

An investigation into vocabulary learning techniques adapted by English-majored students at Vietnam National University of Agriculture

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Abstract

The study aims to survey and evaluate the reality of vocabulary learning methods adapted by 200 English majored students in courses K62, K63, K64 & K65 of English Language - Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages at Vietnam National University of Agriculture. The results of the study revealed that the majority of students participating in the survey said that studying vocabulary is very important/important to them. Therefore, most of the students have identified the role of vocabulary learning in a lecture hall and future employment opportunities. The number of students who identified the role of learning vocabulary properly to help them improve their English skills accounted for 79.5%. This is a praiseworthy signal, but through the reality of the vocabulary learning methods of English students, we realize that they still have many difficulties in learning vocabulary.

Key words: English, learning, reality, techniques, vocabulary

1. Introduction

Vocabulary plays an important role in learning and using English. In the process of learning and practicing language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, vocabulary helps learners capture and communicate most information for many different purposes. However, many Vietnamese people are having difficulty in learning vocabulary so English learning of students in general is still limited and learning is often just coping with exams. Facing such a fact, it is not difficult to find the cause of the above situation. The main reasons can be listed:

Firstly, the duration of English training is not enough to train all graduates with the ability to communicate fluently to meet the needs of employers. In fact, both teachers and students in schools do not have enough time to train and absorb knowledge fully.

Secondly, another reason is that English vocabulary is constantly changing because a large number of words disappear and are replaced by new words or a few words that have multiple meanings at different times or in different periods of time, or different contexts.

Students lack self-assurance and are unable to overcome procrastination. A lot of students are afraid of speaking because they are afraid of being wrong, afraid of being laughed at, and gradually become closed in English lessons. They are also not really aware of the importance of foreign languages.

It can be seen that a large number of students still have many limitations in learning vocabulary. Realizing the essentiality of this problem, we chose the topic "An investigation into

vocabulary learning used by English-majored students at VNUA" to research, with the hope of helping students of VNUA have a comprehensive view and aware of the importance of the problem, thereby creating a premise to promote students' vocabulary learning methods in the most effective way.

2. Objectives of the study

The specific objective of the survey is to explore the theoretical bases of English vocabulary learning methods in general and vocabulary learning methods of English-majored students at VNUA based on the documents related to the research topic. Moreover, the results of the research help to analyze the reality of the vocabulary learning methods of students majoring in English, VNUA, and offer some effective vocabulary learning methods.

Finally, some strategies and solutions to help English language learning in general and vocabulary learning in particular become more effective, along with making recommendations to the faculty's lecturers, to the Faculty of Education and Foreign languages as well as the VNUA aim to improve students' ability to learn vocabulary in particular and learn English in general.

Finally, some strategies and solutions are offered to make learning English in general and learning vocabulary in particular more effectively, along with making suggestions to lecturers of the faculty, to the Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages as well as the University to improve the ability of students in learning vocabulary in particular and learn English in general.

3. Literature review

In the current trend of the integrated economy, in addition to the necessary professional knowledge, we also need good foreign language proficiency. Especially, when English has become a common language in the world, learning foreign languages is becoming more and more significant. However, the effects and results of learning English are still not high. The ability to learn English is not equal, the application of English in life is still limited. But according to the traditional learning method in our country today, learners often complain about the lessons a lot. Learners become passive, less motivated to learn and use the language, which makes the English learning lessons too long and boring.

From the actual needs, we need to find useful solutions to help students learn English Vocabulary better.

The research "Using active teaching techniques to improve vocabulary for 5th grade students at Nhan Thang Primary School" conducted by Ms. Nguyen Thi Soi (2018) shows that although research on the current situation of English teaching and learning in Vietnam has changed significantly, teaching English in general and teaching vocabulary in particular is still not satisfactory. Her study gives some suggestions to help teachers build high motivation for students by using appropriate active teaching techniques.

Another research "Using active learning techniques to engage the second-year students at Tran Quoc Tuan university in vocabulary learning" done by Vo Thi Nga revealed that applying active teaching techniques in engaging students in vocabulary learning activities, made them more actively involved, also more motivated and more interested in learning vocabulary. However, there are still some unavoidable limitations such as some students are not well equipped with skills.

The result of "Study the current situation and propose solutions to learn English vocabulary of non-English major students at Tra Vinh University" conducted by Dr. Phung Van shows that students of Tra Vinh University are fully aware of the importance of English in general and of

English vocabulary in particular. However, students of Tra Vinh University face many difficulties when practicing skills but lack the necessary vocabulary.

