

การสำรวจการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้โดยนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี
ชั้นปีที่หนึ่ง มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีราชมงคลตะวันออก
วิทยาเขตจักรพงษ์ภูวนารถ

The Exploration of English Vocabulary Learning Used by the
First-Year Undergraduate Students of Rajamangala University
of Technology Tawan – Ok: Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth Campus

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจกลวิธีในการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้มากที่สุดและกลวิธีที่ใช้
น้อยที่สุดของกลุ่มนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างประกอบด้วยนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยชั้นปีที่ 1 สาขาการจัดการ
จำนวน 50 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยคือ แบบสอบถามและแบบสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้างใช้ในการรวบรวมข้อมูล
วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถามโดยใช้ค่าเฉลี่ยและส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐานในการตีความทางสถิติและการสัมภาษณ์
โดยใช้ถ้อยความและวิเคราะห์เพื่อให้ได้ข้อมูลเพิ่มเติมเกี่ยวกับความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษา

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า นักศึกษาใช้ห้ากลวิธีในการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษซึ่งได้แก่ กลวิธีการหาความหมาย
ด้วยตัวเอง, กลวิธีทางสังคม, กลวิธีการจำ, กลวิธีเชิงพุทธิปัญญา และกลวิธีหุปัญญา กลวิธีที่ได้รับการจัดอันดับเป็น
กลวิธีที่ใช้มากที่สุดคือการขอให้ครูตรวจสอบรายการคำเพื่อความถูกต้อง (กลวิธีทางสังคม) และการจัดอันดับให้เป็น
กลวิธีที่ใช้น้อยที่สุดคือการฟังเทปรายการคำศัพท์ (กลวิธีเชิงพุทธิปัญญา)

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were to explore the English vocabulary learning strategies that were mostly used by a group of Thai university students, and which strategies that were the least used. The samples consisted of 50 first-year university students majoring in Management. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used for statistical interpretation of the questionnaires, and the interviews were transcribed and analyzed to get further information on students' opinions.

Research results revealed that the students employed five strategies in learning English vocabulary, which were determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive. The strategy that was ranked as the most-used strategy was asking a teacher to check word lists for accuracy (Social Strategies), and the least-used strategy was listening to a tape of word lists (Cognitive Strategies).

Keywords: Strategies, Learning, English Vocabulary

Introduction

English is widely used for international communication. It also plays a major role in working and socializing in the workplace and teaching people in educational institutions. Knowing the English language in the present day can give a person advantages or job opportunities (Reddy, 2016). According to Saitakham (2002), the English language has influenced the ways that people express their feelings and ideas, because they can use English words they have learned.

Nowadays, English is widely known as a universal language and plays an important role in many countries. That is to say, people use it as a native language, as a second language and as a foreign language in many countries in order to fulfill the official business, information, social activities, and even education (Reddy, 2016).

As in many countries, English also plays a vital role in Thai education. This is not only because English is regarded as the most important foreign language, but also because learning other languages besides the mother tongue is useful. Since the government wants to develop Thai education to international standards, Thai people pay more attention to English and appreciate the value of English, from kindergarten to the tertiary level of education.

The number of words in a language is enormous and includes specific terms, jargon, and slang. Moreover, there are many different modes or types of vocabulary for written sources (such as books, websites, package labels, cartoons, leaflets, instructions, and many more) and for spoken discourse (such as conversations, movies, and popular songs). Therefore, there is no way to predict exactly what kinds of words that learners will need to use. For this reason, it is important for students of a foreign language to learn as many words and phrases as they can, so that they will be able to cope with different situations they will experience.

This is similar to Ferreira (2007, p. 12), who stated that vocabulary knowledge helps learners with language comprehension and production. A large vocabulary can improve learners' understanding of what they read and write, which leads to a higher comprehension level, as well. In addition, vocabulary is also essential for determining whether learners are able to communicate successfully. If they know the meanings of a large number of words, they can communicate more effectively (although knowing basic grammar has a positive effect, too).

