

The Application of Vocabulary Learning Strategies to Junior Students in Middle School

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Abstract:

In the English learning, vocabulary is very basic, crucial and important. Language is a kind of tool that human can use to express their emotion and communicate with each other. Language contain a good deal of culture connotation and semantic background. Some English vocabularies' meaning is indistinct and uncertain. Meaning is also different in different context. Only do students understand the meaning of vocabularies in different language environment, analyzing and comparing their wispy difference, they can make correct distinguish for vocabularies. Meanwhile, language is integrated entirety and it can not exist by itself. That is the same as vocabulary learning. Teachers can not just ask students to recite words. The paper mainly introduce five strategies of vocabulary learning and application in the teaching process to improve junior students' ability of vocabulary learning. By interviewing the junior students and teachers in middle school and put forward effective teaching strategies of vocabulary learning for junior students in middle school.

Key words: vocabulary learning strategies, high school students, implications

Chapter One Introduction:

1.1 The Current Situation of English Listening Teaching in Middle School

The new curriculum standard state briefly junior middle school student need to learn 1500 to 2000 vocabularies as well as idiom and set structures of 200 to 300. However, in the teaching process, we have found that lexical resources of a majority of students can't reach the demand of the new curriculum standard. Because of lacking of vocabularies, students will feel difficult in listening, speaking, reading and writing and there aren't the good teaching efficiency. Teachers should change their method of teaching positively, creating and designing various and flexible teaching method in order to motivate students' study interests. So it can enhance students' study ability and optimize teaching.

1.2 The Significance on Vocabulary Learning Strategy

The task of vocabulary learning is a challenging but crucial one for English language learners as they must internalize multiple forms, meanings, collections and usages of word in order to develop related receptive and productive skills (Barcroft, 2009; Gu, 2003; Nation, 1990). For this reason, vocabulary learning researchers have paid increasing attention to language learners' strategic efforts to improve their lexical competence (Nyikos & Fan, 2007). Researchers have also paid increasing attention to exploring how language learners' strategic learning capacity can be enhanced in educational settings, which requires insights into their development as strategic learners (Wang & Lam, 2010)

Human thinking activities and interchange of ideas both materialize via sentences composed of vocabulary. If there weren't vocabularies, any languages aren't imaginative. So, the vocabulary teaching is the one of language teaching foundation and its function is obvious in the whole language teaching process. In other words, vocabulary is the basis of language and unity of structure and meaning in the language system. All kinds of language learning activities are learning vocabularies activities in the final analysis, contacting and applying listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating forming. No reaching the number of vocabulary, learners can't exchange and communicate accurately and neatly mastering vocabuaries is strong protection of language learning. However, at present, English vocabulary teaching is not satisfying. They are mainly reflected in focusing on narrow vocabulary study on teaching contents and teachers' separate teaching on teaching method. At the same time, paying attention to recite in learning manner instead of understanding. Emphasizing test function and ignoring practical application, so students learn to remember just because of test.

Chapter Two Literature review

In order to make learners to understand the concept of learning strategies, professors made the classification according to different standard. And O'Malley & Chamot classify the language learning strategies into three types according to the theory of cognitive psychology. They are Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies and Social/Affection strategies. Metacognitive strategies that involve planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension, and evaluating learning after an activity is completed. Cognitive

strategies are more directly applied in the language learning activities compared to metacognitive strategies. “They operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning”(O’Malley &Chamot,1990,p.44).Therefore, these strategies are directly linked to specific learning tasks and involve more direct manipulation of the learning material. Social/Affection strategies concern the ways to provide more opportunities for the learner to use the target language, which show “a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect”(O’Malley &Chamot,1990,p.45). In the process of the junior high school, Cognitive strategies is widely used by junior students. Next, there are five cognitive strategies introduced in the following.

2.1 Repetition Strategy

Repetition strategies conclude use of word lists, oral repetition and visual repetition. Nation(1982) researched the words list, he thought that words list is a available method in a short time to learn a amount of vocabularies . If students have been used to repeating, Repetition may be a good way to learn.(O’Malley &Chamot,2001). In China, Wu Xia and Wang Qiang (1998) researched the 202 non-English majors of learning strategies in university and. Students disapprove of repetition to learning vocabularies and would like to choose the contextual guessing strategy. Lawson& Hogben (1996) put forward repetition of vocabulary learning strategies.

2.2 Repetition Strategy

Guessing means use the available information to guess the meaning of a new word. Incidental learning through guessing from the context is the most important strategy of vocabulary learning. So some researchers have done comprehensive study in this field abroad. Krashen (1989)once mentioned guessing strategies in his incidental learning theory that vocabulary received a lot of is best acquired incidentally by guessing meanings of the unknown words from context through rhe act of reading itself. Although a number of studies(Krashen 1989;Day,Omura,&Hiramatsu 1991)have sent support to it, more studies of L2 reading and vocabulary acquisition (for example,Li 1998;Knight 1994;Raptis 1996) have indeed challenged this view in terms of wrong guesses, demand for much time ,doubtful validity to various ages ,levels and languages groups . Furthermore, many researchers have noted that even the success in correct guess does not necessarily lead to acquisition of the newword(Nation& Coady 1998)(cited from Wesche, M.B.&Paribaknt,T.S.2000) After making a thorough survey of the incidental theory in both L1 research and L2 research, in a recent study made by Fraser (1999), it is suggested that learning through incidental learning is effective when students know how to take advantage of it. Therefore, it seems that how much L2 learners can benefit from incidental learning in acquiring vocabulary depends heavily on their capability to guess and their awareness to retain the new word after deriving the correct meaning of the new word.

