

CURRENT STATUS OF VOCABULARY PROFICIENCY AMONG SECOND AND THIRD GRADE STUDENTS IN SOME PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NHA TRANG

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Title:

Thực trạng năng lực từ ngữ của học sinh lớp 2 và lớp 3 tại một số trường tiểu học ở nha trang hiện nay

Từ khóa:

Tiếng Việt, năng lực từ ngữ, giáo dục tiểu học

Keywords:

Vietnamese language, vocabulary proficiency, primary education.

TÓM TẮT: Trong bài viết này, chúng tôi tiến hành khảo sát năng lực từ ngữ tiếng Việt của học sinh lớp 2 và lớp 3 tại một số trường tiểu học ở Nha Trang hiện nay. Khảo sát được tiến hành ở 3 trường tiểu học, với công cụ khảo sát chính là phiếu khảo sát năng lực sử dụng từ ngữ cho học sinh lớp 2 và lớp 3. Kết quả thu được: 188 phiếu khảo sát được thực hiện. Sau đó, chúng tôi đã đánh giá năng lực từ ngữ của học sinh theo 3 tiêu chí: theo các mức độ năng lực cao, trung bình và thấp. Từ đó, chúng tôi đề xuất một số giải pháp cho việc tổ chức dạy học Tiếng Việt nhằm nâng cao năng lực từ ngữ cho học sinh tiểu học, cụ thể là học sinh lớp 2 và lớp 3.

ABSTRACT: In this article, we conducted a survey on the Vietnamese Vocabulary proficiency of second and third grade students in some primary schools in Nha Trang. The survey was conducted in three primary schools, using a proficiency survey tool focusing on vocabulary usage for second and third grade students. Results obtained: 188 survey sheets were completed. Subsequently, we evaluated the vocabulary proficiency of students based on three criteria: high, medium, and low proficiency levels. Based on this, we propose some solutions for organizing Vietnamese language teaching to enhance vocabulary proficiency for primary school students, specifically second and third graders.

1. Introduction

Vietnamese is one of the most important and essential subjects in primary education. Language education is carried out in all subjects and educational activities, with Vietnamese Language (referred to as Vietnamese in primary school) playing a dominant role. In other words, Vietnamese Language in elementary schools always plays a crucial role in language education.

Developing language proficiency for students according to the 2018 General Education Program for Language Subjects is associated with effectively training reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Therefore, the task of providing students with linguistic knowledge, knowledge of the Vietnamese language system, rules of operation, and products in communication

activities is a focal point of Vietnamese language teaching in primary schools.

Among the language proficiencies that need to be developed for students, vocabulary proficiency is an indispensable one. It plays a crucial role in providing means for learners to achieve language proficiency effectively. Learners need to master vocabulary and be able to use them in daily communication. If a person's vocabulary is limited, it will hinder their successful communication.

Educators classify vocabulary proficiency as a tool proficiency within language proficiency, recognizing its critical role in enabling learners to effectively attain other skills. For learners and communicators in foreign or second languages, vocabulary proficiency is significant as it lays the groundwork for developing other types of proficiencies. It is also one of the measures of the level of language proficiency and communication skills of learners.

As we embarked on the journey of implementing the 2018 General Education Program in primary schools, particularly targeting second and third graders, our aim was to equip teachers with strategies to optimize Vietnamese language instruction and bolster students' vocabulary proficiency. To achieve this, we conducted a comprehensive survey assessing the Vietnamese vocabulary skills of second and third graders across select primary schools in Nha Trang. Our fervent hope is that the insights gleaned from this study will empower educators to better grasp their students' needs, pinpoint the root causes of any learning gaps, and devise impactful solutions to bridge them.

2. Theoretical framework and Methods

2.1. Theoretical framework

2.1.1. Concept of Vocabulary Proficiency

Vocabulary proficiency encompasses the knowledge and ability to use language, including lexical factors (reflected in vocabulary size and topic range) and grammatical elements. Within vocabulary proficiency, the ability to grasp word meanings, use the most appropriate word, and select the correct word among semantically related options are equally crucial. Generally, an individual is considered proficient in vocabulary usage when they can accurately pronounce the words they are speaking (word phonetics), understand how to use the word in a sentence, grasp the basic meaning of the word, employ the word appropriately in various situations, and comprehend its relationship with other words within a larger context.

