

Investigating ELL Teachers' Knowledge and Practice in Vocabulary Instruction

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The purpose of this study was to investigate EFL teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction. The study involved thirty six secondary school English teachers from three randomly selected schools. Simple random, purposive and available sampling techniques were employed for the study undertaken. Data was collected from the participant teachers through questionnaire, semi-structured interview, classroom observation and stimulated-recall interview. The findings show that, teachers' knowledge was generally consistent with their classroom practices and this marked their knowledge guides their pedagogical practices. However, a few inconsistencies were also noticed. At the same time, the finding exhibited factors which could contribute to the mismatches between teachers' knowledge and practices in vocabulary instruction. These factors include: Students' lack of ability, their lack of motivation, lack of resources, large class size and others. The discussion of these findings suggests implications for practices and recommendations for future research to improve vocabulary instruction in secondary school context.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' knowledge and how they implement their knowledge is central to the process of teaching and learning. Teachers' knowledge refers to the total knowledge and insights underlying teachers' actions in practice. According to Borg (1999), teachers' knowledge implies "the beliefs, knowledge theories, assumptions and attitudes that teachers hold about all aspects of their work" (p. 9). Research in teacher cognition also demonstrates that teachers' knowledge is an important element that has the potential to provide insights into teachers' innate ability to make images and interpretations about what they are teaching, who they are teaching and the context in which teaching takes place (Carter, 1990; Freeman, 2002).

The investigation into teachers' knowledge in terms of 'what' teachers know about what they do in the classroom has become a core interest in typical educational research since the mid-1970s. At this time, the significance of teacher cognition inquiry has been increased and the center of attention in L2 research education has immensely changed from studying teachers' observable behaviors towards teachers' knowledge and beliefs (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 1999).

The relationship between teachers' cognition (knowledge and beliefs) and practices has received substantial attention in the field of teacher education. It is generally believed that teachers' cognitions play a crucial role in classroom teaching and what teachers know or believe and what teachers think have a powerful influence on their classroom practices. The relationship between teacher knowledge and practice is also understood when looking at teaching as a knowledge-based activity. What teachers do in the classroom is informed and consequently is justified, by what they know. Hegarty (2000) offers an explicit account of how teachers' classroom behavior can be informed by their underlying knowledge. His account is focused on the teaching moment when a teacher is interacting with one or more learners so as to

stimulate and direct their learning. Such moments happen within a context of prior contact, syllabus expectation and lesson planning and so on.

In the early 1990s, research in language education also shifted to focus on the cognitive aspects of teaching and attention was seriously paid to the central role of teachers' knowledge in helping to improve language teaching (Prabhu, 1990). Within EFL context as well, there has recently been an increasing interest in research on teachers' knowledge in the field of English language teaching. To this end Shulman (1987) argued that, teachers' knowledge is essential for effective language teaching. Here, what deserves special attention is "the influence of teachers' mental lives or the hidden side of teaching" on their instructional decisions (Freeman, 2002:1).

In the same way, researchers have viewed vocabulary as an important part of a language on which teachers' knowledge research is required to be made. Borg (2003) to this angle points out that, L2 teachers' knowledge needs more focused research on different curricular aspects of language teaching, particularly those unstudied areas such as the teaching of vocabulary, speaking and listening.

Thus, investigating teachers' knowledge and practice of teaching English vocabulary was highlighted in this study. As the researcher believes, no changes in teachers' practice can take place without being preceded by changes in the teachers' knowledge. This was also evidenced by Zhang (2008: 25), who stated that "to better understand L2 teachers' knowledge, more work will be needed focusing on under-examined curricular aspects of language teaching, including vocabulary instruction." In view of Zhang, EFL teachers' knowledge of vocabulary instruction can be considered a critical area to be investigated as it has the potential to demonstrate how such knowledge informs the teachers' practice in EFL classes. Accordingly, the researcher observed the problem at the secondary school level and explored EFL teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction in our context.

