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## VOCABULARY ACQUISITION FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Дунё бўйича, шу жумладан, Боснияда ҳам иккинчи тилда таълим олаётган болаларнинг сони кўпайиб бормоқда. Бу иккинчи тил, бошланғич мактаб доирасида таълим олаётганларда, иккинчи тил луғат захирасини кўпайтиришдек қизиқ масалани юзага келтиради. Бу болалардаги иккинчи тил луғати захирасини билиш табиатини ўрганиш муҳим, чунки улар мактабда фойдаланиш учун луғат захирасини эгаллашдек муаммога дуч келдилар. Бу тадқиқотда қатнашган болалар ҳам шу каби муаммоларга дуч келган. Улар асосий фанлар инглиз тилида ўқитиладиган Сараевадаги биринчи даражали Ҳалқаро бошланғич мактабга бордилар.

Все большее количество детей во всем мире получает образование на втором языке, это относится и к боснийским детям. Этот второй язык, изучающийся в параметрах начальной школы, поднимает интересные вопросы о развитии словарного запаса второго языка. Исследование природы знания словаря второго языка этими детьми особенно важно, поскольку они оказываются перед существенной проблемой усвоения словарного запаса второго языка, необходимого для учебы. Так обстоит дело с детьми, которые участвовали в этом исследовании. Они посещают элитную Международную начальную школу в Сараево, где ключевые предметы преподаются на английском языке.

An increasing number of children around the world, including Bosnian children, are being educated in a second language (L2). This L2 learning in primary school settings raises interesting questions about the development of L2 vocabulary. Investigating the nature of vocabulary

knowledge in these L2 children is important particularly as they face the significant challenge of acquiring L2 vocabulary in order to handle school work. This is the case with children who participated in this study. They attend the first grade at International Primary School in Sarajevo where key subjects are taught in English.

**Калит сўзлар:** инглиз тили, бошланғич синф ўқувчилари, луғат, эга бўлмоқ, алоқа.

**Ключевые слова:** английский язык, ученики начальных классов, словарь, приобретение, коммуникация.

**Key words:** English language, pupils (students) of junior classes, young learners, vocabulary, acquisition, communication.

## I. INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of children around the world, including Bosnian children, are being educated in a second language (L2). This L2 learning in primary school settings raises interesting questions about the development of L2 vocabulary. Investigating the nature of vocabulary knowledge in these L2 children is important particularly as they face the significant challenge of acquiring L2 vocabulary in order to handle school work. This is the case with children who participated in this study. They attend the first grade at International Primary School in Sarajevo where key subjects are taught in English.

## II. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Vocabulary teaching has not always been very popular and teachers have not fully recognized the communicative advantage in developing vocabulary. For a long time teaching approaches such as the direct method and audiolingualism gave priority to the teaching of grammatical structures. The number of words introduced in such courses was fairly low. The advent of the communicative approach in the 1970s set the stage for a major rethinking of the role of vocabulary (Larsen-Freeman, 2007). Based on most researchers, learning vocabulary is central to the mastery of a language. “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.” This is how the linguist David Wilkins summed up the importance of vocabulary learning, (Thornbury, 2004). He pointed out that if you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much, whereas improvement will be much more visible if you focus on learning more words and expressions.

According to Nosratinia, Eftekhari and Sarabchian (2013), vocabulary learning is especially significant in English language acquisition. It is unfeasible for a learner

to communicate without the required vocabulary. At higher educational levels, learners are habitually forced to become autonomous and make conscious effort to learn vocabulary outside of the classroom. Gass (1999) states that learning a vocabulary item is a process that begins with the first meaningful encounter with a previously unknown word and continues through the successful integration of key features of that word into their mental lexicon. She further notes that vocabulary acquisition involves the integration of different kinds of knowledge, as well as the attainment of different levels of ability to use that knowledge in communication.