Up to now, many studies in English on vocabulary have certain contributions to learning or teaching vocabulary. Some studies can be mentioned as "The Effectiveness of Using Language Games in Teaching Vocabulary" by a group of authors who studied the topic. The research has shown that the use of games in teaching foreign languages is an effective method as learners can be more proactive, more happy and comfortable. Along with that, this method also has a direct connection to the learner's imagination, helping the learner to consolidate knowledge in a proactive way.

Besides, the topic "Teaching Vocabulary Through Games – A Sanguine Step" done by Beena (2011) carried out the research of teaching vocabulary through games and then suggested some games that could be applied to teaching and learning vocabulary. Learners can more easily absorb and remember vocabulary for longer time, as a result, they can use vocabulary more fluently and rationally. In addition, this method creates comfort and excitement in learning vocabulary for learners.

The upshot of Mofareh's article "The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught" shows that vocabulary is often seen as an important tool for second language learners since the limited vocabulary in the second language will hinder communication. Together with pointing out the essence of having enough vocabulary for a proficient second language, Alqahtani also mentioned effective vocabulary teaching methods. However, the author also concluded in his report that teachers should pay attention to the subject of vocabulary, students' level, characteristics and also the value of techniques for learners, so lecturers should be aware of these differences when applying their teaching techniques to students.

4. Research methods

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is used to evaluate different aspects of the research content. Google Sheet is applied to analyze the quantitative data collected from the survey questionnaire done 200 English majored students of the Faculty of Education & Foreign Languages of VNUA. The participants consisted of 50 freshmen of course K65 English-majored students, 50 second-year English-majored students of course K64, 50 third-year English-majored students of course K63, and 50 fourth-year English-majored students of course K62 of the Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages at VNUA.

To reflect the current situation of English-major students, the survey was conducted to focus on the learning methods and methods of memorizing vocabulary of English students. In addition, we learnt about the difficulties that students got into when learning vocabulary and found out the appropriate solution afterwards. Through data analysis, we draw accurate conclusions on the issue under study. However, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, this survey was conducted online through Google Form.

To cross check the results of the survey, an in-depth interview was also used. This is the supporting method for qualitative analysis. We interviewed directly, learned the opinions of 20 English language students, and we first conducted a survey of ones of the Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages at VNUA via Google Meet to learn about students' vocabulary during

the study process. After the interview process, we will have a better overview of the current situation of vocabulary learning methods of English students.

Analyze and process data method

5. Research results

The results from the survey done by 200 students and in-depth interviews with 20 students showed that the majority of students of Courses K62, K63, K64 and K65 English-majored at VNUA have the view that learning English vocabulary is very important and/ important to them. Up to 98.5% of the students participating in the survey said that studying vocabulary is very important/important to them. Therefore, most of the students have identified the role of vocabulary learning in a lecture hall and future employment opportunities. The number of students who identified the role of learning vocabulary properly to help them improve their English skills accounted for 79.5%. This is a praiseworthy signal, but through the reality of the vocabulary learning methods of English students, we realize that they still have many difficulties in learning vocabulary. Most of the students spend about 1-2 hours a day learning English vocabulary. Besides, the vocabulary learning methods used by the students are very diverse. Up to 82.5% of students learn vocabulary by taking notes from reference sources, as well as up to 62% of students using the dictionary to look up new words and other methods such as guessing the meaning, asking friends/lecturers, and learning through classroom activities.

The results of in-depth interviews with 20 English-major students show that the majority of students now use smartphones to learn vocabulary, through mobile applications to memorize and learn vocabulary every day. Lots of methods have been applied but they still feel that learning vocabulary is very difficult/difficult, what is the reason? The results of the survey by questionnaire show that the biggest reason leading to the reality of vocabulary learning of English students is the lack of specific learning methods, which leads to frustration and lack of motivation. According to the results of in-depth interviews with 20 students, up to 37% of students find the biggest difficulty is forgetting when learning vocabulary. Therefore, finding a solution to help overcome this situation is an urgent matter of this research. Indeed, we have found suggestions on vocabulary learning strategies for English students and also suggestions on vocabulary teaching in class for teachers of the Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages to help improve the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching. There are three strategic proposals that most students consider to be effective: learning through repeated notes; learning through movies, songs, English stories and learning by flashcards; these are three recommendations that account for 70.3%. As for classroom teaching, it is suggested that teachers often use many games in teaching and learning vocabulary, along with that teachers should always be ready to answer questions and guide students. These are all the results of our research by surveying 200 friends and interviewing 20 English-majored students about the reality and methods of studying vocabulary.

