

“USE IT OR LOSE IT!”

**A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE TURKISH EFL TEACHERS’
PERSPECTIVES, PRIOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACTUAL
TEACHING PRACTICES REGARDING VOCABULARY TEACHING**

“KULLAN YA DA KAYBET!”

**ÜÇ TÜRK İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENİNİN KELİME ÖĞRETİMİNE BAKIŞ
AÇILARI, ÖĞRENME DENEYİMLERİ VE KELİME ÖĞRETİMİNE İLİŞKİN
ÖĞRETİM UYGULAMALARININ NİTEL ANALİZİ**

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is often viewed as a critical tool for language learners in mastering English language. Concerning vocabulary teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, EFL teachers’ viewpoints and learning backgrounds may play a vital role in their practices. Along this view, this paper aims to deeply explore the perspectives, prior language learning experiences and actual classroom practices of three experienced EFL teachers with regards to vocabulary teaching in Turkish High Schools. Areas, where practices have conformed with or differed from perspectives about vocabulary teaching in EFL teachers' actual classroom practices have been examined and discussed. The findings suggest that teachers have a strong belief in the necessity and importance of vocabulary teaching and learning. In addition, all three teachers did not favor memorization of the unknown, instead, they put emphasis on the usage of the new vocabulary. They also believed that a teacher should stand as a role model in directing the students to find their own ways to develop their vocabulary. Even though the teachers in this study had different educational backgrounds, they met in common grounds regarding the aim of teaching unknown words to their students. The most striking common point in their prior language learning experiences was the role of their EFL teachers in learning

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vocabulary. Furthermore, for each one, the responses in the interviews, the actions observed in the classrooms as well as what has been written on the reflective journals seem to match well together by completing one another concerning the findings.

Keywords: Vocabulary teaching, EFL classrooms, vocabulary learning, language teaching experiences, teacher perspectives

ÖZ

Kelime dağarcığı genellikle dil öğrenenler için İngilizce dilinde ustalaşmada kritik bir araç olarak görülür. Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce eğitimi verilen sınıflarda kelime öğretimi ile ilgili olarak, yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin bakış açıları ve öğrenme geçmişleri sınıf içi uygulamalarında hayati bir rol oynayabilir. Bu makale Türkiye'deki bir lisede kelime öğretimi ile ilgili olarak deneyimli üç yabancı dil öğretmenin bakış açılarını, önceki dil öğrenme deneyimlerini ve şu anki sınıf içi uygulamalarını derinlemesine incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin sınıf içi uygulamalarında, uygulamaların kelime öğretimi ile ilgili bakış açılarıyla uyumlu veya farklı olduğu alanlar incelenmiş ve tartışılmıştır. Bulgular, öğretmenlerin kelime öğretimi ve öğreniminin gerekliliği ve önemi konusunda güçlü bir inançları olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, her üç öğretmen de yeni öğrenilen kelimelerin kullanımına vurgu yapmış olup, bilinmeyen kelimelerin ezberlenmesinden yana olmamakla birlikte, öğrencilerin kelimeleri sürekli kullanarak öğrenebileceklerini düşünmüşlerdir. Bunun yanında, öğretmenin öğrencileri kelime dağarcıklarını geliştirmede kendi yollarını bulmaya yönlendirmede bir rol model olması gerektiğine de inanmışlardır. Bu çalışmaya katılan yabancı dil öğretmenleri farklı eğitim geçmişlerine sahip olmalarına rağmen, öğrencilerine bilinmeyen kelimeleri öğretme noktasında ortak paydada buluşmuşlardır. Yabancı dil eğitim geçmişlerindeki en çok göze çarpan ortak nokta ise kendi yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin kelime öğrenmelerindeki rolü olarak gözlemlenmiştir. Son olarak, katılımcıların her biri ile yapılan görüşmelerdeki yanıtlar, sınıflarda gözlemlenen eylemler ve araştırma sürecinde tuttıkları günlüklerde yazılanlar birbirini tamamlayarak çalışma bulguları açısından birbiriyle uyumluluk göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kelime öğretimi, Yabancı dil sınıfları, Kelime öğrenimi, Dil öğretimi deneyimleri, Öğretmen bakış açıları

1. INTRODUCTION

As a primary and universal method of communication, our conversations play a very important role in our lives and the words we use become the linguistic means for conducting our affairs. Vocabulary becomes even more important in learning a foreign language, leading researchers to focus on looking deeper into vocabulary teaching at schools. While the strategies and approaches that EFL teachers and learners use have been taking the significant attention concerning vocabulary learning and teaching in research, their perceptions related to these issues have started to gain importance lately in the field as the quality and the importance of

teaching and learning come into the prominence. However, the instructional decisions of EFL teachers are rather uninvestigated in terms of cognitive aspects. Considering this, Muhamad and Kiely (2018) claim that there are numerous kinds of strategies and approaches for teaching vocabulary but these are all dependent on teachers' perspectives. In the direction of understanding how EFL teachers approach vocabulary in their lessons, it is crucial and necessary to understand the viewpoints they operate from. Various significant ideas have been suggested since vocabulary teaching is appearing as a hot topic in the field (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). For example, Muhamad and Kiely (2018) point out that "the attempt to identify the best approach to teach vocabulary should consider teachers' beliefs" (p. 37). In relation to this point, Takač and Singleton (2008) suggest that what is included in teaching vocabulary in class might be dependent on factors like time, the coverage of the lesson and its significance to the learners.

