Strategies for Teaching and Learning of the Vocabulary English Language in Romanian Schools

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Abstract – The Romanian curricula pay great attention to the ways of affirming the value of the Anglo-Saxon culture by creating values and positive attitudes in students. I am going to look at the problems that my intermediate students might have with vocabulary, identifying the problems and suggesting ways of overcoming them.

The population of this study comprised 96 students studying at "Miron Costin", Secondary School from Letea, Bacău, 7th grade, intermediate level.

The effects of teaching vocabulary using traditional versus modern strategies to twenty low performing 7th grade students were investigated during the 1st semester of the school year 2014-2015.

The purpose of my research is to establish in what way and above all, in what measure, modern strategies prove to be more appropriate and interesting in teaching vocabulary than the traditional ones and how my students will cope with them.

From my point of view, the central idea of this study is that no matter how attractive, interesting and funny modern strategies are, we cannot totally forget about the traditional ones.

Keywords – Experimental Research, Modern Strategies, Teaching and Learning, Vocabulary English Language.

I. INTRODUCTION

Its precise purpose is to establish methods of teaching, learning and assessing, applying to all languages in Europe. According to CEFR [1], there are six reference levels widely accepted as the European standard for grading an individual's language proficiency. The theoretical grounds which stay at the basis of the six reference levels regard language users as social agents who develop general and particular communicative competence, while trying to achieve their everyday goals.

Language is central in preserving linguistic and cultural identity, improving mutual understanding and communication, this is why in pursuing these goals, the CEFR's [3], task was to provide a coherent, transparent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines.

Language stays at the foundation of human behaviour and we use it to perform communicative acts, which may be external, social, internal and private. Communicative acts comprise language activity, which is divided into: - reception: understanding language produced in speech or in writing; - production: producing speech or writing; - interaction: spoken or written exchanges; - mediation: involves translation or interpretation, making communication possible when it is not possible to communicate directly.

We live in a continuously changing world where we are born, we grow physically and intellectually, and at the same time, we try to keep up with all the inevitable developments of our society. But we could not do all these things without having the *engine*: the language. We use language to learn, to communicate, to express our thoughts and feelings, to argue etc. As we all learn in school, language consists of two major parts: vocabulary and grammar. It is not the purpose of this research to establish which one has a greater importance than the other but as Wilkins says: *Without grammar very little can be conveyed... but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed* [8]. My intention in writing this paper was to search the most appropriate strategies which help me enrich the vocabulary of my students at the intermediate level. I am going to look at the problems that my intermediate students might have with vocabulary, identifying the problems and suggesting ways of overcoming them.

Vocabulary acquisition is considered by many to be the most important aspect of foreign language teaching and learning. In the early years of research on teaching English as second language, the pedagogical assumptions regarding teaching-learning relation based mainly on what we call nowadays "traditional strategies" where the teacher was at the center of the class, he/she and dictionaries being the only sources of vocabulary information. During English classes teacher used to address stereotype sentences such as: "Look the words up in the dictionary!", "Use the words in sentences!", "Use context to discover the meaning" or "Memorize the definition of the word!" or providing him/herself the meaning of unknown words.

These commands, grouped under the name "traditional", add to the so-called incidental acquisition of vocabulary by students while reading, and are also related to the use of dictionaries independently. Although students express confidence when using dictionaries, nowadays teachers and researchers disapprove the practice advising students to guess the meaning from the context, a fact which turns us back to the traditional method of acquiring new vocabulary.

II. FROM BEGINNER TO ADVANCED: STEPS IN ACQUIRING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Yet, there is no single method used to describe the learner level of an English speaker. No single system is definitive and there are overlaps and variations with all the systems used. Informally you'll often hear students of English being referred to as: beginner, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced.

Beginners refer to those students who recently started learning the language. They can: - understand and use familiar everyday expressions; - can introduce him/herself and others; - can talk about the present; - can carry out

simple conversations as long as the other person talks slowly and clearly.

A special category of students are *false beginners*[2], those students who have had perhaps some exposure to English and have a very limited grasp of the basics. They have either learned English many years before (perhaps at school) and are coming back to the classroom later in life, or perhaps they have had some contact with English speakers but not formal training. False beginners often learn faster than *total beginners* who may well know nothing at all of English. On the other hand, false beginners may well have imperfect English embedded in their minds and this can take some work to correct.