Since the question "what teachers know" (Carter, 1990, p. 292) is considered as one of the main issues in teachers' knowledge research, this study, thus, seeks to see what teachers know or believe about vocabulary instruction in disparity to the research traditions that emphasized teachers' observable behaviors such as teachers teaching methods or their approaches in teaching English vocabulary. Therefore, teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction was chosen for investigation in this study at the city administration of Addis Ababa government secondary school level. Thus, referring to the studies on L2 teachers' knowledge in various curricular areas, the researcher explored EFL teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction at the secondary school level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Statement of the Research Problem

Teachers play an important role in students' vocabulary development as they prepare learners for strategies that increase their vocabulary knowledge. However, Borg (2009) indicates that vocabulary as an area of study has been sidelined from a teacher's knowledge perspective, and there is insufficient understanding of this curricular area of second language teaching. The researcher also agrees with Borg's idea that studies of vocabulary teaching, which aim to investigate teachers' knowledge of vocabulary teaching and how these affect classroom practices, are rare in our context, and he believes that more research needs to be done on teachers' role of linking knowledge and practice together in EFL classes.

As well, several studies have been conducted in order to find out why there is a problem in vocabulary teaching and to meet the growing demand to solve this issue. To this end, in the literature of English language teaching and learning, a recurring theme has been the neglect of vocabulary. It was often given little priority in language programs and was often left to look after itself, receiving only incidental attention in textbooks and language programs (Richards and Renandya, 2002; Hedge, 2008).

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Personal observations by the researcher revealed that, despite the fact that vocabulary is the foundation of a language, it does not receive adequate attention in EFL classes to improve students' word capacity through vocabulary instruction, and thus students are unable to manipulate different vocabulary tasks in purposeful communication. It is important to realize that Dessalegne (2015), for example, studied teachers' vocabulary teaching in EFL classes, and his finding revealed that vocabulary teaching was given little emphasis and teachers didn't help students to become empowered in the classroom to participate in different vocabulary improvement activities.

With this in mind, it seems that the approach in which vocabulary may often be taught in classes and the manner in which teachers may tend to leave their students to learn vocabulary on their own without their instruction or guidance is not considered by the researcher to be beneficial. This may possibly lead learners to rely on rote memorization of words rather than the active use of words. In effect, it makes communication difficult. Moreover, English teachers indicate that vocabulary is taught through some other language skills such as reading, listening, and writing. As a consequence, teaching vocabulary is considered by most teachers as a secondary activity in secondary schools, and students also prefer to learn grammar and other language skills than vocabulary in EFL classes for their upcoming college entry.

Thus, the researcher believes the way the students at secondary school have been taught English vocabulary needs to be investigated. Hence, the researcher thinks the growth of vocabulary knowledge is one of the essential elements for language learning, and this growth of vocabulary knowledge can be possible when teachers employ their knowledge for effective vocabulary teaching. As Connelly, Clandinin, & He (1997) underscore, what teachers know and how they express their knowledge is central to students' learning and determines their performance to a great extent. Accordingly, the researcher believes teachers' lack of vocabulary instruction knowledge and practice is part of the problem and needs to be studied the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction at the secondary

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school level. Borg (2006: 133) underlined that "further studies into the full range of teachers' knowledge that informs vocabulary teaching practices are thus also required".

Although worldwide there is a large body of literature documenting research findings about teachers' knowledge and their classroom practices with regard to different curricular areas, it seems less attention has been paid to such kinds of research in our context, and little is known about how teachers conceptualize teaching and how their thinking is related to their classroom practices in vocabulary instruction.

Moreover the existing local research works were mainly dealt with interactive or observable behaviors of EFL teachers teaching vocabulary than teachers' cognitive behaviors (teachers' knowledge and belief) of vocabulary teaching. Consequently, secondary school EFL teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction remain unexplored, and it seems there is no close study of what teachers know in reference to teachers' knowledge in EFL teaching in general and vocabulary instruction in particular in our context. Therefore, this study filled the gap by exploring teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction at an EFL secondary school level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate secondary school EFL teachers' knowledge of and practice in vocabulary instruction. The specific objectives of this study were to examine the relationship between secondary school EFL teachers' knowledge and practices in vocabulary instruction and to identify factors that may affect the implementation of teachers' knowledge of vocabulary instruction in practice.