According to Clarke and Nation’s theory (1980), guessing strategy begins by getting the learner to take a close look at the unknown word, next to look at its immediate context, and then to take a much broader view of how the clause containing the word relates to other clauses , sentences, or paragraphs. After guessing, there is a simple checkup system to make sure that the guess is the best possible. Once

learners have mastered the steps of the strategy and have practiced guessing words by systematically going through the steps, it is no longer to apply all the steps. That is, this strategy is just a means of acquiring the unconscious skill that an efficient reader already has. Of course besides the linguistic information that is present within a text, there are other important resources of information that can be used in the guessing procedures. These include knowledge that learners already have about particular words through having met them before, knowledge of the subject that they are reading about (this may be knowledge gained through the learner's first language), and knowledge of the conceptual structure of the topic.

In summary, Naiman (1975) states that one criterion for good language learners are good at guessing; Rubin (1981) also mentions the strategy of guessing which is considered as inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning. In addition, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) expound on the inferring strategy, and then inferencing strategy is included in Oxford's (1990) model. Brown and Hatch (1995) thinks that the meanings are guessed from the clues within the sentences than from the information through passage. Nation (1990) also elaborate on the ways to deal with the unfamiliar words: to guess from or in the context.

2.3 Bilingual Dictionary Strategy

Bilingual dictionary strategy conclude dictionary strategies for comprehension, extended dictionary strategies and looking-up strategies. As a communicating bridge, dictionary is bond between mother tongue and foreign language. So in the process of learning language, dictionary is very important. Applying dictionary is not only the subservience activity of listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating and so on, but also a part of learning strategies for the process of language learning and applying. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) brought dictionary into the structure of cognitive strategy. In recent years, dictionary users' view have become the newest part in the research process. (Hartmann, 1994). Many foreign researchers have used various method to research different parts' usage of dictionary and made great success. Researchers found that dictionary is used to look up words and check their meaning. Dictionary can be used for helping learners' reading understanding and acquire vocabularies (Knight 1994).

2.4 Note-Taking Strategy

Note-taking strategy means meaning-oriented note-taking and learners write down key words or concepts. Ahamed (1989) researched the note-taking strategy, students would like to take notes besides the vocabularies or on the blank. Note-taking strategy is widely regarded as increasing students' intention. A lot of researchers approve of this view, though some of them disagree the view. According to Divesta & Gray (1972), there are two function of note-taking strategy which are encoding and external memory. The former is that note-taking strategy is good for the storage of information and memory of information. The latter is that information noted is good for application to review. There are different view for the function of two note-taking strategies and a lot of researchers thought they are useful. Kiewra (1991) pointed out the encoding function of note-taking strategies is due to the manufacturing of encoding process. Mayer (1983) and Bromage & Mayer (1986) pointed out two

reviewing result of quantity and quality. The former refer to reviewing can make learners to increasing more information. The latter refer to reviewing can adjust learners' way of studying.

2.5 Practice Strategy

Practice means that learners use words in listening, speaking, reading and writing regularly. German famous psychologist Ebbinghaus thought human' memory have itself regular and the process of forgetting is not balanced. People usually forget vocabularies fast after learning words. As the time passing by, forgetting will be from fast to slow. When it reach some degree, forgetting can stop. So according to this regular, guiding students to practice vocabulary regularly and avoid forgetting. Cohen(1990) put forward using cards to category the words .One vocabulary has different method to practice for mastering its meaning (Jiang Xing,2000).

Chapter Three Methodology

3.1 Participants

There are six students who have taken part in this interview about vocabulary learning strategies. Three girls are Lily, Lucy and Linda. Three boys are Tom, Tony and David. Their age is between 11and 14. They have learned English for 7 years and they are eighth grades and come from the same class in a junior middle school which is the best middle school in Nan Chong. Most of the students admitted in the school have high ability in every subject.

I also interviewed two English teachers in eighth grades and come from class one and class two whether they have used repetition strategy, contextual guessing strategy, bilingual dictionary, note-taking strategy and practice strategy.

3.2 Data Collection

Interviewing these students face to face about whether their English teacher use some approaches while teaching vocabulary and what kind of way do they think is best for them to improve their English grades.

The participants of the experiment also include two English teachers teach in class one and class two.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the interview data demonstrates that teachers usually don't take too much time to deal with vocabulary courses. And most students say that they lack of vocabulary strategies. Reciting more and reading more is the best advice they often give to students to improve their vocabulary memory. Most of them think learning vocabulary is the most difficult part of English learning, but they seldom practice vocabulary after class.

