

Vocabulary Teaching to Young Learners

SPEAKER'S NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Opening and Professional Background

Good morning, everyone, and thank you for coming. I'm Halis Bereket.

I graduated from university in 1979 and began teaching in Istanbul. Alongside my school work, I taught English in language courses and reviewed books for publishers. Over the years, I attended a large number of ELT seminars and continually adapted useful ideas to my own classrooms.

As my teaching became increasingly interactive, I also began preparing my own materials and later incorporated computers and interactive-board support. Classroom experience, student responses and ideas encountered through professional development gradually led to a growing collection of practical activities.

I first brought many of these ideas together in seminars such as Storytelling to Young Learners and Vocabulary Teaching to Young Learners. Over the years, I shared classroom experience in approximately 150 seminar presentations on around 30 different topics for teachers and university students.

After retirement, these materials remained stored on hard drives for many years. I have recently begun revisiting, updating and reorganising them with editorial support from ChatGPT, with the aim of making this classroom-based ELT archive available to interested teachers.

Purpose of the Seminar

Today I'm going to talk about vocabulary teaching to young learners. My aim is to present as many practical activities as time allows.

The activities form an activity bank, not a fixed lesson plan. You do not need to use all of them with every text or story. Select activities according to the time available, the interests and abilities of your learners, the language focus, and your own teaching preferences.

Before reading a text or telling a story, I would normally use several short activities to arouse curiosity, activate learners and prepare essential vocabulary.

Seminar Mode

Most of the activities are designed for active participation. During the seminar, please experience them as learners rather than only discussing them as teachers.

Young learners benefit from learning by doing — through games, movement, songs, chants, pictures, stories and purposeful interaction. Language learning should be meaningful, active and enjoyable.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Teach selectively, not exhaustively. A story or text may contain many unfamiliar words. Pre-teach only the key vocabulary learners need in order to enter the text successfully. Other words can often be clarified through context, pictures, mime, gesture or action.

Variety supports motivation. Do not keep young learners on one activity for too long. Recycle the same vocabulary through different activity types so that repetition does not feel repetitive.

Participation matters. Aim to involve the whole class as much as possible. Many of the activities can be adapted so that learners listen, respond, move, speak, remember, match, draw or collaborate.

Choose rather than accumulate. A large activity bank gives the teacher options. The goal is not to fit every activity into one lesson.

Move from support to recall. Begin with strong visual or contextual support, then gradually ask learners to retrieve, recognise and use vocabulary with less support.

OUTLINE

The seminar is organised in three stages:

- A. Presentation Stage — introducing key vocabulary
- B. Practice Stage — recycling and strengthening recall
- C. Follow-Up Activities — extending, applying and assessing learning

Questions are welcome throughout the presentation.

A. PRESENTATION STAGE

Slide 1. Presenting Vocabulary

Introduce selected key vocabulary using pictures, a poster, flashcards and real objects where appropriate. Model the words and let students repeat them.

Speaker's note: Keep this stage focused. The aim is to give learners enough language to enter the text or story, not to explain every unfamiliar word.

B. PRACTICE STAGE

Slide 2. Poster — Words and Numbers

Say the words and ask students to identify the corresponding numbers under the pictures. Then say the numbers and ask students to recall the words.

Speaker's note: Move in both directions — word to number and number to word. This checks recognition first and then asks learners to retrieve the vocabulary from the visual prompt.

Slide 3. Flashcard Recall

Show the flashcards and ask students to say the words.

Speaker's note: Keep the pace lively and vary the order of the cards. Encourage a whole-class response first, then check individual recall where appropriate.

Slide 4. Picture Cards

Give selected students picture cards. Say a target word; the student holding the corresponding picture shows it.

Speaker's note: Involve different learners and change the order of the target words. The activity keeps the whole class listening because any card may be called next.

Slide 5. Point

Place six flashcards in different places around the room. Say a word; students point to the relevant card.

Speaker's note: This is a quick whole-class recognition check and works well before activities requiring spoken recall.

Slide 6. Clap Hands

Hold up a flashcard and say a word. If the word matches the picture, students clap once; if it does not, they remain silent.

Speaker's note: Mix correct and incorrect word-picture combinations unpredictably. The silent response to a mismatch makes this a quick listening and meaning check for the whole class.

