

English vocabulary teaching and learning strategies in Secondary Education

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Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo ser una absoluta reflexión sobre mis años de práctica educativa en la Enseñanza Secundaria e intenta mostrar un trabajo de investigación sobre las estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario en el área de Inglés que he estado llevando a cabo durante los últimos meses. También incluyo un pequeño test que creé para este trabajo y que ha sido realizado por alrededor de 800 estudiantes de los aproximadamente 1300 alumnos del Instituto de Enseñanza Secundaria donde trabajo (IES de Cangas del Narcea, Asturias). Ha sido una gran ayuda a la hora de sacar conclusiones y conseguir porcentajes. Aparte de esta prueba objetiva, cada frase incluida en el artículo es el resultado del estudio de mi práctica docente en tres Comunidades Autónomas diferentes.

Abstract

This article aims to be an absolute reflection on my years of teaching practice in Secondary Education, and tries to show an investigation work on my pupils' vocabulary learning strategies in the area of English that I have been carrying out during the latest months. I also enclose a little quiz I created for this project and that has been filled in by about 800 of the aprox. 1,300 students of the Secondary School where I work (IES of Cangas del Narcea, in Asturias). It has been a great help to come to conclusions and to get percentages. Apart from this objective proof, every statement included in the article is the result of the study of my teaching experience in three different Autonomous Communities.

Introduction

First of all, I would like to clarify the level and ages of the students who have been the object of my study: Secondary Education is divided into two levels or stages, Compulsory Secondary Education (from 12 to 16) and

Bachillerato (from 16 to 18). They are teenagers, and they have their special learning characteristics therefore.

1st CSE: 12-13 years old students.

2nd CSE: 13-14 years old students.

3rd CSE: 14-15 years old students.

4th CSE: 15-16 years old students.

1st Bachillerato: 16-17 years old students.

2nd Bachillerato: 17-18 years old students.

Vocabulary Learning in the area of Foreign Languages is, no doubt, one of the most motivating parts for our pupils, since most of them *are able* of memorizing lists, more or less long, that maybe at first seem to be impossible to assimilate, but thanks to repeated practise and usage of them, they finally remain in their memory.

However has lexical competence traditionally been a little put aside during the Compulsory Education in the area of Foreign Languages, since grammar has been always considered much more important. Words are basic parts of thought, and as several studies and myself have observed, there exists a direct relationship between lexical shortage and failure in this area, and students very often fail to apply grammar rules because they do not understand the meaning of the sentence, they do not know the words in it. And as Jesús Moreno, teacher of the IES “La Malladeta” in Villajoyosa (Alicante) says in his article “Propuestas para la Enseñanza de Vocabulario en el Aula”, “For such important mental processes as relating, arranging, classifying and distinguishing, we need words. Making progress in knowledge implies shading, telling in detail, and for that we need to endow pupils with a significant lexical volume, which allows them to express themselves with clarity, propriety and precision”.

Most of my pupils *do* like learning vocabulary, much more than learning grammar or phonetics, for instance. As it has been said in the abstract, this essay pretends to be a personal reflection, therefore what I am going to explain here is the way my pupils learn vocabulary, the strategies I use to help them with this learning, and the way textbooks help students with vocabulary learning in Secondary Education.

Vocabulary teaching strategies in Secondary Education

When I introduce a topic or a unit, I bear in mind the following aspects:

- I follow the textbook directions, since they are a selection of the most common and suitable terms for their level.
- I determine the next frequency of the new terms usage.
- I also determine the utility of these terms.
- I bear in mind the assimilation capacity of my pupils.
- I teach the new vocabulary basing this teaching on the four basic skills of English as a foreign language: writing, reading, listening and speaking (that is, I try to make use of the new terms in an oral, written, listened and visual way).

I always start with a “brainstorming”, through which our pupils will activate their previous knowledge, at the same time as the most advanced pupils will introduce almost forgotten or even new words for the rest of the class. Moreover, If we write them on the blackboard, the terms will visually be etched in their memory.