As Schmitt (2008) suggests, vocabulary learning is a fundamental component of becoming proficient in a new language. However, my experience as an EFL teacher shows that in Turkish contexts, language learners tend to produce what is needed in communication by placing grammaticality in the first place in their minds rather than making use of vocabulary. In addition, the approaches of teachers towards vocabulary instruction seem to differ, which made me curious enough to examine the perspectives and learning experiences of Turkish EFL teachers regarding vocabulary teaching as well as their actual teaching practice as an independent research topic which is rare to find in the area.

Based on my experience and the views mentioned above, this study aims at presenting conspicuous findings of the perspectives of Turkish EFL teachers on vocabulary teaching as well as their prior learning experiences in the Turkish context. Thanks to the related methodology, this study will be focusing on how these perspectives and prior language learning experiences are reflected in the selected participants' actual practice in classroom interactions regarding vocabulary teaching.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary is a significant element in learning a new language since words and their meanings stand as core elements in acquiring a language for a language learner (Alqahtani, 2015). In teaching vocabulary, teachers and their beliefs on what they teach have a crucial role in a classroom as they represent a leading figure. In investigating teachers' beliefs, Phipps and

Borg (2009) found some tensions between the beliefs teachers explicitly express and the real practices of teachers while teaching English language and indicated that what teachers state and actually perform are dependent upon their belief system and various factors affecting them.

As the field is getting more aware of the influence of what EFL teachers know and believe on their instructional choices (Phipps & Borg, 2009), researchers begin to acknowledge vocabulary teaching in a broader mental context than solely defining it as a strategy training in a part of a lesson. As the mental context has gradually been taken into consideration in EFL teaching, looking deeper into the teachers' educational backgrounds has begun to gain importance. According to Phipps and Borg (2009), EFL teachers might powerfully be affected by their own educational experiences as learners. In addition, Nguyen (2017) indicates that teaching is not limited to the pedagogical knowledge of teachers and their skills but it is rather related to their prior experiences and practice in their particular sociocultural contexts.

In this regard, Muhamad and Kiely (2018) shed light on the significance of understanding teachers' perspectives on vocabulary teaching. They indicated that the context of the vocabulary teaching practice of Malaysian EFL teachers stemmed from their own beliefs based on their prior learning experiences which influenced their current teaching. Accordingly, vocabulary teaching was not a special focus in their current teaching practices since they had acquired vocabulary by themselves as learners without any specific guidance. Therefore, they perceived their limited involvement in vocabulary teaching as a guide for their students to develop their vocabulary knowledge by themselves. Similarly, another fruitful study was conducted in Indonesia (Hermagustiana, Hamra, Rahman & Salija, 2017) to explore the ways EFL teachers reflect their backgrounds on their teaching practices regarding vocabulary teaching. They found that the participants' vocabulary learning strategies they had possessed when they were students did not contribute to their teaching strategies in practice. For instance, the participants agreed upon the unlikeable results of the memorization strategy which their teachers constantly had made use of in their learning process. Therefore, they particularly tended to avoid that strategy in their classrooms. In a different context, Chung (2018) investigated English teachers' beliefs on vocabulary development in Hong Kong with the main factors forming their perspectives. Although the participants held strong beliefs about the power of the use of authentic materials, they did not seem to have intention to incorporate those kinds of materials in vocabulary teaching instructions due to different factors such as their time-consuming nature or the students' tendency of losing the materials.

In consideration with the viewpoints of EFL teachers on vocabulary teaching, various researchers (Chung, 2018; Gerami & Noordin, 2013; Hermagustiana et. al, 2017; Mirzaie, Hemmati & Kiasi, 2018; Muhamad & Kiely, 2018) agree upon the importance of teacher perspective in vocabulary teaching. For example, in their study about teacher cognition in EFL vocabulary teaching among Iranian EFL teachers, Gerami and Noordin (2013) pointed out that the participant teachers had a high level of knowledge regarding teaching English and vocabulary teaching whereas their ways of teaching vocabulary were not compatible with what they really believed. That is, the ways the teachers viewed vocabulary stood out as a critical factor in teaching and learning vocabulary. In their study, the participants hold strong beliefs about what vocabulary teaching context must be in the classroom, they seemed to accept that their views got modified due to the fact that they faced with constraints related to the educational system, students' language background, contextual factors or even social norms.