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory mixed-method design by combining quantitative and qualitative methods as complementary strategies appropriate to the research questions. Explanatory design sets out to explain information and seeks to ask "why" and "how" questions those go on to identify the actual reasons a phenomenon occurs (Creswell et al., 2003). This design starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data. The second, qualitative phase of the study is designed so that it follows from (or connects to) the results of the first quantitative phase. The reason behind the sequence of the explanatory design is that the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (ibid.). Consequently, in the first phase of data collection, the researcher conducted a questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews, observation, and stimulated recall in the second phase. Based on some of the findings from the first phase, integration of the two phases was carried out, and further exploration of teachers' knowledge and practice of vocabulary instruction in an EFL secondary school context was made.

Thus, the researcher decided to use an explanatory sequential mixed method through which information of both quantitative and qualitative nature was collected using different instruments for a more dependable result. As Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner (2007) note, the design has a number of advantages: it can lead to richer data; it allows researchers to be more confident of their findings; and it stimulates creative ways of collecting data. Thus, an explanatory mixed method design was chosen to generate a greater understanding of the issue under study.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were EFL teachers who were teaching English at randomly selected secondary schools. For the study, thirty-six English teachers from

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representative secondary schools took part in filling out the questionnaire. As well, for semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews, four purposefully selected teachers from these representative secondary schools were engaged.

Data Gathering Instruments

For answering the research questions, four instruments were employed in order to gather the necessary data for the study undertaken. These instruments are: questionnaire, interview, classroom observation and stimulated recall. The aim and justification of each of them are presented below.

Questionnaire

Using a questionnaire has several advantages in research. It is applicable to measure a large number of inquiries effectively within a short time and at low cost (Brown, 2001). In addition, the questionnaire aids in gaining a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon under study. This is supported by Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) that first, a questionnaire helps to obtain a general overview of the research. Secondly, if the strategy of data collection is sequential (similar to this research), findings from the questionnaire paved the way for the development of other qualitative data-gathering tools such as interviews, observations, and stimulated recall interviews.

The principal aim of this questionnaire was to obtain an overview of the beliefs and attitudes secondary school teachers of English have about their knowledge and practice in vocabulary teaching. Thus, certain aspects of teachers' knowledge and practice of vocabulary teaching arising from the findings of the questionnaire were further investigated, and certain issues generated by the first investigation were addressed through the participants' views and understandings. As Morse (2003) maintained, by employing more than one method within a research design, the

researcher is able to obtain a thorough understanding of human behavior and experience.

Studies conducted through questionnaires are familiar in many educational research contexts. In view of this, Meijer et al. (2001), for example, used a five-item-likert scale closed format questionnaire to explore EFL teachers' knowledge about teaching reading comprehension to high school students. This example suggests the possibility of using quantitative surveys when studying teachers' knowledge. Thus, this study also used a five-item-likert scale questionnaire to acquire respondents' degree of views about teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction.

Interview

An interview is a widely used research instrument when exploring teachers' knowledge and practice, either in education in general or in TEFL in particular (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Meijer et al., 2001). Employing an interview in this study helped the researcher to better explore the research problem from the teachers' perspectives. Thus, this study employed face-to-face semi-structured interview, which was guided by a list of interview questions and was designed to put interviewees at ease and allowed them to express themselves.

The semi-structured interview in this study served a number of purposes. First, it dug deep into the minds of the interviewees to explore EFL government secondary school teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction. Second, it provided further insight into justifying the claims made by the respondents to the questionnaire. Third, it allowed the researcher to ask questions that were not in the guide, and the researcher could use prompts to encourage the participants to elaborate on the original response. Such a distinctive feature helped the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction. In light of the research questions and aims, the semi-structured interview questions of this study were formulated with the help of the relevant literature in the

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area and based on the findings from the questionnaire. It was conducted after a purposive selection of four teachers was made.

Observation

The main purpose of employing classroom observation in the study was to assess teachers' practices, e.g., their actions, decisions made, vocabulary learning tasks given to students in class, etc. In addition, classroom observation is a good tool for investigating the teachers' level of proficiency and English teaching skills as well as the kind of English environment in which students are exposed to in order to practice the language. This is in parallel with the work of Kuzborska (2011), who attempted classroom observation as an instrument to explore what teachers practice in their classrooms. In line with this study, observation assists the researcher to further explore teachers' knowledge and practice in actual classroom situations. As McNamara (2001) suggested, research on teachers' knowledge needs to be carried out in the classroom context in order to understand the lived experience of teachers.