In summary, vocabulary proficiency entails the capacity to mobilize and synthesize lexical knowledge, along with language usage skills, to comprehend and generate texts effectively to address communication situations in life.

2.1.2. Development of Vocabulary Proficiency

Teaching vocabulary involves not only imparting word meanings but also providing knowledge and equipping learners with strategies to expand their lexical repertoire. When studying vocabulary teaching methods, experts mostly categorize them into two types: receptive and productive vocabulary (Harmer, 1991; Hatch and Brown, 1995). Receptive vocabulary comprises words that learners recognize and understand when used in context, words identified through listening and reading texts but not yet utilized in speaking and writing (Stuart Webb, 2009). Productive vocabulary,

on the other hand, consists of words that learners understand, accurately express, and employ to convey their thoughts to others through speaking and writing activities (Stuart Webb, 2005). Individual vocabulary knowledge depends on personal factors, motivations, desires, and linguistic needs (Hatch and Brown, 1995). Mastery of vocabulary is an excellent skill for individuals in using language, acquired based on their own needs and motivations, and it is a vital component of language proficiency.

Thus, the majority of linguists affirm that vocabulary proficiency (or vocabulary usage proficiency) is one of the components constituting language proficiency. In essence, vocabulary proficiency encompasses the knowledge and ability to use language, including lexical and grammatical factors.

Currently, in terms of content structure, language teaching programs in different educational systems are categorized into two groups: subject-based and language proficiency-based. The mother tongue teaching programs of countries such as the UK, Germany, France, Australia, Canada, Thailand, etc., all emphasize the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For instance, in the UK's mother tongue teaching program, it is explained: "Students' language proficiency is developed through an integrated program of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities." These programs all aim to develop students' comprehensive language proficiency, providing them with a vital tool for communication, learning, and development.

Within the classroom context, teachers often find that learning vocabulary may not always be the most exciting task for students.

However, by employing engaging and interesting teaching methods, teachers can capture students' interest and aid in retention. Some techniques that teachers may consider when teaching vocabulary include drawing (especially effective for teaching children), using word boards, teaching new words through familiar ones, incorporating games (crossword puzzles, role-playing), writing stories or texts by integrating given vocabulary into reading and writing, and using vocabulary accurately within context. Thus, to develop vocabulary usage proficiency, researchers unanimously agree: the best approach is to provide conditions for learners to learn in a rich context, where learners can see the vocabulary they need to learn repeatedly to remember it in the long term.

Formerly, in Vietnam, the emphasis on teaching Vietnamese and foreign languages in schools leaned heavily towards linguistic structure analysis, overlooking the importance of language skills and the formation of language usage habits for students. Presently, amidst the trends of innovation and educational development, the task of language education in schools is to contribute to adjusting non-standard language habits into standard ones and developing these habits through oral and written language in various text formats.

The curriculum for teaching Vietnamese should not only focus on linguistic theory but also prioritize the process of honing language proficiency for students.

2.2. Methods

2.2.1. Theoretical research methods

We analyze and synthesize theoretical research issues and documents related to the topic of the article. Through studying

documents such as scientific research works, books, newspapers, and magazines, we build and establish a theoretical basis to orient theoretical issues on the ability to use words and develop vocabulary. Develop students' ability to use words.

2.2.2. Investigation and survey methods

The method of investigation and practical survey is carried out using survey forms (to probe the current situation by collecting opinions of teachers and students about teaching Vietnamese in primary schools today), questionnaires and questionnaires. ask. Place of practical survey using surveys and questionnaires: 3 primary schools in Nha Trang city.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Target and Scope of Study

Purpose of the survey: the data and information obtained are the basis for us to determine research directions and propose solutions to develop and improve vocabulary skills for students.

