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Foundations for English for specific purposes: improving student's vocabulary

The article deals with the problem of development of lexical skills at the lessons of English language and it gives an overview of the experience of teaching General English course as a foundation English course for specific purposes to the first-year Elementary level students of International Information Technology University (IITU). This academic year, there were about 778 students who were enrolled to the General English Elementary course. Students of IITU have to study General English and Academic English courses before studying "English for Specific Purposes" courses in order to improve their levels of English. As we know, the purpose of English language teaching is the ability to communicate. In this process, learning vocabulary plays a vital role in all language skills. Learners cannot understand others or express their own ideas without enough vocabulary. Accordingly, we will outline some activities, tools for teaching vocabulary in this work. The article encompasses the activities for improving the vocabulary of learners. The activities were used in teaching English language to the first-year Elementary level students at International Information Technology University, Almaty. Forty students studied online for four weeks. They studied online using Microsoft Teams, Moodle and other platforms. Students worked with different textbooks which were listed in the syllabus. The aim of this article is to focus on improving students' vocabulary skill and analyzing what results have been achieved in four weeks. For this purpose, every week students had to work with new vocabulary topics which were indicated in the academic program. As a result, most students have achieved the aim of the syllabus and students were able to recognize familiar words, interpret and understand authentic oral speech on the studied topics and express their opinion on them.

Keywords: teaching English language, vocabulary, speaking, listening, writing, reading skill, new words, memory, progress, course, program.

Introduction

This article gives an overview of the experience of teaching General English course to the first-year Elementary level students of International Information Technology University (IITU). This academic year, there were about 778 students who were enrolled to the General English Elementary course. Students of IITU have to study General English and Academic English courses before studying "English for Specific Purposes" courses in order to improve their levels of English. The General English course is designed to help students develop their English language competence for their current and future academic studies. The course centers around general topics, such as countries and nationalities; family and friends; daily routines; neighborhood; shopping habits; travelling; sports and hobbies, etc. Each topic is studied through skills-oriented acquisition of the relevant glossary and target grammar structures in various kinds of listening, reading speaking and writing activities. The teaching and learning is heavily reliant on the use of IT technologies and students self-study (self-checked grammar exercises, small group projects) which makes it useful for the students' successful career in the chosen field [1]. We would like to underline that we will focus on how students have improved their vocabulary in four weeks with the help of different methods and activities in this paper. The research methodology and the research results are presented in the article as well.

English language is used and spoken in many countries around the world. Learning English becomes an important part of students' study, as it gives them an opportunity to study abroad and to find well paid job as well. In order to communicate well, the students need to have enough vocabulary. As Thornbury (2002) stated that without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed [2]. In addition, Jordan (1997) also states that vocabulary is very important aspect in language, as it is related to all four language skills, for example in listening, reading, writing and speaking skills [3]. If learners do not know the meaning of words, they will not be able to speak, write and translate anything English. Large vocabularies help us to express our ideas precisely, vividly and without repeating ourselves in composition [4].

Hatch and Brown (1995) underlined five essential steps for learning vocabulary and they are also known as learners' strategies:

● having sources for encountering new words;
● getting the forms of the new words;
● learning the meanings of the words;
● making a strong memory of the words;
● using the words [5].

Most researchers offer different tips on how to improve learner's vocabulary. The followings are the list of simple tips:

● Learners should read as much as they can. It is recommended to start with books by authors who are close and pleasant to a learner. In addition, step by step learners will move on to more serious literature. If we find the unfamiliar word in the text, we can read its meaning in the dictionary, and if we want to remember it, we should read it aloud and repeat it several times.

● Another way to increase learner's vocabulary is to write paragraphs, essays, articles, special book and write something exciting or great in a poem. Learners can practice using target vocabulary in their writings.

● Crosswords are also very useful for developing vocabulary. When learners have enough free time, they can use different apps on crossword on the Internet and enjoy playing them.

● Teachers can use various role-play games for students in order to improve their vocabulary. The main purpose of using role — play games in the educational process is to expand the vocabulary of students, to help them to express their own opinion, developing speaking, etc. Schmitt (2000) points out that vocabulary plays a vital role in teaching and learning the second language as lexical knowledge is fundamental to communicate effectively [6]. Every teacher who aims to teach students to speak a foreign language and communicate can use different role-play games as one of the exercises in their lessons. According to Martinson & Chu (2008) game is an appropriate strategy for teaching in creating good environment of learning [7].

We have analyzed different research works on this topic. We have used different resources, such as textbooks, online platforms, videos, etc. to improve forty students' vocabulary in four weeks. Most of them were taken from the *Language Hub A2 Elementary* resources, as it is the main coursebook in the program. The research results (a case study of teaching General English language Elementary level course) and procedure are explained in the next part of our work.