Intermediate students: - can talk and read about a wide number of subjects using appropriate vocabulary and fairly correct, if basic, grammar; - language knowledge is sufficient, operational, to use in the professional world; - can confidently use all the main tenses, and are beginning to use phrasal verbs, modal verbs and suchlike; - do not have a refined tone and style but there is an awareness of pronunciation and what it entails; - have good general understanding; - will make mistakes and sometimes the verb tenses and forms get a bit confused, but generally you can have an extended conversation with them; - often restart sentences in order to be understood and does not yet master special turns of phrase.

Advanced students master the structure of the foreign language, both oral and written. They can: - express him/herself confidently in various situations; - understand the language spoken by natives; - distinguish the differences between formal and informal English; - communicate on everyday topics as well as specialized topics.

III. THE CURRICULUM FOR INTERMEDIATE LEVEL: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Language activity engagement involves acquiring communicative language competence, which includes knowledge of sounds, words, syntactic rules and the ability to use it in order to understand and produce language.

A parallel between the European key competences and the general competences reflected in the Romanian Curricula [5] points out the fact that the first ones comprise:
1) the ability of understanding, expressing and interpreting thoughts, feelings and facts in written or orally, according to the subject's needs or desires and
2) the ability of intercultural understanding, cultural expression and mediation; the second ones highlight: a) the reception and the production of oral and written messages and, b) values and attitudes.

The curricula for grades V-VIII take into consideration the following premises: - the accent is on competences and on developing strategies which help at acquiring them; - the projection of a set of general and specific competences for all foreign languages studied in the Romanian educational system from the perspective of communicative approach; - the correlation of specific competences with

ways of presenting the content; - the projection of what is being taught according to the needs of students; - to ensure continuity from one grade to the next one, taking into consideration the competences drawn on students; - the communication needs of students in the context of their immediate reality: using a cell phone, filling in a CV, writing an e-mail etc; - the use for study of authentic texts which reflect the representative situations of contemporary reality.

The Romanian curricula pay great attention to the ways of affirming the value of the Anglo-Saxon culture by creating values and positive attitudes in students, as it follows: - showing flexibility in exchanging ideas and working in teams; - realizing the importance of English in accessing a job and the place it has in the universal culture; - improving communication and mutual understanding, and combating intolerance and cultural stereotypes; - developing the interest for discovering some social, cultural, and specific professional aspects; - displaying curiosity for discovering aspects related to children's life in the Anglo-Saxon space; - showing awareness in realizing the importance of knowing geographic aspects of the Anglo-Saxon space; - displaying curiosity and interest towards traditions, customs and other important aspects of the Anglo-Saxon culture and civilization; - developing attitudes and conceptions which help develop self- respect and respect for the others; - developing civic and social responsibility by promoting common sense, helping the others, involving in social justice, and cultural diversity; - getting responsible for keeping safe the cultural and natural environment.

In the Curriculum for 7th grade-intermediate level, the specific competences represent a necessary step towards a new level of teaching and learning English:

• *competences for reception of oral messages:*
understanding instructions; **-** understanding the global meaning of a message delivered at a normal speed; **-** identifying and understanding specific information from a message on topics that are familiar or of personal interest; **-** competences for production of oral messages: - expressing feelings; - giving information about him/herself, about activities and events; - expressing opinions/points of view on a familiar topic;

• *competences for reception of written messages:*
identifying the logical components of a text; - inferring the meaning of unknown words/expressions from the context; - finding detailed information in a text in order to complete a task; - understanding the information written in charts, diagrams etc.

• *competences for production of written messages:*
writing about past events according to a given plan; - describing persons, feelings, reactions; - writing functional texts: letters, advertisements, short instructions, messages; - asking for and giving information in writing about activities, persons, experiences, events.

The learning contents for the 7th grade students are grouped into six major themes, each comprising subthemes: - The personal universe: friendship, preferences, healthy life, characters from books and movies; - Environment: actions for protecting it; - People

and places: traditional food and holidays; - Means of communication and information in modern society: radio, TV and Internet; - The universe of art: favorite characters from books and movies.

The communicative language functions focus on; - describing an object, a person, a character; - asking for, giving, confirming information; - asking for and giving an advice; - expressing approval and disapproval; - describing holidays and traditions; - confirming a real condition; - talking about the present result of a past action.

Proficiency in a foreign or second language is a complex phenomenon. Getting to advanced levels is a matter of attending language classes, where teachers choose the suitable strategies in order to achieve the competences mentioned in the curricula, but it is also necessary for the student to engage independently in real-life communication in the target language, thus having the chance to practice what he/she was taught during classes.

