

Survey of Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Reading Class

リーディング授業での語彙学習方略に関する調査

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Abstract

Vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) is important in language learning. According to research, many students do not know how to use vocabulary strategies. Also in this university, it is the first time to survey student's vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) in reading class. We will use the results to teach students the best VLSs. The goal of this research was to survey the VLSs of students in the reading class. Eleven students participated in the research. The finding was all students use a limited number of VLSs to learn vocabulary. The next step is to teach the students the different kinds of VLSs for different kinds of learning tasks because each learning task requires specific VLSs.

Background of the study

Without grammar very little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (Wilkins). That is why vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas orally and in writing. However, students especially non-native speakers of English always find it difficult to acquire vocabulary. Several factors contribute to the difficulty in vocabulary learning, which include spelling, pronunciation, length and complexity, range, connotation and idiomaticity and meaning (Thornbury), similarity to L1 and similarity to English words already known (Gower, Philips and Walter), and vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). This study focused on vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), specifically determining the vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) that students use in their English reading class.

Oxford (8) defines learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.”

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She divided language learning strategies into direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies, which are further divided into memory, cognitive and compensation, are for direct learning and require mental processing of the language. Learners can use memory strategies to store and retrieve new information, such as grouping, creating mental linkages, applying images and sound, reviewing, and employing action. For understanding and producing new language, such as reasoning, practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and summarizing, learners can use cognitive strategies. Learners can also use compensation strategies to make up for “an inadequate repertoire of grammar and, especially, of vocabulary” (Oxford 17). Examples of these strategies are guessing meanings from context or using gestures when the learners do not know the precise expression. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, consist of metacognitive, affective and social strategies. These strategies are used to support learning indirectly, but are powerful to learning process. Learners can use metacognitive strategies to regulate their learning, such as paying attention, planning, self-evaluating and monitoring one’s errors or the learning process. As far as dealing with their own emotions, motivation, and attitudes, such as lowering anxiety, self-rewards, self-encouragement, learners can use affective strategies. When learners interact with native speakers or the target language to learn a language, such as asking questions, cooperating with peers and improving cultural understanding, they use social strategies.

In 1997, Schmitt (199-327) founded the taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), which he categorized into two groups. The two categories consist of discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies are used for discovering meanings of new vocabulary. Consolidation strategies, on the other hand, are used by learners for keeping on memorizing the vocabulary meanings. Discovery strategies consist of determination strategies and social strategies, while consolidation strategies include social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Social strategies are found in both categories because they can be used at any stage of vocabulary learning.

Researchers like Sanaoui (15-28) argued that metacognitive strategies are important for learning vocabulary. English proficient learners who understood effective vocabulary learning strategies often used metacognitive strategies. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (425-449) and Rasekh and Ranjbary (1-15) supported this argument by explaining the effects of instructing vocabulary learning strategies including metacognitive strategies. Specifically, Mizumoto and Takeuchi (17-32) suggested that metacognitive strategies for vocabulary

learning were fairly correlated with TOEIC scores. This showed that metacognitive strategies were very important vocabulary learning strategies for English language learning. The present study focused on finding out the kinds of VLSs students employ in their reading class using Schmitt's (199-327) classification of VLSs. After finding out their VLSs, the goal is to teach them the broad repertoire of VLSs. Benson argues that explicit teaching of vocabulary learning strategies grows the level of independency in EFL/ESL learners. Knowing vocabulary learning strategies can make learners autonomous and help them in taking responsibility of their own learning (Oxford).

Participants

Eleven students, who were registered in the reading course in the 2021 autumn semester, participated in this study. Eight were first year students, one was third year student and two were second year students. The first year students took a reading class in the spring semester. On the other hand, the third year and second year students took two reading classes in the spring and autumn semesters when they were in the first year level. All of them were grouped as level 3, meaning their TOEIC total score belonged to the level 3 group. Level 3 students had the TOEIC scores of 450~499. They were also categorized as belonging to CEFR A2. EF Education First defines CEFR A2 English speakers as those whose "English is sufficient for tourism in an English-speaking country and socializing with English speakers, although to develop deeper friendships an A2 level is not adequate. Furthermore, their English ability allows them for networking with English-speaking colleagues, but working in English is limited to very familiar topics at the A2 level. Their English is not sufficient for academic study or for consuming most English-language media (TV, movies, radio, magazines, etc.). Specifically, they can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment), can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters, and can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

Data gathering instrument

An open-ended survey questionnaire was utilized to gather the data. It asked for student's name, which was optional, and had an open-ended question, "How do you study English vocabulary from the time you started at KUIS Department of English Communication until now? Write your ideas below. You can write in English or Japanese. You can write as many ideas as you can." The survey questionnaire was sent to the University Ethics Committee for approval.

Each student response was analyzed using Schmitt's (199-327) classification of VLSs.