As it has been pointed out until now, the teacher perspective is very influential in the decisions of in-class actions (Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001). The significance of their cognition which was referred by Borg (2003, p. 81) as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching; what teachers know, believe, and think” comes into prominence. In relation to this, as investigating the reflective practice of EFL teachers, Farrell and Lim (2005) found that, the participants had not been consciously aware of beliefs they hold about English grammar teaching and learning until the moment they were directly asked by the interviewer in the study. Thus, the studies related to the teachers' perspectives might highly contribute to the field by investigating what is in teachers' minds and what factors have shaped them concerning vocabulary teaching. On the basis of these points, the present study will look deeply into the teachers' beliefs and aim to be beneficial for providing insights to EFL teachers in terms of their cognition on teaching vocabulary.

In this regard, by exploring English language teachers' viewpoints and classroom teaching regarding vocabulary instruction in Iran, Mirzaie et. al (2018) found that the Iranian EFL teachers hold their own perspectives in terms of vocabulary teaching. As the perspectives derive from the cognition, teacher cognition in language teaching has been investigated under three main themes by Borg (2003, p. 81) as “(1) cognition and prior language learning experience, (2) cognition and teacher education, and (3) cognition and classroom practice”. He suggests that the investigation of the cognition of language teachers is very important by playing worthwhile insights to their mental health. He also points out the fact that there are many other issues that needs to be investigated in the field regarding language teachers' perspectives.

Proceeding from Borg (2003)'s suggestions, in this study, these three themes will be taken as the base for investigating EFL teachers' perspectives and practices considering vocabulary teaching.

It has been pointed out until now that the researchers in the field indicate the influence of teacher perspective and the prior language learning factor in classroom teaching practices. As Borg (2006) suggests, the prior learning experiences of teachers and their professional education maintain exposing influence through their teaching life. It is clear that understanding teachers' perspectives, prior experiences as well as their classroom practices should not be left to chance. Thus, pieced together with the findings and the ideas of various scholars discussed above related to vocabulary teaching and learning, the primary aim of the present study is to explore the perspectives of Turkish EFL Teachers regarding vocabulary teaching as well as the reflections of their prior language learning experiences on their current practices in the classroom context. In order to do so, the study will be following the questions below:

- What are the perspectives of Turkish EFL Teachers on Vocabulary Teaching and Learning?
- What is the role of Turkish EFL Teachers' prior learning experiences in their current vocabulary teaching practices?
 - How was vocabulary teaching handled when they were students?
- What are the perceptions of Turkish EFL Teachers about the vocabulary teaching education of the University program they studied?
- What do Turkish EFL teachers actually do in class regarding their vocabulary teaching?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT

The participants of this study were 3 Turkish EFL teachers who had been teaching English in public high schools for more than 10 years. All participants were female due to the nature of the context in which these three teachers who had been teaching the same levels volunteered to take part in this study. Their ages range from 45 to 50. The names of the participants are confidential in this study. They are mentioned as T1 (Teacher 1), T2 (Teacher 2) and T3 (Teacher 3). T1 was born in Bulgaria, moved to Turkey and started learning English in sixth grade by bringing her knowledge of Russian, French and Bulgarian languages. T2, on

the other hand, started learning English in the second year of high school. Lastly, T3 started learning English in secondary school. Each participant graduated from different state universities in Turkey. In addition, while T1 and T2 graduated from teacher training program, T3 studied English Language and Literature. Although each had previously worked at different schools, they had all taught English at the same high school for the past few years. All of them are currently teaching in 9th and 10th grades as well as in preparatory classes.

The context of this study is a public high school in a city located in the Central Anatolia Region in Turkey. Concerning the EFL teaching contexts in Turkey, vocabulary is one of the most challenging issues in foreign language acquisition. As four skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) as well as grammar takes the attention in the field, little is known about the vocabulary lessons in terms of teachers' approaches and viewpoints as well as their backgrounds. Therefore, the context will serve as a crucial factor in highlighting the place of vocabulary teaching with regards to teacher perspective, learning experience and actual practice.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this study, the qualitative approach was used to address the main research questions. In order to develop an in-depth description and analysis of multiple cases of vocabulary teaching, case study method was used (Cresswell, 2012). Merriam (2009) indicates the importance of the internal validity of qualitative research and points out that this validity is best provided by employing three types of instruments in data collection process. In order to acquire an in-depth analysis, a triangulation of data collection instruments was essential in this study. Thus, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the participant teachers and reflective journals written by the teachers were used to gather rich data.