Apart from the previous considerations, in my opinion, and according to my experience, some other aspects should not be forgotten when teaching vocabulary items, since their usefulness is evident to understand the functioning of the English language:

- Indicating which part of the discourse the item belongs to (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition...).
- Teaching the words or particles which usually go with the term (i.e. to worry *about*, to talk *to*...) as well as the most frequent expressions which include this word (set phrases or collocations), if we consider them useful (i.e. “*little*”- “*little by little*”).
- Explaining their meaning in and out of the context (i.e. *to work* may mean “funcionar” or “trabajar”, depending on the situation).
- Teaching the word pronunciation, which I have moreover generalized with the use of phonetics during the present school year (before this, it seemed to be restricted to high levels). The reason for this initiative is the fact that the Ministry of Education wants to change the curriculum for Secondary Education in the area of Foreign Languages with the increasing importance of Phonetics and pronunciation, as students are intended to be orally examined by the end of their Secondary Education at the P.A.U. (Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad).
- When pertinent, we should talk about the convenience of the word use in certain contexts, indicating if it is *slang*, too formal, etc.

The way textbooks teach vocabulary

Textbooks and activity books in Secondary Education offer nowadays a great variety of activities for our students to learn and especially to reinforce vocabulary. The textbooks mentioned in the bibliography are the ones I have.

Firstly, I would like to clarify that Compulsory Education textbooks offer a much more basic vocabulary than Bachillerato ones. Compulsory Education vocabulary consists of the typical categories, that is, “Family”, “The House”, “Animals”, “Clothes” or “Food” among others, which increase their difficulty and add new words when the level becomes higher. On the other hand, Bachillerato vocabulary highly increases; terms become much more specialized at the same time as all the vocabulary learnt in Compulsory Secondary Education reinforce. In any case, there is normally a specific section for vocabulary practice.

Anyway, the exercises are of the same type in both stages. The following are the kind of activities pupils can find in their books to learn vocabulary:

- Readings: they are normally followed by true/false statements, or by questions, so that they can use scanning and skimming strategies.
- Completing Lists or Tables: they are very useful exercises to review old vocabulary.
- Word Puzzles and Word Squares: Students love them, as it is a way of learning by playing.
- Finding opposites or synonyms: from a list of words written at random, and that usually belong to the same semantic field.
- Writing the words under the correct category heading.
- Circling the odd word out.
- Completing the sentences with the words in the box.
- Unjumbling the letters to form words.
- Describing objects, people, places, a picture, etc.
- Labelling pictures.
- Filling in the gaps with a suitable word.
- Matching the parts to make complete words, set phrases, etc.
- Finding adjectives/verbs/prepositions, etc in a text.
- Matching the names with their descriptions.
- Wordbuilding.
- Replacing for a synonym.
- Projects: thematic posters, f.i.

And, of course, we ourselves may add a great variety of games specifically designed to learn vocabulary, which students regard as amusing and useful ones -I often use sets of cards especially planned for every semantic field, for instance, issuing a number of cards between five and ten among the students, so that everyone must invent a story with the assigned words. And compositions are also of great value for the practising and reinforcement of vocabulary and expressions, since they require a great concentration, a work of looking up new words in the dictionary. A good correction and later, a review of mistakes, greatly improve students' linguistic competence. Finally, I have always got great results with graded reading books, where they can extensively practise their vocabulary, and learn new terms.

On the other hand, some textbooks teach learning strategies in a specific section included in every unit, especially in low levels.

To end with this section, I would like to talk about the vocabulary learning strategies that we can teach our pupils, and that they will be, no doubt, of great utility for them:

1. When taking notes about new words, they should write them with their translation, meanings, and other interesting explanations, such as special uses or expressions. Here, we make use of the notions of monosemy, polysemy, antonymy, homonymy, and so on.
2. When looking up a term in the dictionary, to notice which type of word it is, because it helps knowing about its use or position in the sentence.
3. Illustrating the words with pictures (in low levels).
4. Writing phonetics down when a word has a difficult pronunciation. Also highlighting the stressed syllable or vowel.
5. Circling, highlighting, writing in capital letters, etc, the most difficult or important parts, e.g. *I want TO go*.
6. Creating "word webs" to group words into semantic fields and to facilitate this way their memorization. Or grouping the words in thematic cards.