IV. THE EXPERIMENT

1. Research assumptions and objectives

The skill of using words in different contexts plays an important role in the comprehension of new concepts and ideas and it is what makes the essence of a language but often students encounter difficulties in understanding, recalling at will, pronouncing correctly and, the most important, using it constructively in speaking and writing. Therefore, the linguists show great interest for vocabulary learning as a component of every language and methodologists and program planners are working to find out the most effective ways to promote understanding of vocabulary. The teachers teaching second language use a variety of techniques and methods for teaching vocabulary. Different strategies are effective in different contexts and situations. For this purpose I decided to conduct a study to find out the comparative effectiveness of traditional and modern strategies of teaching vocabulary.

Vocabulary development is very important in making the transition from beginners to low-intermediate and intermediate level of language proficiency, but from my experience I have found out that my learners seem to have reached to a certain linguistic barrier which limits their access to a further acquisition in terms of new structures and vocabulary, as well as limited awareness of collocation usage. Things get complicated when students move from beginners to intermediate, as with young learners teachers can use more attractive and funnier strategies than the ones used with older students. After all, it is funny indeed to teach the word "*dog*" and start barking like one, compared to teaching the word "*richness*" and give students a dictionary definition.

As teachers, I think we often find it difficult to be in perfect harmony with the demands for vocabulary from our students according to their needs, level or learning style. The past ten years, teaching in rural schools, I have discovered that my students divide into two main categories: the unmotivated ones, lacking any desire and interest to learn a foreign language, and the curious and keen on learning students but unaware of how to learn a language different from the native one. So, it was my task to make both categories of students become attracted and willing to bring their personal contribution to their development.

The answer to the first question was easy to be found, as Harmer clearly states: "if language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and flesh".

The real dilemma was to give the answers to the other two questions. When you think of vocabulary, there is a good chance that you think of long lists of words, spelling word lists or the command: go look up the words in a dictionary, write the definition and then write a sentence using the term!. Often teachers require their students to memorize long lists of vocabulary terms. Adding these lists to those from various subject areas, some students may be confronted with up to 100 words per week they are expected to learn. Generally, students seem to learn these words as they give the false impression to teachers that they perform well on weekly questionnaires or tests, but the real test of learning is that of time meaning what students remember a few weeks or months later. How well do they retain this knowledge? If it isn't remembered, it turns out that the triad teaching/ learning/ testing exercise was just a waste of time.

In terms of "How much vocabulary should be taught?", vocabulary enrichment can be thought of as the acquisition of a basic vocabulary that is common to different domains, text types or genres. Once doing that, learners can build up a more specialized vocabulary related to their own needs and interests. From the above question derives another one which seldom gives teachers directions in what strategies to choose when teaching vocabulary: What does "knowing" a word mean? Here is a short list of the characteristics of what word acquisition should be: - the meanings of the word: teachers should provide various contexts/ examples to illustrate the polysemy of the word; - its spoken and written forms: teacher should give students many opportunities to use the new word when reading, speaking and writing; - the "word parts" it may have (e.g. suffixes, prefixes); - grammatical features; - its connotations and denotation: students should generate metaphors using the new word; - its collocations; - antonyms and synonyms; - its frequency; - pronunciation: the ability to recognize and reproduce the word in speech;

Of course, it is the teacher who decides how many of the features of a word he/she should teach to students and that should be done in relation with the level of his/her students. Also related to the characteristics listed above, there are some other exercises that teacher should do in order to have an effective vocabulary instruction: - focus on students building relational understandings; - allow students to make connections to personal background knowledge and experience; - challenge students by giving familiar examples and language; - help students to understand the new word/idea in the context of understanding or solving actual social problems of our world.

2. The hypotheses

The main concern with incidental learning and the overuse of dictionary is that looking up words frequently does not help too much the comprehension process.

So, do students really acquire an important amount of vocabulary while reading? Do they learn more words by guessing from context or by looking them up in a dictionary? Does dictionary use interfere in reading comprehension? Does dictionary use help all the students in the same way?

The past twenty years, studies have brought into discussion the fact that in order to facilitate adequate vocabulary learning, four vocabulary learning partners (teachers, students, material providers and researchers) need to work together to contribute to the learning process. Teachers stop being at the centres of the class and the only source of input. Vocabulary learning activities must contain both an explicit, intentional learning component and an incidental one.

The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recognized by theorists in the field, so research carried out in recent years indicate the importance of intentional learning component by means of innovative techniques of teaching vocabulary. Nevertheless the desire of being in "tendencies" makes teachers to replace more and more often the "old" with the "new" instead of creating a symbiosis between the two types of strategies.

