CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

6.0 General

The academic problems encountered by the students, most often directly related to a language problem. A person learns a language through day-to-day social interactions and through academic institutions, which aid students to comprehend and interpret abstract ideas. The lack of necessary vocabulary skills to clearly demonstrate and communicate knowledge is a major crunch for the students at all levels. This develops into a greater challenge as time wanes. It is quite disheartening to see that many a student proficient either in academics or at the social level fails miserably to communicate either orally or in writing at higher levels. Students' difficulty in communicating in the English language affects their performance. Hence, to be a successful language learner, the student must be competent in all/each of the four areas of the language skills namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW).

The language problem arises mostly because students lack the necessary words in their repertoire. There are several reasons as to why the students pay too little attention to vocabulary growth despite understanding its importance. Vocabulary learning to them just means knowing the meaning of words with all other functions of the word given scant regard. Vocabulary classes are quite boring because they have nothing else to do other than listen to the teachers' explanations of the meaning or definition, pronunciation, spelling and grammatical functions. They live with their
diehard learning habits of rote learning and passive listening. Moreover, they hardly take any risk in applying what they have learnt.

6.1 Results

The following conclusions can be drawn from this study:

1. The high frequency words are known before low frequency words.
2. Recognition of words is better than recall.
4. Girls have a much better vocabulary than boys.
5. Students from city schools outsmart students from rural background.
6. Students know more words of the target language than they actually use them.
7. To aid comprehension students would need a vocabulary of at least 4000 – 5000 words.
8. Learning the GSL and UWL which provide for 95% of the running text will be worth the time for beginning learners.
9. Attention can be given to the high frequency technical vocabulary.
10. There is a need for direct instruction of vocabulary items.
11. Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important.

6.1.1 Hypothesis 1. The high frequency words are known before low frequency words.

Sections 2.7.8.1 and 2.7.8.2 along with Tables 2.27 and 2.28 illustrate the proficiency levels of the students based on PVT and RVT indicating how many students fall under each category of ‘poor’, ‘average’, ‘good’ and ‘very good’. This highlights the number of students who belong to each
category at every level. The decrease in the number of students as the frequency levels went up in the third and fourth categories – 'good' and 'very good' is a clear indication that more number of words are known at the high frequency level than at the low frequency level.

6.1.2 Hypothesis 2 - Recognition of Words is Better than Production & Hypothesis 6 - Students Know More Words of the Target Language than They Actually Use Them

From the data in Table 2.26 - Productive as Receptive Times and Vice versa, Table 2.7 - Consolidated Results of the Receptive Vocabulary Levels Test and Table 2.13 - Consolidated Results of Productive Vocabulary Test, it is quite evident that the students’ receptive vocabulary is clearly larger at all frequency bands. In fact, analysis of all 209 students’ tests revealed that not even one student scored higher on the productive test than the corresponding receptive test at any of the frequency bands. That is, receptive vocabulary was always larger than productive vocabulary for all subjects at each frequency band. This unequivocally endorses that the students have a better sight and recognition vocabulary than productive vocabulary. It also surmises that they know more words than they can actually use. The difference or the wider gap between receptive and productive vocabulary substantiates this.

6.1.3 Hypothesis 4 - Girls Have a Much Better Vocabulary than Boys

The details presented in Table 2.19 - Consolidated RVT - Girls vs. Boys and Table 2.25 Consolidated PVT - Girls vs. Boys elucidates the
hypothesis that the girls’ vocabulary at all frequency bands was better than that of the boys’ both receptively and productively.

6.1.4 Hypothesis 3 - Students adopt various strategies for learning vocabulary

Tables 3.2 to 3.21 indicate that the students of all the classes under study have invariably been using different strategies for learning vocabulary. The most used strategy - study of spelling, has registered a higher percentage (90.5%) of use indicating that irrespective of their language capabilities students use a wide variety of strategies. The success depends on the choice of the apt strategy for task completion.

6.1.5 Hypothesis 5 - Students from city schools outsmart students from rural background.

The socio economic variations found among students have a telling effect on their performance. The toppers from each class were from the urban background having studied in schools where the medium of instruction was English.