The data collection procedure began with the classroom observations. The data were distinguished in observing participants' classroom practices by visiting their classrooms for four hours a day for two weeks. The aim was to observe and explore their actual vocabulary teaching environment. During the visits, detailed observation field notes were taken. In order to do so, an observation protocol was used and the protocol included descriptive field notes and reflective field notes taken during each class that was observed.

As the second instrument a semi-structured interview was used to collect data. The interviews contained 12 questions in total and lasted around 12-15 minutes for each teacher. Accordingly, one question was deleted and some were changed. Thanks to the use of the native

language, the participants seemed to be more comfortable and open in talking about the topic with details. The language of the interviews was Turkish, which was the native language of the participants. The applicability of the interview questions had been tested beforehand with an experienced EFL teacher who had been teaching at a different school in Turkey and had had a research background. The recordings were transcribed and translated into English after the interviews. The language mistakes were not corrected. After that, the responses obtained from the interviews of the teachers were analyzed under specific categories. The English version of the interview questions and a sample extract can be found in Appendices (A and C). Lastly, it should be mentioned that the participants had signed an Informed Consent Form given before the data collection procedure.

As one of the aims of this study was to find out what the teachers actually do in classes regarding vocabulary teaching, it was necessary to analyze teachers' reflective practices. Nguyen (2017) claims that these reflections include looking back and reviewing their teaching by identifying distinctive experiences of their own. Therefore, reflective journal was the last part of the triangulation in this research. The reflective journals were given to each participant during the first visit. They were asked to take notes about the vocabulary teaching parts of their lessons. The journals were collected on the last day of the classroom observations. Their notes were analyzed and compared to the findings that were gathered from the other two instruments. The questions of the reflective journal can be found in Appendix B.

As the aim in this study was to understand the meanings of the actions and see how teachers perceive vocabulary teaching and learning and to understand the factors behind their instructional decisions, the results are to be instructive for EFL teachers to see their practices from different perspectives. In this regard, looking into findings and discussions of these procedures is essential.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to reveal the perspectives of Turkish EFL Teachers on vocabulary teaching, the results were analyzed under specific categories which Borg (2003) used for investigating teacher cognition in language teaching. In the first three sections (4.1, 4.2, 4.3), findings of the interviews and observations will be analyzed and discussed. At the end of each one, conclusions will be drawn. Lastly, in 4.4, the reflective journals of the participants will be analyzed and compared together with the results gathered from the interviews and the classroom observations.

4.1. COGNITION AND PRIOR LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The teachers in the present study all agreed that vocabulary is very important in mastering English language. One of the participants referred vocabulary as ‘the keystone’ of the language teaching. Although they were teaching in the same school and had very similar perspectives and actions regarding vocabulary teaching and they had some remarkable prior learning experiences. Therefore, how they met on common ground was very significant to pace towards a conclusion regarding the general context of this study. For example, T1 expressed that the books had been made of straw paper during her schooling years when she had learnt English. T2, on the other hand, stated that the English lessons had been wasted without any actual English teaching. Lastly, T3 indicated that she had been good at English both in secondary and high school but she had realized how much she liked English language in secondary school: “Actually, even in secondary school, my teacher realized my different and creative usage of English...I mean, she told me that I was very talented and then my interest brought me here” (T3).

When the ways they had developed their vocabulary knowledge were asked, T1 indicated that there had been no special techniques related to vocabulary learning when she had been a student. She stated that she had been putting a mark on a word while looking up her dictionary as she had studied unknown words. After searching for the same word over and over again, eventually, she had been getting mad since those words had not stuck in her mind. She ascribed this to the fact that she had not been actually ‘using’ them:

“When I look back, I do not remember any time that I sat and tried to learn words with the purpose of learning independently. However, when my university education started, and as we started reading more advanced books, most of the time I had to do a dictionary study. While doing that I was getting bored most of the time” (T1).

Interestingly, during the classroom observations, T1 seemed to attach importance to the use of dictionaries. It was clear from the observations that she took a lesson from the negative experience by carefully choosing well-designed dictionaries and by teaching her students how to use the dictionaries for unknown words. For example, in the classroom, when an unknown word popped up during a writing task, the teacher asked one student to look up the dictionary and then form a sentence including that word. T2, on the other hand, mentioned that she had done her best to develop her English and word knowledge with the support of her teacher in

high school: “And thank God, my English teacher supported me, then I tried my best to read stories as much as possible” (T2).

Furthermore, T3 tended to emphasize how she had chased motivation while talking about her prior learning despite the language learning environment in which the teacher had not always been present and vocabulary teaching had been drawn to background. She completely believed in motivation and further added:

“I always organized an English vocabulary notebook on my own. I have learned things with my own effort since then. I listed the words in that notebook. Although, now I give English definitions to my students, I wrote the Turkish meanings back then for myself. I noted the words and tried to make sentences with them” (T3).

