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TÍTULO DEL TRABAJO

**TEACHING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE VOCABULARY IN THE
ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS IN 10TH GRADE STUDENTS IN
PIMAMPIRO CITY**

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Quiero expresar mi profundo agradecimiento a mis padres, por su apoyo incondicional y su ejemplo de perseverancia. Por ayudarme a cuidar de mi hija en todas las circunstancias desde el momento de su nacimiento hasta este preciso instante para que yo pueda desarrollarme como persona y profesional.

Este proyecto de grado es el ejemplo de la educación que ustedes me han dado y de los valores que han inculcado en mí para ser una persona de bien.

A mi esposo por su paciencia durante este camino, en especial en los momentos de mayor estrés y dudas sobre seguir o no.

Y a mi hija, por su comprensión en los momentos en que yo sé que me ha necesitado; sin embargo, a su corta edad, ha entendido que debo culminar este proceso por un mejor porvenir.

Maria Fernanda, Aguirre Amuy

DEDICATORIA

A mi hija:

Quien ha sabido esperar y comprender este proceso. Espero que mi esfuerzo te haga una mujer fuerte, independiente y libre, y que Dios me conceda la vida y la fuerza para apoyarte en todo momento.

A todas las madres:

Como un acto de resistencia para que nadie piense que la maternidad nos quita el derecho a crecer en el campo laboral y soñar con un mejor porvenir.

La maternidad es una etapa muy dura, que muchas la enfrentamos en soledad a pesar de la compañía de los esposos. Sin embargo, resistimos y luchamos contra las adversidades y en contra de la sociedad que se aferra a minimizar nuestros esfuerzos cuando nosotras sostenemos y formamos la vida de las futuras generaciones.

Que mi logro contribuya a debilitar el machismo que persiste en nuestra sociedad y visibilice a las mujeres que buscan un mundo más justo, sensible y sin discriminación.

Con la esperanza de un futuro equitativo para nosotras y nuestras hijas e hijos.

Con cariño y respeto, María Fernanda Aguirre Amuy

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RESUMEN

La investigación, “TEACHING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE VOCABULARY IN THE ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS IN 10TH GRADE STUDENTS IN PIMAMPIRO CITY”, analiza los retos en el aprendizaje de vocabulario en Inglés en los estudiantes de los décimos años y busca identificar las barreras cognitivas, afectivas y contextuales que dificultan su adquisición y cómo los enfoques pedagógicos actuales ayudan a resolver estos problemas. Se aplicó un método cualitativo; 10 entrevistas a los alumnos y 5 entrevistas a los docentes de Inglés. Los resultados evidencian que los estudiantes presentan dificultades relacionadas con la práctica limitada del vocabulario, así como niveles de ansiedad y desmotivación, aspectos que se ven influenciados por el tiempo reducido destinado a la asignatura y el número de estudiantes por aula. Asimismo, se observó que el uso de recursos tecnológicos, como videos y música, favorece la participación y el interés de los alumnos durante las clases de inglés. En este sentido, se considera necesario implementar estrategias de enseñanza más dinámicas y centradas en el estudiante, además de fortalecer la formación docente, con el propósito de mejorar el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje del vocabulario.

Palabras clave: ansiedad, retos en el aprendizaje, enfoques pedagógicos.

ABSTRACT

The research, **TEACHING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE VOCABULARY IN THE ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS IN 10TH GRADE STUDENTS IN PIMAMPIRO CITY**, analyzes the challenges in English vocabulary acquisition among tenth-grade students and seeks to identify the cognitive, affective, and contextual barriers that delay its learning, and how new pedagogical approaches help to solve these issues. A qualitative method was applied: 10 interviews to students and 5 interviews to English teachers. The results showed that students face difficulties such as insufficient practice, anxiety, and demotivation because of limited time and class size. It was found that the integration of technology (videos, music, games, etc.) is effective. In conclusion, the need to employ dynamic, student-centered teaching strategies is emphasized, and teacher training is suggested to transform vocabulary teaching into an effective method.

Keywords: anxiety, learning challenges, pedagogical approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Learning vocabulary has become the essence of acquiring a second language. It is the foundation of developing macro language skills: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Without a robust vocabulary base, learners will always face constant problems in developing communication. As Rosyada-AS and Apoko (2023) emphasize, vocabulary permeates all areas of language learning and forms the foundation upon which fluency is built.