Table 1

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) Using Schmitt's Taxonomies

	Discovery		Consolidation			
	Det	S	S	M	C	Met
1. Checking vocabulary meaning your own way	√					
2. Checking vocabulary meaning by using dictionary	√					
3. Checking vocabulary meaning by asking to other people		√				
4. Memorizing vocabulary through communication			√			
5. Memorizing vocabulary with synonyms and antonyms				√		
6. Memorizing vocabulary by utilizing audio visual materials				√		
7. Memorizing vocabulary by utilizing prefix and suffix				√		
8. Memorizing vocabulary by writing					√	
9. Memorizing vocabulary by pronouncing					√	
10. Memorizing vocabulary in sentences					√	
11. Memorizing vocabulary by using a word list					√	
12. Making the best goals before carrying out vocabulary learning						√
13. Maintaining high motivation through vocabulary learning						√
14. Learning vocabulary by using the best strategy						√
15. Evaluating vocabulary learning after finishing it.						√

Dis-Discovery Con-Consolidation Det-Determination S-Social M-Memory C-Cognitive Met-Metacognitive

Table 1 shows the vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) that were used to label student's response. There were three discovery strategies (Items 1, 2, 3). Discovery strategies were subdivided into Determination (Item 1 and Item 2), and Social strategies (Item 3). Other hand, Consolidation strategy group had twelve items

(Items 4 through 15). Consolidation strategies were subdivided into Social (Item 4), Memory (Item 5, Item 6, Item 7), Cognitive (Item 8, Item 9, Item 10, Item 11) and Metacognitive (Item 12, Item 13, Item 14, Item 15). For example, the student’s response, “*If there’s a word I don’t know, I’ll look up the meaning in the dictionary.*” was labeled as DetDis, which means the student uses Determination strategy under Discovery strategy.

Results

Table 2
Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 1

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
I highlight difficult or unknown words.				I write the highlighted words and meanings in my vocabulary notebook.	
				I write nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, too.	

Table 2 shows that student 1 uses one Discovery strategy, which is a Determination strategy. This Determination strategy is highlighting difficult or unknown words. For Consolidation strategies, he/she uses two Cognitive strategies, which are writing the highlighted words and meanings in the vocabulary notebook, and writing nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs in the notebook.

Table 3
Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 2

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
I use dictionary when I find English vocabulary that I don’t know and take notes.				I use textbooks that have many English vocabulary	I often watch western movies and dramas.
					I listen to western music.

Table 3 reveals the four VLSs that student 2 uses. One is a Determination strategy, specifically using a dictionary for English vocabulary he/she does not know and taking notes. On the other hand, he/she uses one Cognitive strategy, which is using textbooks that contain many English vocabulary, and two Metacognitive strategies, which are watching Western movies and dramas, and listening to Western music.

Table 4

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 3

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
				I use an English vocabulary book for TOEIC.	
				First, I write 7 to 10 unknown words from the wordbook on a piece of paper	
				then I write them down with a pen	
				while pronouncing them until I learn them. Remembering words is hard for me	

As shown in Table 4, student 3 uses Cognitive strategies only. These include using an English vocabulary book for TOEIC, writing 7 to 10 unknown words from the wordbook on a piece of paper, then writing them down with a pen while pronouncing them until he/she learns them. He/she uses none of the Discovery strategies.

Table 5

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 4

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
				Write words and idioms more than once in a notebook	

Table 5 shows that there is only one VLS that student 4 uses, which is writing words and idioms more than once in a notebook (a Cognitive strategy under Consolidation strategies). He/she uses none of the Discovery strategies.

Table 6
Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 5

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
Check meanings using a dictionary.		Speak with my friends in English.		I usually use flash cards.	Watch films with English subtitles.

As shown in Table 6, student 5 uses one kind of Discovery strategy, that is Determination strategy. The Determination strategy is checking meanings using a dictionary. On the other hand, he/she uses three kinds of Consolidation strategies. These are Social strategy, which is speaking with his/her friends in English, Cognitive strategy, which is using flash cards, and Metacognitive strategy, which is watching films with English subtitles.

Table 7
Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 6

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
		Talk to my friends.		Make my vocabulary book.	Set my study time a habit.
				Read aloud many times	
				Listen and memorize as a sentence.	

Table 7 reveals the three Consolidation strategies that student 6 uses. One is a Social strategy (talking to friends), three Cognitive strategies (making vocabulary book, reading aloud many times, and listening and memorizing in a sentence). One Metacognitive strategy is setting a study time. He/she uses none of the Discovery strategies.

Table 8

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 7

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
		Actually speak in English with international students.		I write in my notebook when I study words.	Sometimes I study English by listening to Western music.
				Make my vocabulary book.	

As revealed in Table 8, student 7 uses three Consolidation strategies. This is Social strategy, which is speaking in English with international students. The other is Cognitive strategy, which writing in the notebook when studying words, and Metacognitive strategy, which is studying English by listening to Western music. He/she uses none of the Discovery strategies.