Anyhow, it is a question of using methods which catch their eye and raise interest, and at any rate make our pupils remember certain words.

Learning strategies

This section refers to the conscious or unconscious way our students have of etching new words in their minds.

To incorporate new words or terms, with respect to the same significant, the pupil should go over the majority of the following stages:

- Necessity or desire of learning a certain word.
- First encounter and identification or understanding of its meaning.
- Analysis and processing of its meaning.
- Application of learning strategies or studying for the memorization of the word.
- Reencounter with the word in the same context or in different context.

Having success in this process is normally a guarantee for the memorization of a word. To strengthen the permanence of the new terms, some of the following techniques can be followed: repetition (mentally, aloud, writing), sensorial strategies (association of the new word to a sense), association to a mental image, mnemotechnical and mechanical strategies. Moreover, to end this acquisition-learning process, it is important a periodical repetition, and the effective use in suitable contexts.

Method

To develop this section, I have carried out –as I said in the abstract- an investigation work during the last months in three ways: by taking notes through my observation in class about the manner my pupils learn vocabulary; through their notebook observation (I ask them for it once every term, mainly at the end of it), and finally with an objective quiz I issued trying to get every level. For this part of the project I relied on my workmates' help, since they distributed the test among their students (I only teach five groups belonging to two different levels), so that I could comprise every level of Secondary Education.

Class Observation

First of all, I have been observing, as I stated before- the way students learn vocabulary. Not at the beginning of my teaching experience, but during

the latest two school years, I decided to ask students for a very organized notebook, and I am not totally sure if it is because of this fact, but I have noticed a higher fluency, and consequently, also a greater mastery of vocabulary by my pupils than in the previous years. I really think that well-organized notes enormously help students to learn more and better. My pupils' notebooks, apart from Grammar, Exercises, Phonetics and Compositions, also include a section for Vocabulary, no matter if they have it in their books. Sometimes we also use pictures to label (with clothes, or the weather, for example) that they stick on their notebooks, mainly in low levels. As I have observed, if I ask for tidy and organized notebooks, my students usually try to do it well, even the worst students, they normally like that, and many times they re-write and highlight their contents, achieving with this a unconscious reinforcement of all the things seen in class, and subsequently of vocabulary.

Questionnaire: Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Secondary Education

The following quiz is the one I talked about above. I created it to study the way pupils behave when learning vocabulary. I tested it on about 800 pupils from every year of Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE), and on both the first and the second year of Bachillerato, that is therefore, on the whole Secondary Education to see the differences regarding vocabulary learning strategies. I must also say that only hard-working pupils were chosen to do it, no matter how good or bad their results in the area of English were, since it implies they *do* use strategies to learn English vocabulary.

I wrote the questions always bearing in mind the fact that I wanted to compare vocabulary as a part of FLT to other parts such as Phonetics or Grammar i.e., and I must also say that I created this questionnaire after having taken as many notes as possible about my class observation regarding this aspect of FLT as well as the exam results I own. After this observation I had already noticed that girls in general were better at this part. What I wanted to investigate was why, how and when they studied or etched vocabulary in their minds (Table 1. *Please notice that the questions 5 and 8 admitted one or more answers).