Studies conducted by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2012), raise the issue of the role of self-regulation in vocabulary learning. Based on their findings, self-regulated learning links motivation and strategy in the vocabulary learning process. They suggest directions for future research to gain further insight into the role of self-regulation in vocabulary learning. Second language acquisition of new words never stops. Even in our first language we are continually learning new words and learning new meanings for old words. Learning the vocabulary of a second language presents the learner with the following challenges (Thornbury, 2004): making the correct connections, when understanding the second language, between the form and the meaning of words, including discriminating the meaning of closely related words (e.g. lush and plush); when producing language, using the correct form of a word for the meaning intended (nose not noise)

There are many levels on which a word can be known. According to Nemati (2013), lexical knowledge does not only constitute knowing the simple form and meaning of the word, but it also demands from the learner to recognize, understand and produce a word together with scores of other words in different contexts and situations that are acceptable in the language. To conclude, one thing that all the researchers can all agree upon is that learning vocabulary is an essential part of mastering a second language. The acquisition of vocabulary is a process. Let us now examine how this process started with young learners in Bosnia.

### **III. FOREIGN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY**

In a study by Crookes (1997) the researcher tried to find the connection between second language acquisition and second and foreign language teaching. It was asserted that the relationship is presently often weaker than it should be. He pointed out that second or foreign language teachers must be involved in second language acquisition research to improve teaching. Therefore, second language acquisition has to have a positive relationship with second language pedagogy.

Needless to say, reflection on actual practices inside the classrooms is a key to teachers' creativity and professional development (Jadidi & Keshavarz, 2013).

According to Thornbury (2004), the teacher is a highly productive, although often undervalued, source of vocabulary input. Learners often pick up lot of incidental language from their teachers, especially words and phrases associated with classroom processes, such as "Let's see", "Whose turn is it?", "Is that clear?", "Have you finished yet?" This argument supports Rivers and Templery (1978) who noted that teachers can provide opportunities that stimulate vocabulary acquisition, and they can help the students improve their framework. Pavičić (2009) also pointed out that teaching strategies refer to everything teachers do or should do in order to help their learners learn. Which teaching strategy a teacher will employ depends on the time available, the content, as well as on the strategy's value for the learner.

It becomes important to explore what a teacher can do to facilitate learning and to help students achieve high learning outcomes. If a teacher has high expectations for students and challenges them to live up to high expectations by engaging them in meaningful learning activities, students tend to work harder, put more effort, and be more persistent in completing a learning task or project (Ketsman, 2012). On the other hand, if a teacher has low expectations for students and perceives students as not capable of completing challenging learning tasks, this teacher will design simplistic classroom instruction that corresponds with low teacher expectations. In a study, Wright, Betteridge and Buckby, (2006) provided insights about the role of expectations in foreign language classrooms and offered examples of foreign language pedagogical practices that reflect high expectations. The study concluded that expectations shape the learning process in Spanish high school classrooms and contribute to high student achievement. Research states that a teacher has a tremendous role in making learning meaningful for students, and therefore, makes a difference in student learning choices and experiences.

It seems likely that many authors are focused on studying how teachers affect a classroom and discussing behaviors and attitudes of effective foreign language teachers. Foreign language teachers are distinctive in terms of the nature of the subject, content of teaching, teaching methodology and teacher-learner relationships (Crosse, 2007). Foreign language teachers need to create an environment where they communicate in the language that they teach.

Numerous studies revealed that teacher content knowledge and their ability to share knowledge are among the most important teacher qualities that contribute to high student achievement outcomes (Linse, 2005; McCardle & Hoff, 2006; Zimmerman, 2001). Some studies suggest that an effective foreign language teacher needs to be able to evoke and sustain interest and motivation of students and to be

available for any questions and help (Zoltan, 2001). Other studies claim that effective teachers should have a student-centered classroom, should be creative, and should teach outside the syllabus (Zimmerman, 2001). To summarize, what teachers can actually do to increase their students' learning and develop their creativity is still in need of more focus in second/foreign language education research.

#### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

##### **Research Question**

The goal of this study is to evaluate children's' English L2 acquisition. We want to determine whether English L2 vocabulary will be better acquired by implementing teaching methods which are appropriate for young learners. We assume that using different methods suitable for young learners will increase their motivation in learning L2. We expect that all children would know almost all vocabulary words which are the focus of this study by the end of the semester. We want to explore the effect on the development of vocabulary learning by investigating the relationship between vocabulary teaching strategies employed by teachers.