As the world is constantly changing, mastering the English language has become a basic requirement to be prepared for facing new challenges in the field of commerce and business. The continuous changes toward interconnected markets and remote collaboration means that English serves as the lingua franca for international communication through digital platforms. Specifically, English proficiency is necessary to sign legal contracts, access to research, and participate in multinational companies. Subsequently, people who prioritize the English language are prepared to understand global challenges and are able to lead diverse international enterprises.

English has become the fastest-increasing language in this modern world, and it occupies the status of a commercial language by connecting the East and the West and the North and the South. (Srinivas & Parupalli, 2019). English is the most spoken language around the world, and it is used to develop international relationships, such as Diplomacy, Finance, Marketing, Science, Tourism, Education, Technology, Trade, etc., so the English language serves as a common language to facilitate communication.

Today, learning the English language is mandatory in the curricula in Ecuador. As a result, students are expected to achieve a practical level of English upon graduation from secondary or higher education institutions. This decision establishes a clear academic goal where learners need to achieve a functional level of English proficiency until graduation. Consequently, the mandate not only works for higher standards but also prepares learners for the professional demands.

This research aims to identify the main challenges students face in acquiring vocabulary in the English language and analyzes the strategies that teachers implement in the classroom to overcome these difficulties, among the 10th-grade students in Pimampiro city. The present research looks to generate data to produce effective practices to contribute to improving teaching practices, considering that vocabulary is essential at developing communicative competence.

Although this research is focused on the schools located in Pimampiro city, it addresses a common concern of other EFL contexts, across other institutions where students face the same struggles with vocabulary acquisition, which results in a loss of confidence in using the English language to communicate.

Learning challenges, such as limited exposure and lack of practice, have become a barrier in effective vocabulary acquisition, added to teaching strategies are not suitable for all students' needs. For that reason, it is fundamental to implement a student-centered class approach that helps students to learn the language effectively. The external challenges, when combined with inflexible teaching methods, increase the barriers for effective vocabulary acquisition. For that reason, it is fundamental for teachers to implement student-centered classroom approaches and personalize the learning experience.

The project embraces a qualitative method by applying interviews to students and teachers in the 10th-grade classrooms in schools in Pimampiro city. The interviews will be conducted using open-ended questions to ensure a detailed understanding of the present problem. Students will be selected randomly. The research is divided into four parts. The first explains a theoretical framework where the literature about learning vocabulary and teaching strategies to improve it will be reviewed. The second chapter describes the strategies teachers could use to help students to acquire the English vocabulary, and analysis procedures used to obtain data. The third chapter talks about the results of the findings, and the fourth chapter gives the conclusions and recommendations originating from the study.

DEVELOPMENT

Listening is seen as the most challenging skill in the domain of a second language (SLA), specifically the English Language, as in Ecuador it is mandatory to master in high schools and Universities. Learners at elementary schools often face difficulties when trying to understand the spoken language. These challenges are multifaceted and come from both linguistic and affective barriers. A2 learners do not have extended vocabulary knowledge, and their grammatical competence is not developed, which influences their ability to infer meaning from auditory input. Moreover, affective difficulties such as lack of motivation and anxiety, hinder learners' ability to understand the spoken English language. (Goh, 2000; Vandergrift, 2003).

In Ecuador, access to authentic resources to teach English is limited. Teaching listening is usually based on book activities and recordings referring to dialogues, which are not always connected to real-world situations. Moreover, the lack of interaction with authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, podcasts, or native speakers separates the real essence to learn a second language. These methods emphasize isolated skills and do not reflect the complexity of the real-world contexts. As a result, learners become unmotivated and do not have success in developing the listening skill to understand what is said in natural scenarios. (Field, 2008; Graham, 2017).

Current pedagogical approaches emphasize the importance of engaging input, which increases students' motivation. The use of music, such as interactive songs, has become a transformative tool. Interactive songs combine auditory, visual, and kinesthetic stimuli, which creates a multisensory learning experience for different learner styles. Songs require active participation, movements, or answering to cues, which transforms passive listening in interactive and emotionally engaging processes. (Murphey, 1992; Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

In summary, the incorporation of interactive songs represents an advanced pedagogical strategy that aligns with the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of A2-level learners. However, despite the growing interest in using music in the language classroom, there remains a significant gap in empirical research examining the structured use of

interactive songs as a consistent instructional tool for developing listening comprehension. Most existing studies focus broadly on the benefits of music or address vocabulary acquisition rather than listening 7 specific outcomes. The state-of-the-art aims to critically examine the theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and pedagogical implications of using interactive songs to improve listening comprehension in young EFL learners, thereby laying the groundwork for targeted classroom-based action research.