It is obvious that vocabularies have a vital role in learning any language, but the students struggle with learning vocabulary because their vocabularies are not large enough to use many helpful learning approaches. In other words, it is difficult for students with weak

knowledge of vocabularies to use strategies to learn and understand new vocabulary effectively. Saitakham (2002), for example, revealed that many Thai students do not succeed in learning English because they lack good strategies for learning vocabulary.

The researchers decided to examine the real situation at their university, so they did a preliminary study by asking undergraduate students in their courses what kinds of problems they had. The students reported that they felt frustrated when they did not know the meanings of words while reading English books. Therefore, this problem discouraged students from trying to comprehend English passages in books. They did not want to look the words up in the dictionary all the time. They wanted to know the meanings of words spontaneously. They added that vocabulary is important for learning the language and for communicating with other people. They believed that, if they knew a lot of words, they would be able to understand better.

With the idea that vocabulary is essential, as it plays a significant role in studying English, the researchers would like to provide the students chances to explore their vocabulary learning strategies. This is essential to help the students learn English vocabulary more effectively.

As mentioned above, in the problem, the researchers are interested in English vocabulary learning strategies of 50 first-year students majoring in management at Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok, Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth Campus. It is not clear how the students at the university deal with vocabulary learning or what strategies they use while learning. Accordingly, this research endeavors to explore whether they have any strategies for learning vocabulary and, if so, what strategies they tend to use the most, and what strategies they tend to use the least.

Purposes of the Study

1. To explore the most-used strategies for English vocabulary learning.
2. To explore the least-used strategies for English vocabulary learning.

Research Framework

Many researchers have studied the classification of vocabulary learning strategies. Schmitt (1997)'s taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies is emphasized in this study, with

the purpose to support the use of integrated approaches and strategies in expanding learners' vocabulary. The taxonomy is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies

| Groups | Strategies |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Determination Strategies (DET) | These are individual learning strategies which help learners to discover the meaning of words by themselves with no assistance from peers, such as guessing the words from the context. |
| Social Strategies (SOC) | It engages learners in interaction with their peers, and doing this, it helps them to learn from each other, such as observing their classmates and asking their teacher for the meaning of a word. |
| Memory Strategies (MEM) | They are strategies which engage learners in learning the new word through mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new word. An example is that the learners see a particular action from a kind of sport on TV and guess the name of the sport because they already remember the actions associated with that sport. |
| Cognitive Strategies (COG) | They do not engage learners in mental processing but are more mechanical. An example is repeating the pronunciation of new words. |
| Metacognitive Strategies (MET) | They are strategies relating to processes involving monitoring, decision making, and evaluation of one's progress. Metacognitive strategies help the learners in determining appropriate vocabulary learning strategies for learning new words. |

Source: Schmitt, 1997

Literature Review

The researchers studied different definitions of the term “vocabulary” and the importance of vocabulary learning. The information is discussed in the following sections.

Definition of “Vocabulary”

There are many researchers who studied the definition of vocabulary and defined them in several ways.

According to Hiebert and Kamil (2005, p. 2), words come in two forms. They are oral and print, which people have to understand or recognize (receptive), and words they use when writing and speaking (productive).

TESOL (n.d., p. 2) states that “vocabulary can be defined as the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning, the way individual words do.”

In addition, Kimberly (2010, p. 20) gave the meaning of vocabulary as “the ability to understand and use words to acquire and convey information.” The number of words student know relates to their comprehension abilities.

Ur (2012, p. 60) defined the word “vocabulary” as the words in the language. Some items are more than a single word; they can have multiple words that express a single idea, and they are learned as a whole “chunk.”

According to the above definitions from various researchers, it can be concluded that vocabulary is the ability to understand words, expressions, or even sentences in order to acquire information. When the students have knowledge of vocabulary, they can comprehend what they are learning. Moreover, the teachers and educators need to encourage the students to use their own vocabulary learning strategies and enhance their abilities in order for them to succeed in learning languages.

Importance of Vocabulary Learning

It can be claimed that vocabulary is the most important factor for students because it becomes the essential component for understanding the lessons they are studying, and vocabulary can enhance students’ comprehension of the lessons.

