do not often lend themselves to direct observation, which is why in most cases we need to draw on the learners' own accounts (Wen-Ta, Zoltán and Schmitt, 2006: 82). Therefore, besides applying some of the ideas given in previous sections to design activities where we can have students make use of learning strategies, one of the main ways to measure and assess the use of learning strategies is through self-report questionnaires.

Besides the famous questionnaire, the "Motivated Strategies for learning Questionnaire" (MSLQ), developed at the university of Michigan by Paul Pintrich and his colleagues, which focuses on strategies and motivation, in the field of L2, the most frequently used instrument for assessing language strategy use has been the "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" (SILL) developed by Rebecca Oxford (1990) (see Appendix 1).

This instrument is therefore based on Oxford's taxonomy of the six different types of strategies mentioned above.

More specifically regarding vocabulary learning strategies, there are also instruments similar to the ones mentioned above. Gu and Johnson (1996) as cited by Schmitt (2006) included a section of vocabulary learning strategies in their Vocabulary Learning Questionnaire (Schmitt, 2006: 84).

It may be concluded that one of the most useful ways to get accurate information on the use of vocabulary learning strategies by learners is to design self-assessment questionnaires that students can fill in at the end of a lesson. The combination of the results in the questionnaires and the way students deal with vocabulary in the different tasks designed for each skill during the course and in the final assessment instrument could result in very useful information for the teacher on how learners are using strategies. In addition, self-assessment is always beneficial to students since it encourages learner autonomy. When having students carry out self-assessment to reflect on their own learning, we could either design a questionnaire which only includes the use of learning strategies or include items for students to answer in content-based self-assessment questionnaires. Despite the fact that self-assessment is not normally carried out in secondary schools, those teachers who use self-assessment usually forget to include items related to learning strategies in their self-assessment instruments. The key is therefore to include these items and give them the importance they deserve.

8. ICTs AND VOCABULARY TEACHING AND LEARNING

There is absolutely no doubt that the information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized the world we live in and especially how we communicate with each other. Obviously, language learning is no exception. Almost all students nowadays have access to the internet at least at school and even at home in most cases. Our students are digital natives and they belong to a generation which is naturally attached to technology. Most of them, if not all of them, have a mobile phone and are very familiar with downloading applications which make their lives easier, more comfortable or which makes it easier for them to communicate with the rest of the world. Despite all the dangers this entails and the obvious complications that may arise in class due to the use of mobile phones, there are also many advantages of new technologies if we think about the use we can give to them when teaching a foreign language.

It is an unquestionable truth that every day more and more foreign language teachers use ICTs in class, which is definitely a great way to get students closer to the reality of the foreign language and how it is used around the world. Something as simple as showing students a video where native speakers of English communicate with each other or the possibility of accessing real texts, news, or teaching material is obviously something which makes foreign language learning a much more attractive and interesting activity. Everybody seems to agree that, as a media of education, ICTs can provide many solutions for teachers. For example, new technologies make it much easier to show students pictures on a screen so that they associate words and meanings, listening to songs and reading through the lyrics helps students with the pronunciation of the words, and the fact of having a mobile phone means that all students carry a dictionary in their hands everywhere they go, something which was impossible to think of 40 years ago. According to Mullamaa (2010), something as basic as power-point presentations has proved to be most popular with students. Similarly, exercises designed as an extension to activities carried out in the classroom support the acquisition of vocabulary (Mullamaa, 2010: 41).

ICTs are definitely a very valuable tool to improve teaching and learning, and more specifically the teaching and learning of vocabulary, not only for students but also for

teachers. On the one hand, for teachers, it is a professional resource to explore many methods of teaching vocabulary, share materials and learn from other foreign language teachers around the world. On the other hand, for students, ICTs provide opportunities to develop their vocabulary by doing many different activities which are interactive in most cases.