In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of each participant's knowledge and practice of vocabulary instruction, the researcher used observation as a tool to observe each participant's actual classroom teaching during observation periods, each lasting forty-five minutes. For this study, observations took place in three representative government secondary schools with four purposely selected teachers for a total of four observations. Observation data was used to help triangulate emerging findings from questionnaire, interview, and stimulated recall data.

Stimulated Recall

Gass and Mackey (2000) describe stimulated recall as a means of attempting to explore subjects' thought processes and strategies by providing them with some sort of support, such as a video or audiotape to talk about their thought processes at the time of actual activity.

The use of stimulated recall in this study was aimed at accessing each participant's thoughts about key vocabulary instruction issues in teaching practices. During the stimulated recall, the stimuli video recording and transcript of the observed lessons were used to give the teachers the opportunity to articulate their thoughts in relation to the immediate context of their own classroom teaching.

The teachers' articulation during the stimulated recall sessions after observation revealed the underpinning knowledge bases of their practices and the challenges they faced while teaching English vocabulary. In the study, the participant teachers responded to the questions such as how they thought the lesson went, what vocabulary items they taught, why they taught the way they did, if they were to deal with the same vocabulary item, what would they do differently and other related questions were raised. The teachers' stimulated recall guide question for this study was adapted from a source by Nelms (2001), used for teachers' stimulated recall inquire purposes. Stimulated recall was also used for the purpose of triangulation.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, data was collected sequentially in two phases. The first phase of data collection was the administration of the questionnaire. In the second phase, the researcher used his time to conduct qualitative data such as semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated recalls with purposely selected teachers at representative government secondary schools, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a discussion of research findings with reference to each of the two research questions. In each of these two sections, the quantitative and qualitative findings were synthesized and briefly reported, followed by an interpretation of the results with reference to the literature reviewed and existing relevant research evidence.

Relationship between teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction

In this section, teachers' actual classroom practice of vocabulary teaching is discussed. In order to address this question, teachers were asked to indicate which vocabulary teaching practices they used. They also required to report other vocabulary teaching practices they performed. The result of the vocabulary teaching practice they described is shown in table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 English teachers' practices about vocabulary teaching in the classrooms (One participant may have more than 1 item responses)

No	Items of teachers' practices in vocabulary teaching	Responses	Percentage
	I use implicit instruction techniques on a case-by-case or ad hoc (informal) basis.	11	30.6
	I advise learners to learn vocabulary outside of a class or use dictionaries.	12	33.3
	I use explicit instruction techniques, such as explaining word form, word meaning, or word use when teaching vocabulary.	26	72.2
	I use association, for example, by identifying productive prefixes and postfixes, synonyms or antonyms, or by letting students infer.	18	50
	Using vocabulary teaching strategies, I teach some new words first and then give some activities for practice.	24	66.7
	I encourage students to discover strategies for new word learning for themselves.	15	41.7
	I provide students with a lot of opportunities to use new words in context.	22	61.1
	Since some words are difficult for students, I use students' L1 to explain the meaning.	9	25
	Other (specify)	3	8.3

As the figures on table 1.1 note, most teachers highlighted the importance of explicit instruction techniques, such as explaining word form, word meaning, or word use when teaching vocabulary. For instance, 72.2% of participants reported that they provided students with explicit instruction techniques in their vocabulary teaching, whereas only 30.6% of participants reported that they used implicit instruction techniques in their vocabulary teaching. Similarly, 66.7% of the teachers stated that they teach some new words using different vocabulary teaching strategies and then give some activities for practice. Besides, 61.1% of the participants stated that they provide students with a lot of opportunities to use new words in context. Likewise, 50% of the participants use association, for example, by identifying productive prefixes and postfixes, synonyms or antonyms, or by letting students infer.

Again, more than 41% of the participants reported that they encouraged students to discover strategies for new word learning for themselves. Analysis of the data also indicated that a small number of the participants (33.3%) advise learners to learn vocabulary outside of a class or use dictionaries. Comparatively, very small percentages of the participants (25%) and (8.3%) reported that they use students' L1 to explain the meaning of the new words and use other methods of vocabulary teaching, respectively. In general, explicit instruction techniques, giving vocabulary learning activities for practice, use of new words in context, and use of association for vocabulary teaching are some of the techniques frequently practiced by most teachers in EFL classes.