Table 1. *Questionnaire on English Vocabulary Learning Strategies in CSE and Bachillerato*

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES
IN CSE AND BACHILLERATO (Thanks you for your collaboration!)**

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School Year:

Sex:

Age:

- 1. When you do not understand something in a text and your teacher is not there to help you, what do you do?**
 - a. I jump it , and I keep on reading, without paying any more attention to it.
 - b. I stop and I do not keep on reading, because if I do not know every word, I can't understand the text, so I take a dictionary and I look them up.
 - c. I stop to think and I deduce more or less the meaning by looking at what I understand of the rest of the text.
- 2. Which is the part you like the most in this area?**
 - a. Phonetics
 - b. Grammar
 - c. Vocabulary
 - d. Activities
 - e. Listening
 - f. Speaking
- 3. What is the part you find the hardest to study from the above ones?**
- 4. And which one do you find the easiest?**
- 5. Where do you write down the new vocabulary? (Circle every suitable answer)**
 - a. In my notebook.
 - b. I make cards arranged in topics.
 - c. In my textbook.
- 6. How do you learn vocabulary for your exams?**
 - a. By heart, repeating it aloud or by myself many times.
 - b. Writing it down many times.
 - c. I simply review the activities and texts seen in class
- 7. When do you try to memorize vocabulary?**
 - a. That very same day, or a few days after seeing it in class.
 - b. One or two days before the exam.
- 8. Which of these strategies do you use to learn new words? (Circle every suitable answer):**
 - a. I sometimes read books or texts in English, no matter if it is not compulsory for class.
 - b. When I get a song lyrics that I like, I look up some words that I do not know in the dictionary.
 - c. When I see some words or phrases in English that I do not know either on TV or on a computer game, I try to find out their meaning, either looking them up, or by asking my teacher.
 - d. Sometimes I have a look at the dictionary and I learn some new word.
- 9. Which of the following types of activities do you think of as the most useful to learn or practise vocabulary? :**
 - a. Filling in the gaps with vocabulary given.
 - b. Crosswords or Word squares.
 - c. Reading texts.
 - d. Matching (words and pictures, words and their definitions, etc).
 - e. Completing vocabulary list or columns.
 - f. Writing compositions.
 - g. Reading books in English.

Results

The main and the most notorious results I reached to through the use of this questionnaire were the following ones (Table 2):

1st Question: *When you do not understand something in a text and your teacher is not there to help you, what do you do?*

The most outstanding fact is the great difference among the boys and girls of 3rd CSE, since a 100% of girls admit jumping new words in a text and keep on reading, while a 0% of boys said ‘yes’ to the same option. Most students of the other levels try to infer the meaning from the context.

2nd Question: *Which is the part you like the most in this area?*

The questionnaire reveals that the students who like vocabulary the most are the boys of 3rd CSE (41, 6%), and the ones who dislike vocabulary the most are the boys of 1st Bachillerato (0% chose it as the part of the area they liked the most). As an average percentage, Secondary pupils prefer “Speaking” over the rest of the parts, and “Phonetics” is the one they like the least.

3rd Question: *What is the part you find the hardest to study from the above ones?*

As it was predictable, a significant 0% of the boys in 1st CSE chose it as the hardest part to study (it contrasts with the 27.2% of girls of the same level). On the other hand, it was in the upper levels that vocabulary was chosen as the most difficult part of English; so we have a 45% of boys and a 55.5% of girls in 1st Bachillerato, and a 60% of boys and a 41.6 of girls in 2nd Bachillerato.

4th Question: *And which one do you find the easiest?*

Consequently, a 37.5% of boys and a 54.5% of girls in 1st of CSE said that they find vocabulary the easiest part of English to study. It is also remarkable the great difference among boys and girls in 3rd of CSE, since a 50% of boys said it was the easiest part while a 0% of girls said the same.