The basic question is: do my students learn better using traditional, modern or both types of strategies? In order to find out the answer to this question I started my experiment leaving from three hypotheses: - students will respond better to traditional methods; - students will respond better to modern strategies and will demonstrate interest and full commitment during activities when using modern strategies; - vocabulary gains will both be quantitative, reflected in the number of words known, and qualitative, reflected in the features/ characteristics known about a word, as well as in the permanent/ long term retention of words.

V. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

1. Population and material under study

The population of this study comprised 96 students studying at "Miron Costin", Secondary School from Letea, Bacău, 7th grade, intermediate level. Being a rural school, I confronted myself with a major problem: most of my students came from very poor families, showing little interest for studying, and lack of motivation. Their poor material conditions also reflected in some way in their possibilities of collaboration in school activities which implied Internet research for information when it was the case, bringing newspapers articles, magazines or even colored pencils when needed.

As I have mentioned before, the studies in the field of vocabulary teaching brought into discussion the four learning partners, among which material providers were mentioned. Students' Book is an important material tool when it comes to teaching and teachers should take into consideration the activities and exercises which serve this purpose, the way grammar and vocabulary notions are related from one level of study to the next one. During the 6th grade my students studied on "World Class" - Longman, by Michael Harris and David Mower, the course content being organized in 6 modules as it follows: Animals, Homes, Stories, Food and Robots.

During the 7th grade I worked with my students on "High Flyer-Intermediate"- Longman, by Ana Acevedo and Marisol Gower, the content being organized in 24 units, some of the vocabulary notions from Students' Book having connections with the ones studied during the 6th grade. Each unit contains specific activities meant to develop the 4 skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading, notions belonging to grammar and vocabulary fields and exercises also having the purpose to improve students' pronunciation. The listening and speaking exercises give students the opportunity to develop listening. Each unit teaches students how to write through a guided-process approach. This way, students learn how to write instructions, to make notes for a composition and the parts of it, fill in a form, how to write a survey report or short informal letters etc. There is a great importance given to reading activities, each unit has a reading strategy or skill related to the text under study. Grammar is clearly presented in each unit, with examples chosen from the text of the unit and it supports the needs of the unit language.

Students' Book is based on high-interest topics that reinforce the vocabulary and language that students need in their daily lives. The Students' Book contains real-life unit themes related to: personal information, at school, friends and family relationships, health, history and culture, leisure and daily living. The opening pictures at the opening of every unit presenting real life scenes activate prior knowledge and give students the opportunity of making guesses about the content of the unit. There is special attention given to vocabulary in a section called "Word Watch" where specific features of words are expanded: nouns formed by adding prefixes and suffixes, compound adjectives, words functioning as more than one part of speech, different meanings for the same part of speech, old words with new meanings, word families, compound nouns etc.

Students' Book also includes four units of revision, one for five units of teaching. Students have the opportunity to check the acquired knowledge and to have a further practice of what they have studied in the previous units.
In order to give students as many chances as possible to develop reading, listening and speaking, each unit ends with an episode of a story called "The Flood", where they can read, listen the story on the tape and answer the questions which follow each episode.

My opinion as a teacher regarding "High Flyer-Intermediate" Student's Book is that it has a well structured content which points to important aspects of grammar and vocabulary but the most important thing is that the activities are structured to ensure an equal development of each one of the four skills. The only thing to object is that sometimes the grammar notions are too many but here interferes the teacher who has the ability to

choose and present them in an appropriate manner for students to understand.

2. Period of research, research instruments and variables

The effects of teaching vocabulary using traditional versus modern strategies to twenty low performing 7th grade students were investigated during the 1st semester of the school year 2014-2015. The experiment was conducted for a period of two months: during the 1st month students received vocabulary instruction based on traditional teaching strategies, while the second month of the experiment based on vocabulary instruction using modern strategies.

The experiment was structured on three phases: the pre-test/pre-experimental phase, the experimental phase and the posttest/post-experimental phase, in each of it different types of tests and questionnaires were used by the researcher at different times according to the objectives of the study. The pre-experimental phase included, among the vocabulary pretest, questionnaires which meant to create a general picture of students' preferences on learning styles, favorite teaching exercises and activities etc.

