

**ACTIVATING PASSIVE VOCABULARY FOR 10TH-GRADE STUDENTS***Sitora Islomalieva**1<sup>th</sup>-year master's student at Namangan State Institute of**Foreign Languages named after Iskhokhon Ibrat**[sitorauslomalieva@gmail.com](mailto:sitorauslomalieva@gmail.com)*

**Abstract.** This study explores strategies for activating passive vocabulary among 10th grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. By implementing interactive and communicative activities, the research aims to bridge the gap between recognition and active use of vocabulary. The study involved a series of classroom interventions over a semester, and results indicate significant improvement in students' ability to use vocabulary actively in speaking and writing. The findings underscore the importance of engaging instructional methods in enhancing vocabulary acquisition for EFL learners.

**Key words.** Passive vocabulary, communicative activities, vocabulary words

**Introduction.** Language learning success is often measured not just by how well a student understands the target language, but also by their ability to fluently produce it [1]. In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), one persistent challenge is the significant gap between passive vocabulary words a learner understands and active vocabulary words they can confidently use in speaking and writing [2]. This gap presents a crucial task for EFL teachers: developing effective pedagogical strategies to transform these known but unused words into active, usable vocabulary [3].

This theme emerged from consistent classroom observations, where it's clear that learners often have a rich reservoir of receptive knowledge but hesitate or struggle to use these words spontaneously [4]. This, in turn, limits their fluency and expressive capacity.

Renowned researchers have long explored the mechanisms behind vocabulary activation [5]. For instance, Paul Nation emphasizes the role of repetition and strong receptive exposure in retaining vocabulary [6]. Meanwhile, scholars inspired by J.C. Richards highlight the importance of meaningful, contextualized practice and retrieval activities, like focused writing tasks or vocabulary notebooks, to help transition words into active use [7].

The aim of this research is to identify, analyze, and implement practical techniques that will effectively convert passive vocabulary into an active, communicative resource for 10th-grade EFL students [8]. Conducted at School No. 34, where advanced vocabulary is especially vital for academic and higher-level communication, the study's outcomes are expected to equip teachers with evidence-based methods and practical activities that boost students' productive vocabulary and, in turn, enhance their fluency and confidence in English.

**Literature Review.** Vocabulary acquisition has been widely recognized as a core component of second and foreign language learning [1]. Researchers consistently distinguish between passive (receptive) vocabulary, which learners can recognize while reading or listening, and active (productive) vocabulary, which learners can accurately and confidently use in speaking and writing [2]. One of the major challenges in EFL classrooms is helping learners transfer vocabulary from passive recognition to active use [3].

Paul Nation is one of the most influential scholars in the field of vocabulary learning [6]. Nation (2001, 2013) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge develops through repeated encounters with words in meaningful contexts. According to him, learners need multiple "meetings" with a word before it becomes part of their active vocabulary [6]. He highlights the importance of deliberate vocabulary learning, vocabulary notebooks, spaced repetition, and extensive exposure through reading and listening. Nation also stresses the balance between receptive and productive practice, arguing that productive use of vocabulary requires intentional opportunities for learners to use words in speaking and writing [6].

In line with Nation's view, several studies have shown that repetition alone is not sufficient unless learners actively retrieve and use new vocabulary [4]. This idea is further supported by Jack C. Richards, who focuses on the communicative and contextualized use of language [7]. Richards (2002, 2015) argues that vocabulary learning is most effective when words are taught and practiced within meaningful contexts rather than in isolation. He advocates for task-based activities, short writing tasks, and communicative speaking exercises that encourage learners to actively use newly learned vocabulary [7].

Other researchers also underline the role of retrieval practice and contextualized output in activating vocabulary [5]. Studies indicate that activities such as role-plays, guided discussions, sentence-building tasks, and short written reflections help learners move vocabulary from receptive knowledge to productive use [8]. These activities force learners to recall words actively, which strengthens memory and increases fluency.

Despite the extensive research on vocabulary learning strategies, there is still a gap in studies focusing specifically on secondary school EFL learners, particularly 10th-grade students [9]. Many studies emphasize adult learners or university contexts, while fewer investigate how practical classroom-based strategies work with school-aged learners who often lack confidence in speaking and writing [10]. Moreover, there is limited research examining how a combination of strategies, rather than a single method, affects vocabulary activation in real classroom settings. Based on these theoretical and empirical findings, the present study adopts and adapts several strategies suggested by Nation and Richards to address vocabulary activation among 10th-grade EFL learners.

