A PRACTICAL GUIDE

FOR MAKING ENGLISH VOCABULARY FUN AND

ACCESSIBLE FOR TEENS WITH DOWN SYNDROME

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Abstract

Vocabulary acquisition is a central component of English language learning. Due to the cognitive, linguistic, and memory challenges of adolescents with Down syndrome, the traditional teaching methods proved to be insufficient for them. This guide presents practical strategies for teaching English vocabulary through multisensory approaches, structured routines, and engaging activities, which have proved very effective in practice. A practical daily and weekly plan, complete with examples, rewards, and reinforcement strategies, is included.

Introduction

Adolescents with Down syndrome often face unique challenges in language acquisition, including slower processing speeds, short-term memory difficulties, and expressive language limitations[1]. Vocabulary learning is particularly challenging because it requires both recognition and production of words in multiple contexts. Research emphasizes the importance of multimodal instruction and frequent repetition to support vocabulary retention[2]. In addition, motivation plays a key role. Engaging learners through playful activities, songs, and technology-assisted exercises enhances attention and encourages active participation.

Principles of Effective Vocabulary Instruction

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[1] Buckley, S., & Bird, G. (2013). *Language development in Down syndrome: Research, theory, and practice*. Cambridge University Press.

[2] Laws, G., & Gunn, D. (2012). *Communication interventions for individuals with Down syndrome*. Down Syndrome Research and Practice.

1. Multisensory Learning

Combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic stimuli helps solidify vocabulary. For example, showing a picture of an apple while saying the word aloud and performing a gesture supports memory retention.

2. Repetition and Consistency

New words should be introduced multiple times in different contexts. Consistent review helps move vocabulary from short-term to long-term memory[3].

3. Simplified and Concrete Language

Using short, clear sentences and concrete examples allows students to focus on comprehension rather than decoding complex grammar.

4. Positive Reinforcement

Rewards, stickers, and praise for effort encourage motivation and reinforce learning[4].

5. Contextual Integration

Embedding vocabulary in daily routines—at home, in class, or during real-life activities—enhances practical understanding.

Daily Routine for Adapted Vocabulary Learning

It is very efficient to use four main stages: 1. Introduction, 2. Main Activity, 3. Review & Practice, and 4. Feedback & Reward.

The Introduction Part of the lesson consists in visually presenting new words with objects and gestures for 5 - 10 mins with the help of flashcards, real objects, or digital images.

The Main Activity step means engaging students in games, storytelling, or role-play, and it lasts for 15 - 20 min. It is effective and fun to use adapted activities like: Bingo, Memory, “I Spy”, shop, or kitchen role-play.

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[3] Kent-Walsh, J., & Binger, C. (2009). *Using multimodal strategies to support language learning*. Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research.

[4] Fyfe, E., & Karmiloff-Smith, A. (2015). *Motivation and learning in adolescents with developmental disabilities*. Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews.

The Review & Practice part of the lesson means revisiting words in different contexts for about 5 – 10 mins. The students are invited to use sentences, match words to objects, or retell short stories.

The Feedback & Reward stage comes with praising their effort and providing small rewards for about 2 -5 mins, and we can use stickers, points, or short playtime.

Adapted Teaching - Vocabulary Plan and Activities to use:

Day	Words	Activity	Reward
1st Day	apple, banana, orange	Flashcard naming game	The student receives a sticker for each correct word
2nd Day	dog, cat, bird	Storyboard: "A Day at the Park"	The student receives a bonus point for using 2+ words in a sentence
3rd Day	milk, water, juice	Role-play: buying drinks	The teacher and the students clap or cheer for each correct word
4th Day	red, blue, green	Color song or rhyme	The students watch a short video or sing along
5th Day	run, jump, sit	Gesture-based action game	The student receives points or stickers for participation
6th Day	Review all 10 words	Bingo or Memory game	The student receives a special reward for effort

Practical Tips for Adapted Teaching:

1. Incorporate multiple senses: Use images, gestures, sounds, and objects simultaneously.

2. Repeat often: Review new vocabulary in varied situations throughout the week.
3. Celebrate achievements: Stickers, points, and verbal praise reinforce motivation.
4. Keep lessons short: 20 - 30 minutes per session maintains focus and engagement.
5. Collaborate with caregivers: Home practice reinforces classroom learning.

Teaching English vocabulary to teens with Down syndrome requires creativity, structure, and patience. Using multisensory methods, consistent repetition, and adapted fun activities ensures vocabulary learning is accessible and engaging. The adapted strategies and plans presented in this guide offer educators and caregivers practical and effective strategies to enhance language development in adolescents with Down syndrome.

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1. Buckley, S., & Bird, G. (2013). *Language development in Down syndrome: Research, theory, and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Fyfe, E., & Karmiloff-Smith, A. (2015). *Motivation and learning in adolescents with developmental disabilities*. Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews.
3. Kent-Walsh, J., & Binger, C. (2009). *Using multimodal strategies to support language learning*. Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research.
4. Laws, G., & Gunn, D. (2012). *Communication interventions for individuals with Down syndrome*. Down Syndrome Research and Practice.