Forty students with Elementary level of English studied online for about four weeks. They studied online using Microsoft Teams, Moodle and other platforms. Students worked with different textbooks which were listed in the syllabus, such as *Language Hub A2 Elementary Student's book by P. Maggs, C. Smith, A. Tennant; Language Hub A2 Elementary Workbook by P. Maggs, C. Smith, A. Tennant; Language Hub A2 Elementary Wordlists, etc.*

The aim of this work is to focus on improving students' vocabulary and analyzing what results have been achieved in four weeks. For this purpose, every week, various vocabulary topics were given to students according to their academic program, and they were all indicated in the syllabus. Forty students (3 groups) had to work with some new words from Language Hub Wordlists Unit 1 and Unit 2 in four weeks. After the completion of the Units 1 and 2, students will be able to recognize familiar words, interpret and understand authentic oral speech on the topics, such as Arrival (countries and nationalities, everyday items, etc.) and My family (appearance, personality adjectives, members of the family, etc.) and express their opinion on those topics.

First of all, we would like to point out that we can use different effective activities in order to improve students' vocabulary. For instance, Language Hub Elementary level course book (2019) offers different useful activities for speaking about countries and nationalities (Fig. 1):

Figure 1. Talking about countries and nationalities
(from Language Hub A2. Elementary. Student's book by P. Maggs, C. Smith, A. Tennant, Macmillan Education, 2019)

• Students have to work in pairs. They should look at the flight map and match the numbers on the screen and with the names of the countries. This task motivates students to know more about other countries in English. Students can give short information in English language as well. We would like to highlight that most people enjoy learning geography, however some students cannot pronounce the names of countries correctly in English. So, we can use the following activity to teach Elementary students to pronounce the country names without mistakes: "Work in pairs. Look at the flight map in Fig. 1 and match the numbers on the screen (1-4) with these country names *Brazil, Canada, the USA, Mexico*".

• This activity focuses on pronunciation. Students should be explained what syllable is. Syllable is a word or a part of a word that has one vowel sound. First, students should listen and repeat the words (Fig. 2). Then, they have to underline the stressed syllables [8]. For example, _Indian, Japan, etc._

Figure 2. Stressed syllables
(from Language Hub A2. Elementary. Student's book by P. Maggs, C. Smith, A. Tennant, Macmillan Education, 2019)

In addition, the following course book's wordlist Unit 1 offers some new words related with everyday items. The following activity can be used in order to improve students' vocabulary:

• Students should work with photos and match the numbers with the list of everyday items in the box. After that, students have to read the text and answer some questions related with the information in the text. For example, students are given "True and False" sentences and they have to correct them if the sentence is wrong [8].

Figure 3. Everyday items
(from Language Hub A2. Elementary. Student's book by P. Maggs, C. Smith, A. Tennant, Macmillan Education, 2019)

In teaching vocabulary, teachers should provide students with information about cultural background, customs whenever possible, which will not only broaden students' horizon, but also motivate their interest in English. In our opinion, the most interesting and effective activity which really motivates students to learn English language and to learn more new words is watching videos, films, tutoring videos, etc. So, Elementary students can learn how a new word is used by watching someone uses it in context (Fig. 4). They will learn about the different contexts that may surround a new word as well as the gestures and mannerisms that often accompany it. Watching movies is a casual way to learn words. Similar to reading illustrated books, learners get the perk of visual cues, while also benefiting from hearing how the word is usually pronounced.

Figure 4. Greeting people and making introductions
(from Language Hub A2. Elementary. Student's book by P. Maggs, C. Smith, A. Tennant, Macmillan Education, 2019)

In addition, according to the IITU General English course's Syllabus Elementary students should be able to describe the appearance and personality of the members of their family. If students want to learn words about the family members and describe the personality and appearance of them, they can work with the following activities:

• Draw a family tree and write the names of the members in your family. This activity helps students to know more about how to name their relatives in English. Most students can name them only in Kazakh or Russian languages, so this activity will help them to use those words in speaking about their family.

• Teachers should introduce some new words which can be used to describe the appearance of the person and show some pictures to students. They have to match the words with the pictures and describe each person using those new words (Fig. 5) [8].

Figure 5. Talk about appearance
(from Language Hub A2. Elementary. Student's book by P. Maggs, C. Smith, A. Tennant, Macmillan Education, 2019)

While teaching 40 students in these 4 weeks, they were introduced 40 new words and students worked with these activities which were mentioned above. Furthermore, they had other speaking, reading writing and listening activities to practice those 40 new words. For instance, the students had to write a paragraph about their family and describe the family members. They had to write 10-15 sentences. It was a good practice for them. The results of this research are shown in the next part of our work.