##### **Participants**

There were nine participants in the study and all of them are Bosnian children. They attended the 1<sup>st</sup> grade at International Primary School of Sarajevo. They have had two months of exposure to English in a school setting with 21 lessons which take place in English. The Bosnian children ranged in age from 6.1 to 7.9 years.

##### **Tasks**

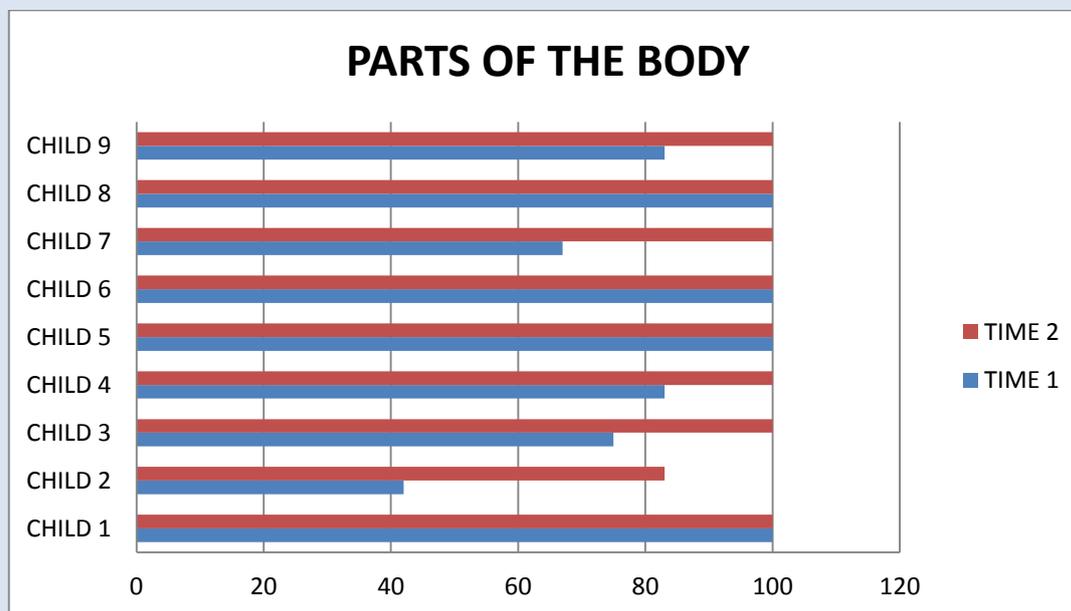
The children were given a vocabulary test. The learners were asked to answer some questions related to three topics which we covered in the last two months. The topics were: my classroom, parts of the body, and my family - verbs and nouns. The children were shown some pictures and asked to label the objects. The children were tested twice. The first time the test took place was at the beginning of November and the second time was twenty days later, when all activities were implemented.

#### **V. APPLIED ACTIVITIES IN ORDER TO REINFORCE VOCABULARY ACQUISITION**

The biggest challenge in this research was to implement different activities in the classroom in order to help children to acquire the words. Generally, we increased exposure to certain words by using them within various collocations and situations. Here are activities which were implemented in the classroom:

- Presenting a set of concrete objects
- Flashcards
- Elicitation
- Questions to prompt vocabulary development
- Total Physical response (TPR)
- Games
- Magic box
- Making their own picture dictionary
- Power point presentation- slide show
- Posters- my family- presenting their family members
- Songs
- Miming the actions
- Making posters around the classroom- word walls