The questionnaires on learning styles revealed the fact that approximately half of the subjects of this study are visual learners, saying that they learn better from visual inputs such as: pictures, posters, flashcards, Power Point Presentations or graphic organizers. 30% of the students expressed their preference for auditory cues: audio tapes, dialogues and discussions, songs and drills. The rest of 20% of students mentioned that for them, dynamic activities, role plays, board games, or experimenting themselves are techniques which help them memorize better and faster.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH

1. Pre-test/pre-experimental phase: analysis and interpretation of the initial evaluation

In order to have a correct evaluation of the students' potentials that would help me to elaborate an efficient teaching strategy that suits their linguistic level I gave my students two types of tests in the pre-experimental phase. I started from the very beginning of school year when the compulsory initial test was given to students. As I expected, the three-months summer holiday reflected in the results of the test. 50% of the students classify at low language level, 45% at middle level and only 5% of them classified at the top of hierarchy (Figure 1). Though the initial test focused mainly on grammar problems studied in the 6th grade, the vocabulary knowledge was tested by asking students to write a composition about their favorite animal/pet.

Unfortunately, many of them were not able to complete the task because they could not remember the vocabulary related to the description of an animal (special parts of the body, habitat etc) learnt during the previous year of study, fact which demonstrates the idea that though students perform relatively well on weekly/monthly questionnaires

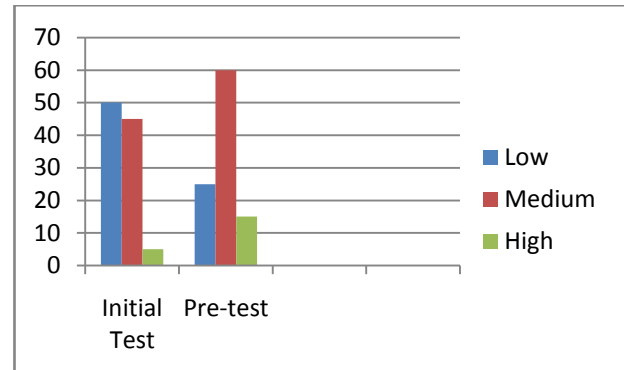/tests, they could not repeat the good results a few months later.

Fig.1. Significance of difference between the scores of Initial Test and Pre-test

The students were given a second test exclusively on vocabulary problems meant to assess the overall language proficiency of the class and the students' relative language level. The results of the second pre-test classified 25% of the students at a low level, 60% at middle level and 15% at a high level (Figure 1). Low level students could not remember basic vocabulary (studied in the 6th grade) related to animals, having difficulties in solving the exercises based on matching or grouping the words. They also had serious difficulties in completing the sentences with suitable verbs. Middle level students proved that they have knowledge about the vocabulary tested, 65-70% of them also succeeded to match correctly the adjectives, the words with their definitions, and the compound words. These students had some difficulties in completing the sentences with suitable verbs. The analysis of high level students' tests proved that these students did not encounter major problems in solving the exercises, their mistakes being caused by insufficient attention in solving the tasks. Knowledge of the students' relative level is also important in implementing an efficient class organization because teacher can arrange them into groups for group work in two cases: students belonging to a group can receive tasks according to their language or a student who needs help can be placed beside one who can assist him.

2. The experimental phase-implementation and monitoring of the experimental program

As it was mentioned before, the experimental phase comprises 2 stages: during the first stage, the teacher used traditional strategies of teaching vocabulary for one month, while the second month of the experiment the teacher used modern strategies.

The first stage of the experiment started on 20th October 2014 and lasted until the 22nd November. During this stage, Unit 1: "Show business", Unit 2: "Bumps, thumps and flashes", Unit 3: "Comics" and Unit 4: "Thrillers" were taught using traditional strategies based on use of: - dictionaries; - guessing meaning from the context; - teacher as the main source of input; - translation; - explaining the meaning in the target language.

All four lessons follow the typical lesson pattern where students listen while the teacher explains a new structure/word to them, students read a text and then

answer comprehension questions, students do an exercise from the students' book or given by the teacher. We cannot say that there is something intrinsically wrong with these types of lessons but it is obvious that it is the teacher who gives all the information in presenting a new item, without involving the students too much in the process.

In teaching Unit 1, "*Show business*", the teacher based on the students' ability of guessing the meaning from the context or using their previous knowledge related to the topic under discussion. In this case, it is essential that students pay great attention to the text and context in order to discover the meaning of new words or to make associations with their personal experience. Within the text, the unknown word is accompanied by well-known ones, which define its meaning and make it easier to infer.