Results and Discussion

Students were administered online tests (on Socrative platform) and speaking tests to determine the progress of the students. The online test consisted of 20 questions: multiple choice and open-ended questions; speaking test included expressing opinion, presenting ideas on the issues under study. Table 1 shows the results of each group.

The results of speaking tests and online vocabulary test on Socrative platform

Groups	Online Socrative Vocabulary test-100 %	Online on Microsoft Teams Speaking test results -100 %
IS 1 & MCM (Elementary - 14 students)	74.9	93.2
IS2 & CS (Elementary - 13 students)	74.4	90.3
Fin & MAN & Jour& RET (Elementary - 13 students)	76.3	95.3

Figure 6 illustrates student's results from the online vocabulary test which was conducted on Socrative platform.
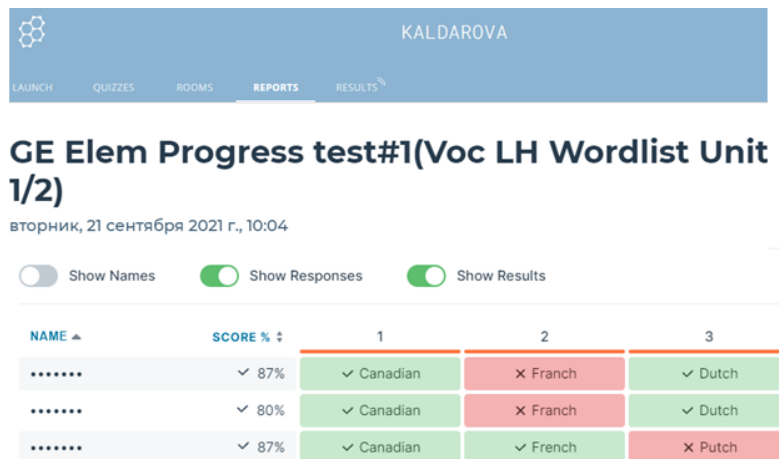

Figure 6. The results of an online vocabulary test on Socrative platform

The analysis of the results shows that some students faced problems in answering open-ended questions. The allotted time was limited (15 minutes for 20 questions) and students had to answer as quick as they could. However, students of "Fin& MAN& Jour& RET" group showed the highest result in tests, it was 76.3 % out of 100 %. "IS2 & CS" group showed the lowest result, it was 74.4 % out of 100 %. However, students got higher results from speaking test. "Fin& MAN& Jour& RET" group's students tried to use the target vocabulary in their speaking and showed the highest result – 95.3 % out of 100 %. The resource enabled the student to complete the task well; there were few lexical errors and meaning was not affected. Although, "IS2 & CS" group the new words repetitively in their speaking, and some words were inappropriate to the task. This group had the lowest result, it was 90.3 % out of 100 %.

Research discussion. There were three IITU Elementary groups with a total of 40 students. All of them passed the speaking test. The result ranges from 90.3 % – 95.3 %. Speaking tests covered the topics from Unit 1 and 2 which students studied in 4 weeks. An online vocabulary test results fluctuates from 74.4 % – 76.3 %. We would like to point out that the activities and online platforms which were used to improve students' vocabulary were effective. The reason is that we can see students' results were higher that 70 % from the online test and speaking tests. Furthermore, they were able to use those learnt vocabulary in their speaking about different topics. Most students have achieved the aim of the syllabus and students were able to recognize familiar words, interpret and understand authentic oral speech on the topics, such as Arrival (countries and nationalities, everyday items, etc.) and My family (appearance, personality adjectives, members of the family, etc.) and express their opinion on those topics. The activities which were used in teaching/learning English language in these four weeks were useful and helpful for students.

Conclusions

It is recommended to pay attention on improving student's vocabulary skills through different vocabulary activities, techniques, methods and online platforms. In addition, we have to underline that vocabulary is very important in improving leanea's all four language skills such as listening, writing, reading and speaking skills. Most researchers agree that teaching vocabulary is interconnected with four language skills. For instance, as we know reading is the one-person activity, learners can really take their time with a new word and work out

its meaning and usage. Also, this research has shown that listening activities also impact how we learn to pronounce and use new words. There are lots of ways to learn by listening. We would like to mention that one of the advantages of rich vocabulary is that it helps learners to express themselves in writing and speaking as well. To sum up, we would like to highlight that communicating in English language with others allows learners to gain valuable input on their word usage and pronunciation while expanding their vocabulary. Goerss, Beck, and McKeown (1999) assert that learners need to be involved in active learning to successfully acquire and retain new vocabulary [9]. So, learners should join English clubs or meet with other local people learning English and practice a lot.