The Role of Vocabulary in Language Learning

Having a solid lexical foundation in vocabulary is essential for effective communication, regardless of the learner's age, background, or proficiency level. As Nation (2013) emphasizes, vocabulary is not only useful to comprehend input but also to produce it. Without vocabulary, communication becomes ineffective. Learners need to express their ideas to respond to others as they are part of everyday conversations and participate in the academic context. So, vocabulary is more than a component of language; it is the building where other languages are constructed.

The importance of vocabulary has been reflected in the evolution of teaching methodologies over time. Initially, language instruction placed emphasis on grammar, as seen in traditional methods like the Grammar-Translation method. According to Meara (1996), vocabulary size has a strong correlation with communicative success than grammatical accuracy or pronunciation skills.

Furthermore, vocabulary is tied to the development of all four language skills, as in the receptive skills (reading and listening), vocabulary enables learners to decode meaning from texts and spoken discourse. In productive skills such as writing and speaking, vocabulary allows learners to connect their thoughts, making them clear and creative. Absence of vocabulary causes interrupted comprehension and production, leading to frustration and disinterest.

Studies by Qian (2002) and Read (2000) support that learners with broader vocabulary are better readers and feel confident when speaking, even if they do not know grammar.

In Ecuador, vocabulary becomes struggled as students have limited exposure to the English Language outside the English classroom. The vocabulary they learn plays an important role in their linguistic progress. The limited contact with the language in real life situations increases the importance of well-structured instruction in vocabulary.

According to the Ministerial Agreement MINEDUC-ME-2016-00020-A, signed by Augusto X Espinosa A., Minister of Education, on February 17th, 2016, where it was agreed the CURRICULA FOR GENERAL BASIC EDUCATION FOR THE SUB-LEVELS OF PREPARATORY, ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND UPPER; AND, THE CURRICULUM FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL, WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE WORKLOAD, which mentioned:

Through this Ministerial Agreement, the Basic General Education curricula are established for the sublevels of Preparatory, Elementary, Middle, and Upper; and for high school level with their respective hourly loads, which is mandatory for the entire National Education System; starting from September 2016 in schools in the Highland Region and in the 2017-2018 school year in those in the Coastal Region.

In 2021, through the Resolution No. MINEDUC-SFE-2021-00008-R, the Ministry of Education decided to issue the curricular proposal called "Prioritized Curriculum with emphasis on Communication, Mathematics, Digital, and Socio-emotional skills," which was developed based on the 2016 national curriculum.

On March 10, 2023, through AGREEMENT No. MINEDUC-MINEDUC-2023-00008-A, the Ministry of Education agrees to issue the Prioritized Curriculum with an emphasis on Communication, Mathematics, Digital, and Socio-emotional competencies, applicable in educational institutions of all types and modalities of the National Education System, as a curricular proposal that can be contextualized by educational institutions within the framework of responsible autonomy.

On August 16, 2024, the Ministry of Education issued, through AGREEMENT No. MINEDUC-MINEDUC-2024-00060-A, the National Strategy for Curriculum Strengthening and Renewal. This process involves the implementation of curriculum insertions, which strengthen the curriculum through topics and areas of local and global

interest that contribute to the well-being, autonomy, and proper development of students' different everyday life contexts. These insertions include five areas:

1. Civic, ethical, and integrity education
2. Socio-emotional education
3. Education for road safety and sustainable mobility
4. Education for sustainable development
5. Financial education

The current curriculum has been organized by areas of knowledge that promote an interdisciplinary approach.

At both the Basic General Education level and the High School level, students must develop their learning in the following areas of knowledge: Language and Literature, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Foreign Language, Physical Education, and Cultural and Artistic Education. These are developed through the subjects of Language and Literature, English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Studies, Physical Education, and Cultural and Artistic Education.

The following table outlines the current curriculum for Basic General Education Superior Sublevel (8th, 9th, 10th), organized by areas of development and learning, where teaching 5 hours of English as a foreign language is mandatory.