In the preceding section, vocabulary teaching practice was investigated through a quantitative study. In the following section, major findings addressing teachers' knowledge and practices in vocabulary teaching are discussed qualitatively. To get an answer about teachers' knowledge and their classroom practices, the researcher raised various questions regarding this issue. The following are some of the questions and their subsequent answers given by the participants on the issue.

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In their response to the question ‘Could you tell me your ideal way of vocabulary teaching?’ The participants gave various answers about their ideal way of teaching vocabulary. Teacher 1 (T1), for example, stated that *most of the time I employed sentence construction techniques using the new words to develop students’ productive knowledge of vocabulary... I use this technique to get students to generate their own sentences with the words they learned. Besides listing key words on the blackboard, I asked them to find synonyms and antonyms for the new words* (Semi-Structured Interview). The participant stated that in his vocabulary teaching he mainly employed sentence construction techniques and let the students find the synonyms and antonyms of the new words in their vocabulary learning.

Data from classroom observation revealed that T1 employed sentence construction techniques and let them find antonyms and synonyms of personality-describing words when he engaged in vocabulary instruction. To be specific, when he was teaching the day’s lesson, he (T1) started by listing the personality (characters) describing words on the blackboard and asked students to tell him their antonyms or synonyms, and then gave examples to show how they are used in sentence construction. Episode 1 below illustrates how T1 presented a vocabulary lesson (adjectives to describe characters) to his students in class.

Episode 1:

Teacher1 (T1 hereinafter): There is an important vocabulary lesson here. Please look at the adjectives to describe characters on page 111 of the Increase Your Word Power section. Do you notice these adjectives have a special feature in describing leaders?

Students (S hereinafter): (Said), yes

T1: Please pay attention to these adjectives. They are unique in describing people’s characters. Next, I would like to give you synonyms for some of these words, and you will tell me their antonyms. For example, synonyms for strong (resilient), popular (known), and fair (reasonable). What are their antonyms?

S: (saying the antonyms together) weak, normal, unfair.

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T1: Very good! I would like to give you an example to show how to use these adjectives in sentence construction. For example, he is popular in sports.

S :(They started constructing sentences using adjectives describing character)

In this episode, T1 used a method he stated in the interview. First, he told them the synonym of the adjectives, and then he asked students to find the antonym, and he showed the students how they were going to construct sentences using these personality-describing adjectives.

In teacher 2's (T2) case, however, it was indicated that his vocabulary teaching usually concentrated on context approach. As he explicitly says, "using the context I let the students to guess the meanings of the new words. I most of the time use the context approach for students to understand and practice vocabulary learning in the classroom" (SSI). Supporting T2's idea T3 also says, "Though there is no one best method for vocabulary teaching most of the time I personally prefer context approach" (SSI). In Episode 2, T2 used context approach in his vocabulary teaching.

Episode 2

T2: Today, our topic is 'Guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context'. Who can tell me how to guess the meaning of the unknown words using the context?

S: (silent)

T2: When we meet a new word in a text, guessing from the context is important.

Look at this sentence.

We can't cut bread with that knife because it is blunt.

Look at the word blunt. What does it mean? We can work it out by:

- 1. Looking carefully at the rest of the sentence;*
- 2. Thinking about what we need to cut bread – our knowledge of the world;*
- 3. Looking at what kind of word it is – a noun, a verb, an adjective, an adverb. We should be able to work out that blunt means not sharp, and*

that it is an adjective. Who can guess the meaning of the underlined word in the following sentence?

1. Her father was very strict but she still felt great affection for him.

S: (some students raised up their hands and one of them said) love or respect

T: Yes, great.

In this instructional episode, T2 employed a context approach to guess the meaning of unknown words, and he thought this method was ideal for vocabulary teaching. However, this is not the only method he used. He may also have employed other methods based on the vocabulary lessons he planned to teach. This is revealed in a subsequent classroom observation (look episode 2) made with him when he was teaching a vocabulary lesson to grade 10 students on pages 87 and 88, guessing the meaning of unknown words from the students' textbook.

The other question raised by the researcher is: "Do you feel your knowledge and your classroom vocabulary teaching practice match?" For this question, T1 asserted that, "my vocabulary teaching knowledge and my classroom practices match." I am implementing what I know. That means the two are congruent. "What I have in my mind and what I accomplished go in line" (SSI).