However, it is also true that the integration of ICTs in teaching and learning is more complicated than what it seems because it demands more specific skills both from students and from teachers, which is why nowadays, according to the Spanish national curriculum we must also assess the digital competence of our students. This obviously means that apart from using ICTs in class, we must never forget that we should also teach our students how to make a good use of ICTs so that they become autonomous leaners and make the most of these new technologies on their own. On the other hand, teachers also require training on ICTs and how to use them in class. During my teacher training placement, I noticed that some teachers had become very concerned about learning how to use new technologies but others simply continued to teach in the most traditional way in a class where the closest the teacher got to new technologies was pressing the play button to listen to a conversation or watch a video on a screen.

In this section I will focus on the benefits of using ICTs as a support for classroom teaching and I will suggest some resources to use in the EFL classroom.

8.1. The benefits of using ICTs as a support for classroom teaching

According to Mullamaa (2010), some of the most common benefits of using ICT as a support for ordinary classroom teaching are: (a) the relatively easy access whenever and wherever you wish it, (b) dematerialization, which means that we use less paper and physical materials, (c) that it enables us to use modern technologies and we, both teachers and students learn how to use them, (d) individualization, which means that we can adapt materials paying attention to the different interests of our students, their level or their needs and (e) the contact and communication beyond the school, the country or continent since we have the possibility to share our experiences, ideas and methodology with other teachers.

Another important benefit of using ICTs in the foreign language classroom is that it increases motivation, which is a key factor in any learning process. The use of ICTs in the classroom is something that feels attractive to students and something that they enjoy doing because it means getting closer to their reality. This obviously motivates students and makes them want to spend their time discovering new resources that they will hopefully use on their own in the future.

8.2.Online resources to teach vocabulary

In this section I will introduce some useful resources I have found on the internet which could be used in class or presented to students when teaching and learning new vocabulary.

Sites teaching new words and phrases

There are many websites on the internet that call attention on new words and phrases on a regular basis. This is obviously a great way of getting information about them. These websites include especially online dictionaries like the Oxford dictionary online (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/) or the Cambridge dictionaries (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/) which both include a "word of the day" section. The Longman dictionary website (http://www.ldoceonline.com/) also provides similar sections including *word of the day*, *picture of the day* and even a section for visitors to check whether they know the meaning of a series of words connected to a certain topic (the "*do you know these words?*" section). Other websites include other similar sections like *idiom of the day* or even proverbs, collocations or phrases.

Interactive websites and games

Teaching and learning vocabulary is not just about presenting new words or phrases and learning their meaning and other aspects. The process of teaching and learning vocabulary also involves an important part which is the revision of the words and phrases learnt to check how well students can retrieve those words and use them again in the future once they have stored them in their long-term memory.

Therefore, we should also take into account that ICTs can also be a great tool to help students revise and check how well they remember the vocabulary they have learnt. One of the most effective ways to do this is by having students do interactive exercises

where they have to participate, communicate with each other in groups and become aware of their knowledge of the vocabulary. To do this, there are many traditional games which have been adapted to the digital era we live in which are available in many sites. Games like *the hangman* or *scrabble* are available on the internet and we can always adapt these to our students' level and the vocabulary we want to focus on.

The website "Manythings" (http://www.manythings.org/) for example, offers a large variety of games in CGI version, or with Flash, Java or JavaScript. The words are chosen from a wide range of vocabulary and then the program generates a word from a vocabulary area and writes down a space for each letter. Users have to type in letters one by one, and if a letter appears in the answer, it is written down in the correct position or positions. If a letter is chosen that does not appear in the answer an extra line is drawn in a simple picture of a man being hanged (http://www.manythings.org/hmf/8995.html).

This is just one of the many possibilities the internet offers with games to practice vocabulary in a foreign language. There are many other possibilities which can be explored by teachers like power point board games where students play in groups choosing squares and answering questions. Many websites offer downloadable templates for teachers to adapt the game to what they want to revise in class. These games and resources definitely get students active and motivated in class and most of them lead to a sense of competition which, at reasonable levels, is a great way to motivate students in class.