Curriculum for the Basic General Education (BGE) level.

Subniveles de Básica		Elemental	Media	Superior
Áreas	Asignaturas	Horas pedagógicas por grado	Horas pedagógicas por grado	Horas pedagógicas por grado
Lengua y Literatura	Lengua y Literatura	10	8	6
Matemática	Matemática	8	7	6
Ciencias Sociales	Estudios Sociales	2	3	4
Ciencias Naturales	Ciencias Naturales	3	5	4
Educación Cultural y Artística	Educación Cultural y Artística	2	2	2
Educación Física	Educación Física	5	5	5
Lengua Extranjera	Inglés	3	3	5
Proyectos Escolares		1	1	2
Desarrollo Humano Integral		1	1	1
Horas pedagógicas totales		35	35	35

Figure 1

“Curriculum for the Basic General Education (BGE) level.”

Source: Ministerial Agreement No. MINEDUC-MINEDUC-2018-00089-A

Based on the previous chart, where English as a foreign Language must be taught 5 hours a week in the superior levels. Students are expected to reach a certain level of English when graduating from Superior General Education (8th, 9th, 10th EGB).

The following chart illustrates the English levels that are expected to be achieved by learners in both EGB and BGU.

Levels of Proficiency: Branching Approach

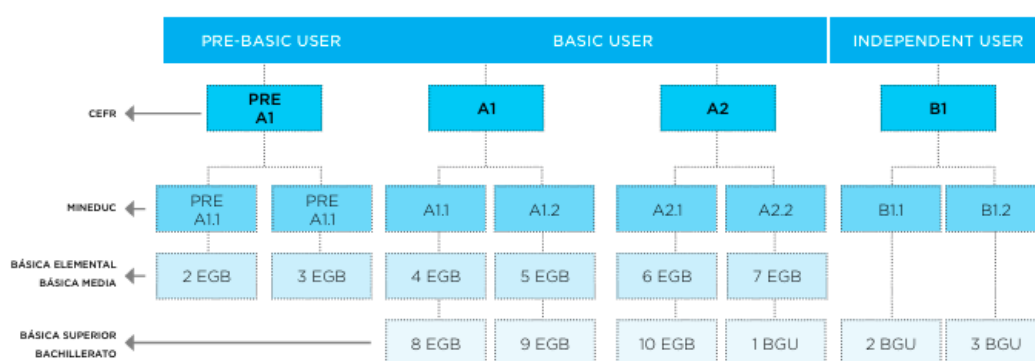


Figure 2

“Levels of Proficiency: Branching Approach”

Source: English National Curriculum

According to what is established in the English National Curriculum, students from the 10th level must reach an A2.1 level in terms that by the end of BGU learners will demonstrate at least a CEFR (**Common European Framework**) Level B1 (Threshold) and have a limited but effective command of the spoken language, where they will be able to:

1. Speak quite confidently on everyday topics, especially in relation to personal interests and routine contexts. Produce short and connected texts related to familiar topics or issues that are personally relevant to the student.

2. Express opinions and emotions related to everyday situations, as well as describe personal experiences, future aspirations, and provide simple explanations for their ideas and plans.
3. Manage common communicative situations that may occur when interacting in English-speaking environments, including the exchange of basic factual information.
4. Read and understand simple texts related to topics of personal or academic interest. Understand the main points of clear, standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.
5. Write a personal letter, email, or note on a familiar topic, describing an event or situation for an intended purpose with sufficient accuracy and coherence to be followed most of the time. (Ministerio de Educación [MINEDUC], 2016).

According to the present curriculum, it takes a constructivist approach where students understand how their L1 works, which is a product of intensive input and production in real-life contexts. This previous knowledge helps learners to form the foundation to understand the English language.

Theoretical Foundations of Vocabulary Acquisition

The vocabulary acquisition of a second language (L2) is a topic of much research. The debate centers on various theoretical frameworks that explain how learners acquire, retain, and use new lexical words, but the most influential of these are the cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. Each offers a separate perspective on how vocabulary is learned and internalized by language learners.

The input hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen, emphasizes the importance of understandable input in the language acquisition process. This theory proposes that learners acquire a language when they are exposed to a higher level of language they already know ($i+1$). This theory has supported at learning big amounts of vocabulary where reading extensively has been applying as a study method. (Bravo & Alves 2020).