We selected and conducted a survey on the current state of Vietnamese language teaching and vocabulary proficiency among elementary school students at three primary schools in Nha Trang City, including Tan Lap 1 Primary School, Tan Lap 2 Primary School, and Phuoc Hai 1 Primary School.

The number of students surveyed for vocabulary proficiency assessment was 188, consisting of 115 second-grade students (38 from Tan Lap 1 Primary School, 34 from Tan Lap 2 Primary School, and 43 from Phuoc Hai 1 Primary School) and 73 third-grade students (35 from Tan Lap 1 Primary School and 38 from Phuoc Hai 1 Primary School).

Survey Period: School Year 2022 - 2023 (with additional surveying in the first semester of the school year 2023-2024).

3.2. Results of Student Vocabulary Proficiency Survey

To obtain objective, accurate, and realistic results, we collaborated with teachers from the primary schools to have second and third-grade students complete a vocabulary proficiency survey. Specifically, 73 students from Tan Lap 1 Primary School, 34 students from Tan Lap 2 Primary School, and 81 students from Phuoc Hai 1 Primary School participated in the survey.

The criteria for evaluating student responses included:

Accurate use of word forms (auditory and visual recognition of words, reading and writing of words): Students correctly employed the spoken form of words (accurate pronunciation of word sounds) and utilized the correct written form of words (accurate reproduction of word writing based on observed images; accurate reproduction of word writing based on heard sounds).

Understanding word meanings and expanding vocabulary: Students connected word forms and meanings; associated words with abstract meanings, concrete meanings, appropriate communication contexts, and identified relationships between words within the vocabulary system, recognizing antonyms.

Using words in specific communication contexts: Students knew how to select, arrange, and combine words into phrases and sentences (choosing the most appropriate vocabulary for expressing the content identified in the specified vocabulary).

Table 1. Results of the survey on the ability to use words of students of some primary schools in Nha Trang

Unit: Percentage

Criteria	Evaluation					
	Second grade			Third grade		
	Good	Average	Below Average	Good	Average	Below Average
1. Use the correct form of words (hear and recognize words, read and write words)	47.8	45.2	7	75.3	24.7	0
2. Understand the meaning of words and expand vocabulary	40	53	7	72.6	27.4	0
3. Use words in specific communication contexts	58.3	33.9	7.8	67.1	32.9	0

During our survey of student assignments, we observed that the majority of students correctly utilized spoken word forms and accurately reproduced word writing based on observed images or heard sounds. They demonstrated an understanding of word meanings, although some students still lacked knowledge of antonyms. Moreover, when teachers provided specific communication contexts, students were able to select appropriate vocabulary for expression. However, some students struggled to use words in specific communication contexts (leaving questions blank or providing incorrect contextual responses), mainly among second-grade students who had a limited vocabulary base. Students commonly made several errors in vocabulary usage, including:

Capitalization errors: some students failed to capitalize the first letter of sentences and proper nouns.

Error in word usage, such as:

Misspelling due to regional dialects: "mượng" (mượn), "vân lời" (vâng), "chăn màng" (màn), "bịt kính" (kín), "mặt áo" (mặc), "áo khoát" (khoác), "tắc tivi" (tắt)...

Misspelling of vowel sounds (ay-ây): "thây đồ" (thay), "giây" (giày), "thức dạy" (dậy)...

Initial consonant errors: ("tr/ch") "trở đi học" (chở), "học chò" (trò); ("c/k") "ciên trì" (kiên), "kũng" (cũng); ("s/x") "xê" (sê)...

Errors in tone marks: (confusion between the "hoi" and "nga" tone marks): "ngũ" (ngũ); "đễ" (đẽ), "sê" (sê)...

Spelling errors influenced by pronunciation: "lìn" (liền), "dị/ dậ" (vậ)...

Errors due to a lack of understanding of word meanings, such as: "bịt bánh" (bịch), "bịch mắt" (bịt)...

Repetition of words during expression

Students make mistakes in using words for the following reasons:

- Students confuse words with close sounds.

- Students use words that do not match the meaning of the sentence because they do not remember the exact phonetic form of the word.