The observation data (see episode 1) also illustrates that his vocabulary teaching shows consistency between his knowledge and his classroom practices. He was presented with what he knew and prepared for the day's lesson, and students were also pursued the lesson and practiced what they were told to do by their teacher. This was revealed in a subsequent stimulated recall interview conducted with him, and he mentioned that: "I think the lesson was successful. First, most students understood what I tried to teach. This is because I was checking what they were performing" (Stimulated-Recall Interview).

Generally, the data in episode 1 revealed that the teacher (T1) presented what he thought in his mind and said in the interview. This disclosed his knowledge to be

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mutually interacting with his classroom activities. That is, his knowledge guides his pedagogical practices. Thus, the teacher's knowledge and his pedagogical practices are revealed to be congruent.

Factors affecting teachers' knowledge of vocabulary instruction in practice

This section discusses findings about factors affecting vocabulary teaching quantitatively. The questionnaire in this part consists of 5 items designed to identify these factors. Table 2 below shows the frequency and percentages of the responses with reference to each item.

Table 2. Frequency and percentages of factors affecting vocabulary teaching response

No	FACTORS AFFECTING VOCABULARY TEACHING	SA		A		CD		D		SD		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Vocabulary instruction time is too limited to teach vocabulary well.	8	22.2	13	36.1	4	11.1	8	22.2	3	8.3	36	100
2	The class size is too big to manage teachers' vocabulary teaching practices.	9	25	17	47	2	5.6	6	16.7	2	5.6	36	100
3	Students' English proficiency level is too low to apply teachers intended vocabulary instruction techniques.	11	30.6	16	44.4	1	2.8	5	13.9	3	8.3	36	100
4	Students' lack of interest (motivation) to learn about new words affects their vocabulary knowledge.	8	22.2	17	47.2	3	8.3	5	13.9	3	8.3	36	100
5	The existing English language materials and resources do not encourage teachers to apply their vocabulary teaching purpose.	6	16.7	14	38.9	2	5.6	9	25	5	13.9	36	100

KEY: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, CD = Can't Decide, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

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Based on their classroom practices, participants in the quantitative part of the study marked the following details about factors affecting vocabulary teaching: As the responses in table 2 indicate, more than half of the respondents (58.3 %) reach a decision that the time given for vocabulary teaching is inadequate to practice different vocabulary activities compared to the time given for teaching other language skills. However, a significant number of the respondents (11 teachers) argue against the statement that the time given for vocabulary teaching is relatively adequate to teach vocabulary.

Regarding class size, a large number of the respondents (72.2 %) asserted that class size is one of the factors that critically affect teachers' vocabulary teaching and that teachers with large classes have problems in teaching vocabulary compared to teachers dealing with small classes.

Yet again, majority (75 %) of the respondents affirmed that students' low level of language ability affected teachers' implementation of vocabulary instruction techniques. Here, teachers may lack interest in presenting what they prepared for the day's lesson due to their students' low level of competency.

Similarly, according to the data in table 2, 69.4% of respondents chose to strongly agree and agree with the statement "lack of motivation affects students' vocabulary knowledge." This implies that the limitation of vocabulary items on university entrance exams deters students from practicing it and focusing on other language skills rather than vocabulary to pass the exam.

Concerning materials and resources, 55.6 % of the respondents didn't doubt the appropriateness of the existing materials and resources for teaching English vocabulary. However, a significant number of the respondents (38.9 %) claim the existing materials and resources have their own drawbacks concerning vocabulary teaching.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing vocabulary teaching, qualitative data were collected in addition to quantitative data. The following are questions raised by the researcher in the semi-structured interview and its subsequent responses made by the participants about these factors.

The first question is, "What factors made your vocabulary instruction knowledge and practice not congruent?" As the evidence revealed, a set of contextual factors and challenges affected participants' ability to realize their knowledge in action in vocabulary instruction. The following analysis showed how problems with resources and students' lack of capacity had an impact on the application of teachers' knowledge in vocabulary instruction.