## RESULTS

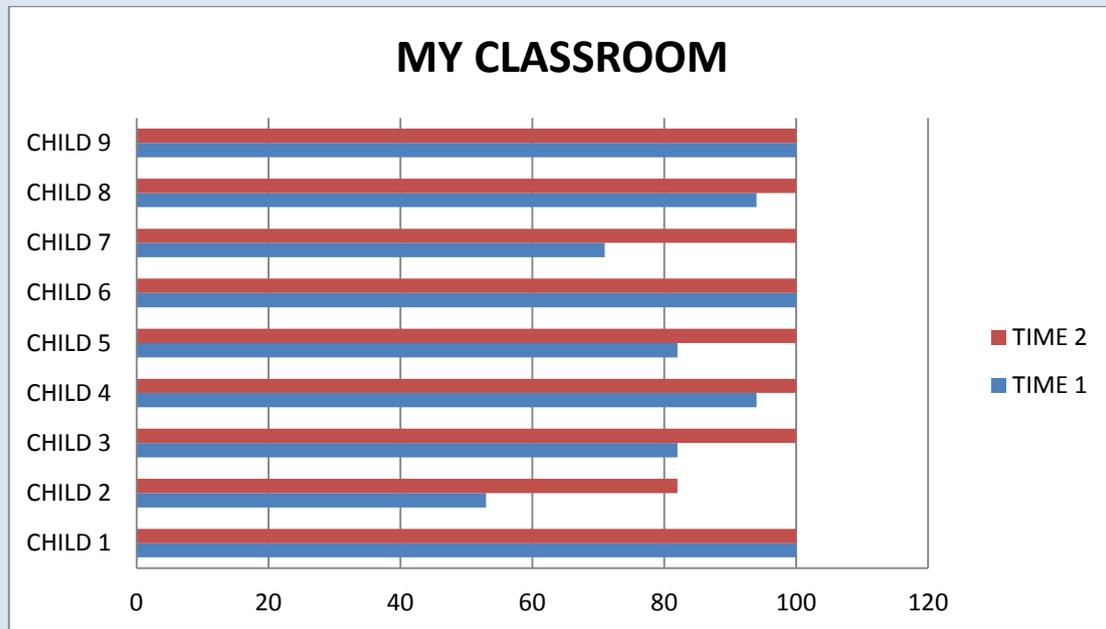


**Table 1. Words related to parts of the body**

The first time when the children were tested (TIME 1) four children were able to label all words. All of them scored above the 50th percentile.

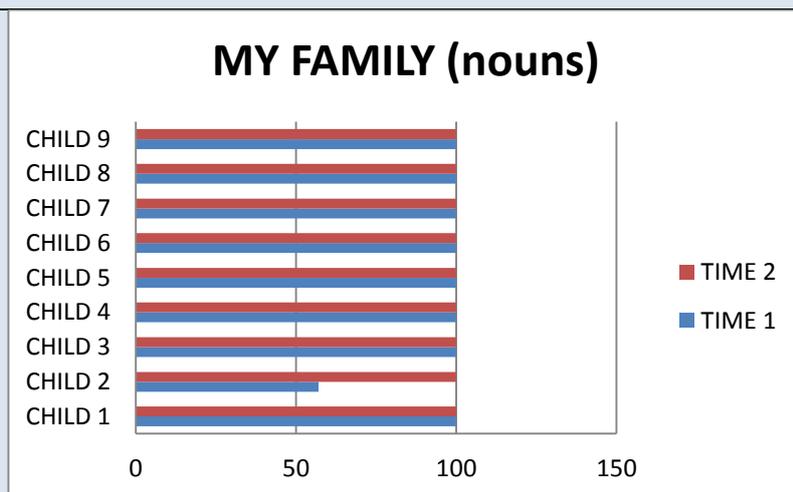
Second time (TIME 2) when the children were tested, eight children were able to label all the words.

Table 1 shows a great improvement in acquiring new words.



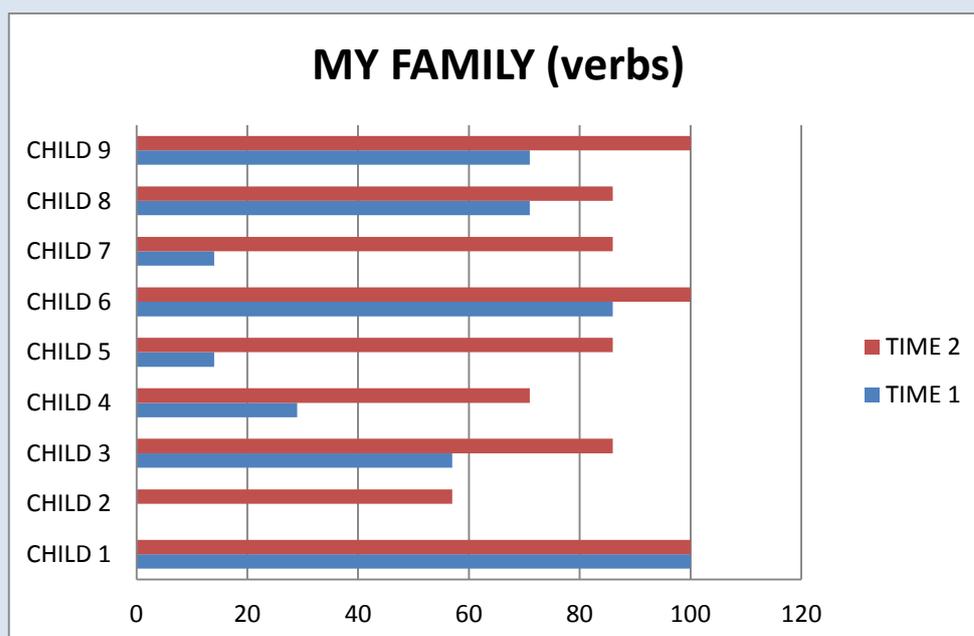
**Table 2. Words related to the classroom objects**