Relating to Y. Chang (2021), vocabulary acquisition is a cognitive process related to meta-linguistic factors, namely phonological-orthographic and morphological awareness. The development of phonological-orthographic processing skills promotes the learner's ability to discriminate phonology and to improve the speed and accuracy of transcribing phonological streams to complete the processing of semantic meaning.

A solid understanding of sounds (phonology) and the awareness of word structure, prefixes, suffixes, and root words (morphology) is crucial to improve learners' ability to discriminate the individual sounds in words more clearly, convert spoken sounds into their written form, and finally process the word's meaning.

Carbo Silva et al. (2023), mention that vocabulary acquisition of a second language implies more than to know its form, it involves the capacity to apply this word or group of words in diverse situations of pragmatic context, respecting the syntax and semantic structure.

Consequently, knowing a word goes beyond its graphical or phonological representation. As Oster (2009) states in relation to the acquisition of a foreign language, knowing a word involves its semantic knowledge; that is, knowing its meaning, the connotations it carries, and the associations that can be made with it. Similarly, it involves knowledge of the word's form, that is, its phonetic and graphic aspects and its composition into smaller units, and finally, knowledge of its use, its grammatical function, accepted collocations, and limitations in this regard.

On the other hand, the sociocultural approach, established in Vygotsky's (1978) emphasizes social interaction and context. This theory claims that vocabulary acquisition happens through collaborative activities, such as dialogue and scaffolded learning. Concepts like the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggest that learners acquire language more effectively when they are supported by more informed peers or teachers. Through social interaction, learners construct meaning and acquire vocabulary in authentic and meaningful contexts. Both theories offer valuable contributions to vocabulary acquisition. On one hand, cognitive theory remarks mental strategies meanwhile the sociocultural theory highlights the importance of interaction and environment.

In the Educational field, understanding these theories could help teachers to develop new teaching strategies. Teachers who perceive the need to apply cognitive exposure, such as multiple exposures, elaboration, can create new learning environments which could support vocabulary acquisition, particularly where exposure to the target language is limited. Preparing instruction in these theoretical perceptions is critical. It ensures that vocabulary is not just memorized temporarily but meaningfully integrated into the learner's linguistic repertoire.

Common Challenges in Vocabulary Learning

Vocabulary learning is one of the most persistent challenges for EFL learners. Vocabulary requires acquiring the form, meaning, and use of words in a variety of contexts. This process is delayed by cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and environmental factors that complicate learners' ability to retain and use vocabulary effectively. For this reason, it becomes necessary to design instructional strategies that respond to students' learning needs.

Many adolescents consider English as a difficult subject and often fail to see its relevance in their daily lives, which leads to demotivation, anxiety, and academic frustration. These difficulties can negatively affect their transition to higher education, since a basic command of English is often required to enter certain universities, take part in exchange programs, or apply for scholarships. (Espín Santamaría et al., 2025).

Due to the study of the English language in Ecuador is mandatory, teachers must adapt teaching strategies according to the students' expectations and contextual realities, especially in high school, where teenagers are discovering their identity, interests, and values, while simultaneously preparing for academic performance in college and the transition to adult life.

Another aspect to consider is teachers' professional preparation in managing didactic materials such as digital games, which could promote learners' attention and motivation in class. In that sense, the use of games provides students with the opportunity to participate, feel motivated, and increase participation in class. (Torres & Estrella, 2022).

Furthermore, English teachers must have recognize student's different ways of learning and be able to overcome daily difficulties which help learners to communicate in the English language. Students will use the language if teachers apply decisions to make learning comprehensible through the use of mimics, digital tools, images, and the correct use of the white board. This procedure will familiarize students to learn frequent expressions and its meaning that will encourage them to use the language in class. (Bravo & Alves, M. 2020)

The Ecuadorian Education required significant changes in the teaching and learning process related with digital platforms. According to Gavilanes Cuesta and Naranjo Andrade (2024), "E-learning" can be considered one of the best strategies to be adopted for teaching and learning" (p7), when it is applied in classroom or at home. The use or digital devises, such as computers or tablets, allows to students to enter to the digital world and learn in an autonomous way due to many digital platforms offer engaging, innovative and effective activities to develop listening, reading, speaking and writing in the English language.