To this end, T1, for example, says, "There is no language laboratory for practicing different vocabulary activities and the only thing that is found in the classroom is a chalkboard" (SSI). He further states, "If there is a language lab equipped with different kinds of resources, we can teach not only vocabulary but also other skills at large" (SSI). Besides, this participant commented more on students' capacity as one of the factors that affect teachers' knowledge in practice. To this angle, he said, "most of our students lack the vocabulary to explain what is expected of them in the classroom setting" (SSI). T4 also shared T1's view and said: "Students' low perception of vocabulary learning and their level of capacity are major challenges in EFL class (SSI).

Episode 3 below, showed how T4 taught prefixes in his vocabulary class and his students difficulty with a vocabulary lesson about prefix.

Episode 3:

T4: *Please listen to this note here.*

A prefix is a group of letters added to the beginning of a word which changes its meaning and makes a new word. Who can tell me words formed by prefixes?

S: *(Silent)*

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T4: *You are not familiar with the words formed by prefixes?*

S: *(Quiet)*

T4: *Alright, please look at these words and tell me the letters added at the beginning of the words dishonest, impatient, irresponsible, illegal, unlock, disappear*

S: *(Some students said) dis, im, ir, il, un, dis*

T4: *Alright. Let's look at the meanings of these prefix added words. Who can tell me their meanings?*

S: *(Most students seem to have a little understanding about their meanings but a few of them tried... dishonest (lying), irresponsible (careless), disappear (vanish))*

T4: *Please notice that many prefixes give the opposite meaning to the word they are put in front of.*

In this instructional episode, T4 explained to the students what a prefix is and how they can form opposite meanings. Besides, he gave them examples to show how prefixes are formed by adding letters to root words. However, except for a few of them, most students are passive in the class due-to lack of capacity to learn the lesson.

Though the teacher applied what he knew in teaching vocabulary, reasons such as students' low level of proficiency and their lack of motivation made him not practice what he knew in an actual classroom setting. Thus, these constraints affected the implementation of teachers' knowledge of vocabulary instruction in practice.

In the same way T3 clarified his view by saying, *"When I want to teach vocabulary using different kinds of posters, pictures, or visual aids, I can't get these materials."* The implementation and knowledge are sometimes incongruent due to lack of resources (SSI). Likewise, T2 affirmed, *"There are many factors that make knowledge and practice not match."* For example, *problems with resources, students' lack of capacity, large class size, etc. are the major ones*" (SSI). Moreover, T1 argued, *"I found little time to deal with vocabulary in the textbook because the other skills took most of the time"* (SSI).

The other question about factors affecting vocabulary teaching states: *"What other constraints do you think have an influence on the actual practice of vocabulary*

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teaching?" As the participants revealed, students' lack of reading to improve their vocabulary knowledge is one of the significant problems EFL teachers face. From this angle, T1 said, "One thing which I observed is students' lack of motivation in reading" (SSI). He further says, "When you let them read some kinds of supplementary materials, they are not interested in reading those materials" (SSI). Likewise, T2 stresses students' high attachment to their mother tongue in EFL class as a constraint to his vocabulary teaching. He pointed to the same problem in different words, saying "... instead of guessing from the context or using other techniques, students are very keen on using their mother tongue for the meaning of the new words when learning EFL vocabulary" (SSI).

Likewise, T3 asserted that "lack of facilities such as conducive classes, visual and audio aids etc. influences teachers' actualization of vocabulary knowledge in practice" (SSI). Moreover, T4 asserted, "In-service or pre-service training given to EFL teachers didn't focus on vocabulary teaching" (SSI). Besides, remarking the policy of language teaching, T3 explicitly pointed out that: *Grammar gets more attention because of the policy, and students were focusing on learning grammar. 80-90 % of the exams are related to grammar and reading skills, and how can they listen to you when you are teaching vocabulary? So, the attitude is the result of the policy, and it is the challenging factor* (SSI).

Generally, these findings revealed different factors have an impact on teachers' vocabulary teaching and these factors affected the implementation of teachers' knowledge of vocabulary instruction in practice. These challenging constraints can also illustrate the picture of the problems. Reducing them would possibly allow vocabulary instructions to be effective in a secondary school context.

Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers' knowledge and their classroom practices in vocabulary instruction was investigated through quantitative and qualitative studies. The findings elicited

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through both the questionnaire and an in-depth study revealed that teachers' practices were consistent with their knowledge. There were, however, a few mismatches due to various reasons.