Kahoot!: using mobile phones in class

Kahoot! (https://create.kahoot.it/login) is an interactive website which allows teachers to create their own quizzes or use quizzes made by other teachers. The website offers the possibility of using different types of quizzes, from multiple choice, to jumble, discussion and survey quizzes. The website is very easy to use and in many cases students are already familiar with how to use it. The most attractive thing about *Kahoot!* for students, at least the first time they use it, is that they are allowed to use their mobile phones in class, which is itself something that normally goes against what they are told to do in class. Obviously, this is also one of the main disadvantages of this resource, it may be against the school rules to use mobile phones so we may have to check with the

administration board whether we are allowed to use this resource in class or not. Another possible disadvantage is that students need to have access to the internet, something that sometimes is a problem, either because students do not have internet access on their phones or because the school does not provide Wi-Fi connection to the internet.

Regardless of the type of quiz we choose, the website always works in the same way. Students access the website (kahoot.it) on their mobile phones and insert a PIN code for the quiz that the teacher shows on the screen and which is automatically given to the test we have chosen. Then students need to choose a nickname for them in the game (they may play the game individually or in groups using one mobile phone for three or four participants). Once they have all done this, questions appear on the screen and time starts running. They must answer the questions by clicking the correct answer on their mobile phone screen as if it were a remote control. When time is up, there appears the correct answer and a ranking of those students who answered correctly in the shortest time and they get points. At the end of the game the student or students who have answered more questions correctly in the shortest time wins. Once each correct answer is shown, it is the teacher who clicks to go on to the next question which means that the teacher has time to ask students why that is the correct answer and why the other answers are incorrect, which may give us valuable information on students' knowledge of the vocabulary.

9. TEACHER TRAINING PLACEMENT AND VOCABULARY TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the following section I will describe part of my experience during my teacher training placement and the implementation of some of the activities and resources mentioned in other sections of this work. I will focus on how well these activities worked with my students and how they could be improved to be implemented in the future.

My teacher training placement took place in IES Canarias Cabrera Pinto. This high school is located in the city centre of La Laguna and provides education to more than 1,000 students. I had the opportunity to teach teenagers of first, third and fourth year of *ESO*, as well as students of first year of *Bachillerato*. Even though I spent time with all these age groups, the group I had the opportunity to formally teach was a group of students of fourth year of *ESO*. This group was an especially large group (30 students), some of them with special education needs which required much more time from the teacher and me to design activities adapted to their needs so that they could participate and also learn in class in the same way as the rest of their classmates. The main method to assess how well the activities worked during the unit I taught, was observation. I tried to use with them several different activities, and observed how well these activities worked and how they could be improved in future occasions.

The group's level of English was not especially high. There were a few students (1 or 2 out of 30) which were a bit stronger than the rest but in general I would say they were all around an A2+ level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Besides, students were very talkative in general and found it very difficult to maintain attention for a long time so I tried to change activities often and mainly did activities which were dynamic and had them move around the class and change seats from time to time.

9.1. Introducing the new vocabulary of the unit

The text book I used with this group of students was *Mosaic 4* (Oxford University Press) and the unit I had the opportunity to teach dealt with entertainment and leisure. At the beginning of the unit, some new vocabulary was presented related to leisure and free time and I tried to present this vocabulary without having students look at the book. I

told them that they would not need to use their books during the first part of the lesson. Some of them looked a bit surprised while others quickly closed their books with a smile on their face.

I had prepared a power point presentation (see Appendix 2) but taking into account that the topic of leisure, entertainment and free time is one which students were probably familiar with, I decided to check first how much vocabulary they already knew. I asked them to work in groups and make a list of all the words they could think of related to entertainment and leisure. Students quickly started working in groups and seemed quite participative. I gave them exactly 3 minutes and told them how much time they had left every time 1 minute had passed which gave the activity more excitement and got students nervous because time was running out. When the three minutes had passed, I asked individual students from each group to say the words they had written, I tried to make sure that everybody understood the words and told them to spell the words for me and I wrote the words on the board so that everybody could see and add new words to their lists.

