

A Study on the Current Situation of Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Junior High School Students In One Rural Area

Jinrong Gu, Libin Duan

Sichuan Normal University

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is the basis of language learning. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are closely related to vocabulary. Due to the differences in learning situation and teaching resources, there are differences in vocabulary learning between students in urban areas and those in rural areas. This paper selects 93 students and two teachers from a rural junior high school to investigate their VLS. The research methods are questionnaire and interview. The collected data is processed by SPSS.26. The results show that students' overall awareness of VLS is weak and their vocabulary learning methods are mechanical. Teachers actually focus on the cultivation of VLS, however, the effect is poor. More efforts are needed to train students' VLS in the future. The curriculum standards (2022 Edition) clearly proposes to cultivate students' learning strategies and form their own learning strategies. VLS are a part of it and it's accord with the educational conceptions, which is beneficial to improve students' English vocabulary learning efficiency, solve some difficulties caused by vocabulary problems, and promote the development of students' language ability, even to improve the ability of autonomous learning and self-regulation for lifelong language learning.

KEYWORDS

Vocabulary Learning Strategy; English Vocabulary; Junior high School

1 Introduction

Vocabulary learning is the basis of English learning. New English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) clearly puts forward that students in junior high school should master 1600 to 1800 words. The cultivation of students' learning strategies is clearly stipulated. At present, most domestic teachers still adopt the general teaching model of "reading English plus reading Chinese" (Yan Shiyi, 2021). It's mechanical without deep and meaningful connection and expansion of words. Students can't skillfully use words in various contexts. It's still the difficulty in English teaching and learning. Questionnaire and interview are used to investigate junior high school students. The purpose of the research conforms to the educational concept of curriculum standards for vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) can reflect students' scientific mastery of language learning methods, autonomous learning ability, and even self-regulation ability well, which is beneficial for lifelong language learning.

2 Literature Review

(1) Vocabulary learning strategies

It is necessary to understand the definition of VLS before doing deep investigation research. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) propose that learning strategies are used by learners to understand, learn or keep new information. Likewise, the scholar Liu Rude (1997) holds that it refers to the complex scheme composed of learning rules and skills by learners. As for second language VLS, Gu (2003) refers to various strategies for purposefully analyzing vocabulary learning tasks, planning, deploying, monitoring and evaluating learning behaviors in order to acquire second language vocabulary. Recently, Ma Guanghui (2016) believes that it refers to beliefs, actions, methods or means to promote the acquisition, memory, extraction and use of vocabulary to form new ideas. In summary, VLS are thoughts, rules, skills, methods or ways, etc. used by learners in order to achieve the effectiveness of vocabulary learning and it enjoys some principles of English language learning.

(2) The classification of VLS

The most influential classification is the one proposed by prominent researchers O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990). The first level is called metacognitive strategy, which mainly includes planning, selective attention, monitoring and evaluation, which can be applied to all types of learning tasks (Chamot, 1987). The second level is cognitive strategies including repetition, association, classification, etc. Third level strategy is social and affective strategy. Oxford (1990) studies further and adds them based on O'Malley & Chamot's research. According to the curriculum standard (2022 Edition), the interactive strategy and affective strategy are classified clearly and respectively except cognitive and metacognitive strategy.

(3) Relevant empirical studies

In terms of empirical research, the conclusions are various. Some scholars conduct study on VLS in universities and higher vocational schools. Others conduct researches on secondary school students. The results show that there's a significant correlation between the use of most learning strategies and vocabulary. Also, some students' VLS is unreasonable and is not conducive to effective learning. Although numerous scholars are conducting empirical research on VLS, all the studies on the VLS mainly focus on metacognitive and cognitive strategies of high-level English language learners, while there are relatively few researches on social and affective dimension. Actually, the total amount of the empirical study of English VLS is not enough.

3 Methodology

(1) Research questions

- 1) What are the characteristics of students' VLS in the rural area?
- 2) What are the implications for teaching of VLS?

(2) Participants

The participants are from two classes of Grade 7 in junior high school in Mianyang, Sichuan. Most of the students themselves want to know their vocabulary learning and they are highly enthusiastic and cooperative, so that the data is more reliable. Besides, most of students in this school are from poor families in remote areas, their learning characteristics is worth researching.

