

An investigation into strategies to learning English vocabulary of first year non-English majored students at a University in Mekong Delta

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Abstract: *Vocabulary acquisition is recognized as an important factor in second language learning. However, mastering English vocabulary is always a challenge for learners. This study aims to identify vocabulary learning strategies frequently-used by first-year Non-English majored students at a University in Mekong Delta and how these students evaluate the importance of learning English vocabulary by using strategies.*

Keywords: *English vocabulary; vocabulary learning strategies; learners*

1. Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge is often considered an important tool for second language learners. Nation (1990) further describes the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. Success in using a second language heavily depends on vocabulary knowledge and lack of that knowledge is the main obstacle and the biggest obstacle for readers to overcome Huckin (1995).

Even after many years of learning English, it is difficult for learners to communicate successfully. They tend to use simple vocabulary instead of what they have learned and use ineffective vocabulary learning methods. Therefore, learning vocabulary is a significant obstacle for students when learning a foreign language.

As a result, the research - “An Investigation into Strategies to Learning English Vocabulary of First-year Non-English Majored Students at a University in Mekong Delta “ is carried out to discover learner’s awareness of the importance of English vocabulary learning through the use of vocabulary learning strategies, which can reveal learner’s overall learning motivation and engagement, is used to develop targeted teaching methods that promote effective vocabulary learning strategies and is able to contribute to improved English language programs in the Mekong Delta, specifically tailored to the needs and learning styles of Non-English majors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Learning strategies

Learning strategies are the natural learning processes that take place regardless of whether the learner is paying attention to them and purposefully modifying them, according to Bialystock (1985). Learning processes and learning strategies are therefore the same.

Based on their contributions to language learning, Rubin (1987: 20) separates the strategies into three categories: social, communicative, and learning strategies. Language acquisition can be facilitated directly by learning strategies, but language learning can also be indirectly facilitated by social and communicative tactics.

Oxford & Scarcella (1994) summarizes her view of language learning strategies by listing twelve key features. They are i) the contribution to the main goal, communicative competence; ii) learners’ allowance to become more self-directed; iii) the expansion of the roles of teachers; iv) being problem-oriented; v) specific action taken by the learner; vi) the involvement of many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive; vii) direct and indirect learning support; viii) being not always observable; ix) being often conscious; x) being taught; xi) being flexible; xii) being influenced by a variety of factors. These twelve features reflect almost fully the characteristics of language learning strategies.

Each researcher defines learning strategies from different perspectives. In this study, the researchers adopted the definition by Oxford on the account that

it covers the essential aspects of language learning strategies.

2.1.1. The important of learning strategies

It is crucial that students “learn how to learn” in addition to their English language proficiency, which is regarded as content. Long-term gains would be the main advantage for students. In the lengthy and intricate process of learning a language, effective learning practices would allow students to continue enhancing their English on their own.

“The main benefit gained from all learning strategies ... is the fact that they enable learners to take note control of their own learning so that students can take more responsibility for their studies”. (Nation, 1990)

The strategies, consequently, facilitate learners to produce their independence, autonomy, and self-reliance within the study. With a variety of learning methods at their disposal, students can choose how specifically they want to handle challenges. Practical knowledge of learning strategies and the consequent application skills could dramatically alter the problems associated with learning.

Furthermore, good learning strategies may have a great contribution to the learners’ success in language learning. Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1999) stated: “differences between more effective learners and less effective learners were found in the number and range of strategies used, in how the strategies were applied to the task, and in whether they were appropriate for the task”. It can be inferred that with appropriate learning strategies, students can learn faster and more effectively.

2.1.2. The important of vocabulary learning

Vocabulary learning is extremely important for those that learn English. Vocabulary is used not solely by students while finding out within the school but also in society. Vocabulary is essential so as to totally perceive what others want to mention and to be able to communicate well. Vocabulary learning is additionally important for students. As a result, vocabulary is used because of the beginning of learning English. Vocabulary is defined as “all the words known and employed by a specific person” by Cambridge Dictionary. Nevertheless, learning vocabulary requires focus in order to sustain basic cognitive functions over an extended period of time, and it usually causes problems for the learner because they tend to forget the words they have acquired easily. Additionally, we won’t be able to speak clearly if our vocabulary is poor. The

perceived input of a language is the key to learning it, and studying vocabulary is actually the key that opens that door. Why is vocabulary an essential skill? Because it communicates your ideas and point of view, vocabulary is very significant.