Slide 7. Odd One Out

Show a lexical set of flashcards with one item from a different category. Students name the cards and call out “Odd one out!” when the unrelated item appears.

Speaker's note: Change the lexical sets according to the vocabulary being taught.

Slide 8. Lip Reading

Place six flashcards on the board. Silently mouth one word; students watch your lips and identify it.

Speaker's note: Mouth the word clearly without producing any sound. This encourages close visual attention to articulation and adds variety to vocabulary recall.

Slide 9. Miming

Show a student a picture and ask them to mime it. The class guesses the word.

Speaker's note: Choose words that can be represented clearly through action. Let different learners mime so that the activity remains participatory rather than teacher-led.

Slide 10. What's Missing?

Display a set of flashcards. Students close their eyes while you remove one or more cards. They open their eyes and identify what is missing.

Speaker's note: Increase the challenge gradually by removing more than one card.

Slide 11. Copy Me!

Hold up a flashcard and say the word in different ways — softly, loudly, slowly, quickly, sadly or angrily. Students copy both the word and the manner of saying it.

Speaker's note: Useful for pronunciation practice without turning repetition into a mechanical drill.

Slide 12. Balloon Challenge

Divide the class into two groups and invite volunteers. Give a category. The learner has a limited time, indicated by a slowly deflating balloon, to produce words from that category; a learner who cannot recall a word may say “Pass”.

Speaker's note: Use a safe classroom version of the original activity. The essential feature is time pressure and rapid lexical retrieval, not the balloon itself.

Slide 13. Guess the Card

Choose a flashcard without showing it. Students ask Yes/No questions until they identify the word.

Speaker's note: Encourage learners to ask purposeful Yes/No questions rather than make random guesses. The activity recycles both vocabulary and simple question forms.

Slide 14. What's Your Card?

Give each learner a card from one of several lexical sets. Learners move around the room asking “What's your card?” until they find the other members of their lexical set.

Speaker's note: A time limit can increase energy, but make sure learners still use the target question meaningfully.

Slide 15. Kim's Game

Display a set of flashcards for a short time. Remove them and ask students to write as many words as they can remember.

Speaker's note: Keep the viewing time short enough to require attention but long enough for success. Compare answers afterwards and briefly revisit words that were difficult to recall.

Slide 16. Commands

Associate a set of flashcards with different commands. Show a card; students identify and carry out the corresponding command.

Speaker's note: This combines vocabulary recall with physical response.

Slide 17. Musical Chairs — Adapted

Students move around the chairs while you call out words from one category. When you say a word that does not belong to the category, they sit down immediately. Continue for several rounds, changing players or roles so that many learners can participate. Remind students to move safely around the chairs and not to push one another.

Speaker's note: The original seminar notes include a prepared word list. Keep that list in Teacher's Classroom Materials rather than crowding the speaker's notes.

Slide 18. Flashcard Recall Challenge

Show a student a flashcard. If the student says the word correctly, they move to the board. Continue and recycle the cards, then finish with a final recall round involving a small group of learners.

Speaker's note: Begin by showing flashcards to individual learners. Learners who recall the word correctly move to the board. Recycle the cards and finish with a short final recall challenge involving a small group. Rotate learners across rounds so that participation remains broad rather than turning the activity into a strict elimination contest.

Slide 19. Throw the Ball

Say a target word and throw the ball to a student, who says another target word before throwing it to another student. A variation uses numbered vocabulary: say a number and the catcher recalls the word linked to that number. Always use a soft, lightweight ball and remind students to throw it gently.

Speaker's note: Keep the ball movement controlled and the pace brisk. The numbered variation is especially useful when vocabulary has already been linked to numbered pictures or a poster.

Slide 20. Yes/No Questions

Give one student a flashcard without showing it to the class. The student answers Yes/No questions from classmates until they identify the word.

Speaker's note: Support learners with simple question stems if necessary. The aim is to make vocabulary retrieval interactive while giving repeated practice in asking and answering questions.

Slide 21. Match Words and Pictures — Flashcards

Give students word cards and picture cards. Ask them to match each target word with the corresponding picture.

Speaker's note: Ask learners to say the word as they make each match. This turns a visual matching task into an opportunity for spoken recall as well.

Slide 22. Match Words and Pictures — PPT

Students match words and pictures using the PowerPoint presentation.

