# How to Apply Advance Organizer Strategy to Vocabulary Teaching

**Yang Mei**

China West Normal University,
Nanchong, China

**Abstract:**

*Vocabulary is the prerequisites of mastering the English language. So in the English teaching, vocabulary teaching plays an important role. Teachers often spend a large amount of time teaching vocabulary, but some students can't really master them. It's common that lots of teachers complained vocabulary teaching is time-consuming and inefficient. Although many vocabulary strategies are introduced by scholars, it's still difficult for students to well master vocabulary. Proposed by American psychologist Ausubel in 1960, advance organizer is a kind of introductory material used to promote learning. The material can be words, pictures, sounds and so on. Different from lead-in material that focuses on motivating students, advance organizer acts as a conceptual bridge from the original knowledge to new knowledge, thus making students build new cognitive structure meaningfully and actively. Based on the current situation of vocabulary teaching and advantages of advance organizer, this paper adopts the literature analysis to explore the ways of applying advance organizer to vocabulary teaching and to prove advance organizer is a good strategy worthy of applied to vocabulary teaching.*

**Keywords:** vocabulary; vocabulary teaching; cognitive structure; advance organizer strategy;

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is very significant to English teaching because without vocabulary we can't express our ideas. Wilkins (1972) once wrote that "……while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". This view reflects the importance of vocabulary and vocabulary teaching. Lewis (1993) argued, "Lexis is the core or heart of language", which further support Wilkins' point of view about vocabulary. In fact, more and more English teachers have realized the significance of vocabulary in their teaching, but they didn't adopt appropriate method to

teach it. Traditionally, lots of English teachers focus on just two aspects of vocabulary teaching. One is that they pay much attention to explain the meaning of English words, and the other is that they simply emphasize how to rote words without encouraging students to remember them actively and meaningfully. The traditional vocabulary teaching method enables students to remember many words in a short time, while it fails to make students really internalize what they acquired into their own knowledge. As time goes on, they often quickly forget words' meaning. First proposed by American psychologist Ausubel in 1960, Advance organizer is a kind of introductory material to promote students' learning of new knowledge, and through presenting information before learning task, it acts as a conceptual bridge from the old information to the new information. Ausubel suggested that advance organizers might foster meaningful learning by prompting the student regarding pre-existing concepts. As vocabulary teaching needs to change the current mechanical teaching way and advance organizer can make learning occurs more naturally and meaningfully, so this paper tries to explore how to apply advance organizer to vocabulary teaching. It expects to improve the current situation of vocabulary teaching and give some implications to teachers about how to appropriately apply advance organizer to vocabulary teaching.

## 2. Literature review

This chapter illustrates some most related concepts about vocabulary teaching and advance organizer to make us further clear about how to apply advance organizer to vocabulary teaching.

### 2.1 Concepts of advance organizer

Advance organizer is a metacognitive strategy proposed by American psychologist Ausubel in 1960 in his book Assimilation Theory of Meaningful Learning. Generally, advance organizer can be a tool used to introduce the lesson topic and illustrate the relationship between what the students are about to learn and the information they have already learned. Ausubel (1960) proposed that, " organizers are introduced in advance of learning itself, and are also presented at a higher level of abstraction, generality, and inclusiveness; and since the substantive content of a given organizer or series of organizers is selected on the basis of its suitability for explaining, integrating, and interrelating the material they precede, this strategy simultaneously satisfies the substantive as well as the programming criteria for enhancing the organization strength of cognitive structure". According to Ausubel, a person's existing knowledge about a concept is the most important factor in whether new material will be meaningful, and by means of advance organizer, it's easy to build the conceptual bridge from the old information to the new information, thus making learning happens in a logical way. Mayer (2003) said, "An advance organizer is information that is presented prior to learning and that can be used by the learner to organize and interpret new incoming information". An advance organizer is not a summary or review of a previous lesson. It also doesn't provide a structure for the current lesson. Instead, it provides a structure for student thinking. Words (spoken or written), diagrams and charts, photographs, real objects or actual models can act as advance organizers as long as they can present a structure for the new material by relating it to the learner's existing knowledge,

thus making it easy for students to make connections from one concept to the next. Advance organizers help to make complex concepts or tasks clear, and also to relate known information to new or unknown information.

## 2.3 Types of advance organizer

Chances are good that teachers may use different kind of advance organizers. According to the relationship between original knowledge and new knowledge, advance organizer is divided into three types: super-ordinate organizers, subordinate organizers and coordinate organizers. The first type refers to organizers are more inclusive and abstract than the new learning materials; the second type refers to organizers are just part of the new materials, and the third type refers to advance organizers share some common characteristics with new materials. However, according to the presentation form of advance organizer, linguists divide the advance organizer into the three types: expository advance organizer, narrative advance organizers and graphic organizers. Expository advance organizers refer to words used to describe new knowledge, for example, a teacher may tell students what the lesson's goals are, which indicates the lesson's purpose before it begins. Narrative advance organizers involve storytelling. At the beginning of the class, the teacher may tell an interesting story that relates to important concepts in the lesson. Graphic organizers refer to present information visually or in pictures. It used to help students identify the problem and come up with possible solutions through analyzing the ways in which different aspects of a problem are related. Maps, diagram, picture web and chart are members of the graphic organizers.