It can be seen from the extracts and the discussion above that even though there had been constraints in their vocabulary learning in the past, they later focused on trying to find their own way of acquiring vocabulary. This was one of the major things they brought into their classrooms they taught from their past experiences. That is, considering the problems they had had, they did their best to guide their own students in many ways and made them actually use the words in contexts. For example, even if they had tried to learn the words with Turkish meanings in their past, they never encouraged their students to do that in their current teaching practice. They gave importance to interest and motivation one must have to be able to acknowledge the meaning of vocabulary learning. Furthermore, each journey had started with a guidance of an English teacher in their past. How crucial the role of the teacher in learning is also very obvious at this point.

During the interviews, the teachers highlighted some more remarkable points regarding handling new vocabulary. For example, T1 specifically expressed how much she had admired when her teacher had written down and had taught the part of speech the words belong to in addition to explaining the English meanings of the unknown words. Moreover, hearing her teacher constantly talk in English in class had made her more motivated to learn the words. In consideration to the vocabulary environment in class, T2 and T3 expressed that they had liked their English teacher but it had been mostly about memorizing the words without using it in a context. They had known the meaning but not the usage of it: “It is not important to know the exact meaning of a word. Rather, you are the owner of that word when you can actually use that word” (T3).

The vocabulary learning experiences of the teachers clearly display how important the role of using the words is in teaching and learning vocabulary. T2 suggested that the idiom ‘Use it or lose it’ can be very appropriate to use in mentioning this importance. It was obvious in the classroom observations that the participants did not create a situation where the students tried to memorize a new word unlike what had happened in their prior learning. In addition to the general context of the vocabulary learning environment, the participants were asked to share a small anecdote that they remembered to pinpoint some moments in the past that could be affecting them even now:

“There was the word ‘dolphin’ in a paragraph. At that moment, I didn’t know what it meant in English but in Bulgarian, it was ‘dolphin’, too. When I did this transfer and guessed the meaning, the teacher was very surprised. She praised me by mentioning that I knew the meaning without looking up my dictionary. Even though I later explained the situation to my teacher, she held me up as an example a couple of times by synthesizing the whole event by telling the rest of the class how important learning another language was (laughs). **Imagine, you are 14 and your English teacher praises you!**” (T1).

“One of my teachers was using mimes and gestures a lot. For instance, once there was a paragraph which explained that if you comb your hair, the comb generates electricity. I never forget this. **The teacher demonstrated everything in practice**” (T2).

The specific anecdotes of the two participants together with their cognition related to prior learning experiences shows the importance of the teacher and usage of the new words in vocabulary teaching. The ways in which their teachers approached towards vocabulary teaching clearly left a permanent impact on the participants of this study in compliance with what Borg (2006) suggests. In a similar manner with what Hermagustiana et al. (2017) found in their study with Indonesian EFL teachers, the teachers in this study could not benefit from any kind of vocabulary teaching approach that had been taught by their teachers during their schooling years. However, one salient finding that differs from Hermagustiana et al. (2017)’s findings was that the teachers in this study turned their negative vocabulary learning experiences into an advantage in their practices. For example, T1 preferred making use of dictionaries which are seen to have high-quality in the market and among scholars to teach new words rather than completely ignoring the dictionary use because of her prior learning experiences regarding the memorization of the words from dictionaries. Lastly, a remarkable finding in this study was

very similar to Muhamad and Kiely (2018)'s in that, just like Malaysian EFL teachers, the Turkish EFL teachers in this study also guide their students without giving a special focus on only one approach while teaching new vocabulary. They rather showed the ways of acquiring words as they had done the same in their prior learning experiences.

4.2. COGNITION AND TEACHER EDUCATION

In consideration of the role of vocabulary learning background on teaching practices, the teachers were asked to reflect on the University program they had studied. As it can be seen from the following sentences, they had different interpretations: “Frankly speaking, I think I don't use each strategy I have learned there in relation to vocabulary teaching” (T1); “So, now I don't want to be unfair to my teachers, but I started teaching English properly in 1993 by attending a training course” (T2); “I'm a graduate of literature at the university. We didn't see much about teaching English. This is what I've done in my class for years, and I'm a little instinctive” (T3).

One thing they agreed on was that although they had had a good education at the university, the things they had learnt were not all applicable in all levels. Therefore, the teachers needed to find their way by developing themselves and by experiencing the real classroom environment. As she was teaching high school students, T1 pointed out that her main aim was to have them get accustomed to learning independently. She thought that in order to increase their English levels for their future, the students needed to choose from the ways the teacher shows and acquire vocabulary on their own. T2 on the other hand believed that she had improved her vocabulary training skills by attending teacher training seminars. According to her, that was mainly because the universities back then had not been sufficient enough to prepare the teachers for the real classroom teaching. She indicated that in one of the seminars she had taken, there had been a teacher from British Council who had effectively used mimes and gestures and therefore set a great example for T2 in her upcoming teaching life.