**Methodology.** This study employed a mixed-methods research design in order to investigate the problem of passive vocabulary use among 10<sup>th</sup>-grade EFL students and to examine the effectiveness of instructional strategies aimed at activating students' productive vocabulary. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' vocabulary use, classroom behavior, and underlying affective and cognitive factors.

The participants of the study were 22 tenth-grade students learning English as a Foreign Language in one secondary school class. The group consisted of 16 female and 6 male students with varying proficiency levels. Some students demonstrated higher achievement in English, while others showed average or lower levels of performance. This mixed-level classroom context allowed for observation of differences in vocabulary use and learning needs.

Data collection was carried out through questionnaires, classroom observation, and individual student interviews. Classroom observation was conducted during regular English lessons to examine how frequently students used newly learned vocabulary actively in speaking tasks and communicative activities. Particular attention was paid to students who demonstrated passive behavior, such as reluctance to speak, reliance on repetition only, or avoidance of vocabulary use in front of peers.

In addition to observation, individual interviews were conducted with students who showed passive vocabulary use. The interviews revealed several key reasons for this passivity. Some students experienced fear and anxiety when speaking English, particularly in front of classmates. Others reported difficulties in understanding the English language, which limited their confidence and willingness to use vocabulary actively. A further group of students expressed low interest in the subject, which negatively affected their motivation to engage in vocabulary-based activities.

Based on the findings from observation and interviews, differentiated instructional strategies were implemented during the teaching process. Students who experienced speaking anxiety were gradually encouraged to use vocabulary, beginning with speaking in front of the teacher, followed by small groups, and eventually in front of the whole class. These students were also provided with motivational support and advised to practice speaking in front of a mirror to increase confidence and reduce fear. For students who had difficulty understanding

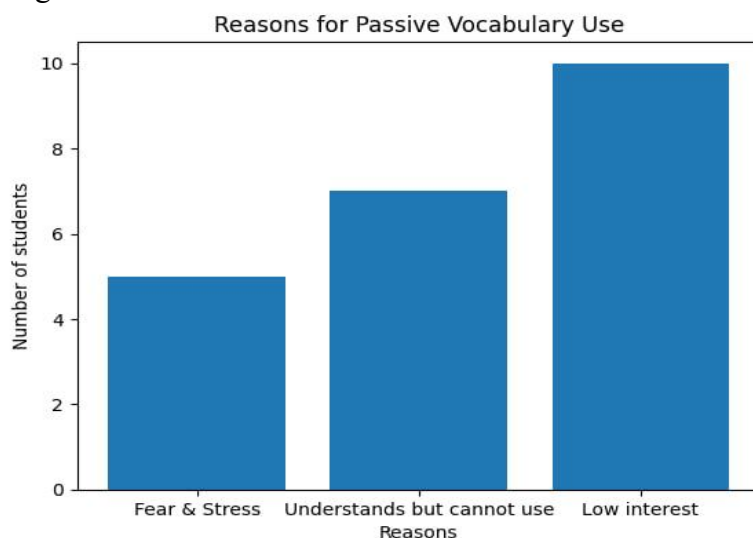
English, additional support sessions were organized after lessons, lasting approximately thirty minutes to one hour. During these sessions, vocabulary was reviewed using textbooks and simplified explanations to strengthen comprehension. For students who lacked interest in the subject, vocabulary instruction was adapted by incorporating videos, cartoons, and words related to their personal interests in order to increase engagement and motivation.

**Results and Discussion.** The results of the study reveal that a significant proportion of 10th-grade EFL students experience difficulties in actively using newly learned vocabulary. Questionnaire findings showed that approximately 70% of the students reported challenges in using vocabulary in speaking activities. At the beginning of lessons, students rarely used new words actively, and most vocabulary use was limited to repetition rather than spontaneous production.

The data further indicated that five students experienced fear and stress related to speaking English in class. In addition, seven students reported that although they understood the meaning of vocabulary items, they were unable to use them actively in speaking. Ten students stated that they preferred vocabulary learning through role-play activities, videos, and films rather than traditional methods.