Today the Ministry of Education has opened a digital culture implementing technology through platforms from early ages. Another factor that limits the English learning process is the number of students who conform a classroom. An overcrowding classroom is associated to teachers with feelings of frustration. (Páez Romero, V. G., & Santillán Marroquín, W. E., 2020).

Effective Teaching Strategies

Many teachers have developed effective strategies to help learners acquire the English language in response to the challenges they face in their daily labor. Instruction of vocabulary must go beyond memorization of large amounts of words. Instead, teachers need to support learners to acquire a depth understanding of vocabulary using communicative teaching strategies to open students the opportunity to use the language in real-life contexts.

Vocabulary is an essential part of reading, where learners can understand the words in context. However, they cannot always comprehend all the text's concepts due to a lack of wide vocabulary knowledge.

1. **Explicit vocabulary instruction** includes teaching of word definitions, pronunciation, and grammatical use. This strategy is useful to introduce low-frequency vocabulary where learners won't acquire a word incidentally. As Chowdhury y Ara (2021), mentioned, pre-teaching vocabulary is the key before completing reading or listening activities to support comprehension. Explicit instruction is more effective when it involves exposure to words and allows learners to engage with them through semantic mapping, word association, and sentence construction tasks.

2. **Incidental learning** refers to exposure during reading, listening, or other activities that are not essentially focused on vocabulary learning. Incidental learning increases the breadth of vocabulary knowledge through extensive reading programs, where learners read big texts for general understanding. This practice shows to gain significant vocabulary. However, incidental learning needs to find words in supportive contexts.

In this process, teachers can select appropriate texts accompanied by follow-up activities that reinforce new vocabulary.

3. **Contextualization** is another element in vocabulary learning. The words should not be taught in isolation. New vocabulary must be presented within meaningful sentences or supportive texts. Studies by Schmitt (2010) and Webb (2008) show that learners are more likely to remember and use vocabulary when they learn it in context. For example. The word "economics", as part of a reading about the economy, provides learners with the semantic context. Activities such as: roles play dialogues and problem solving could help students to internalize vocabulary meanwhile they internalize vocabulary while they develop listening and speaking competencies.

4. **Communicative teaching strategies** are another aspect to consider, because they provide students with the opportunity to use vocabulary in real-life scenarios as they must simulate communicative scenes. Task-based language Teaching (TBLT), encourages learners to use the language to complete real-life tasks such as:

- Making a doctor's appointment.

- Asking for a hotel reservation
- Asking for directions
- Buying a souvenir
- Writing a letter
- Making a memorandum
- Managing a debate
- Role-playing a school president election, etc.

According to Ellis (2023), this approach promotes deeper learning because vocabulary is used for a clear objective. Also, the CLIL method, Content and Language Integrated Learning, integrates subject content (e.g., science, physics, maths) using the English language instruction, offering natural contexts for vocabulary development.

5. **Recycling and repetition**, are other strategies to foster retention.

Vocabulary must be reinforced in every opportunity to move from short-term to long-term memory. Nation (2023) suggests that learners need to encounter a word at least ten times before it can be remembered naturally. Teachers can support this process by incorporating a variety of classroom activities, such as word games, flashcards, quizzes, and simple association tasks that help students recycle new vocabulary. In addition, digital tools like Quizlet or Anki provide students with opportunities to review vocabulary through visual and auditory support, which contributes to better retention.

6. **Learner-centered strategies**, including personal vocabulary notebooks, word lists, and self-assessment activities, encourage students to take a more active role in their own learning process. When students feel motivated and involved in real communicative activities, they are more likely to use vocabulary and try to maintain consistent practice.

Successful vocabulary learning depends of a wide use of strategies and methods that integrate the cognitive, contextual, and motivational aspects of how students learn. Teachers in EFL contexts, including those from the public and private educational institutions in Pimampiro, Ecuador, should try to implement flexible and evidence-based methods that encourage both understanding and usage of vocabulary in authentic communication settings. Combining explicit teaching with rich input, meaningful practice,

and regular review creates an active learning environment in which vocabulary acquisition can succeed.

Contextual Limitations in Latin American Classrooms

Vocabulary acquisition is deeply affected by the sociocultural, instructional, and economic contexts. In Ecuador, EFL learners suffer systematic challenges that limit vocabulary learning. These restrictions involve insufficient resources, large classes, insufficient teacher training, and outdated curriculum implementation. Seeing these limitations could help to understand and evaluate why acquiring vocabulary is a difficult task and look for strategies that respond to students' contextual realities.