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Арнайы мақсаттарға арналған ағылшын тілінің негіздері: студенттердің лексикалық дағдыларын дамыту

Мақалада ағылшын тілі сабақтарында лексикалық дағдыларды дамыту мәселесі қарастырылған және бастауыш деңгейдегі бірінші курс студенттеріне арнайы мақсаттар үшін ағылшын тілінің негізгі курсы ретінде жалпы ағылшын тілін оқыту тәжірибесіне шолу жасалған. Халықаралық ақпараттық технологиялар университеті (ХАТУ) өткен оқу жылында жалпы ағылшын тілінің базалық курсына шамамен 778 студентті қабылдады. ХАТУ студенттері ағылшын тілінің деңгейін көтеру үшін «Кәсіби ағылшын тілі» курстарын оқымас бұрын жалпы ағылшын және академиялық ағылшын курстарын оқуы керек. Өздеріңіз білетіндей, ағылшын тілін оқытудың мақсаты — қарым-қатынас жасай білу. Бұл үдерісте сөздік оқу барлық тілдік дағдыларда маңызды рөл атқарады. Студенттер жеткілікті сөздік қорынсыз басқаларды түсіне алмайды немесе өз ойын жеткізе алмайды. Осыған сәйкес, осы жұмыста лексиканы оқытуға арналған кейбір әрекеттер, құралдар көрсетілген. Сонымен қатар білім алушылардың сөздік қорын молайту шаралары қарастырылған. Бұл іс-шаралар Халықаралық ақпараттық технологиялар университетінің (Алматы қ.) 1 курс студенттеріне ағылшын тілін үйретуде қолданылды. Қырық студент төрт апта бойы онлайн білім алды. Олар Microsoft Teams, Moodle және басқа платформалар арқылы онлайн режимінде оқыды. Студенттер бағдарламада көрсетілген әртүрлі оқулықтармен жұмыс жасады. Мақаланың мақсаты — студенттердің сөздік қорын жақсартуға және төрт аптада жеткен нәтижелерді талдауға бағыттау. Ол үшін апта сайын студенттер оқу бағдарламасында көрсетілген жаңа сөздік тақырыптарымен жұмыс істеуге тура келді. Нәтижесінде білім алушылардың көпшілігі оқу бағдарламасының мақсатына жетті және білім алушылар таныс сөздерді тани алды, зерттелетін тақырыптар бойынша шынайы ауызша сөйлеуді түсіндіре білді және түсіне алды және олар туралы өз пікірлерін білдіре алды.

Кілт сөздер: ағылшын тілін үйрену, сөздік, сөйлеу, тыңдау, жазу, оқу дағдысы, жаңа сөздер, жад, прогресс, арнайы мақсаттағы ағылшын тілі.

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Основы английского языка для специальных целей: развитие лексических навыков студентов

В статье рассмотрена проблема развития лексических навыков на уроках английского языка, и дан обзор опыта преподавания общего курса английского языка как базового курса английского языка для специальных целей первокурсникам начального уровня. В Международный университет информационных технологий (МУИТ) в этом учебном году на базовый курс общего английского было зачислено около 778 студентов. Студенты МУИТ должны изучить курсы общего английского и академического английского перед изучением курсов «Профессиональный английский язык», чтобы повысить свой уровень английского языка. Как известно, целью обучения английскому языку является умение общаться. В этом процессе изучение словарного запаса играет жизненно важную роль во всех языковых навыках. Учащиеся не могут понимать других или выражать свои собственные идеи без достаточного словарного запаса. Соответственно, мы наметим некоторые мероприятия, инструменты для обучения лексике в этой работе. В статье рассмотрены мероприятия по расширению словарного запаса учащихся. Эти мероприятия были использованы при обучении английскому языку студентов первого курса начальной школы Международного университета информационных технологий (г. Алматы). Сорок студентов обучались онлайн в течение четырех недель с помощью Microsoft Teams, Moodle и других платформ. Студенты работали с разными учебниками, которые были указаны в программе. Цель этой статьи — сосредоточиться на улучшении словарного запаса учащихся и анализе результатов, достигнутых за четыре недели. Для этого каждую неделю студенты должны были работать с новыми темами лексики, которые были указаны в учебной программе. В результате большинство учащихся достигли цели учебной программы, и учащиеся смогли распознавать знакомые слова, интерпретировать и понимать аутентичную устную речь по изучаемым темам и выражать свое мнение по ним.

Ключевые слова: обучение английскому языку, словарный запас, говорение, аудирование, письмо, навык чтения, новые слова, память, прогресс, профессиональный английский.