In addition vocabulary is basic competence that must be reached by students in order to master other competencies like Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. It is difficult to master in the other competencies without mastering and understanding the vocabulary.

Dewi (2013:9) describes another importance of vocabulary. He said that vocabulary mastery is needed to develop the four aspects of communication such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

Famous linguist Wilkins (1967) once said that without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. Indeed, vocabulary is considered the beginning of all foreign language learning and determines the success of the learner. Therefore, in order for their English learning to be truly effective and highly applicable, learners must clearly understand the importance of vocabulary.

Some argue that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, we will not be able to use structures and functions that we may have learned to communicate intelligibly, depends heavily on vocabulary knowledge and lack of that knowledge is the main obstacle and the biggest obstacle for the reader to overcome (Huckin, 1995).

Generally, among the four skills of English Vocabulary is present everywhere and is considered an important part of English no matter the situation. Because vocabulary is considered the beginning of all foreign language learning and determines the success of the learners. Therefore, we should not ignore its importance and influence.

2.2. Learning vocabulary strategies

2.2.1. Discovery strategies

a. Guessing strategies

When faced with an unfamiliar term, students typically try to figure it out by guessing or inferring its meaning from its context. Guessing strategies include guessing the word’s meaning from contextual clues, analyzing its part of speech, detecting affixes or roots, and checking for L1 cognate. According to Hulstijn (1992), meanings deduced from context 16 are typically easier to recall than meanings provided

in a decontextualized list. Furthermore, learners can better retain words when they are exposed to appropriate grammatical usage or collocations in natural contexts.

b. Dictionary strategies

For language learners, the dictionary is considered an indispensable friend during the journey to conquer knowledge. A dictionary is a place to explain information about human language in the most understandable and objective way. The task of a dictionary, especially an encyclopedia, is to help readers understand and apply (use) correctly a word, phrase, term, idiom, concept, category or a specific issue in human social life so using a dictionary is deemed essential in learning vocabulary in any language.

c. Social strategies

Learners can learn the meaning of words by asking others such as teachers or classmates to translate an unknown word into their mother tongue, give synonyms and antonyms of that word, sentence strategies with vocabulary, or participate in group activities to discover the meanings of English words.

2.2.2. Consolidation strategies

a. Note-taking strategies

The human brain will remember better if images and colors are used. Therefore, learners can absolutely apply this vocabulary learning method to memorize new words more effectively.

b. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategy refers to problem-solving techniques that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials. Cognitive methods encompass a variety of techniques such as directed bodily reaction, translation, grouping, note-taking, deduction, recombination, imaging, auditory representation, key word, contextualization, elaboration, transfer, and inference.

c. Memory strategies

Memory strategies are techniques or methods that can help improve our ability to remember and recall information. Repeating information aloud or writing it down multiple times can help reinforce your memory.

3. Conclusion

The current study views vocabulary as a crucial component of language, and studying vocabulary is a crucial aspect of learning a second or foreign language. For language learners to successfully complete tasks related to both production and comprehension in the second or foreign language, they require a broad

range of target language words. Providing students with a range of vocabulary acquisition techniques is one method to support their efforts in improving their vocabulary in a second language. Their ability to use a second or foreign language will improve as a result of this, as they will be more proactive, inventive, and successful in increasing their vocabulary.

The results show that learners used almost every strategy presented. Some strategies that are said to be applied frequently and other strategies are also used but with less frequency. A notable point is that students often have to learn vocabulary on their own, mainly through mechanical memorization, without much guidance from teachers. This shows that there is a need for intervention and support from instructors to help students develop and use vocabulary learning strategies more effectively.

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