One of the challenges for many teachers is the lack of access to authentic input. In many urban and rural regions, school becomes the only environment where students are exposed to the English language, and this issue is sometimes limited by the lack of materials and instructional time. Students do not have another choice but to rely on teachers' knowledge and book exercises with minimal access to visual sources, digital platforms, applications, or extracurricular English programs, such as attending an English theater, film forum, or being part of an English-speaking, reading, or writing club where students could experience and use vocabulary in real contexts.

Large class sizes are another issue that many public institutions face. 30 to 40 students in a classroom makes the teaching and learning process more difficult. It becomes challenging for teachers to offer individual attention, provide feedback, and assess students in their vocabulary process. Teachers often focus their efforts on the group rather than tailoring tasks for different learners' needs. Large classes limit the opportunities to practice communicative interaction and meaningful vocabulary use.

Another barrier that limits effective vocabulary instruction is the lack of teacher training. Many teachers in Ecuador do not receive specific preparation in vocabulary teaching and are not sufficiently familiar with recent methodological advances in this area. A study conducted by Jiménez and O'Shanahan (2016) in Colombia revealed that many EFL teachers continued to rely on the grammar-translation method, which emphasizes

grammatical accuracy and translation exercises rather than vocabulary development and communicative competence.

Curricular inconsistency is another factor that limits effective vocabulary instruction. Although the national curriculum emphasizes communicative competence and task-based instruction, classroom implementation often differs from these guidelines.

Limited class time, pressure from standardized assessments, and an excessive reliance on textbooks often reduce vocabulary instruction to memorization and fill-in-the-blank activities. This gap between curricular expectations and classroom realities weakens efforts to promote meaningful vocabulary development.

Finally, socioeconomic factors affect significant learning opportunities. In Ecuador, the rural areas suffer from limited internet access, reducing learners' opportunities for vocabulary exposure. They only depend on the teacher's creativity to teach the English language. In Pimampiro, there are 5 educational institutions where the English language is taught, and just 1 of them is equipped with a lab where students can practice the language on digital platforms.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that students face in acquiring English vocabulary and the teaching strategies employed by educators. The study was carried out with thematic interpretation of interview data; the methodology aimed to uncover both the patterns and the underlying causes of vocabulary learning difficulties in the EFL context of Pimampiro, Ecuador.

The participants in this study were students and English teachers from the 10th level of General Basic Education in public schools located in Pimampiro. A sample of 10 students, aged 14 to 15, was selected through random sampling in order to represent different levels of academic performance and socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, five English teachers with teaching experience ranging from 2 to 15 years voluntarily participated in the interviews. Their contributions provided essential pedagogical insights

and contextual understanding of instructional practices. All participants were informed of the research objectives and ethical considerations, such as anonymity, voluntary participation, and informed consent.

The data collection instruments consisted of student and teacher semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with all participating teachers and a subgroup of 10 students. The interview guide was based on themes that emerged from the literature review, such as the balance between explicit and incidental vocabulary instruction, the integration of context, and the role of learner engagement. The interviews were conducted in person, with prior consent from the participants, and were audio-recorded for later analysis. The purpose of this process was to examine the quality and variety of vocabulary input offered to students, as well as to determine whether the instructional materials were consistent with communicative and cognitive learning principles. This analysis made it possible to identify whether vocabulary instruction was integrated across different language skills and if it promoted deeper processing through repetition and contextualized use.

Data analysis was carried out following a qualitative research approach. Qualitative data obtained from interview responses were analyzed using thematic coding. Through repeated reading and coding of the data, key themes emerged, including limited contextual exposure, memorization-based instruction, student anxiety, and resource limitations. NVivo software was used to support the qualitative analysis and to organize the data consistently across the identified themes.

The teacher interviews revealed that although many educators were aware of interactive strategies, they struggled to implement them due to time constraints and large class sizes—an issue reflected in all public institutions.

This study followed an action research approach, as its purpose was to describe and interpret current classroom conditions while also informing practical teaching interventions. Based on the data collected, this study proposes pedagogical recommendations aimed at improving vocabulary instruction in public schools in Pimampiro. In this way, methodological design supports academic research while

responding to the professional development needs of teachers and the language learning needs of students.

