

THE USE OF ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN DIFFERENT ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

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Abstract

This article explores the critical role of academic vocabulary within academic disciplines. It examines how academic vocabulary is defined by scholars and discusses effective teaching and learning approaches that students have found practical. The focus includes understanding the definition of academic vocabulary, as well as methods for teaching and acquiring it effectively.

Keywords: General academic vocabulary, domain-specific academic vocabulary, tiered words, scientific vocabulary, sub-technical vocabulary, semi-technical vocabulary, specialized non-technical lexis, frame words.

Introduction

Academic vocabulary, while not commonly used in daily communication, plays a critical role in academic settings. These terms are often more difficult to comprehend and use accurately. Mastery of academic vocabulary enhances essential skills such as critical thinking, analysis, problem-solving, reading comprehension, and understanding key concepts in specific fields. Various methods and strategies have been employed in teaching and learning academic vocabulary. However, educators often prioritize teaching grammar over focusing on lexical grammar, which contributes to limited vocabulary knowledge among EFL learners in academic contexts (Mozaffari & Moini, 2014).

Literature Review

Several scholars have identified a connection between low academic performance and insufficient academic language proficiency (Baumann et al., 2002; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Carlo et al., 2004). Sibold (2012) highlights that mastering academic vocabulary is more demanding than general language due to its abstract and specialized nature.

Methodology

This study employs various methods to explore the significance of academic vocabulary in different disciplines. A literature review examines key theories and prior research on academic vocabulary. Comparative analysis, utilizing corpus data from authentic materials such as journals, theses, articles, and textbooks, investigates vocabulary usage in diverse contexts. Additionally, a questionnaire assesses students' perceptions of the importance of academic vocabulary within their fields of study.

Analysis and Results

Academic vocabulary is a cornerstone of language learning and plays a pivotal role in academic success. According to Biemiller and Boote (2006), recognizing words in texts significantly improves comprehension. Researchers define academic vocabulary in diverse ways. Antonacci, O'Callaghan, and Berkowitz (2014) note that strong academic vocabulary knowledge facilitates understanding within specific disciplines. Biemiller (2005) asserts that while vocabulary knowledge does not guarantee success, its absence can lead to failure. Similarly, Marzano (2005) argues that both general and context-specific academic vocabulary can enhance learners' academic performance.

Nagy and Townsend (2010) describe academic vocabulary as terms frequently encountered in academic discussions, articles, and texts. Nation (2001) categorizes academic vocabulary as scientific, semi-technical, specialized non-technical, and frame words.

Academic vocabulary is often divided into two main categories:

1. Discipline-Specific Vocabulary: These are technical terms unique to specific fields such as geometry, biology, or statistics (e.g., mean, median, mode). Researchers like Marzano and Pickering (2005), Fisher and Frey (2008), and Hiebert and Lubliner (2008) refer to such terms as technical or content-specific vocabulary. Beck et al. (2002) classify them as Tier 3 words.

2. General Academic Vocabulary: These are words used across various disciplines, often abstract in meaning and challenging to master (Townsend, 2009). Examples include terms like "form" and "process," whose meanings may vary depending on the context. These words, also called Tier 2 words, are high-frequency terms applicable in multiple domains (Gardner & Davies, 2014).

Teaching and Learning Academic Vocabulary

The development of academic vocabulary is essential for academic success. Baumann and Graves (2010) emphasize the importance of building strong vocabulary knowledge to effectively comprehend academic texts. Friedberg, Mitchell, and Brooke (2016) similarly argue that mastering complex academic terms is vital for independent learning and meaningful classroom participation. Teachers can adopt various strategies to foster academic vocabulary. Baumann (2002) suggests creating a supportive academic environment tailored to students' levels, using relevant examples to demonstrate appropriate word usage. Wei (2021) proposes incorporating resources like newspapers, magazines, and topic-based programs to enhance vocabulary lessons.

Although incidental learning can help individuals acquire general vocabulary, academic vocabulary requires deliberate instruction for significant improvement within a short timeframe. Perego and Boyle (2017) highlight two main approaches to vocabulary learning: incidental learning and explicit instruction. Research by Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) suggests that combining these approaches enhances students' reading comprehension.

Nushi and Jenabzadeh (2016) analyze effective strategies for teaching academic vocabulary, including word scaling, analogies, semantic analysis, and the Frayer model. However, no single strategy works universally, as students often employ different methods based on their preferences.

Students often struggle with academic vocabulary due to its limited use in everyday conversations. Providing realistic examples that connect new vocabulary to students' personal experiences can aid learning. Jarvis (1987) argues that meaning is derived from relating new knowledge to prior experiences.

Educators should tailor teaching methods to students' academic proficiency, using flexible explanations to clarify similarities and differences between concepts. Linguistic, academic, emotional, and cultural factors can also present challenges, significantly influencing students' educational outcomes.

Conclusion

Mastering academic vocabulary is crucial for success in academic disciplines, requiring both explicit and indirect instructional methods. Effective teaching techniques, when applied cohesively within the classroom, can significantly

enhance vocabulary development. Interactive methods are particularly valuable for improving comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Ultimately, academic vocabulary forms the foundation of academic language, and students' achievements largely depend on their ability to master it. By analyzing and synthesizing key findings from multiple studies, this research provides valuable insights for educators and learners alike.

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