5th Question: *Where do you write down the new vocabulary? (Circle every suitable answer)*

The great importance given by teachers to the students’ notebooks in low levels (they are normally evaluated too) is evident in the answers to this

Table 2. Answers to the Questionnaire on English Vocabulary Learning Strategies in CSE and Bachillerato

	1º ESO		2º ESO		3º ESO		4º ESO		1º BACH.		2º BACH.	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1st QUESTION												
A	12,5%	0%	0%	4,54%	0%	100%	19,3%	0%	18,1%	27,2%	0%	4,16%
B	25%	54,5%	26,3%	15	25%	0%	40,2%	68,7%	18,1%	16,6%	40%	0%
C	62,5%	45,4%	73,6%	27,2%	75%	0%	40,2%	31,2%	63,6%	66,6%	60%	24
2nd QUESTION												
A	25%	18,1%	0%	0%	8,3%	0%	0%	6,25%	18,1%	5,5%	40%	0%
B	37,5%	0%	10,5%	9%	16,6%	30,5%	19,7%	0%	9,09%	5,5%	0%	33,3%
C	25%	27,2%	26,3%	31,8%	41,6%	19,5%	19,7%	6,25%	0%	11,1%	20%	33,3%
D	0%	9%	21%	4,54%	8,3%	19,5%	20,4%	6,25%	0%	33,3%	0%	20,8%
E	0%	18,1%	15,7%	22,7%	8,3%	0%	0%	62,5%	45,4%	11,1%	0%	4,16%
F	12,5%	27,2%	26,3%	9%	25%	30,5%	40,2%	25%	9,09%	27,7%	40%	8,3%
3rd QUESTION												
A	12,5%	18,1%	21%	31,8%	25%	0%	0%	43,75%	9,09%	16,6%	60%	25%
B	62,5%	36,3%	36,8%	18,1%	33,3%	30,5%	80,3%	25%	45,4%	16,6%	0%	29,1%
C	0%	27,2%	21%	22,7%	25%	39,4%	19,7%	18,7%	45,4%	55,5%	60%	41,6%
D	0%	0%	0%	4,5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
E	25%	0%	10,5%	4,5%	8,3%	0%	0%	6,25%	0%	11,1%	0%	4,16%
F	0%	18,1%	10,5%	18,1%	8,3%	50%	0%	6,25%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4th QUESTION												
A	2,5%	9%	10,5%	13,6%	8,3%	40%	0%	6,25%	18,1%	16,6%	13,3%	0%
B	12,5%	0%	21%	36,3%	25%	0%	19,7%	62,5%	0%	55,5%	66,6%	41,6%
C	37,5%	54,5%	21%	27,2%	50%	0%	40,2%	6,25%	63,6%	16,6%	20%	25%
D	12,5%	9%	31,5%	4,5%	8,3%	10%	19,7%	12,5%	9,09%	0%	0%	0%
E	12,5%	9%	5,2%	9%	0%	0%	19,7%	6,25%	9,09%	0%	0%	25%
F	0%	0%	10,5%	9%	8,3%	0%	0%	6,25%	0%	11,1%	0%	8,3%