Analysis and discussion of results

By analyzing the data obtained through interviews and comparing them with established theories of second language vocabulary acquisition, the study confirms and contextualizes many of the pedagogical concerns outlined in the literature review.

One of the most prominent findings was the limited vocabulary retention among students, which closely aligns with Nation's (2006), who claimed that learners require consistent, repeated exposure to lexical items to move from recognition to production. Students reported forgetting words after short periods of time and struggling to use them in context, even if they had recently learned them. This issue faced by many students is a result of the insufficient exposure to the English Language where the only environment learners have contact to the English language is at school.

Vocabulary is regularly taught through isolated word lists, fill-in-the-blank tasks, or memorization activities because of teachers' pressure about the curriculum, so they forgot that vocabulary is part of communicative practice rather than a discrete item.

Another dimension of the findings shows an acceptable range of word recognition in receptive skills, such as reading, but students show a weaker performance in productive skills, such as speaking and writing. This observation supports Nation's (2001) distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary and emphasizes the pedagogical need to bridge this gap through activities that promote productive usage. For instance, teachers say that during speaking assessment, most students choose to use basic vocabulary and avoid new words, which demonstrates a lack of confidence and a natural recall ability. This further reinforces Laufer's (1998) argument that moving from recognition to production requires guided practice, feedback, and meaningful communication.

Furthermore, the study confirmed the existence of many affective limitations, especially anxiety and demotivation. The interviews conducted to students reveal that vocabulary learning is a frustrating experience specially when they have to memorized

words without tasks that help them to support learning. Similarly, teachers recognized that students do not want to participate in class unless the activities are well-structured and engaging. This perception suggests the need to apply affective pedagogical strategies, which include opportunities to speak without fear.

Another significant finding was the limited use of teaching strategies based on the contextual students' realities. Despite literature supporting the efficacy of interactive methodologies, including the use of songs, stories, and real-life simulations. Most vocabulary instruction relied heavily on textbook-based exercises and lacked multisensory or emotionally engaging elements that could support student motivation and retention. Teachers pointed to limited resources, large class sizes, and rigid curricular frameworks as key obstacles to implementing more dynamic teaching approaches. This situation reflects challenges commonly found in the Latin American educational context, as described by Mendoza and Zambrano (2021), where infrastructural and systemic limitations limit pedagogical innovation.

Teachers also reported that national curricula place greater emphasis on grammar structures and reading comprehension than on vocabulary development. They noted that summative assessments tend to focus on form-based knowledge, which often discourages teachers from experimenting with communicative or integrative vocabulary tasks. These systemic challenges align with the curriculum–practice gap identified by Pérez and Castillo (2022), who argue that instructional practices are unlikely to change unless assessments give greater value to vocabulary use and production.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study set out to investigate the challenges students face in acquiring English vocabulary and the teaching strategies used by educators in the 10th level of general basic education in Pimampiro, Ecuador. Drawing upon a qualitative method, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how lexical competence is developed—or hindered—in a context marked by limited resources, traditional instruction, and systemic constraints.

The findings indicate that vocabulary acquisition in the EFL classroom is influenced by a combination of cognitive, affective, and contextual factors. Students experience difficulties with vocabulary retention, spontaneous use, and pronunciation, mainly due to limited opportunities for repeated and meaningful exposure and practice. These difficulties are often linked to teaching methods that emphasize memorization and grammatical structures, instead of incorporating vocabulary instruction into communicative and contextualized learning activities. Furthermore, emotional barriers such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes significantly reduce students' disposition to use new vocabulary in productive ways.

Despite teachers being aware of the importance of vocabulary in language learning, they rely on traditional methods due to time limitations, large class sizes, and pressure from standardized assessments. Although strategies like the use of songs, games, and collaborative activities have demonstrated pedagogical value in literature, their application remains limited in the classroom due to systemic and logistical restrictions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research highlights the urgent need to shift toward more student-centered, multisensory, and interactive approaches to vocabulary instruction. Strategies that incorporate repetition, contextual learning, and emotional engagement—such as the use of interactive songs, games, and videos have the potential to address many of the challenges identified. Additionally, curriculum designers should consider aligning instructional goals with communicative outcomes that emphasize vocabulary use in real contexts.

On the other hand, educational authorities should establish continuous professional development programs focused on innovative methodologies for vocabulary teaching and the effective integration of technological resources.

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