The first time when the children were tested three children were able to label all words. All of them scored at or above the 50th percentile. Four children were not able to name „chair“ and „desk“ and these words were the most difficult to remember. All children were able to recall following words: school bag, book, pencil case, water bottle and computer. Second time when the children were tested eight children were able to label all the words. Table 2 shows great improvement in acquiring new words related to my classroom.



**Table 3. Words related to family members (nouns)**

First time when the children were tested eight children were able to label all words. Second time when the children were tested nine children were able to label all the words. The nouns related to family were acquired the fastest. One of the reasons why is that every child needed to make a poster which represented his/her family. They introduced their family members and had already spoken about them. Finally, we pasted them on a wall in our classroom. It is very important when we work with young learners to make them feel safe. Having family photos in their classroom made them feel happy and secure. When told that the posters will be taken off all the children asked the teachers not to do it. This poster was their favorite one.



**Table 4. Words related to family (verbs)**

The first time when children were asked to reproduce verbs, results were not promising. Most of the children were not able to recall even the 50th percentile of verbs. It seems that children were having difficulties in remembering verbs. We assumed that this is because verbs are abstract - especially the verb *work*. According to OisPichette, Serres and Lafontaine (2012) the nature of a word plays a role in its retention. They suggest that concrete words have a higher potential for retention due to the higher number of connections they allow. This is exactly the case with the verb *play*. The verb most successful in the recalling process was *play* because children were familiar with it and it has been used in many songs and games. The second time three children were able to recall all verbs, four children recalled more than 80th percentile of the verbs and the rest of the children are still having difficulties with remembering. To conclude, there is a great improvement in acquiring verbs but results still needed to be improved.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In order to prepare students to be global citizens in the 21st century, knowledge of a foreign language is of prime importance. The current trend of lowering the age for compulsory English education around the world has created a huge demand for teachers of young learners. Young learners are talkative, spontaneous, have lots of physical energy and they are easily distracted. They need to have their interest, imagination and curiosity sparked to keep their attention in the classroom. Therefore, English teacher education programs need to have a specific focus on methods for teaching children to prepare new teachers to apply developmentally appropriate approaches to the English as a foreign language classroom. It is of extreme importance to encourage learner's active participation in vocabulary learning and cooperation with their peers and the teacher. It is necessary to include vocabulary items that are part of the curriculum and provide learners with opportunities to work with items they find meaningful.

Furthermore, the second or foreign language teachers must be involved in second language acquisition research to improve teaching. There must be a positive relationship with second language pedagogy and second language acquisition. In this case study different approaches have been used to help young learners develop their vocabulary. Working with this age group is demanding because we need to have lots of resources, ideas, and changes of activity to match their short attention span. We need to remember that play is the young child's natural way to learn and that is the reason why many different games were implemented. As we could see there was a

big improvement in the acquisition of new words after implementing all activities appropriate for young learners.

This case study emphasized the role of teachers as a practical link between second language acquisition research and classroom practice. This is because much of what actually happens in many second or foreign language classrooms depends on the teachers' views of pedagogy and their knowledge. We agree with Crosse (2007) who stated that the higher the qualification of the adult working with young children, the better quality of teaching they are likely to have. We hope that our study and others like it may benefit teachers and pedagogues seeking to maximize their class time and their students' language learning potential.

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