	1º ESO		2º ESO		3º ESO		4º ESO		1º BACH.		2º BACH.	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
5th QUESTION												
A	87,5%	100%	52,6%	54,5%	58,3%	80%	80,3%	68,7%	9,09%	33,3%	0%	16,6%
B	0%	0%	5,2%	4,5%	41,6%	0%	0%	6,25%	9,09%	33,3%	0%	12,5%
C	12,5%	36,3%	57,8%	54,5%	75%	40%	80,3%	37,5%	100%	50%	100%	91,6%
6th QUESTION												
A	37,5%	36,3%	42,1%	45,4%	41,6%	40%	100%	25%	36,3%	50%	0%	16,6%
B	25%	54,5%	21%	22,7%	8,3%	0%	0%	50%	9,09%	16,6%	20%	25%
C	37,5%	9%	36,8%	31,8%	50%	20%	0%	25%	54,5%	33,3%	80%	58,3%
7th QUESTION												
A	50%	81,8%	42,1%	45,4%	66,6%	70%	0%	37,5%	18,1%	33,3%	0%	20,8%
B	50%	18,1%	57,8%	54,5%	33,3%	33,1%	100%	62,5%	81,8%	66,6%	100%	79,1%
8th QUESTION												
A	12,5%	27,2%	15,7%	22,7%	25%	0%	0%	6,25%	36,3%	33,3%	33,3%	29,1%
B	12,5%	36,3%	21%	54,5%	33,3%	40,2%	19,7%	75%	27,2%	33,3%	0%	58,3%
C	75%	36,3%	63,1%	63,6%	83,3%	60,1%	59,4%	56,2%	63,6%	33,3%	66,6%	62,5%
D	37,5%	54,5%	31,5%	27,2%	16,6%	0%	19,7%	37,5%	9,09%	16,6%	0%	12,5%
9th QUESTION												
A	12,5%	18,1%	31,5%	22,7%	0%	20,1%	60%	25%	45,4%	0%	53,3%	16,6%
B	37,5%	9%	26,3%	27,2%	16,6%	20,1%	0%	25%	18,1%	5,5%	0%	4,16%
C	37,5%	36,3%	10,5%	27,2%	16,6%	10%	20%	6,25%	0%	11,1%	20%	25%
D	0%	9%	5,2%	13,6%	8,3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8,3%
E	0%	0%	0%	9%	16,6%	20,1%	0%	6,25%	18,1%	0%	6,6%	4,16%
F	12,5%	9%	15,7%	0%	25%	0%	0%	25%	9,09%	11,1%	20%	12,5%
G	0%	18,1%	10,5%	0%	16,6%	30%	20%	6,25%	9,09%	72,3%	0%	29,1%

questions. So, we have a 87.5% of boys and a 100% of girls in 1st CSE who note down new vocabulary on their notebooks, while in Bachillerato the opposite happens: a 100% of boys in 1st Bachillerato and a 100% of boys together with a 91.6% of girls in 2nd Bachillerato note down new vocabulary on their text books. Moreover those boys in both 1st and 2nd Bachillerato never note down any vocabulary on their notebooks. It is also meaningful that the boys in 4th CSE note new vocabulary in the same proportion (80.3%) both on their notebooks and on their textbook. Finally, the percentages of pupils who make some kind of cards to memorize vocabulary is extremely low in every level and both in boys and girls, except for the boys in 3rd CSE (a 41.5%) and the girls in 1st Bachillerato (a 33.3%).

6th Question: *How do you learn vocabulary for your exams?*

Surprisingly, there is a very big percentage in all levels of pupils who learn vocabulary by heart, repeating it aloud or by themselves (it is so evident with that 100% of boys in 4th CSE). Boys in 2nd Bachillerato are the only ones who affirm that they never study vocabulary this way.

7th Question: *When do you try to memorize vocabulary?*

Generally speaking, the boys are the “laziest” pupils, although not much more than girls when learning vocabulary. Most of them admit leaving the study of new words for the last days before their exam takes place. In higher levels the difference among boys and girls is bigger. It can be seen in the boys in 4th CSE and in 2nd Bachillerato above all, since the 100% of them said that they prefer studying vocabulary just before their exams.

8th Question: *Which of these strategies do you use to learn new words? (Circle every suitable answer)*

In my opinion, it is the most interesting question, since it reveals the different strategies the students use when learning vocabulary. Surprisingly, the boys and girls in 1st and 2nd CSE are the ones who use more devices. They recognize above all, asking their teachers about the new words they see on TV or computers, but a high percentage also look up the words appearing in song lyrics in dictionaries, f.i. the girls in 4th CSE, 1st and 2nd Bachillerato also use a great number of strategies. On the other hand, the ones who use less devices are the girls in 3rd CSE and the boys in 2nd Bachillerato. The most used strategies are trying to know song lyrics, especially 75% of girls in 4th CSE (we must not forget that the great majority of teenagers love music), and above all noting down unknown words that they see on TV or compu-

ters to ask their teachers about their meanings (a 75% of boys in 1st CSE, or a 66.6% of boys in 2nd Bachillerato).