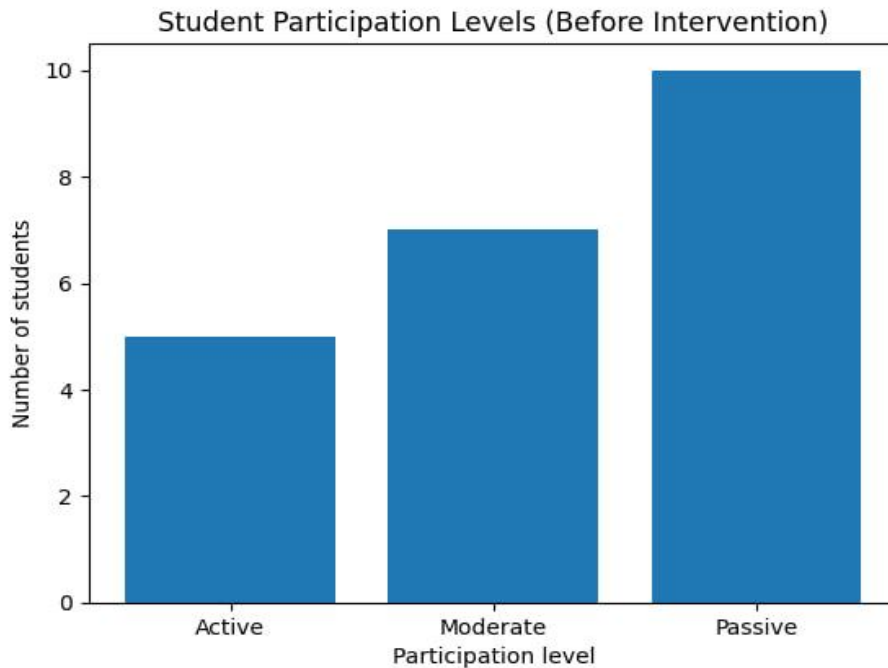
Classroom observation revealed differences in participation levels among students. Five students were identified as active participants, seven students demonstrated moderate participation, while ten students were classified as passive in vocabulary use. Passive students rarely volunteered to speak and showed hesitation during communicative activities.

Interview results supported the observation data. Five students stated that fear of making mistakes prevented them from using vocabulary in front of others. Seven students reported that limited understanding of English lessons reduced their confidence in vocabulary use. The remaining students expressed low interest in the subject, noting that they were more attracted to technology and other interests typical of adolescence, which affected their engagement in English lessons.



**Figure 1. Illustrates the main reasons for students' passive vocabulary use.**

The results show that fear and stress affected five students, while seven students reported understanding vocabulary but being unable to use it actively. Ten students indicated low interest in the subject as a factor influencing their vocabulary use.



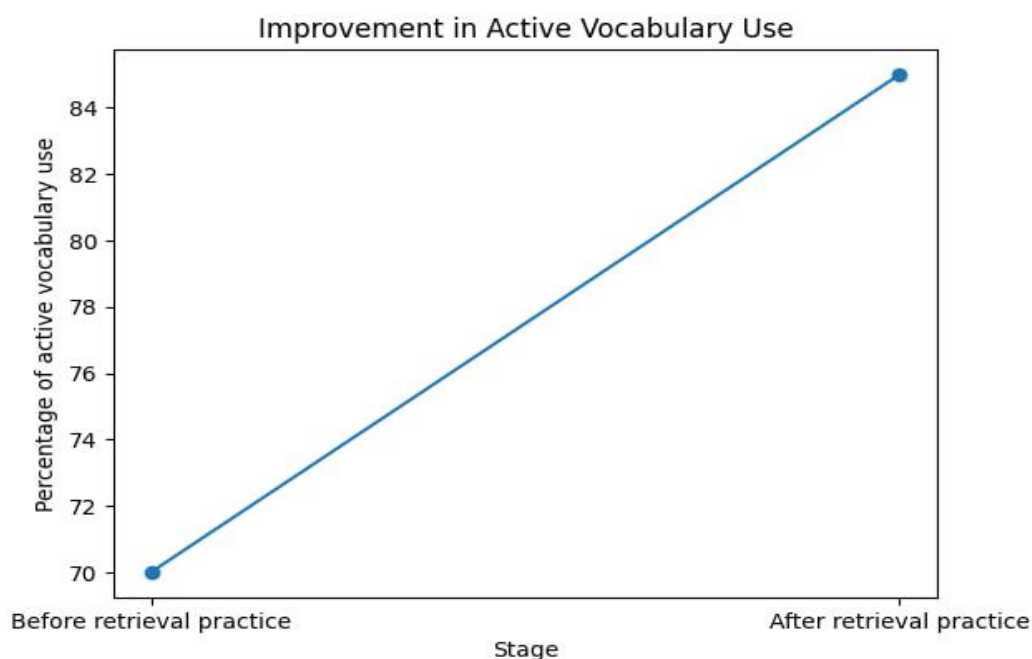
**Figure 2. presents students' participation levels before the implementation of vocabulary activation strategies.**

The data indicate that five students were actively involved in vocabulary use, seven demonstrated moderate participations, and ten students remained passive during speaking activities.