When it comes to reading and speaking skills, having vocabulary knowledge will help students to deal with activities inside and outside school (Nation and Waring, 1997, p. 6).

Avila and Sadoski (1996) stated that having a good vocabulary is important for acquiring a language. According to Krashen and Terrell (1983), vocabulary plays a major role in students’ success, and it is important for acquiring and learning English as a foreign language. For these reasons, it is clear that, even though form and grammar are important in communication, the knowledge of vocabulary plays an essential role.

People learn words and grammar in their native language when they understand what people are saying. But they cannot understand if they are not able to recognize important words in the sentences they hear. Therefore, they cannot acquire a language if they do not understand vocabulary.

The studies above show that it is important for students to know words in order to use them when they are learning a language. The minimum number of words students need for a foundation was studied by Albrechtsen, Haastrup, and Henriksen (2004, p. 129). They found that students should be familiar with around 3,000 words to give them a good foundation for language learning and comprehension.

Methodology

The population was composed of 50 first-year-students majoring in Management in the Faculty of Business Administration at Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth Campus. The reason these students were chosen is that the researchers teach English to these students, so it is convenient for data collection.

Research Instruments

The research instruments for data collection were a semi-structured interview form and rating scale questionnaire. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students to study the use of strategies and their opinions on English vocabulary learning. In that way, the researchers were able to obtain specific information from the students and investigate the processes they used when learning English vocabulary.

The questionnaire was adapted from the one used by Schmitt (1997). In the questionnaire, there was a survey of English vocabulary learning strategies proposed in the format of six levels proposed by Isaac and Michael (1973). There were five strategies for learning English vocabulary including Determination Strategies (DET), Social Strategies (SOC), Memory Strategies (MEM), Cognitive Strategies (COG), and Metacognitive Strategies (MET).

Data Collection

The researchers gave the students' guidelines and explanation in order to avoid the ambiguity and misinterpretation while they were doing the questionnaires and interview.

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was held at the end of the third month of the semester, academic year of 2019. Ten students were selected to have the semi-structured

interview and the researchers interviewed them in the Thai language for 15 minutes. After the interviewing, the researchers translated the interview contents from Thai into English.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed to the students at the end of the semester, academic year of 2019. The students needed to fill out the questionnaire for an hour and the researchers collected them all.

Data Analysis

After collecting the completed questionnaire and interview, the data were analyzed to determine the most-used and the least-used strategies for English vocabulary learning. The questionnaire was analyzed and interpreted by mean and standard deviation. The data from semi-structured interview were transcribed and analyzed to find the insightful information on the students' use of strategies in learning vocabularies. The format of six levels of opinions was used to determine the extent of using English vocabulary learning strategies, and the scale is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The Scale and Interpretation of Six Levels of Opinions

| Levels of Opinions | Interpretation of Levels of Opinions |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 6: Always | Positive (most-used) |
| 5: Usually | |
| 4: Often | |
| 3: Occasionally | Negative (least-used) |
| 2: Seldom | |
| 1: Never | |

The criteria were interpreted by using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0 which was proposed by Oxford (1989).

Table 3: The Interpretation of data based on SILL

| Interpretation of the Data | Range of Mean for Each Item |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Usually used (Positive attitude) | 4.5-6.0 |
| Often used | 3.5-4.4 |
| Occasionally used (Negative attitude) | 2.5-3.4 |
| Seldom used | 1.0-2.4 |

The mean (\bar{x}) of each item was used in order to provide the average levels of using vocabulary learning strategies, and the standard deviation (SD) of each item was used for the measure of dispersion of each set of vocabulary learning strategies from the mean (see Table 6).

Description of the Population of the Research

Semi-Structured Interview

The number of responses was ten. Table 4 presents the number of students in each room.

Table 4: The Number of Responses for the Semi-Structured Interview

| Population | Number of Interviewees |
|---|------------------------|
| first-year students majoring in management in 1/1 room | 5 |
| first-year students majoring in management in 1/2 room | 5 |
| Total | 10 |

Questionnaire

In this research, the number of responses was the copies from 50 students, representing 100 percent of the target population. Table 5 shows the number of students in each class.