6. Conclusion

The majority of students are aware of the necessity of learning vocabulary, according to data processing and survey findings from an online poll of 200 students and in-depth interviews with 20 English students. Up to 82.5% of the students participating in the survey said that studying vocabulary is very important for them, and 16% of the students said that studying vocabulary is important. Therefore, the majority of English students have seen the benefits and

role of vocabulary learning in their learning process in the classroom as well as in future job opportunities. The number of students who consider the role of properly studying vocabulary to help them improve their English level accounts for 79.5%. However, there is still a small percentage of students who are not aware of the importance and role of vocabulary learning in classroom learning as well as future job opportunities. Therefore, it is a good sign that 46.7% of students spend 1-2 hours a day practicing English, and perhaps this number will increase in the future if they find appropriate methods. According to the current situation and English learning methods being applied by English students, up to 82.5% of students are studying vocabulary through taking notes from sources outside the classroom, such as watching movies, reading stories, listening to music, etc. and when they meet a new word, 62% of students use the dictionary to look up the meaning of the word right away. The survey shows that most of the remaining students choose the method of guessing the meaning of the word according to the word. The scene or the use of vocabulary learning applications on smartphones today is no longer strange or very popular. Many methods are applied, but still up to 37% of students have difficulty "forgetting" when learning vocabulary, so what is the reason?

There are many reasons pointed out but there is no specific learning method that takes the top position with the rate of 58%, the next reason is a subjective factor that is lazy, which is 33% of the majoring English students said. All of the above causes can be overcome, but you have to be really determined and dedicated to it otherwise your results will still level off. It's easy to get discouraged, and over time, it will become a problem. Psychological obsession extinguishes the fire of passion in you.

Therefore, it is necessary to find out strategies for studying vocabulary for English students and also suggestions for teaching vocabulary in class for teachers of the Faculty of Education and Foreign Language to help improve teaching effectiveness. The strategic suggestions given by the students were learning through movies, songs, and English stories (30.1%); learning through repetition (21.1%) and learning by flashcards (19.1%) and some other strategic suggestions such as learning through a dictionary, applying words in context to communicate, listening, learning through games, learning with goals every day, etc. As for classroom teaching, it is suggested that teachers often use many games in teaching and learning Vocabulary, along with that they need to always be available to answer questions and guide students. Besides, teachers also need to participate in activities with students and limit speaking Vietnamese in class as well as be patient with students to have an effective but meaningful lesson. Above are the results of our research through surveying and interviewing 200 English students about the current situation and methods of vocabulary learning.

7. Recommendations

To extend vocabulary and boost communication confidence of English-majored students of the Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages at VNUA, we offer some suggestions:

For VNUA

In order to help English-majored students have the opportunity to learn and practice English language skills, especially vocabulary, it is necessary that the VNUA organize game shows to create a playground not only for English-majored students but also students from the whole university to have the opportunity to learn from each other; open seminars, invite foreign experts, prestigious English centers to help students know the importance of English, exchange opportunities as well as jobs that English brings, thereby promoting more learning motivation;

organizing exchange programs between foreign student groups with English-majored students to create learning opportunities as well as an environment to practice English better.

VNUA should also be facilitated with scholarships for English-majored students who have the opportunity to study abroad, exchange foreign students to create opportunities to exchange and study with international friends, open English Olympic or English Orator competitions between faculties and federations throughout the VNUA so that students have the opportunity to learn and monitor English communication to help them communicate confidently in English with everyone around them.

Head teachers and subject instructors should also remind and encourage students to constantly strive to learn so that "Practice makes perfect".

For the Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages

Seminars and workshops should be held between students and leaders of the faculty, foreign experts to answer difficult questions and to answer challenging problems and provide helpful guidance in the process of studying English so that they can build the future. Encourage students to participate in competitions launched by Hanoi Youth Union, University and Hanoi City, especially English Olympic or English Rhetorical Competitions.

An English Club should be established by the faculty to encourage students to participate and create an ideal environment for learning English as well as to find effective English learning methods for students.

Associate with the English Center at VNUA and other prestigious centers, universities throughout Hanoi City so that English-majored students in particular and VNUA students in general have the opportunity to exchange, study and exchange experiences with other university students in the process of teaching and learning English in order to improve their own vocabulary for future work.

For students

For English-majored students, first it is necessary to have clear goals, make the most appropriate learning plan, and not to set goals too far from reality.

The goal needs to be very specific, how many words do we need to achieve per day/ week/month/ year and determine our level to have a specific strategy from easy to difficult, from simple to complex. Having a detailed plan is not enough, students need to have a suitable learning method, which is really effective.

Students should join English clubs, extracurricular programs related to English to create a regular and consistent practice environment. Actively participate in discussions and participate in the Listening and Speaking skills courses that the University and the Faculty introduce/organize to gain necessary information for themselves, as well as have the opportunity to improve their vocabulary.

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