The objective in the second part of the activity was to introduce new vocabulary related to this topic and, in order to do that, I decided to get students guess the meaning of words. This time they would not have to look at the context but associate the words with pictures. I prepared flashcards (see Appendix 3). Fifteen flashcards had a word written on it and the other fifteen had a picture. Not all the words were new, there were new words (those appearing in the unit of the textbook) and other words I thought students would be familiar with (some of them had even been mentioned by some students in the previous activity). Then I told students to pick one card each (without looking at it), then look at it and try to find their partner by matching the words and the pictures. I gave them again a time limit and once the time had passed I checked and I told them how many mistakes they had made and gave them some more time to continue looking for their partner. Suddenly, students were moving around the class, really trying to look for their partner and they were all working as a big group to find the meaning to all the words they were supposed to learn in this unit. Some of these words were *rollercoaster, box office, script, review, library, author, actor, bestseller,* among others.

Clearly, when implementing this activity, I used one of the techniques to teach vocabulary mentioned by Nation (1990), which referred to it as a way of teaching meaning by using pictures. In addition, by doing it this way, we would avoid using the L1 to explain the meaning of the word, although this might be necessary in other cases depending on students' previous knowledge and level of English. In addition, this way of presenting new vocabulary is basically what Nation (1990) referred to as a direct approach to teaching vocabulary, i.e. a methodology where students are fully aware of the vocabulary they are learning and where the vocabulary is taught in an explicit way.

After this presentation of the new vocabulary, students would have to recognize and use this vocabulary in further reading, writing, listening and speaking activities in the rest of the unit.

How could this activity be improved?

Students participated actively while doing the activity and the whole group recognized the words when they saw them again in texts and other activities, something I interpreted as a good sign and I thought the activity had worked well. However, I was not totally satisfied with the way the text book was structured and therefore, in order to improve the implementation of this activity I have thought that I could carry it out in a different way.

My tutor during my training period had made it very clear that it was very important that students were taught the grammar and vocabulary that appeared in the unit. I could include more vocabulary, but those new words appearing in the book had to be taught. However, there were no instructions about the order in which I had to teach the unit. All the units in the book were organized in the same way: the first pages dealt with the new vocabulary, normally the new words appeared in bold and students had to match the words with pictures either by listening to them or by matching with numbers. Then there were a few reading, listening and speaking activities in which students had to use those words.

After giving it much thought I got to the conclusion that by presenting the vocabulary the way I had done it, I was teaching vocabulary in a decontextualized way and I had missed a great opportunity to teach students the strategy of guessing the meaning of

words out of context. By doing the activity of matching the pictures and the words, students had to simply memorize the words afterwards (like they would have done when memorizing a list of words). However, in order to contextualize the vocabulary, I could have given them a reading text in which those words appeared to have them read the text and try to guess the meaning of those words by carefully paying attention to the context. Following Nation's (1990) suggestions, I could have designed an activity where students had to use the information in the text for something else (in order to create an interest in understanding the content) and include the new words in those texts so that they had to guess the meaning of them by looking at the context. In other words, I could have used a more indirect approach to vocabulary teaching as Nation (1990) referred to it. By using a more indirect approach, students would feel the need to understand the unknown vocabulary in order to do a different task afterwards and they would be learning vocabulary without being totally conscious of it at the same time that they would be learning how to use vocabulary learning strategies. This, by the way, is much closer to a real-life situation where students would have to use learning strategies to understand unknown words in a text in order to do something afterwards.

It is also worth highlighting that when implementing this activity, I incurred in another mistake, one that Nation (1990) pointed out and that is, that knowing a word involves much more than just learning the meaning of the word. Therefore, we could also improve this activity by complementing it with other ways of making sure that students learn not just the meaning of the word but also the spelling of the word, the pronunciation, its position and use in a sentence and when it is appropriate to use it (register).

