

## HOW TO TEACH VOCABULARY IN PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL

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*Abstract:*

This paper explores effective strategies for teaching vocabulary to preschool and school-aged children, a critical component of language development and academic success. The significance of vocabulary instruction is grounded in its direct impact on reading comprehension, literacy skills, and the ability to communicate effectively. In preschool, the focus is on creating a rich linguistic environment through interactive read-aloud, music and movement, thematic learning, and the use of tangible objects to make abstract concepts more accessible. These methods leverage children's natural curiosity and engagement with the world around them to foster language acquisition in an intuitive and enjoyable manner. As children progress into formal schooling, the approach to vocabulary instruction becomes more structured, incorporating direct teaching of word meanings, contextual learning, and interactive activities such as word games and puzzles. The paper emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching methods to suit the developmental stage of learners, ensuring that vocabulary learning is both effective and engaging. By integrating a variety of instructional strategies, educators can support students in building a robust vocabulary that serves as the foundation for lifelong learning and success.

*Key words:* Read-Aloud, thematic learning, props and realia, contextual learning, puzzles

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Vocabulary acquisition is a cornerstone of language development, enabling children to express themselves, understand others, and engage with written texts. The National Reading Panel (2000) highlights vocabulary instruction as one of the essential components of reading proficiency. For preschoolers, vocabulary growth is rapid and heavily reliant on environmental exposure (Hart & Risley, 1995). As children enter school, the focus shifts towards a more structured approach to vocabulary building, essential for reading comprehension and academic achievement (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

### Teaching Vocabulary to Preschoolers

#### Interactive Read-Alouds

Reading aloud to preschoolers is a powerful tool for vocabulary development. Picture books with rich narratives and colorful illustrations capture children's attention and introduce them to new words in meaningful contexts. Teachers should choose books that are slightly above children's current language level to challenge them and facilitate vocabulary growth (Neuman, Newman, & Dwyer, 2011).

#### Music and Movement

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Songs, rhymes, and movement activities are not only enjoyable for young children but also effective in reinforcing new vocabulary. Repetition in songs and rhymes helps children memorize new words, while accompanying movements can aid in understanding through kinesthetic learning (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

#### Thematic Learning

Organizing learning around themes allows for the integration of new vocabulary across various activities, making learning more cohesive and contextually relevant. Themes such as "The Weather," "Community Helpers," or "Under the Sea" provide a framework for introducing related vocabulary in a way that builds on children's existing knowledge and interests (Wasik & Iannone-Campbell, 2012).

#### Use of Props and Realia

Using real objects, or realia, makes abstract words more concrete for preschoolers. For instance, when learning about fruits, having the actual fruits for children to see, touch, and taste can significantly enhance understanding and retention of new vocabulary (Silverman & Hines, 2009).

#### Teaching Vocabulary to School-Aged Children

##### Direct Instruction

Explicit vocabulary instruction becomes more prominent as children progress through school. This includes teaching word meanings, pronunciation, parts of speech, and usage in sentences. Strategies such as semantic mapping or word walls can also help students visualize and organize their understanding of new words (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2010).

##### Contextual Learning

Encouraging students to infer the meanings of new words from context helps them become more autonomous learners and prepares them for encountering unfamiliar vocabulary in their reading. Teachers can model this strategy during read-alouds and discussions, gradually transferring the responsibility to students (Graves, 2006).

##### Word Games and Puzzles

Games and puzzles make vocabulary learning interactive and fun, turning what could be a tedious task into an engaging challenge. Activities like Scrabble, Boggle, or online vocabulary games cater to different learning styles and can be adapted for individual or group work (Marzano & Pickering, 2005).

##### Vocabulary Journals

Keeping a personal vocabulary journal encourages students to take ownership of their learning. They can record new words, definitions, and examples of use, creating a personalized resource for review and reflection (Scott & Nagy, 2009).

#### Conclusion

Effective vocabulary instruction is multifaceted, incorporating strategies that engage students in meaningful, contextualized learning experiences. For preschoolers, emphasis should be on interactive read-alouds, music and movement, thematic learning, and the use of tangible objects to make learning vivid and memorable. As children grow, direct instruction, contextual learning, interactive games, and personal vocabulary journals become key components of vocabulary development. Across all ages, fostering a love for reading and a curiosity about words is fundamental. By implementing these strategies, educators can support children's language development, enhance their literacy skills, and lay the foundation for lifelong learning.

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