To give an overall representation of vocabulary-related techniques influencing instructors' pedagogical knowledge for their teaching, participant teachers outlined certain techniques they employed, especially those they thought to be effective in developing their learners' vocabulary knowledge. Some of the techniques include: sentence construction technique; finding synonyms and antonyms of the new words; employing context clues; and allowing students to guess the meanings of the new words. From this angle, it is difficult to single out one specific technique as being especially beneficial for students due to the number of techniques teachers use. However, as one of the participant teachers says, *my ideal way of vocabulary teaching is to put words in their best context. At that point, the students don't need a dictionary. They don't need to ask their friends or go anywhere. They just try to answer things from the context* (T3; SSI).

Besides, majority of the shared teaching techniques indicated in the interviews were observed in the teachers' pedagogical practices. A commonly used strategy for teaching vocabulary reported by the participants in the questionnaire was providing contextual clues to familiarize students with unfamiliar words. This instructional strategy was matched with their pre-observation interview results and was reflected during observation sessions. This methodology is also supported by Thornbury (2002), who suggests that words in context increase the chances of learners' understanding not only their meaning but also their typical environments, such as their associated collocations or grammatical structures. According to the results of the questionnaire in teachers' actual classroom practices, (61%) of respondents agree on providing contextual clues to familiarize students with unfamiliar words. This means that one way to foster vocabulary development and retention is to teach words in the

best possible context, where students can use contextual clues to apply word meaning to unknown words.

Teachers who answered the questionnaire also claimed vocabulary should be taught explicitly and more than 72 % of the teachers said we use explicit instruction techniques, such as explaining word form, word meaning, or word use, when teaching vocabulary. It is clear that vocabulary is best taught explicitly, which is also what many researchers of second language acquisition promote. Explicit vocabulary teaching is the best way for students to acquire new words (Lightbown; Patsy and Spada 2006; Milton 2009; Allan 2010; Schmitt 2010). As a consequence, the response in the questionnaire is consistent with the results made through classroom observations, where most teachers in a classroom were using explicit techniques of vocabulary teaching.

The results of the study also reflected the relationship between teachers' knowledge and their practices when they were teaching vocabulary. Teachers' knowledge has been found to be mutually interacting with their pedagogical practices. To this end, some of the observation results illustrate that teachers' teaching about a word shows consistency between their knowledge and their classroom practices. For example, T1 presented what he knew and prepared for the day's lesson, and students also pursued the lesson and practiced what they were told to do by their teacher (see episode 1), and this was revealed in a subsequent stimulated recall interview with the teacher. To this end, the observed teacher mentioned in his post-observation interview, "As you observed, the lesson was very interesting and based on our student's level of understanding, it was good and I did what I had in my mind" (T1, SRI). This means a teacher's knowledge guides his pedagogical practices, and this finding is similar to many previous studies which have concluded that language teachers' knowledge is consistent with their practices (e.g., Borg, 2011; Farrell & Ives, 2015).

In the same respect, Borg (2006) stated that the context in which teachers work has a major impact on their knowledge and practice relationships. Thus, teachers often considered the context as a causing factor that they had to deal with.

To this end, in this study, a set of challenges affected the participants to realize their knowledge in action in vocabulary instruction. Factors such as lack of resources, students' lack of capacity, their lack of motivation, large class size, and little time given for vocabulary lessons in the textbook are some of the challenges. These challenges are attributed to the inconsistent relationship between teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction. As one of the participant teachers reveals, "There are many factors that make knowledge and practice relationships not be congruent." Among them, problems of resources, students' lack of capacity, their lack of motivation, and large class size are the major ones" (T2's SSI). These findings lend support to the literature review that demonstrates how contextual factors impede the congruence of teachers' practices and their knowledge (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Basturkmen, 2012). It also seems that the findings of this study in terms of challenging factors can give a picture of the barriers whose removal would possibly cause vocabulary instruction to be effective in an EFL secondary school context.

Generally, the way of revealing the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction in the context of this study brought relevant research evidence concerning this issue. The rationalized practices evident in this study also bear some resemblance to the account provided by Hegarty (2000), viewing teaching as a form of intelligent behavior and creative application of knowledge. Thus, it is accepted that teachers' knowledge plays an important role in their practices and guides their classroom instructions (Borg, 2015).

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