Unit 2, *Bumps, thumps and flashes*, gave the teacher the opportunity to check the students' ability of working with the dictionaries. Apart from understanding the meaning of new words, this unit brought into discussion other features of what "knowing" a word means, such as the division of a word into syllables, pronunciation and what part of speech a word is. Though the teacher expected students to show a certain dexterity in using the dictionaries, the reality proved the opposite. As I have mentioned before in one of the chapters, the poor social and material conditions of most of the students reflect in the way they can prepare their lessons. So, many of them cannot afford to buy a dictionary and the only occasions when they can use one are at school. Even though many of them do not have a dictionary at home, the students involved actively in the activity which implied working with dictionaries.

The topic of Unit 3, *Comics*, was very attractive to students. The fact that the vocabulary was related to one of their points of interest, comics and cartoons, made the lesson very interesting and funny. The students were anxious to communicate, to talk about their own experiences regarding comics and their heroes. The teacher encouraged students to activate their personal life experience and to infer the meaning of new words from the context. The topic of the lesson could be easily illustrated by using visuals and the students got actively involved in the process of decoding the new meanings.

Though it might be said that it is relatively easy to learn vocabulary, it is not so easy to make students produce and reproduce what they have learnt. My students told me that many times they feel that they know the words but they do not *come out* when needed or they are not sure on their pronunciation. Therefore, another problem when teaching a new word is also teaching its pronunciation.

This is why in Unit 4, *Thrillers*, the lesson aimed at assuring communication directly in the target language, without going through the translation process, but rather enabling the students to think in the target language as they speak, by assessing meaning to the unknown words in the spoken language. My strategy was to give them the opportunity of using only English and correcting each other or, with my help if necessary. It was not an easy thing to do, especially because some of my students have the tendency of mixing the target language with the native language, both for asking and giving answers, but because

the topic of the lesson related to feelings, I combined explanations with sketchy blackboard drawings and mime.

At the end of the first stage of my experiment, it was necessary to have an accurate feedback regarding the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used up to this point. The diagnostic test conceived for this purpose helped me assess the students' weak and strong points, their ability to use language individually, but also determine how appropriate the methods are to students' needs and what should be improved or changed.

The results of the post-test1 revealed the fact that the number of middle level students increased, compared to initial test and the pre-test but, at the same time, the number of high level students decreased compared to pre-test (see Figure2). This indicates that the traditional methods used for teaching vocabulary from units 1-4 helped low level students, but the same strategies were not enough to ensure a long-term retention for high level students. Or the same students were not able to use their knowledge "under the pressure" of having to solve the test items taking into account the factors time and stress.

Post-test 1 was conceived to check vocabulary knowledge as well as grammar problems. The items focused on choosing the correct variant out of two (ex.1), completing a text with the suitable words from a list, rewriting sentences using adverbs in their correct place, discriminating between Present Simple and Present Continuous and forming the tenses correctly. Low level students could not choose the correct variant of words, except 40-45% of them; they did not prove that they know the correct order of adverbs in a sentence, and they do not know the adequate use of Present Simple and Present Continuous or how these tenses are formed. Though middle level students gave the correct answers in a higher percentage, many of them encountered the same difficulties in solving the tasks, a fact that demonstrates they solved the exercises based rather on guessing than on having real knowledge of the tested topics. The only one high level student solved correctly the first exercise of vocabulary, but he/she did not prove to be very sure on the choices made for the second vocabulary exercise, making some mistakes. Ordering the adverbs in a sentence raised some problems as well, but the student demonstrated that he/she knows the verbal tenses and the way they are formed.
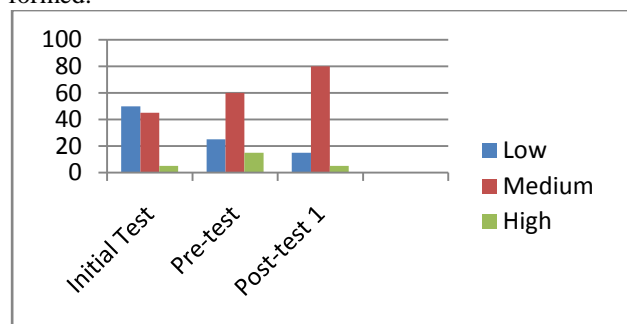

Fig.2. Significance of difference between the scores of Initial Test, Pre-test and Post-test1

The analysis of the post-test 1 results indicates the fact that the teacher must find remedies and devise more

efficient strategies for the next stage of the experiment in order to achieve better results from all the students, results reflected in the students' progress along the curriculum and their ability to use the language actively for communicating.