6.2 Implications

Vocabulary is only one component of a course, but it is a component that learners notice and that can occupy a lot of their learning time. It is a component that deserves more attention from the teachers and course designers and the aim of this study has been to inform that attention. Yet there are various arguments put forward for not providing enough classroom time for vocabulary instruction. They are:

1. Individual words are less important than the overall discourse.
2. Guessing strategies could be taught to infer meaning.
3. Dictionary use can be encouraged to develop word knowledge
4. Reading and listening can enhance vocabulary.
5. Individual teacher is free to select vocabulary items and the methods of teaching them.

But in reality it is seen that, lexical guessing is impossible with insufficient lexical knowledge which also is hindrance for paying attention to discourse. Dictionary use may sometimes be too time-consuming and frustrating. On the other hand where explicit vocabulary instruction took place the students faired well acquiring and improving their repertoire.

Language learners sometimes, if not often, feel that they cannot remember words that they attempt to learn. Such words are probably, not committed to memory effectively, and if so, are not stored in such a way that they may be easily retrievable when necessary. In order for learners to go about deepening their receptive or productive command of vocabulary, they must first remember the words well enough to recognise them or be able to make an attempt to use them in conversation or in written language. There are various ways of attempting to commit new vocabulary to memory like a) rote repetition b) analysing the word according to its root, affixes, inflections as a way to understand its meaning c) semantic mapping and d) use of mnemonic device.

There exists a large gap between the vocabulary knowledge of a student at tertiary level and the actual vocabulary he needs to understand the literature he has to read. To close this gap, there is a need for, massive vocabulary expansion and instruction. The choice of vocabulary items to be
taught could be based on the frequency of the words and their usefulness. The words could be taught and reinforced employing various activities and games.

“Multi-word items are typically presented as a problem in teaching and learning a foreign language. Their non-compositionality, whether syntactic, semantic or pragmatic in nature, means that they must be recognised, learned, decoded and encoded as holistic units” (Rosamund Moon, 1997, p 57). The more these multiword units are integrated into the syllabus the less problematic they are. The appropriate use and interpretation of multi word items by L2 speakers is a sign of proficiency. These items are difficult to learn yet they need to be learnt at some point of time. Based on the frequency and usefulness of these words the teachers can decide on which multi word units could be taught to their students.

6.4 Recommendations

The question that gnaws every teacher’s mind is how he/she could make the students learn quite a number of words within a limited span of time. It is top priority that the students first learn the 3000 high frequency words. It would be futile to teach them the other vocabulary items of low frequency until otherwise the high frequency words which constitute the 95 % of any written text are learnt well. “The learning of these basic words cannot be left to chance, but should be taught as quickly as possible, because they open the door to further learning” (Norbert Schmitt & Michael McCarthy, 1997, p 3). Once these high frequency words are mastered then the teacher can focus on helping the learners to learn and master the use of strategies that would enable them to comprehend and learn the low
frequency words. It would be worth spending time on strategies like guessing from context, using word parts and mnemonic techniques to remember words and using vocabulary cards to learn new words. The ultimate aim in introducing the strategies and enabling students gain control over the strategies is to help them eventually learn new words autonomously to improve their vocabulary size and thereby their mental lexicon.

Children have a fascination for language and almost no inhibitions about it. Adults in contrast typically display considerable anxiety about their language, an anxiety known as linguistic insecurity. This insecurity does not develop naturally. It is the consequence of repeated - almost negative - interactions with teachers wielding red pens, subtly disparaging the native speech of their pupils.

Second language learners must achieve a high level of proficiency before their use of context approaches that of native speakers. Strategic knowledge involves conscious control over cognitive resources. Training students in the use of context has enhanced student’s ability to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words. Students’ ability to make use of contextual information may be enhanced through instruction. Strategic knowledge offers the promise of large gains in learning for a relatively small investment of instructional time. Furthermore, increasing learner’s exposure to written language has been documented to produce gains in language proficiency. Only sustained exposure to comprehensible input can lead to a high vocabulary growth necessary for successful language learning.