- Students do not understand the correct meaning of words.

Some other reasons leading to students making vocabulary errors:

- Because students do not fully understand the meaning of the word or misunderstand the meaning of the word.

- Because students confuse some words with similar meanings.

- Because their cognitive level and vocabulary are still limited.

3.3. Proposed Solutions

3.3.1. Proposing the development of a supplementary exercise system to enhance vocabulary proficiency for elementary school students

When constructing and selecting exercises to cultivate vocabulary skills for elementary students, alongside adhering to the principles of Vietnamese language teaching, it is essential to consider the principle of appropriateness to inspire interest and motivation for learning among students. Additionally, the exercise system should include materials relevant to students' communication environment and gradually increase in difficulty. The exercise system should center around the principle of communication, emphasizing students' autonomy, initiative, and creativity during the learning process. It is necessary to design exercises that enable learners to effectively navigate the relationship between linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors such as: communication targets, communication purposes, and communication contexts. Based on the analysis of theoretical issues regarding vocabulary proficiency, we suggest that teachers can develop a system of exercises to develop Vietnamese vocabulary proficiency for elementary students, comprising various exercise types:

Exercises focusing on the correct usage of word forms;

Part-of-speech exercises;

Word meaning comprehension exercises;

Word usage exercises;

Vocabulary expansion exercises;

Exercises to enhance vocabulary activation.

3.3.2. Gamifying Exercises

In the realm of Vietnamese language learning, as well as in education more broadly, students often struggle to develop an affinity for subjects, especially if the instructional content lacks engagement and allure. Elementary school students, particularly those in grades 1, 2, and 3, are young and have limited attention spans, making sustained focus challenging. They may easily become disheartened and tense during lessons if the content exceeds their actual abilities. Teachers must introduce students to innovative teaching methods, captivating them in lessons and encouraging active participation in learning. It is essential for educators to design suitable games and effectively integrate them into lessons to stimulate students' interest and motivation for learning. Since gamified learning methods align well with the psychological characteristics of elementary school students, they have the potential to ignite students' passion for learning.

Incorporating games into each lesson can foster enthusiasm and interest in learning, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and quality of education for students. Teachers can organize games such as "Golden Bell," "Connect," "Fun Learning Contests," "Fill in the Blanks," "Guess the Meaning," "Role-playing," "Spelling Bee," "Pronunciation Challenges," among others, or host writing competitions where students write words or sentences on the board in groups, individually, or collectively. By engaging in these games, students actively explore and discover knowledge based on the information provided by the teacher, offering ample opportunities for them to express their personal views, take initiative in learning, and master communication situations.

Through these activities, the latent Vietnamese language skills of students have the chance to be applied in specific contexts.

2.3.3. *Cultivating a Positive Vietnamese Learning Environment for Elementary School Students*

Teachers should foster a positive environment that stimulates students' learning interests by avoiding the creation of distinctions between weak and strong students. They should provide ample opportunities for students to engage in communication, using words, gestures, and eye contact to encourage them. When errors are identified, teachers should still encourage students to complete their tasks and provide reminders after they have finished, rather than interrupting and correcting them immediately.

Teachers should instill motivation for learning through enjoyable activities. Utilizing language games, melodies in songs, and other playful elements can significantly impact students' emotions as they grasp the language.

In conclusion, in the process of teaching Vietnamese, teachers should expose students to the language as much as possible. Immersing themselves in the language regularly will help them remember more words and develop strong communication reflexes.

4. Conclusion

Based on the assessment of vocabulary proficiency among second and third-grade students in some elementary schools in Nha

Trang and existing research on the principles and methods of teaching Vietnamese, we propose several measures that teachers can implement to enhance students' vocabulary proficiency. These proposals take into account feasibility and effectiveness in developing vocabulary proficiency for elementary school students, thereby improving the quality of their learning and meeting the demands of educational innovation. Additionally, teachers should be flexible and proactive in selecting appropriate methods and approaches tailored to each condition, circumstance, and student group during the teaching process.

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