

A Study of English Vocabulary Learning Strategies of the High English Learning Achievement students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University

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Abstract

This survey study investigates English vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) used by the high English learning achievement students of Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University in the second semester of the academic year 2019. The subjects were 92 students and they were selected based on the purposive sampling technique. The purpose of the survey is to find the most and the least frequently used vocabulary learning strategies and the correlation among the vocabulary learning strategies used by the high English learning achievement students. An instrument used in this survey study was a 25-item questionnaire adapted from Schmitt (2000) for vocabulary learning strategies. The data was analyzed by using frequency, standard deviation, and means. The result of this study indicated that the uses of Metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used by the high English learning achievement students who were considered high proficient students in English. The least frequently used vocabulary strategy was in Cognitive strategies. The result of correlation is all strategies are more or less interrelated with each other. However, the findings will be advantageous to teachers' teaching and students' learning strategies.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS), the High English Learning Achievement Students

Introduction

In the field of English language learning, there are many factors that have an effect on Thai students' low English language learning proficiency: students' learning

styles, teachers' teaching styles, and students' background. One of the most difficult problems of unsuccessful English instruction in Thailand is that students lack particular vocabulary knowledge which can influence students' reading comprehension. One of the three core elements of language, vocabulary has still captured the interests of TESOL researchers, learners of language, and linguists (Wongsothorn, 1996). Additionally, learning the vocabulary is the fundamental foundation and an integral part of a second language (Sun et al., 2017). A learning process determines the successfulness of one's effort in mastering a language. Learners cannot easily understand any part of a second language if no efforts are being put as it is underlining the acquisition of it. Zhang and Lu (2015), support the claim by citing that contextual clues practice establishes learners' proficiency of English. It takes place when interactions happen between two different parties as they are listening and replying to dialogues that are being uttered. Conclusively, having a more active role and engages more whenever they could allow learners to have better understanding of English and its components.

Also, having limited vocabulary knowledge, students are not able to express and communicate well. For this reason, the main purpose of this study is to generally explore students' vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) and to investigate which effective vocabulary learning strategies are used by the high English learning achievement students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University.

A number of scholars have attempted to classify learning strategies such as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) put forwarded three types of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Oxford (1990) proposed two broad categories of strategies namely, direct and indirect strategies. The former strategy includes memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies while the latter one includes metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. GU and Johnson (1996) presented two main dimensions of vocabulary learning strategies for their study: metacognitive regulation and cognitive strategies which deal with six subcategories namely, guessing, using a dictionary, note taking, rehearsal, encoding, and activating. The total number of strategies in their study was 74 items. There are different vocabulary strategies classification systems; however, the classification introduced by Schmitt (2000) is the basis as it suits the purpose of this study. He organized 58 categories into five types. According to this classification, strategies are classified as determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive.

(1) Determination strategies: These strategies are used by learners “to discover the meaning of new words without other’s help”(Schmitt, 2000). Learners determine the meaning of unfamiliar words by using reference materials like dictionaries; guessing the meaning from the textual context; and identifying the parts of speech and constituent elements.

(2) Social strategies: They are used to determine the word definitions by asking teachers, classmates and native speakers. In short, it involves interaction with each other and learning from each other (Schmitt, 2000). They can also be used to make information stable by speaking to native speakers or even language teachers outside the class.

(3) Memory strategies: Memory strategies traditionally known as Mnemonics, help learners to acquire the new words by connecting new words to the background knowledge (Schmitt, 2000), using some form of imagery or grouping (grouping words with collocation, i.e., idea—great, brilliant, unusual, and original). They can aid in the retention of new words. Memory strategies are made up of three groups: (a) Using images to make a strong connection with the word and its meaning. These images can be developed in the mind or drawn in notebooks, (b) Using strategies to connect words together in such a way to bring vocabulary back. For example, using words in the sentences to make retrieval easier, and (c) Using vocabulary knowledge aspects to stabilize the meaning of the new words. Some examples are, paying attention to the word’s phonological or orthographical form, memorizing affixes and roots, matching some words to their corresponding physical action, and learning the word class.