(3) Research instruments

1) Questionnaire

The questionnaire is adapted according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990). This scale adopts Likert's five level scale, and the number 1-5 stands for never used, sometimes used, basically used, generally used, and always used respectively. 93 valid questionnaires are collected. 36 boys and 57 girls participate in the survey. According to SPSS.26. statistical analysis, the reliability of the overall scale is 0.955 and the KMO value is 0.918 and $p=0.000<0.01$. The reliability and validity of the VLS questionnaire is reliable and valid.

2) Interview

In order to research more about the students, their teachers are interviewed. The questions are: (1) What do you think of the mastery of words in your class? (2) How do you guide students to learn words in your class? (3) Do you pay attention to the cultivation of students' VSL? And how do you help them learn VSL to learn words?

(4) Data analysis

The data of questionnaire is collected online. Students fill in it through Wechat and QQ. The designed questionnaire is first sent to their English teachers, and then they tell students the reason and requirements. The data then is processed and analyzed by SPSS.26. The interview for teachers is conducted both offline and online. The data then processed by excels.

4 Results and Discussion

(1) The analysis of questionnaire

Of the three dimensions, the mean of social and affective strategy is 2.04, which is the highest among the three. The mean of other two dimensions is 1.71 and 1.90 respectively. However, they are all below 3, which implies that the awareness of students' VLS is weak.

Table 4.1 Descriptive analysis of VLS

Dimension	N	Average	Standard deviation
Cognitive strategy	93	1.71	.65
Metacognitive strategy	93	1.90	.89
Social/affective strategy	93	2.04	.87

The specific strategy results of each dimension is shown in table 4.2. In cognitive strategies, to some extent, the most used strategies are homophonic creation (2.16) and advertisements and slogans (1.95), while the less used one is repetition (1.41). Among metacognitive strategies, the most used strategy is planning (2.04) while the less used one adjustment (1.78). In social and affective dimension, the strategies of cooperative and asking for help is 2.49 and 2.03 respectively. The mean of all other strategies is between them.

So, students prefer concise and rhythmic vocabulary memory methods and mechanical rote repetition isn't effective for them. Admittedly, students may have certain arrangements and goals for their vocabulary learning, however, they are somewhat backward in action. Also, group cooperative and asking for help are helpful for them to learn English vocabulary.

Table 4.2 Descriptive analysis of specific VLS

Dimension	Specific strategy	Average	Standard deviation
Cognitive strategy	Homophonic Creation	2.16	1.145
	Ads and slogans	1.95	.971
	Repetition	1.41	.663
Metacognitive strategy	Plan	2.04	1.031
	Supervising	1.97	1.047
Social/affective strategy	Cooperative learning	2.49	1.203
	Ask for help	2.03	.972

(2) The analysis of interview

In the first question, teachers believe that the overall mastery of words isn't good. Some students can't even write a correct word in dictation. The problems that words can't be read or spelled out are common. Students' vocabulary are receptive and they have difficulty in productive words. They can't use words flexibly leading to communication breakdowns. A large amount of learning difficulties and problems affect students' interest and desires of English learning.

In the second question, teachers mention that they stress phonetic pronunciation. New words are learned in texts. Most of them look at word lists to learn and review the key words. Besides, cards, pictures, objects, etc. are used in classes. Vocabulary learning is mainly learned or acquired together with other class activities in class by situational teaching method. Group cooperation is not mentioned.

In the third question, students are encouraged to observe structures of words, use word formation to learn vocabulary, guess according to contexts, and use dictionaries. It shows that the above-mentioned strategies mostly belong to the category dimension, however, the categories of metacognitive, social and affective VSL are few.

5 Conclusion and Implications

The research has its limitations because of limited time, samples and researcher's knowledge. Therefore, more in-depth researches are needed. All in all, students in this school have weak awareness of VLS and are more passive learners. The teachers in the school have the awareness of cultivating of students' VSL and most of the strategies belong to cognitive VSL. The effectiveness isn't ideal. For future learning, students should learn to know a wide range of ways to learn vocabulary first. Open students' horizons of English materials and improve students' sensitivity to words. More metacognitive strategies should be cultivated. Second, vocabulary learning should be interesting and cooperative. Songs, poems and proverbs have the same effect. In addition, students like to learn words cooperatively. They are usually strict with each other, which makes students remember words longer. Third, teachers should play the role of resource providers and helpers well. Teachers should strengthen professional knowledge, constantly improve education and teaching ability for most students' English knowledge only comes from English teachers and they just accept it passively and blindly.

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