The second stage of the experiment started on 24th November 2014 and lasted until the 15th December, followed by a second post-test on 20th December. During this stage, the teacher used for teaching Unit 5: *Animal helpers*, Unit 6: *Revision* and Unit 7: *Mars* modern strategies which gave students the opportunity of getting involved more actively in acquiring new vocabulary. The strategies used for teaching these units included concept mapping/ clarifying routine technique, mind map, "I Know, What I Want to know, What I have Learnt" technique (KWL), Power Point Presentations, and crosswords and games.

Unit 5, *Animal Helpers* (see Appendix: Lesson plans), which has as main topic animal testing and cosmetics industry, was very challenging both for the teacher and the students. The main strategy used for teaching this lesson was concept mapping/clarifying routine technique, difficult enough to use when the students are used to getting all the information from the teacher instead of bringing their own contribution. Due to the fact that the topic of the lesson presented a reality of our world-animals being used for all kind of cruel purposes, and that most of the students had at least one pet at home, the lesson was very interesting and the students involved actively. Through questions and guidance, the teacher succeeded in making students find the answers and meanings to the new words and achieve a complete concept mapping of the terms.

The students enjoyed sharing their experiences and opinions on the topic with their classmates while making their own associations with the realities from their lives. The only inconvenient with concept mapping technique is that it is not possible to teach more than one or two words, due to the fact that it takes some time to read the text all the necessary times in order to find the right answers that fit the seven stages of the activity. Therefore, it is the teacher who has to decide which terms should be taught using the concept mapping technique, while the other new words should be taught using one of the traditional strategies: using a dictionary or the teacher giving their meaning.

The second stage of the experiment includes a Revision unit, mostly because in my opinion revision lessons are very versatile, they gave to teachers the opportunity of using multiple and various types of strategies, both for revising and practicing what it has been revised. In Unit 6, *Revision* (see Appendix: Lesson plans), the teacher revised grammar notions- Past Simple versus Past Continuous, forms and uses, followed by practice, and vocabulary notions-words learnt in units 1-5. To practice the vocabulary notions, students had to solve exercises that included mind map technique, matching, and controlled writing task.

In Unit 7, *Mars* (see Appendix: Lesson plans), the teacher used attractive and interesting techniques right

from the beginning of the lesson in order to stir the students' curiosity on the topic. The game used for the warm up stage, "You say, we pay", was meant to create a relaxed atmosphere, and together with the KWL technique activated the students' knowledge about the topic of the lesson. The KWL technique had a double role in the lesson development: the first one was already mentioned-that of activating previous knowledge, at the beginning of the lesson, and the second role was to revise the vocabulary learnt from different sources, at the end of the lesson. The Power Point Presentation comes to add extra visual information which helps the students understand better the meaning of new words found in the text under study. PPP is part of computer-assisted language learning which fosters learner autonomy and a wide range of opportunities for authentic interaction in the target language.

The second stage of the experiment was followed by post-test 2. The items focused on the vocabulary notions taught during this stage: changing the meaning or the grammatical function of a word by adding suffixes or prefixes, filling the blanks with words chosen from a list of words, reordering correctly the words in a sentence, and choosing the appropriate linkers that logically connect the sentences in a text. The results of post-test 1 compared with the results of post-test 2 show a change in better of how students responded in the second stage of the experiment. 10% of the students remained at low level, 70% classify at middle level and 20% at high level (see Figure 3).
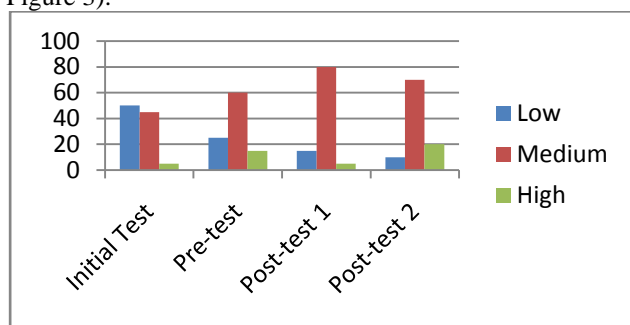

Fig.3. Significance of difference between the scores of Initial Test, Pre-test, Post-test1 and Post-test 2

3. Post-experimental phase: analysis and interpretation of data

Though the results did not improve significantly after the second post-test, they show the fact that modern strategies which involve the students actively in the learning process work better than the traditional ones. Of course, various measures of vocabulary knowledge depend on factors such as classroom level and the period of time spent learning, this is why any progress is considered important and it creates the premises for further actions in order to achieve the expected results.

The study reveals the difference between the performances of the students taught with the traditional and modern strategies of teaching. The percentage of high achievers who were taught with the modern strategies increased (20% -Post-test 2) compared to the percentage of high achievers who were taught with traditional strategies of teaching vocabulary (5%).