9th Question: *Which of the following types of activities do you think of as the most useful to learn or practise vocabulary?*

The types of activities students consider the most useful to learn or practise vocabulary vary depending on their levels and sex. “Fill in the gaps” exercises have been chosen by a 31.5% of boys in 2nd CSE, a 60% of boys in 4th CSE, a 45.4% of boys in 1st Bachillerato, and a 53.3% of boys in 2nd Bachillerato. A 37.5 of boys and a 36.3% of girls in 1st CSE, together with a 27,2% of girls in 2nd CSE prefer crosswords or word squares. Just a 25% of boys in 3rd CSE and a significant 0% the girls in 3rd CSE consider writing compositions the most useful device (in contrast to many English teachers’ opinion). And reading books in English has been chosen by a 30% of girls in 3rd CSE, a 72.3% of girls in 1st Bachillerato, and a 29.1% of girls in 2nd Bachillerato. Generally speaking, students of Secondary Education regard “fill in the gaps” exercises and reading books in English as the most useful activities to learn or reinforce vocabulary, while matching exercises, and completing vocabulary lists are considered the least useful.

Conclusions

As I have been saying from the beginning of this essay, this work has been eminently practical, since it has been an attempt to reflect what I see in my classes everyday, that is, the way the textbooks I use introduce new vocabulary, the type of specific exercises, the strategies students use, their preferences, and so on.

Through the use of a questionnaire I wanted to show a series of facts and evidences in the different levels of the Secondary Education. It was a hard work which took me a lot of time, but it was, in my opinion, the best way of getting objective results and conclusions.

The most notorious and general conclusions I have reached after my research are the following:

1. Visual, colourful and ludic activities are the ones which make pupils learn vocabulary more easily.
2. Most students do not know how to learn vocabulary, so we are expected to provide them with some strategies for it. Moreover, once

- they get used to reflect on the new words function in the sentence, they get easier to be memorized. Brainstorming and reinforcement activities are especially important for etching words.
3. Well-organized notes and notebooks including a specific section for vocabulary greatly help pupils to reinforce vocabulary.
 4. Boys in general panic when they do not know every word in a text while girls keep on reading and try to infer the general meaning. It is especially evident in 3rd CSE.
 5. In CSE, students point at vocabulary as one of the most beloved parts of EFL, while Bachillerato students say that vocabulary is one of the most difficult parts of the area. We must not forget that vocabulary becomes much more specialized and greatly increases at this level. Low levels pupils love learning vocabulary because it is generally introduced by amusing and colourful exercises full of drawings such as crosswords, matching activities, etc. The higher a level is, the more difficult they find learning and etching vocabulary.
 6. Girls find English vocabulary less easy than boys do, therefore they apply more strategies than them to etch it. And they *do* study it, while boys prefer to invest this time in studying grammar.
 7. Low-levels students normally note all the new vocabulary down in their notebooks, but the older they become, the less they note it down on their notebooks, and they start to write it on their books, all around and next to the new words they learn from the texts in their textbooks.
 8. The way they learn vocabulary greatly varies according to their level. According to my research and observations, in 1st and 2nd CSE, they find this part of FL really easy because they learn it in a very ludic way, almost without noticing they are learning new words. In 3rd and 4th CSE, they surprisingly start to learn vocabulary by heart, as the number of new words greatly increases. Finally, in Bachillerato, they usually apply the strategy of learning new words in a context, and they constantly ask teachers for examples which include them. All these premises are especially true in boys.
 9. Both boys and girls in general admit not giving so much importance to vocabulary (they still think that grammar is the most important part of the area), and they usually delay its learning as much as possible (just before their exams take place), especially boys.
 10. Lyrics and vocabulary on TV and advertising make teenagers become interested on learning new words, especially the lowest and the highest levels, and boys above all.

11. Except in 3rd CSE, where they consider writing compositions as a boring and useless way of reinforcing vocabulary, the rest of levels regard it as a useful one, as well as “fill in the gaps” activities. Reading books is also considered as a really useful activity for etching and practising vocabulary, especially by girls.

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