After the implementation of vocabulary activation strategies, noticeable changes were observed. The results showed that students' active participation increased following the use of retrieval practice. The percentage of students actively using vocabulary rose from 70% to approximately 85% after regular retrieval practice activities were introduced. Furthermore, after the application of storytelling and role-play activities, five previously passive students began to participate actively in vocabulary-based speaking tasks.

Observation during the intervention period also indicated that lower-level students, although experiencing some difficulty, increasingly attempted to use vocabulary by asking for support from peers and the teacher. These changes were observed consistently over a one-month period, indicating a positive shift in students' willingness to engage in active vocabulary use.

The findings of this study confirm that passive vocabulary use remains a significant challenge for 10th-grade EFL learners. The results revealed that a large proportion of students understood vocabulary receptively but were unable or unwilling to use it actively in speaking. This finding supports Nation's (2001) distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, which emphasizes that knowing a word does not necessarily lead to its active use without systematic practice.



**Figure 3. Shows the change in students' active vocabulary use after the introduction of retrieval practice.**

The results demonstrate an increase from 70% to 85% in active vocabulary use following regular retrieval-based activities.

One of the major factors influencing passive vocabulary use in this study was affective barriers, particularly fear and stress related to speaking. Students who experienced anxiety were less likely to participate in vocabulary-based activities, which aligns with Richards' (2002) view that emotional factors can strongly influence learners' willingness to communicate. The gradual speaking approach applied in this study, which encouraged students to speak first in front of the teacher and later in small groups, appeared to reduce anxiety and increase participation.

The findings also demonstrated that comprehension difficulties played a key role in limiting students' active vocabulary use. Students who reported understanding difficulties showed low confidence in using new words, even when they recognized their meanings. This supports Nation's (2013) emphasis on the need for repeated exposure and comprehension-based input before productive use can be expected. The additional support sessions provided after lessons helped these learners engage more confidently in vocabulary tasks.

Motivation was another important factor identified in the study. Many students reported low interest in traditional vocabulary learning, which is consistent with research suggesting that adolescent learners are more engaged when instruction reflects their interests and everyday experiences. The use of videos, films, and interest-based vocabulary helped increase engagement and encouraged students to participate more actively. This finding aligns with communicative and task-based approaches advocated by Richards, which stress meaningful and contextualized language use.

One of the most significant outcomes of the study was the improvement observed after the implementation of retrieval practice. The increase in active vocabulary use from 70% to 85% demonstrates the effectiveness of retrieval-based activities in strengthening productive vocabulary. This finding supports previous research indicating that recalling information from memory enhances retention and facilitates the transition from passive to active vocabulary knowledge. Regular retrieval practice at the end of lessons provided students with structured opportunities to use vocabulary without external support.

Furthermore, storytelling and role-play activities contributed positively to students' participation, particularly among previously passive learners. The fact that several passive students began to engage in speaking tasks suggests that communicative activities can reduce

fear and promote confidence. These findings reinforce the importance of providing meaningful, low-pressure speaking opportunities in EFL classrooms.

Overall, the discussion of the results indicates that activating passive vocabulary requires a combination of cognitive, affective, and motivational strategies. The integration of retrieval practice, differentiated support, and communicative activities proved more effective than relying on repetition alone. These findings suggest that systematic and student-centered vocabulary instruction can lead to increased confidence and more frequent use of vocabulary in speaking, particularly in mixed-level EFL classrooms.

**Conclusion.** This study examined the issue of passive vocabulary use among 10th-grade EFL students and explored instructional strategies aimed at activating learners' productive vocabulary. The findings indicate that although many students possess receptive knowledge of vocabulary, they often struggle to use these words actively in speaking due to affective factors, comprehension difficulties, and low motivation. The results demonstrate that the implementation of differentiated instructional strategies, including retrieval practice, storytelling, and role-play activities, contributed to a noticeable increase in students' active vocabulary use. In particular, regular retrieval practice proved effective in strengthening recall and encouraging students to use vocabulary without reliance on textbooks or notes. Communicative activities provided meaningful contexts for vocabulary use and helped reduce students' fear and anxiety related to speaking.

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