9.2. Revising the vocabulary learned in the unit

During the unit I taught, I also implemented activities to check how well students could use and remember the vocabulary they had learned during the unit. Instead of giving students a test with a list of words to translate them into Spanish or have them write definitions, I designed a quiz using the *Kahoot!* application. Some students were already familiar with the application and knew how to use it but others were not, so I briefly explained what they had to do before doing the activity.

I designed an activity in the form of a quiz in which I mainly focused on vocabulary and grammar. Regarding the vocabulary items, I included questions in which students had to complete sentences using one word (multiple choice questions). In these questions, all the options were words that students had learned throughout the unit so they obviously need to remember the meaning of the word and the context and associate the word which best fitted in each case. Other questions were jumble questions in which students had to reorganize sentences by putting the words in the correct order. Here I included some verbs, adverbs and words they had learned which had to be put in a specific position or which were followed by a preposition to check how well students knew the words they had learned. Here I included other aspects of the words and not just the meaning as suggested by Nation (1990).

Judging by students' attitude and participation I think the activity went quite well since all of them seemed to be participating and also having fun. The fact that they could use their mobile phones in class was something new for them and they liked the idea. In addition, students were quite motivated and showed a competitive attitude since all of them wanted to win the game. However, judging by the results, I have to say that students had some problems remembering the vocabulary they had learnt in class. They had problems especially with the jumble questions. In general, they found it difficult to put the words in order to form questions or to form reported speech sentences (this was the grammar focus of the unit).

How could this activity be improved?

Taking into account that students had problems remembering some of the vocabulary, I guess that I should have students do this test more than once. Probably, by repeating the activity a few days later, students would have found it much easier to remember the meaning or the structure of sentences when using the vocabulary in context.

Another way of improving the activity would be to stop the game before the correct answer appears and ask students which option they chose and why and get them to listen to other students' opinions and debate which the correct option is. When doing the activity, I simply waited for the correct option to appear on the screen and I did not ask students why that was the correct option and why the others were incorrect. Especially with the jumble questions, I could have had students come to the board and write their

options and then ask other students to come to the board and correct the option written of it were incorrect. I know that doing this obviously requires more time in class and the activity could end up being long and tiring for students but maybe doing this after some questions, especially the most problematic ones, could help students see their mistakes and learn from them.

10. CONCLUSIONS

It is unquestionable that vocabulary is a very important aspect of language learning since most foreign language learners agree that the vast majority of their problems when communicating in the foreign language comes from a lack of vocabulary. In addition, many experts and linguists agree that without vocabulary it is very complicated to communicate in any language. Therefore, it is very important for foreign language teachers to focus on vocabulary as well as on any other aspect of the foreign language, if not more. However, not only teaching vocabulary but teaching students vocabulary learning strategies will help them in the future to become more autonomous learners. Learning a word involves much more than just learning the meaning or the equivalent of the word in the L1, which is why, in addition to all this, teachers should take a comprehensive approach when they teach new words in class and also pay attention to other aspects such as pronunciation, spelling, use in a sentence, etc.

One of the biggest challenges for foreign language teachers is to find ways to integrate vocabulary in the different language skills. Therefore, we should try to distance ourselves and our teaching methods from traditional ways of teaching vocabulary which mainly consist on teaching lexical items out of context like lists of words and just ask our students to memorize those words when they study for a foreign language exam. Many experts agree that this way of teaching and learning vocabulary helps students store new words in their short-term memory but most students forget these words after some time. A good solution to avoid this way of teaching vocabulary would be to include the vocabulary in the four main skills by designing activities where we do not just assess content comprehension but also comprehension of the vocabulary or the ability of students to implement strategies to understand the vocabulary in the exercises like for example guessing the meaning of words out of context.