Speaker's note: This provides the same language focus through a different medium and can be used as a quick whole-class check.

C. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Slide 23. Drawing Worksheet

Give students a worksheet and ask them to draw pictures representing the target vocabulary.

Speaker's note: Drawing creates another memory route and also gives the teacher a quick indication of understanding.

Slide 24. Jigsaw Puzzle

In groups, students put together a jigsaw puzzle related to the target vocabulary or story.

Speaker's note: Use the completed picture as a prompt for naming and reviewing the target vocabulary. Group work also gives learners a natural reason to cooperate and talk while completing the task.

Slide 25. Pelmanism

Students turn over cards to find matching word-and-picture pairs. A student who finds a pair keeps it; the student with the most pairs wins.

Speaker's note: Use word-picture or picture-picture pairs depending on the learning aim.

Slide 26. Flashing Activity — Flashcards

Flash picture cards very briefly. After each card is hidden, students identify and say the corresponding word.

Speaker's note: Flash each card only briefly and vary the sequence. The short exposure encourages rapid visual recognition and immediate spoken retrieval.

Slide 27. Flashing Activity — PPT

Flash pictures briefly on the PowerPoint. After each picture disappears, students write the corresponding word.

Speaker's note: This variation shifts from oral recognition to written recall.

Slide 28. Worksheet

Use a prepared worksheet to recycle or assess the target vocabulary.

Speaker's note: The actual worksheet belongs in Teacher's Classroom Materials.

Slide 29. Shouting Dictation

Students dictate missing words or parts of a text to one another from a safe, controlled distance.

Speaker's note: Set clear rules before starting so that the noise remains purposeful.

Slide 30. Running Dictation

In groups, one learner runs to read a displayed text, returns and dictates it to the group writer. Groups compete to finish quickly and accurately. Roles can be rotated.

Speaker's note: This integrates reading, memory, speaking, listening and writing.

Slide 31. Listening Dictation

Read the words or sentences three times. First, students listen without writing. Second, they listen and write. Third, they listen again, check and correct their work.

Speaker's note: Keep the three stages distinct; the first listening should not become a writing stage.

Slide 32. Guided Fantasy / Imagery

Guide students through an imaginative, sensory experience connected with the text or story.

Speaker's note: The complete porridge script should be placed in Teacher's Classroom Materials. In the seminar, explain the purpose and demonstrate only as much as time allows.

Slide 33. True/False — PPT

Use a PowerPoint True/False activity to check comprehension and recycle vocabulary.

Speaker's note: Ask learners to decide first and then justify or correct false statements where possible. This turns a simple comprehension check into further language use.

Slide 34. Homework

Set a short follow-up task that reuses the target vocabulary in a meaningful way.

Speaker's note: Homework should extend the classroom work rather than simply repeat a list of words.

Slide 35. Five Senses Project

Students identify and write words from the story or text connected with sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

Speaker's note: This encourages learners to organise vocabulary through meaning and sensory association.

Slide 36. Make Your Own Picture Dictionary

Students prepare their own illustrated dictionary using vocabulary from the story, text or unit.

Speaker's note: This can become a cumulative project rather than a one-lesson task.

Slide 37. Banko Quiz — PPT

Use the Banko Quiz PowerPoint to review vocabulary and comprehension in an interactive format.

Teams may choose “Banko” before a question to take a risk for a higher score.

Speaker's note: Keep the quiz brisk and participatory. Use it mainly as an enjoyable review of vocabulary and comprehension rather than as a high-stakes test.

Slide 38. Quiz

Use a short quiz to review or assess learning at the end of the sequence.

Speaker's note: Assessment can be light and formative; the aim is to see what learners can now recognise, recall and use.

CLOSING

Are there any final questions?

Thanks a lot for your participation.

EDITORIAL NOTE FOR THE ELT ARCHIVE

This document is primarily the presenter's My Handout / Speaker's Notes, but it is written clearly enough to be shared as part of the ELT Archive. Ready-to-use classroom resources — worksheets, flashcards, prepared word lists, dictation texts, Guided Fantasy scripts, quizzes and related files — should be collected separately in Teacher's Classroom Materials.

Editorial and language support: This archival material has been reorganised and language-edited with the assistance of an AI-based editorial tool (ChatGPT), while the classroom practices, activities and professional experience remain those of the original teacher-author.