Seven or more encounters with a word are required to be able to use a word productively. The bulk of word learning occurs as a word is
encountered repeatedly in context. For this to happen, the student must be exposed to large amounts of comprehensible input. So the teachers should create opportunities for their students to get such multiple encounters with the words that they want their students to learn and use effectively. So students must be encouraged to read extensively.

"Comprehension of a text containing difficult words can sometimes be increased by instruction on the difficult words in the text, if, beyond providing definitions, the instruction involves multiple exposures to the word in context, and requires deep processing of information about the words" (William Nagy, 1997, p 73).

As teachers are not around to help students outside the classroom, it is very vital to ensure that the students become self directed, motivated and thereby be independent to garner relevant information for the conduct of conversations or successful communication outside the classroom in their day-to-day life. Learner autonomy is an important factor for the language learners because it would go a long way in channelising the learners based on his needs and it would enable him to gear up the process of learning. It has often been found that students' attitude is to merely clear the papers or pass the required examination with good marks or grade. They are least bothered about other relevant / useful skills that they could have been acquired in the process. All that they are worried about is gaining a few more marks in each of the subject that they study and it is most unfortunate that most students and some teachers too deal with the languages too as a mere subject to be studied. This attitudinal indifference will duly impede with the teachers effects to train the learners to become autonomous. Hence
it is imperative that the students incur a greater responsibility for their learning if there ought to be some progress in their learning.

They learn to rely more on themselves, scrounging for information wherever necessary adapting to the conditions of learning by adopting the strategies that are most suitable to them. It would be fine to expose the learners to the different kinds of strategies to enhance their knowledge. But it would do good to inculcate in them a sense of responsibility to become autonomous learners. Sometimes the educational system encourages the learners to be spoon-fed and remain passive. The teacher instead of being the facilitator is viewed as an authority who dictates terms to the learners. The saddest thing is that students prefer to be told what to do to get the meritorious marks in their examinations. When there is a teacher to instruct all communication ‘goes to or through the teacher’. This is bound to stifle communication of any sort in a language classroom.

The role of the teacher has to definitely change form the dictatorial boss or a leader to a helper, guide, and a consultant. Teachers can enable students to become more independent by identifying the strategies that they employ to learn and training them on the usage of new strategies or ushering them into a world of new strategies. This initiative rather than belittling or disavowing the credentials of the teacher strengthens them for it makes them more creative and multifarious. They rely more on their quality and their relationship with learners than on authority which is a welcome change to help learners have more responsibility to become more successful - a situation most satisfactory to all teachers.
“With the increasing importance that has been placed on the adult language learners autonomy in recent years, the role of teachers is not to pay lip service to self-direction in learning, but rather to facilitate its development” (Elizabeth Bertoldi. et al, 1988, 157). A massive amount of the language the student hears is provided by the teacher. The uniqueness of the L2 teaching classroom is that language is involved in two different ways. First of all, the organisation and control of the classroom take place through language and secondly language is the actual subject matter that is taught. Hence teacher’s language is particularly important to language teaching. In addition to this high motivation can cause successful learning. The process of creating successful learning which can spur high motivation is to a great extent under the teacher’s control.

6.5 Further Scope

If the levels tests were administered at the beginning of the course as suggested by the authors, it would have given a clear concept of the level of students and accordingly the precepts of teaching could be varied to suit the needs of the students. A pre-test and a post-test could be administered to give a clearer perception quantifying the vocabulary development that has taken place as the outcome of rigorous teaching. The results based on the questionnaire used to analyse the lexical items could have been correlated with the vocabulary size to check the validity of the test. The lexical frequency profiles of the students could be obtained through drafts of essays to understand the lexical density.

Students could be taught various strategies rather than being left to fend for themselves. The awareness and use of at least a few of the strategies
taught, would definitely have a telling effect on the students’ vocabulary. The students and of course the teachers would see a sea change in their vocabulary development within a year’s time. Although it appears to be a herculean task, it nevertheless is simple and effective because the teachers are becoming the facilitators, highlighting the need for a sound vocabulary, motivating students towards becoming independent learners. The autonomy in learning vocabulary is bound to ensure that the students become successful in communicating their ideas and thereby clinching success in their day to day life and career. The right words, at the right time, to the right person, will no longer be a distant dream but a dream come true.