Lastly, T3 stated that she did not know very much about the techniques related to vocabulary teaching since she had had only a few pedagogical courses as she had studied in the literature program at the University. However, she turned this into an advantage by storifying the words she wanted to teach with her pedagogical background. She also used stories from mythology and provided words by asking students to write a story: “My opinion is that teaching is a bit instinctual and it depends on your personality traits, and if your personality is appropriate, you can teach. I found my own way” (T3).

It is apparent that although they had different pedagogical backgrounds, the participants all agreed that vocabulary teaching depends on the environment that the teachers are in where the teachers make use of their prior learning experiences and continuously develop themselves. It was obvious from the classroom observations that none of the teachers stopped developing after University. For example, in congruence with her expressions, T2 used stories a lot while teaching words. This was very much in conformity with what Nguyen (2017) pointed out in that the teachers in this study did not regard vocabulary teaching as something limited with their pedagogical knowledge. On the contrary, they thought of it as an ongoing process.

4.3. COGNITION AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE

In addition to the importance of vocabulary teaching and prior learning experiences in general, the participants also expressed their viewpoints about the important factors in developing English vocabulary knowledge of their students in the classroom. Accordingly, T1 thought that the students first needed to know how to develop their vocabulary knowledge. Also, she pointed out that she always told her students not to depend on her all the time. Although her students were asked to search the words in a dictionary or sometimes work in pairs to discuss the words, the important thing was its use. In order to make them actually use the words, T1 first tried to make them find out the ways they acquired and used the words best. For example, she mentioned that word games, social media or just writing could be interesting for them. Whatever it was, she directed the students to find their own interests: “I first talk to them and ask them what they like doing. One says he likes watching movies. I say okay then, watch movies because the words that are acquired from there can be more permanent” (T1).

T1 also emphasized the orientation of the dictionary use during the first weeks of each academic year. Accordingly, she showed how to use it and the students did a comprehensive dictionary practice. T2 and T3 added more on crucial factors in vocabulary learning. For example, T2 claimed that the students first needed to know what *learning vocabulary* meant. That is, they needed to realize it did not just mean knowing the Turkish meanings of the words, but learning a word also included more such as learning its part of speech: “English explanation, function in a sentence, the pronunciation, and then checking on whether they can actually use the words are definitely essential” (T2).

Similarly, T3 was very much against memorization in learning vocabulary. She thought that the students needed to see the words in context and they needed to relate them to the real world. When they memorized the words, she said “the words seem like the clouds flying above

unattended". All in all, the participants thought that showing the ways of learning vocabulary to the students was necessary which necessarily included showing the methods, working on English definitions, pronunciation and the real use of the words. One difference among the points of view was the use of the dictionary which only T1 gave importance.

One of the most recurrent expressions among the participants regarding the integration of vocabulary in the lessons was about explaining the unknown words in English. They all believed that it was a must in the classes. Indeed, this was completely in congruence with what they were doing during the lessons. During the classroom observations, all the teachers meticulously explained the meanings of the words and did not tolerate any Turkish speaking. This was boosting the motivation of students because everyone was talking in English with the teachers even during the breaks. All the teachers regarded the Turkish meaning as the last-ditch when there were some abstract words that could not be explained easily in English.

The teachers believed that there was no need in saving a part of the lesson for teaching vocabulary. This was because there was no limit in acquiring new words and they could come out one after another. According to them, it could happen at any phase during the lesson and the idea of handling vocabulary only in specific lessons or parts of the lessons did not make any sense. In regard to this, T2 expressed some crucial thoughts:

“For instance, if I give a speech regarding an important day in a class, an unknown word during that speech...uh...if you are a careful teacher, you understand what they do not know when you look at their faces. Then, I believe that specific words must be immediately taught right then” (T2).

All in all, the participants agreed on the idea that there was no specific time for vocabulary teaching. The teacher must be careful and detect the words and teach them without making the students memorize the words. All the teachers were against the memorization of the words or a strict word teaching in a definite part of a lesson and they had their own ways to teach and guide the students to actually use the words. In contrast to what Chung (2018) found in another context in which the teacher did not use authentic materials by putting forward to students' unwillingness in English lessons as a reason, the participants in this study did not get demotivated and changed their ways of teaching vocabulary because of those kinds of factors. For instance, T3 was trying her best to integrate each and every one of students in the class. In contradiction to what Gerami and Noordin (2013) found in their study with Iranian EFL

teachers, Turkish EFL teachers' ways of teaching vocabulary in this study were compatible with what they really believed.