Table 5: The number of Responses for the Questionnaire

| Population | Target Population | Returned Questionnaires |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|
| first-year students majoring in management in 1/1 room | 27 | 27 (100%) |
| first-year students majoring in management in 1/2 room | 23 | 23 (100%) |
| Total | 50 | 50 |

Results

Semi-Structured Interview

With regard to the students' opinions about the importance of vocabulary, they expressed the view that vocabulary was important for their learning because vocabulary could help them understand the lessons. The students believed they could expand their knowledge of the content in their English courses through the better understanding of vocabularies on business field.

Moreover, the students believed that knowledge on vocabulary could enhance their ability to understand the words used in different contexts or situations. During classes, their teachers explain that some words and phrases can be used in different ways, so it is important to understand the context before choosing the suitable words. In every lesson, the teachers give them many terms, and they take notes. If the students are not sure about the meaning or context, one important strategy they use is to ask their teacher for information, so they can confirm what they thought.

Finally, the students explained in the interviews that they learned vocabulary in various ways. They had their own ways to learn. One was learning vocabulary from using dictionary. When the teacher assigned them to do some assignments, they used the dictionary to find the meanings. Sometimes, students liked to take notes, which helped them remember the word or phrase. Then, they would ask the teacher in order to check the meaning of words. While they were studying the vocabulary section in their text book, the teacher gave explanations, and they reviewed the meanings again.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire shows the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) under the main five categories, which are Determination Strategies, Social Strategies, Memory Strategies, Cognitive Strategies and Metacognitive Strategies. They are the strategies which were reported to be employed by the students in order to discover the meaning of English vocabulary that they encountered while studying business courses in English.

Table 6: The Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) of the First-Year Students Majoring in Management

| Vocabulary Learning Strategies | Frequency (%) | Mean \bar{x} | SD | Result |
|--|---------------|----------------|-------|------------|
| 1. Determination Strategies (DET) | | | | |
| - Use English-Thai dictionary | 86 | 4.55 | 0.979 | Most-used |
| - Analyze affixes and roots | 75.1 | 2.20 | 1.189 | Least-used |
| 2. Social Strategies (SOC) | | | | |
| - Ask teacher to check word lists for accuracy | 100 | 5.52 | 0.658 | Most-used |
| - Ask teacher to translate the meaning of a word that they do not understand | 86 | 2.26 | 0.976 | Least-used |
| 3. Memory Strategies (MEM) | | | | |
| - Use physical actions when learning a word | 90.3 | 4.65 | 0.894 | Most-used |
| - Remember affixes and roots to know the meanings | 86 | 2.35 | 0.972 | Least-used |
| 4. Cognitive Strategies (COG) | | | | |
| - Use the vocabulary section in your textbook | 90.3 | 4.74 | 1.035 | Most-used |
| - Listen to a tape of word lists | 88.1 | 1.91 | 1.179 | Least-used |
| 5. Metacognitive Strategies (MET) | | | | |
| - Practice by doing vocabulary exercises (e.g. filling words in the spaces) | 86 | 4.91 | 1.039 | Most-used |
| - Translate the meaning of word from Thai into English | 83.8 | 2.07 | 1.206 | Least-used |

Table 6 presents the vocabulary learning strategies used by the students, and the ones they reported to be the most-used and least-used strategies, in the main five categories.