It is also important to take into account that most students forget the vocabulary they learn not just because of the way they have learnt it, but also because teachers do not make the effort to design activities where students have to retrieve and use the words they learnt in the past. The key here is to design activities in which students are somehow forced to use the new vocabulary they have learned either in speaking, reading, writing or listening. Although it may sound easy, designing these activities

requires time and effort from teachers and in many occasions teachers find it very difficult to dedicate such an amount of time to designing activities which is why the majority of them end up giving students decontextualized exercises to assess vocabulary acquisition.

Finally, it is worth taking into account that ICTs constitute a very useful tool to teach a foreign language in general and in particular to both teach new vocabulary and revise the vocabulary learnt in previous units. The use of ICTs has proven to be not just effective but also motivating for students which normally enjoy very much using new technologies in the classroom.

I would like to finish mentioning that, after my training I have realized that the integration of vocabulary teaching and learning in the different language skills still remains a challenge because of a reason: it is complicated to design integrated activities and it requires a lot of time and previous planning from teachers. After my teacher training placement and while working on this project I realized that I had made exactly the same mistakes I criticized, precisely because of not giving it much thought when planning and designing the activities. It can therefore be concluded that integrating the vocabulary in the different language skills takes time and that we as teachers should always plan and design our activities with time and with a justified reason that explains why we would do it that way and not in another way. We should be constantly asking ourselves whether the activity worked or not, what the results were and how it could be improved in the future. We should give vocabulary the importance it deserves in our classroom and we should definitely adopt a systematic approach towards vocabulary teaching and learning, especially a systematic approach that works depending on the students' level, the learning situation, our vocabulary learning goals and the needs of our students.

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APPENDIX 1

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning as developed by Oxford, R. L. (1990)

Direction

This form of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is for students of English as a second or foreign language. You will find statements about learning English. Please read each one and write the response (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) that tells HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS on the worksheet for answering and scoring.

1. Never or almost never true of me.
2. Usually not true of me.
3. Somewhat true of me.
4. Usually true of me.
5. Always or almost always true of me.

NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE OF ME means that the statement is very rarely true of you.
USUALLY NOT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true less than half the time.
SOMEWHAT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you about half the time.
USUALLY TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true more than half the time.
ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you almost always.

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, let the teacher know immediately.

Part A

1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	
4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.	
6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.	

7. I physically act out new English words.	
8. I review English lessons often.	
9. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	

Part B

10. I say or write new English words several times.	
11. I try to talk like native English speakers.	
12. I practice the sounds of English.	
13. I use the English words I know in different ways.	
14. I start conversations in English.	
15. I watch English TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	
16. I read for pleasure in English.	
17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	
18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	
19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	
20. I try to find patterns in English.	
21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	
22. I try not to translate word-for-word.	
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	

Part C

24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	
25. When I can think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	

27. I read English without looking up every new word.	
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	
29. I can think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	

Part D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	
31. I notice my English mistakes and I use that information to help me do better.	
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.	
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	
38. I think about my progress in learning English.	

Part E

39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am Learning English.	

Part F

45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	
47. I practice English with other students.	
48. I ask for help from English speakers.	
49. I ask questions in English.	
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	

Other strategies I use in foreign language studies:

_____

Worksheet for Answering and Scoring of SILL

1. Write your response to each item (that is, write 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) in each of the blanks.
2. Add up each column. Put the result on the line marked SUM.
3. Divide by the number under SUM to get the average for each column. Round this average off to the nearest tenth, as in 3.4.
4. Figure out your overall average. To do this, add up all the SUMS for the different parts of the SILL. Then divide by 50.
5. Copy your averages (for each part and for the whole SILL) from the Worksheet to the Profile.

Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D	Part E	Part F	Whole SILL
1. ____ 2. ____ 3. ____ 4. ____ 5. ____ 6. ____ 7. ____ 8. ____ 9. ____	10. ____ 11. ____ 12. ____ 13. ____ 14. ____ 15. ____ 16. ____ 17. ____ 18. ____ 19. ____ 20. ____ 21. ____ 22. ____ 23. ____	24. ____ 25. ____ 26. ____ 27. ____ 28. ____ 29. ____	30. ____ 31. ____ 32. ____ 33. ____ 34. ____ 35. ____ 36. ____ 37. ____ 38. ____	39. ____ 40. ____ 41. ____ 42. ____ 43. ____ 44. ____	45. ____ 46. ____ 47. ____ 48. ____ 49. ____ 50. ____	SUM Part A _____ SUM Part B _____ SUM Part C _____ SUM Part D _____ SUM Part E _____ SUM Part F _____
SUM ____ ÷ 9 = ____	SUM ____ ÷14 = ____	SUM ____ ÷ 6 = ____	SUM ____ ÷ 9 = ____	SUM ____ ÷ 6 = ____	SUM ____ ÷ 6 = ____	SUM ____ ÷ 50 = ____ (OVERALL AVERAGE)

Profile of Results on the SILL

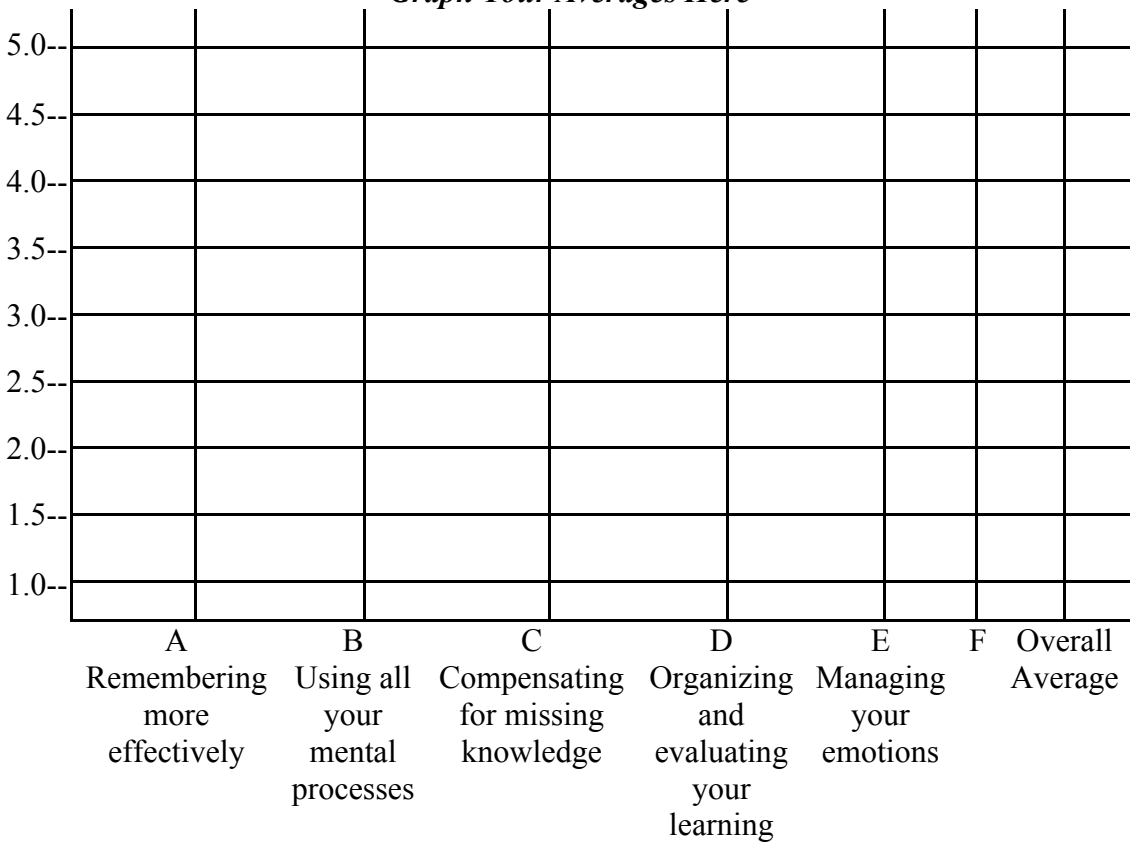
This Profile will show your SILL results. These results will tell you the kinds of strategies you use in learning English. There are no right or wrong answers. To complete this profile, transfer your averages for each part of the SILL, and your overall average for the whole SILL.