4.4. REFLECTIONS ON VOCABULARY TEACHING

The classroom visits and the interviews certainly provided a detailed picture of the teachers' reflections regarding their vocabulary teaching classroom practices. In addition, their reflective journals contributed to the essence of this process. As the teachers wrote down notes in a reflective journal each day, it turned out that what they had written was the complement of their perceptions and practices related to vocabulary teaching. For example, they all had previously indicated that there was no definite time to teach vocabulary since the words were context-dependent and may pop out at any time. This was compatible with what they wrote in journals regarding the question about the specific parts they had handled the unknown vocabulary during the lessons. Particularly, a noticeable reflection of T1 was related to her intention of the dictionary use as she wrote "Before the reading, the students searched for the meaning of the words that they did not know by doing a dictionary study. Then, we used the smartboard for more definitions and examples". Her belief in the power of the effective use of the well-designed dictionaries was again obvious from most of the parts in her journal.

Similarly, T2 seemed to apply what she had believed about how the students must be exposed to English as much as possible and see the function and use of the unknown words by writing "As I always do, I wrote down the target word on the board with a colored pen. Then, by making up contexts I taught the meaning, part of speech, synonyms, antonyms and I wrote example sentences." Finally, T3 frequently pointed to the necessity of the 'contexts' which conformed to what she had believed about the power of the stories. One example from her journal was as follows: "I asked them to guess the meanings of the unknown words from the text we were reading, then I tried to explain the meanings."

Their continuous focus on speaking in English, giving English definitions, teaching pronunciation and part of speech while teaching an unknown word, making the students guess from the context, giving opportunity to use the new words were the most common notable features of the practices in English classes which were in compliance with the interview responses and the notes in the journals for all the participants.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The triangulation of the data collection instruments in this study has solidified the importance of teacher perspective in teaching vocabulary thanks to the detailed analysis of the responses of the participants to the interview questions, their classroom practices, and the notes they had taken on the reflective journals at the end. It was found that their actions were very much in congruence with their beliefs regarding vocabulary teaching.

This study highlights important issues regarding vocabulary teaching in EFL classrooms. In congruence with what Schmitt (2008) and Alqahtani (2015) claimed, the participants believed in the importance of teaching vocabulary in EFL classrooms and regarded vocabulary as a core in mastering the language. One of the most remarkable point was that although the EFL teachers in this study who taught in the same high school in Turkey had very different educational backgrounds, they met in common grounds regarding the aim of teaching unknown words to their students. In consequence of the semi-structured interviews with the three participants, it was found that they all perceived the teacher's role as a guide in showing the ways and letting students find their own ways while learning words independently. They also strictly believed in the necessity of talking in English and giving English definitions of the unknown words to be able to make sure that the students could actually 'use' those words. Thanks to the triangulation of the data instruments, these statements were supported by the further classroom observations and the reflective journals of the participants. They put a lot of emphasis on giving the English definitions of the unknown words, giving familiar contexts for each word, making students guess from the context, and using mimes and gestures.

During the conversations, some factors affected the teachers in shaping their perspectives were highlighted. In compliance with what Nguyen (2017) pointed out, one of the salient factors was their own teachers in their prior learning experiences. It was found that their teachers still seemed to be standing as leading figures in their minds. In addition to this, the things the teachers did for their self-development regarding vocabulary teaching was another crucial factor found in shaping the perspectives. That is, the teachers were found to believe in a non-stop learning process which they still applied themselves and suggested their students to find their own ways of acquiring vocabulary. In compliance with what Muhamad and Kiely (2018) found regarding Malaysian EFL teachers' beliefs and current practices, Turkish EFL teacher's past experiences had a great impact on their current teaching. Besides, in contradiction with what Gerami and Noordin (2013) found regarding Iranian EFL teachers' classroom

practices, the teachers' perspectives in this study conformed to what they did in the actual classroom environment.

In addition to the conclusions drawn above, it should be mentioned that since the limited time might have constrained to bring out more details in the study, a similar one conducted in a longer period may be essential.

Lastly, this study enables both researchers and EFL teachers to acknowledge and understand the importance of teacher perspectives, prior learning experiences and the actual classroom teaching regarding vocabulary teaching and make sense of the ways the teachers handle the unknown words in classroom context better. The teachers in this study definitely set an example for future EFL teachers both in the Turkish context and all around the world.

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APPENDICES

A – Interview Questions (English Version)

1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. What classes/grades do you teach in your school?
3. What is the role of vocabulary in language learning in your opinion? Please give details.
4. What do you consider most important in developing the English vocabulary knowledge of your learners?
5. In which part of your lesson do you teach vocabulary? Please explain.
6. How do you handle unknown words during your lessons? Please give examples.
7. How should vocabulary be integrated in a lesson do you think?
8. Now, considering your own learning experiences, when did you start learning English?
9. How did you develop your vocabulary knowledge as a student?
10. Was there any specific focus on vocabulary acquisition in English lessons?
11. Could you share one of your anecdotes that you remember regarding that time?
12. What do you think about the reflections of what you have learnt in the program at the University on your vocabulary teaching practices in your classes?