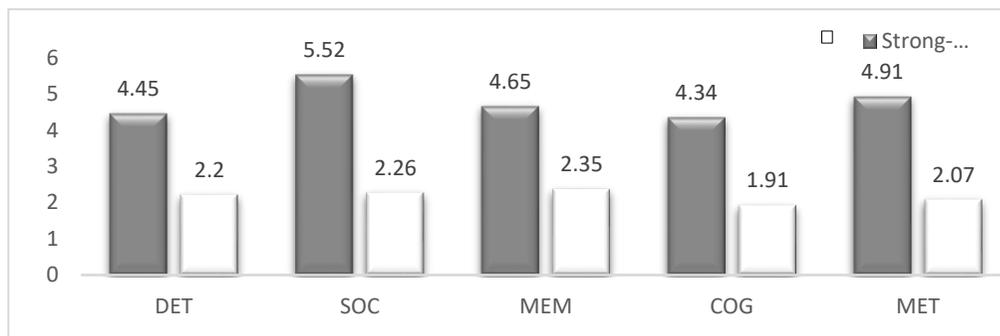
The first purpose of employing the questionnaire was to explore the most-used vocabulary learning strategies. From the data, in the Social Strategies category (SOC), it showed that all of student (100%) usually asked their teacher to check word lists for accuracy. For the Memory Strategies (MEM), a large percentage of students (90.3%) reported to usually employed this strategy. Trying to remember the meaning of words using the physical actions when learning, was very popular among the students. Ninety-point-three percent of the students used the Cognitive Strategies (COG) that they usually learned vocabulary from the vocabulary section in their textbook. It was found that 86% of the students, used the Determination Strategies (DET) that they usually used an English-Thai dictionary in learning. Lastly, in the Metacognitive Strategies, 86% of the group reported practicing by doing vocabulary exercises as an important way to learn the meaning of English words.

The second purpose of employing the questionnaire was to explore the strategies that are the least used or rarely used by the students in learning English vocabulary.

Seventy-five-point one percent of students hardly ever analyzed affixes and roots to guess the meanings of words. Most of them (86%) seldom asked the teacher to translate the meaning of a word that they did not understand. They seldom used the strategies such as remembering affixes and roots, 86% of the students reported they hardly used the strategy. A large majority of them (88.1%) seldom listened to a recording of word lists. Lastly, more than four fifths of the group (83.8%) seldom used the strategy of translating the meanings of words from Thai into English.

Figure 1 presents the scale and interpretation of six levels of opinions, by showing the most-used (in gray) and the least-used (in white) strategies in the five main categories: DET (use English-Thai dictionary and analyze affixes and roots), SOC (ask teacher to check word lists for accuracy and ask teacher for translation of the meaning of a word that they do not understand), MEM (use physical actions when learning a word and remember affixes and roots to know the meanings), COG (use the vocabulary section in your textbook and listen to a tape of word lists), and MET (practice by doing vocabulary exercises, e.g. filling words in spaces, and translating the word from Thai into English).

Figure 1: Differences between Most-Used and Least-Used Strategies (Mean)



Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In conclusion, according to both Table 6 and Figure 1, the strategy of asking a teacher to check word lists for accuracy (Social Strategies) was ranked as the most-used strategy, and listening to a tape of word lists (Cognitive Strategies) was ranked as the least-used strategy by the students in learning vocabularies.

Discussion

In this study, according to the results from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, the strongest English vocabulary learning strategy was SOC, which corresponded with the results from the two other research studies, discussed below.

Imamee (2016) investigated vocabulary learning strategies of Thai EFL students at a private university. The questionnaire used in the study was based on Schmitt (1977)'s taxonomy and classifications of vocabulary learning strategies by focusing on the five strategic categories: determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive. The results suggested that the social strategies were the most frequently used. The results from Imamee (2016) were correlated with the results from this study.

Puagsang and Intharaksa (2017) investigated vocational students' use of vocabulary learning strategies. A questionnaire and an individual semi-structured interview were used to elicit the frequency of VLSs used, as was done in the present study. The results of their study were similar to the results of this study as they revealed that, among the five strategic categories (determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive), the social strategies were ranked as the most frequently used.

Recommendations

1) The results of the study indicated that students should be trained to understand how to employ the appropriate English language learning strategies. Moreover, language teachers may need to prepare some classes to instruct the English language learning strategies in helping students to employ the appropriate English language learning strategies.

2) The teachers should design lessons with various kinds of activities and medias in English, such as the Internet, English-speaking films, games, radio, and television programs. Moreover, some lessons may be combined with the use of websites which students can visit and use a variety of language learning strategies in order to motivate them to learn.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This study only investigated the English language learning strategies used by a group of first-year students majoring in management to learn vocabulary. Further studies should be conducted with other majors and campuses. Moreover, investigation of the relationship between English language learning strategies and age, gender, learning style, motivation or other factors should be further explored.

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