## 2.3 Studies on vocabulary teaching

As a research aspect of vocabulary acquisition research, vocabulary teaching mainly studies how to improve classroom vocabulary teaching efficiency. Robert Lado (1955) talked about patterns of difficulty in vocabulary teaching. He highlighted key issues related to words, the native language factor. He stated that while dealing with vocabulary one should take into account three important aspects of words - their form, their meaning and their class. Visnja Pavicic (2003) dealt with a way to improve students' abilities to explore, store and usage of vocabulary items. He laid emphasis on self-initiated independent learning with strategies. He said that the teacher should create activities and tasks to help students to build their vocabulary and develop strategies to learn the vocabulary on their own. Kroll and Tokowicz (2005) studied the presentation methods of vocabulary and found that the presentation through pictures can help to acquire vocabulary. Zeng jianxiang (2007) compared the method of lexical representation with context and that without context, and pointed out that the effect of contextual vocabulary acquisition was better than that of non-contextual vocabulary acquisition. These studies reveal that vocabulary teaching should focus its form, meaning and word class, and especially strategies have been improved to be a good way for enhancing the efficiency of vocabulary acquisition.

### 3. Procedures of applying advance organizer to vocabulary teaching

Since we have pointed out problems faced by vocabulary teaching and advantages of advance organizer above, now we discuss how to apply advance organizer to vocabulary teaching.

First of all, teachers need to know students' prior knowledge or experience, in other words, teachers need to know students' current level. Ausubel has emphasized the importance of students' original knowledge if teachers want to make students learn knowledge meaningfully and interestingly. Only when teachers have learned about students' original knowledge, they can well help students to build the conceptual bridge from the old information to new information. As we know, the function of advance organizer is to make connections between original knowledge and now knowledge, so without learning about students' original knowledge, teachers can't make efficient design to facilitate learning.

Next, similar to the procedures of applying advance organizer to reading teaching, teachers should carefully select advance organizer based on the characteristics of words they are going to teach. Since words are actually different from each other in many ways, teachers can't use the same advance organizer to teach all the word, so they need to find links to the organizer in order to make students learn new materials in a logical and meaningful way. On the one hand, teachers should analyze the features of words comprehensively, such as their meaning, word class, pronunciation and so on. On the other hand, teachers should select appropriate advance organizer to teach these words. Various advance organizers can be used in teaching vocabulary.

At last, after selecting several advance organizer based on the characteristics of words, teachers now come to apply these advance organizers to teach vocabulary. In this stage, teachers should lead students actively to construct the new knowledge.

### 4. Advance organizers in vocabulary teaching

Illustrating lesson's purpose can act as advance organizer in any kind of teaching, which is no exception for vocabulary teaching. However, considering the features of vocabulary teaching, there are some advance organizers specified for vocabulary teaching. Teachers can ask students to find the origins of certain words by looking up materials before class and then let some students to share their findings so as to provide scaffolding to learn new words. The prepared materials can be considered as advance organizer. And for those homonyms, advance organizer can be the simple word in homonyms, and by means of the same pronunciation, students can be easy to learn the more complexed words. Similarly, simple synonyms can be used as advance organizer to teacher complexed ones. Sometimes, words needed to be learned in a lesson are closely related, so teachers are suggested to make these words into sentences to create a context so that students are able to know how to use them. When creating context, it's better to make it close to real life situation so that students can guess the meaning of words with the help of life experience. For those concrete words, it's better to present pictures before presenting words, for humans are more sensitive to images than words. When teaching verbs, teachers can make actions to let students guess what the words mean, or let some students act while others try to guess the meaning of words, advance organizers can be

things in the same category. Teachers introduce the same category learned before, and lead students to add new words to the same category. In such a way, the new knowledge can be remembered more deeply in students' mind.

## 5. Conclusion

Firstly, this paper introduced the current situation of vocabulary teaching and pointed its two shortcomings: time-consuming and low efficiency. Then it explained the reason why teachers should apply advance organizer to vocabulary teaching. Advance organizer actually acts as conceptual bridge from the original knowledge and now knowledge. Through bringing in advance organizer, students are able to transfer from their previous knowledge to new knowledge. In the literature review part, this paper briefly introduces studies on vocabulary teaching and found studies on advance organizer is quite rare to further explain why teachers need to apply advance organizer to vocabulary teaching. It also reviewed some related concepts of advance organizer and types of it. After that, this paper puts forward the procedures of applying advance organizer to vocabulary teaching in detail and shares some common advance organizers in vocabulary teaching.

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