Part	What Strategies Are Covered	Your Average on This Part
A	Remembering more effectively	_____
B	Using all your mental processes	_____
C	Compensating for missing knowledge	_____
D	Organizing and evaluating your learning	_____
E	Managing your emotions	_____
F	Learning with others	_____
	OVERALL AVERAGE	_____

Key to Understanding Your Averages

High	Always or almost always used Usually used	4.5 to 5.0 3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used Never or almost never used	1.5 to 2.4 1.0 to 1.4

Graph Your Averages Here



APPENDIX 2

GOOD TIMES

UNIT 6
ENGLISH AS FIRST FOREIGN LANGUAGE

WHAT DO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH ENTERTAINMENT?

HOW MUCH VOCABULARY DO YOU KNOW?

ROLLERCOASTER

LIVE

REVIEW

LIBRARY

BOX OFFICE

AUTHOR

BESTSELLER

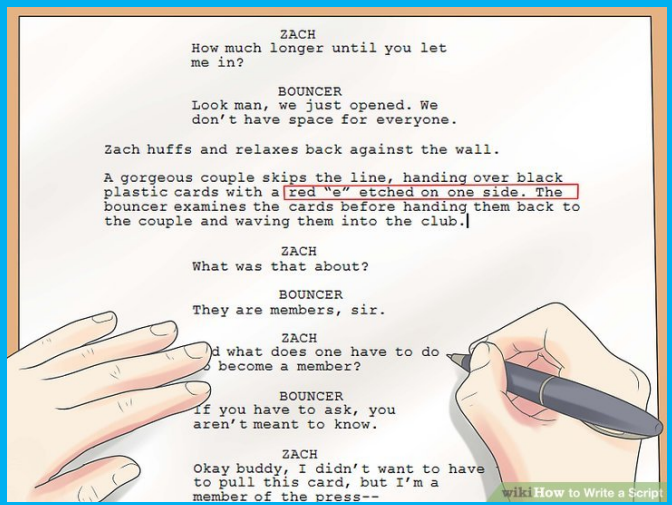
PLOT

SCRIPT

FIND YOUR PARTNER!

You have 6 minutes starting now!

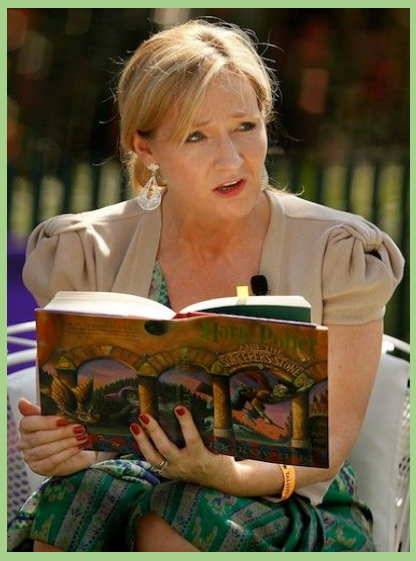
APPENDIX 3

	ROLLERCOASTER
	THEME PARK
	LIVE CONCERT
	**SCRIPT**

	BOOKSHOP
	LIBRARY
	BESTSELLER

	BOX OFFICE
	STAND-UP COMEDY
	ACTOR

	CONDUCTOR
	DIRECTOR
	REVIEW

	**AUTHOR**
	SPECTATORS