B – Teacher Reflective Journal Questions

1. Bugünkü derslerimde kelime öğretimine ne kadar zaman ayırdım?
2. Bugünkü derslerimde kelime öğretimi adına neler yaptım?
3. Kelimeleri niçin özellikle bu şekilde ele aldım?
4. Kelimeler genellikle derslerin hangi kısımlarında öğretildi?

C – A Sample Extract from the Interviews

Röportajcı: *Şimdi, kendi öğrenciliğinizi düşünürseniz İngilizce öğrenmeye ne zaman başladınız?*

T2: *Lise 2'de. Çünkü o zamana kadar derslerimiz hep boş geçiyordu. Lise 1'deki öğretmenimizde çok o kadar bizim İngilizce öğrenmemiz gerektiğine inanmıyordu. Çünkü ben sağlık koleji mezunuydum yani lise 2'de başladım İngilizce öğrenmeye.*

Röportajcı: *Bir öğrenci olarak kelime bilginizi nasıl geliştirdiniz?*

T2: *Hikâye kitabı okumaya çalıştım. Bu konuda sağ olsun öğretmenim destekledi. Normalde benim hemşire olmam bekleniyordu ama ben olmak istemedim. Sonra üniversite sınavına*

girdim. Zaten 7 tercih yapmıştım, 5'i İngilizce öğretmenliğiydi. Ve de sağ olsun öğretmenimin desteği çok oldu, çok hikâye kitabı okumaya çalıştım.

Röportajcı: *İngilizce derslerinde özellikle kelime edinimine odaklanma söz konusu muydu?*

T2: *Yani tabii derste kelimeleri de öğretiyordu öğretmenlerimiz. Son üç senede iki öğretmen değiştirmiştik, ikisi de iyiydi. Çoğunu çok hatırlayamıyorum, anlamlarını İngilizce mi veriyorlardı Türkçe mi ama herhalde Türkçedir diye düşünüyorum.*

Röportajcı: *Öğrencilik zamanlarınızda kelime öğretimine nasıl yer verilirdi?*

T2: *İkinci öğretmenim mimik, jest kullanıyordu. Mesela bir parça vardı tarağı saçına sürersen elektrik üretir gibi bir konulu parçaydı, onu bak hiç unutmuyorum, hani böyle uygulamalı göstermişti. Okuma parçasında geçen kelimelerdi işte. Fears, dance gibi kelimeler falan.*

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is an important component of language learning as it is necessary for learners to acquire sufficient amount of vocabulary in order to master the target language. In Turkish contexts in which English is being taught as a foreign language, the importance of acquiring vocabulary clearly stands out because most of the time other components of English language such as grammar comes into prominence in learners' minds. In vocabulary learning process, the teacher becomes an important figure and thus, their perspectives towards vocabulary teaching and their prior learning experiences highly affect their vocabulary teaching practices in the classrooms. In this study, the views and experiences of Turkish EFL teachers about vocabulary teaching were investigated in detail as the shape of an EFL vocabulary lesson is based on the teachers' viewpoints and understandings of teaching and learning in the milieu of classrooms. In order to do so, a triangulation of instruments was used. Salient categories in the obtained data appeared from the conversations from the interviews, field notes from the classroom observations and the notes that the teachers had taken on their reflective journals. It is clear that the analysis of teachers' perspectives on vocabulary teaching works on exploring what is hidden in their minds. The findings show that the teachers regarded vocabulary as a keystone in learning English and all strictly rejected the idea of using the native language while teaching, especially while explaining the word meanings. They also agreed on the idea that there is no specific time to teach vocabulary. The unknown words may pop up from anywhere and at any time during a lesson. Moreover, rather than giving word lists and making students memorize, the teachers created a meaningful context for the words to make them use the new vocabulary. Lastly, a very salient finding was that the participants found teacher guidance very important in teaching vocabulary. That is, according to them, the teacher needs to be the role model in showing the ways of acquiring vocabulary and leads students to find their own learning ways. The findings also reveal that the prior learning experiences affect the teachers' ways of teaching vocabulary by either standing as an example or leading the teachers to take example from negative experiences. All in all, their vocabulary teaching practice reflected their own beliefs concerning their learning experiences. They did not completely seem to operate within the spectrum of their pedagogical knowledge only. In conclusion, this study brings light into the importance of language teachers' perspectives and prior learning experiences which highly affect their classroom practices regarding vocabulary teaching.