(4) Cognitive strategies: They deal with mechanical aspects of learning vocabulary and are not related to mental processing (Schmitt, 2000). The most commonly used cognitive strategies are repetition, taking notes and highlighting new words, making lists of new words, using flashcards to record new words, put English labels on physical objects, keeping a vocabulary notebooks, and writing the words many times.

(5) Metacognitive strategies: These strategies represent learners’ capability to find opportunities for learning and then record and review those experiences. In other words, metacognitive strategies include monitoring, decision-making, and assessment of one’s advance (Kafipour & Naveh, 2011, p. 618). They can also help learners to specify suitable VLS for learning new words (Schmitt, 2000). Specific examples include using English language media, studying new words many times, paying attention to English words

when someone is speaking English, continuing to study new words over times, and skipping or passing new words.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to find the most and the least frequently used vocabulary learning strategies and the correlation among the vocabulary learning strategies used by the high English learning achievement students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University.

Research Questions

Base on the objectives of the study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the most and least frequently used vocabulary learning strategies of the high English learning achievement students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University.
2. How are the correlations among the vocabulary learning strategies used by the high English learning achievement students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University.

Research Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were 92 the first year high English learning achievement students and studying in the second semester, academic year 2019, from Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University. Participants were 483 students that enrolled in the second subject of fundamental English. The researcher of this study selected them especially who passed the first subject of fundamental English in the first semester, academic year 2019 with grade point average 4.00, and then 92 students as the high English learning achievement students.

Instrument

The instrument used to collect data for this study was a vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire by Schmitt (2000) as it suits the purpose of this study. The 25 items of strategies based on Schmitt' taxonomy is adopted in the questionnaire due to some limitation and appropriateness. The 25 questions were sub-classes of the five categories of vocabulary learning strategies which are Determination, Social, Memory, Cognitive, and metacognitive. Moreover, a pilot study was conducted with 30 students who were similar to the actual subject, for content validity and it were constructed

through three teachers of English who has conducted research on learning strategies. In order to gauge the reliability coefficient of 25 items likert-scale questionnaire with reliability Cronbach- Alpha formula was used in calculating the reliability of items, which the reliability value was 0.846.

The vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire consisted of the 25-item questionnaires were asked about the frequency of the use of vocabulary learning strategies implemented by the high English learning achievement students. The following scales were used to indicate the frequency of the usage of each strategy: 0 = never use it, 1 = seldom use it, 2 = sometimes use it, 3 = often use it, and 4 = always use it

Data collection procedures

The following procedures were following in order to attain the aim of the study. The asked for cooperation with answering the questionnaire from the high English learning achievement students, selecting them based on the purposive sampling technique. Ninety two of the high English learning achievement students were chosen from those whom were willing to participate and consent forms filling were prepared for all of them. After they completed the consent forms, the questionnaire were distributed to the students during their normal class session during which time they were given clear instructions and explanations for filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaires were then collected upon completion.

Data analysis

The obtained data from the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire (VLSQ) was analyzed by using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. The descriptive statistics were used to find mean and standard deviation to answer the questions of the study. The participants' choices of the vocabulary learning strategies determined the classification of their frequency of usage of the VLS. The classification of their frequency was as high use of strategy, medium use, and low use based on a five-point rating scale, ranging from never (0 point), seldom (1 point), sometimes (2 points), often (3 points), and always (4 points). Thus, the scoring system of strategy use can be valued from 0.00 to 5.00. The mean of each VLS category valued from 0.00 to 1.99 is considered as low use of strategy, from 2.00 to 2.99 as medium use, and from 3.00 to 5.00 as high use.