The percentage of average achievers is higher after Post-test 1 (80%) compared to the percentage of average achievers after Post-test 2 (70%) , this fact indicates that the difference of 10% between the two posttests is rendered in the 20% of high achievers. The better performance of some of the average students who succeeded to pass from middle to high level may be attributed to the fact of being taught with modern strategies. The same thing happened when analyzing the differences between the scores of low achievers from Post-test 1 (15%) and Post-test 2 (10%). This means that the difference of 5% of low achievers moved to average achievers (see the table below).

Better performance of all the students who acceded to a higher level after Post-test 2 is also due to the role of the teacher and students as partners and co-learner in the learning process. Using modern strategies, the teacher facilitates the students to involve actively in the process and encourages them to experiment with the words.

Table 1: The comparative results of Initial Test, Pre-test, Post-test 1, and Post-test2

Tests	Average score of the class	High level students	Middle level students	Low level students
Initial test	5,11	5%	45%	50%
Pre-test	5,91	15%	60%	25%
Post-test 1	5,96	5%	80%	15%
Post-test 2	6,63	20%	70%	10%

The analysis of data after comparing the two post-tests comes to invalidate the first hypothesis of this study, that students will respond better to traditional methods, and validates the second hypothesis, that students will respond better to modern strategies and will demonstrate interest and full commitment during activities when using modern strategies. As far as the third hypothesis is concerned, that vocabulary gains will both be quantitative, reflected in the number of words known, and qualitative, reflected in the features/ characteristics known about a word, as well as in the permanent/ long term retention of words, the things must be viewed from a double perspective: the vocabulary gains reflected more in the number of words known and long term retention of them, and less in the features known about a word. The students solved better the exercise which required to complete sentences with words from a list compared to the exercise where they had to complete sentences with words formed by adding suffixes or prefixes to an already existing form. If we take into consideration the fact that knowing a word is the sum of all connections between semantic, syntactic, orthographic, phonological, morphological, cognitive, cultural and autobiographical features, it is unlikely, therefore, that any two students will "know" a word in exactly the same way.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The statistical results display that the 96 students' performances of memorizing the intermediate-level vocabularies were different before and after the treatments of student-centered interactive approaches.

Traditional strategies involve a lot of passive teaching. Students have to spend a lot of time listening to the teacher or reading. It is also true that a lot of students enjoy passive learning. They just like to listen when the teacher is speaking or feel really relaxed when you tell them to open their books and solve a task. But when the equilibrium is broken and the lesson tends to be too much passive, the students' benefit from the lesson diminishes. Students retain more when they are actively involved in the learning process and, as the results of posttest 1 suggested, if students learn passively, most of the classroom information is forgotten within a short period of time, while information acquired from active learning usually is retained for long term periods.

Active learning can be interesting, enjoyable and fun. Students must feel relaxed and happy in getting involved in the learning process without transforming everything only in laughter and with no value. Giving the students the opportunity of being more involved in their own learning requires a change in the teacher's attitude because he/she must understand that he/she is not the supreme authority in the classroom anymore, and that there has to be a partnership with his/her students in order to obtain the desired results. Of course, it has to be mentioned that in the active learning teachers have to rely less on the course book and use all three sources of information available: the teacher, the students and the books.

For me, as a teacher, it is absolutely compulsory to devise my lessons taking into account the theories and approaches on what teaching vocabulary should be, but practice in the classroom has taught me that everything must be done according to the students' level and needs. Teaching, for the moment, in a rural school, made me follow some essential rules: teach terms that are central to the unit or theme of study - these are words that are so important that if the students do not understand them, they will have difficulties understanding the remainder of the unit. Maybe the text contains 15-20 new words, but there are only 4-5 that address key concepts, sometimes only 1or 2. Help the students understand these 4-5 or 1-2 new words and they will be able to infer the meaning of the other words by themselves. It is not a problem if you teach fewer vocabulary terms as long as you teach them in a manner that results in deep understanding of each term. New terms must be defined using language and examples which are already familiar to students. They will retain better and for longer periods of time the vocabulary which is connected to personal knowledge and experience.

Nevertheless, from my point of view, the central idea of this study is that no matter how attractive, interesting and funny modern strategies are, we cannot totally forget about the traditional ones. If years ago teaching vocabulary was possible only by using the traditional strategies, nowadays we cannot plan our lessons based only on student-centered

strategies. Dictionaries, translation and inferring meaning from the context are strategies which can co-work with modern ones and help the student become confident in his/her ability of using English.

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