Table 9

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 8

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
				I look at the word book and learned the words.	
				I write them on paper many times.	
				I put them on sticky notes	

As seen in Table 9, student 8 uses Consolidation strategies only, which are Cognitive strategies. Specifically, he/she uses three strategies, such as looking at the wordbook and learning the words, writing them on paper many times, and putting them on sticky notes. He/she uses none of the Discovery strategies.

Table 10

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 9

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
				I make a sentence using the vocabulary.	

Table 10 reveals that student 9 uses one Consolidation strategy only. This is Cognitive strategy, specifically making a sentence using the vocabulary. He/she uses none of the Discovery strategies.

Table 11

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 10

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
Third, my smartphone asks me questions randomly.				First, I view vocabulary in word book.	Second, I enter these words in my smart phone.
					Final, I view vocabulary again when I have mistakes.

The data in Table 11 shows that student 10 uses four strategies. Under Discovery strategies, he/she uses a Determination strategy, which is using a smartphone, which asks random questions. On the other hand, he/she uses two Consolidation strategies, namely: Cognitive strategy and Metacognitive strategy. The Cognitive strategy is viewing vocabulary in wordbook. The Metacognitive strategies are inputting the vocabulary into a smartphone, and viewing the vocabulary again when making mistakes.

Table 12

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) of Student 11

Discovery		Consolidation			
Determination	Social	Social	Memory	Cognitive	Metacognitive
If there's a word I don't know, I'll look up the meaning in a dictionary.		Sometimes I speak with my mother in English.	I watch foreign movies in English	If there's a word I don't understand in class, I take notes.	
I look up the meaning of foreign music lyrics.					

Table 12 shows that student 11 uses two Determination strategies, which are looking up the meaning of difficult words in a dictionary and looking up the meaning of foreign music lyrics. On the other hand, he/she uses three Consolidation strategies, namely: Social, Memory and Cognitive. The Social strategy is speaking with the mother in English sometimes. The Memory strategy is watching foreign movies in English. The Cognitive strategy is taking notes of the words he/she does not understand.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that all students use limited VLSs to learn vocabulary. The highest number of VLSs is five (Student 6, Student 11) followed by four VLSs (Student 2, Student 3, Student 4, Student 7, Student 10). Using Schmitt 's(199-327) taxonomies with fifteen VLSs, the students use a limited number of VLSs to learn vocabulary. In fact, two students use one VLS only (Student 4, Student 9). Student 4 only writes words and idioms more than once in a notebook as his/her Consolidation-Cognitive strategy to continue learning the vocabulary. Student 9 does the same, which is making/writing a sentence using the vocabulary (Consolidation-Cognitive strategy). In their study, Abraham and Vann (85-102) found that very successful learners used a greater variety of learning strategies and they preferred guessing the meaning, paraphrasing and using more clarification strategies. These results were supported by the findings of Phillips' (57-67) study which found that more proficient students used more paraphrasing, setting goals or avoiding verbatim translation. Advanced-level students used strategies more frequently than elementary-level students (Griffiths 367-383).

High achievement group students reported significantly more different strategies than low achievement group. Less successful students were more likely to use same strategies available to them (Pape and Wang 419-449). In other words, successful learners used strategies more frequently, flexibly and with greater variety. On the other hand, less effective learners tend to overuse one or two major ineffective strategies (Chamot and El-Dinary 319-338).

The findings also revealed that many of the VLSs that students use are Cognitive strategies. These results support the findings of O' Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Russo and Kupper (557-584) which found that beginning and intermediate level students used more cognitive strategies than metacognitive strategies, but intermediate level students still used more metacognitive strategies than beginning level students, which indicated that strategy use may be associated with proficiency level. Both levels of students preferred note-taking, repetition, cooperation, and asking for clarification. In the study of Ehrman and Oxford (1-13), they found that older or more advanced learners used more complex strategies and certain strategies were identified often by advanced learners. In their 1999 study, Chamot and El-Dinary's (319- 338) found that high-achieving children used greater metacognitive strategies while low- achieving children used greater cognitive strategies. Ellis supported this by arguing that good language learners were good at metacognitive strategies. Some of the students in the present study use one or more Metacognitive strategies, which is good news.

Conclusion

Although some students use one or more Metacognitive strategies, which are often utilized by good language learners, in general, all students use a limited number of VLSs to learn vocabulary. After implementing the first step in successful teaching vocabulary, which was to identify the VLSs that students use to learn vocabulary, the next step is to teach the students the different kinds of VLSs for different kinds of learning tasks since each learning task requires specific VLSs.

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抄 録

語彙学習戦略は言語学習にとって重要である。これまでの研究では、多くの学生が語彙学習方略をどう使用すればよいのか理解していないことが報告されている。本研究の目的は、リーディングにおける本学の学生の語彙学習方略を明らかにし、最適な語彙学習方略の指導を検討することである。研究には11人の学生が参加した。その結果、すべての学生が限られた語彙学習方略しか使用していないことが明らかになった。今後のステップとして、それぞれの学習タスクに応じた語彙学習方略をリーディングの授業を通じて指導する必要がある。