Result and Discussion

Table1 Descriptive Statistics: Mean, Standard Deviation, and frequency (N = 92)

Strategy	Mean	Std. Deviation	frequency
Overall strategies	2.49	1.12	Medium
Metacognitive	2.83	1.22	Medium
Memory	2.73	1.26	Medium
Social	2.52	1.10	Medium
Determination	2.30	1.03	Medium
Cognitive	2.10	1.00	Medium

Table1 depicts the descriptive statistics of the five categories of VLS used by the participants. It is clear that of all the five strategies on the questionnaire Metacognitive (M= 2.83, SD= 1.22) was the highest mean score followed by Memory (M= 2.73, SD= 1.26). The other two mean scores were Social (M= 2.52, SD= 1.10) and Determination (M= 2.30, SD= 1.03). Whereas Cognitive (M= 2.10, SD= 1.00) was the least mean score of the five categories of the VLSs employed by the participants.

Table2 Correlations among the VLS (N=92)

Strategies	1 Metacognitive	2 Memory	3 Social	4 Determination	5 Cognitive
Metacognitive					
Memory	0.274				
Social	0.0514**	0.489**			
Determination	0.469**	0.34*	0.411**		
Cognitive	0.365*	-0.021	0.092	0.37*	

Notes. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table2 reveal that there is positive significant correlation of metacognitive strategy with social strategy ($r = 0.514$, $p < 0.01$), determination ($r = 0.496$, $p < 0.01$), and cognitive ($r = 0.365$, $p < 0.05$) which implies that metacognitive strategy is used as much as social, determination, and cognitive strategies. It is also depicted here that memory

strategy is positively and significantly correlated with social strategy ($r = 0.489$, $p < 0.01$), and determination strategy ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.05$) which infers that the memory strategy users used social and determination strategy as well. It is show here also, social strategy is positively correlated with only determination strategy ($r = 0.411$, $p < 0.01$) that suggests the one who uses social strategy must use determination strategy and vice versa. It is described through the above table that there is positive significant correlation of determination strategy only with cognitive strategy ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.05$) which indicates that determination strategy users are more use of cognitive strategy. This analysis is basically done to identify the interrelationship among these strategies.

Discussion

The following sections report the findings acquired from VLSQ to answer the research question : What are the most and least frequently used vocabulary learning strategies of the high English learning achievement students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University. The finding of this study showed that the high English learning achievement students were medium strategy users. Based on the holistic mean score 2.49, it is of medium frequency of strategy use as shown in table1. In addition, a frequency of use of the five vocabulary learning strategies can be seen as well, with the highest score 2.83 for the metacognitive strategies and the lowest mean frequency score 2.10 for the cognitive strategies as described in table1. Moreover, it is obvious that metacognitive strategies are the most frequently used by the high English learning achievement students also indicate that they tend to learn under their interest and seem to enjoy learning English from real experiences other than inside the classroom. So the students can make sustainable progress in English with pleasure and without any pressure. Wette and Furneaux (2018) to explore academic discourse socialization of international graduate students. At the end of the study, it appeared that although the students were learning at the universities and the language of communication is English, they had improved significantly as they developed independent learning strategies. Moreover, for the second research question: How are the correlations among the vocabulary learning strategies used by the high English learning achievement students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University. The result of correlation in table 2 that all strategies are more or less interrelated with each other. It means that the high English

learning achievement students equally use every VLS. From both results of research question in this study may indicate that students can success in English vocabulary learning if they use all of VLS in medium frequency and use them equally. Oxford (1990) suggested that using a strategy at a medium level shows the learners are aware of the strategies but they need to be encouraged to use them more in their learning process.

Recommendation

Learners as well as teachers can be benefitted from this survey. The teachers can implement the findings of this study to support high proficient students and encourage weak students. If the teachers understand the natural learning vocabulary of the students then it can contribute to be a better understanding of how to learn the word in the other language. In addition, it might be beneficial for the university to implement the lesson plan or activities that conform to their suitable VLS. Moreover, for the method of collecting data should include open-ended questions into the questionnaires to give students more space to report their valuable information that might help the researcher and teacher understand their strategies of vocabulary learning.

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