The interview data shows that teachers usually don't take much time to deal with vocabulary courses. Although they know many kinds of vocabulary teaching approaches, they just don't spend too much time on vocabulary. Most of them choose repetition strategy, they just guide students to use some strategies to deal with vocabulary tasks. Compared with reading, writing, and grammar teaching,

vocabulary teaching are often regarded as more relaxed teaching task.

Chapter Four Results and Discussion

4.1 The Result and Discussion of the students' interviews

From interview, students usually like to choose repetition strategy and they think the main method of learning vocabulary is repetition. In fact, they make use of repetition indeed. Junior students are influenced by traditional learning strategy. Repetition is a traditional learning method, such as reciting ancient poetry and writings in classical Chinese. Which influence English teaching in a great degree.

4.2 The Result and Discussion of the Teachers' interviews

Teachers just ask students recite and repeat vocabulary. They lack of a kind of awareness of delivering some vocabulary strategy and using some vocabulary teaching approaches in class. They just recite and practice repeatedly which can make students lose passion of learning vocabulary easily. Although they have some vocabulary approaches in their mind, they seldom apply these teaching approaches into their class or they just choose one kind of teaching approach and use it again and again, which can make students feel bored of learning easily. Teachers are lack of interaction with students and students actually seldom join in the vocabulary activities.

Chapter Five Conclusion

Flexible vocabulary teaching strategies can strengthen students' study interests and motivate studying intention, which is also efficient means of intensifying studying confidence. Flexible vocabulary teaching strategies play an important role on cultivating students' creative thought. In actual teaching process, junior high English teachers should accord to instructional programme and analyze existing problem in teaching vocabularies. Teachers should work hard to improve and then promote teaching result. So it can consolidating knowledge for junior high students of building English knowledge.

First of all, teachers should let students combine listening, speaking, reading and writing. Mastering a vocabulary need to apply sound, form and meaning and accurate sound is the base for listening understanding. It should be emphasized that listening and speaking are first following the reading and writing for junior students learning language. Taking the vocabulary paper for example, firstly, teacher show a model paper for students in the class, then expressing the following sentences containing vocabulary paper. There is a paper in it. The paper is yellow. This paper is big. I like a pear. I want this paper. This can stimulate students' auditory sense and makes the vocabulary remembered by heart.

Secondly, teachers should make full use of situational vocabulary teaching strategies. Situational vocabulary teaching strategies are study situation, acting situation and life situation. Here, just taking life situation for example. Vocabulary teaching process is communicative and teaching in life setting. That is to say teacher should teach English vocabulary in the words. Taking some vocabularies of place for example, such as behind, back, front, right, left, across from and

between. Teacher stand behind the student A and say I am behind A. Then teacher stand behind student B and say I am behind B now. After that, students need to stand up one by one describing their places according to the actual situation. Students are happy and the whole class's mood is relaxed. Learning vocabulary in the true situation, teachers teach breezily and students are remindful.

Thirdly, In the suitable period, according to spelling rules of appearing model sentence in the text book, teachers need to teach the grammar knowledge to students and help them develop the association ability as well as students learning independently as following. In the junior middle school period, these grammar rules are common. Verb is changed for noun. Noun is changed for adjective. Adjective is changed for adverb. Compound is made up by two or more than two root and stem. It help students learn about some root and affix and also can enlarge students' lexical resources by explaining fundamental knowledge of word-building.

Lastly, teachers should let students mastering vocabulary by games. Junior middle students prefer to match and sports ,which is suitable for their age. So teacher can make full use of game and students' sense of competition to review and remember vocabularies. When students are studying verb or verb phrases such as run, jump , dance, sing , cook , drive, throw , play the piano , play basketball and so on , teacher can pick a student out to act for others before the class and then these students must give answer according to the student's acting.

When students are studying sentences about direction, teacher can make a student draw the line road and others students give the answer according the line road.

Researching English vocabulary learning strategies and applying it to the teaching class have been become an important task for English teacher in modern English education. It is not only to improve teachers' language learning, but also make a good example for students getting good learning method. So the success of English vocabulary teaching strategies can contribute to English education.

In a word, junior high English learning contain four parts of listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the same time, these four parts are basis on vocabulary. So junior high English teachers need to attach importance to students' vocabulary memory. However, many teachers emphasis the self-centered teaching model and ignore students' cognitive characteristic. In a word, there is mach method to remember English vocabulary. Teachers and students should innovate continually and break up traditional mindset, then developing various innovative English learning method.

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Appendix A 学生访谈表

- 1 你认为英语最难学的是: 语音、词汇、语法?
- 2 你自己背单词有无方法? 如有, 是什么?
- 3 在词汇学习的过程中, 老师有没有教过你记忆单词的方法?
- 4 你有没有这种情况, 背的单词大部分都忘?
- 5 你记不住单词的主要原因是什么?
- 6 你感觉自己词汇学习的效果好吗?
- 7 你认为有必要得到词汇策略的训练吗?
- 8 你认为通过什么方法才能学习英语词汇? (死记硬背、习得、练习)
- 9 目前, 你的词汇学习中遇到的最大的困难是什么?
- 10 你认为学习词汇主要靠课堂还是课后自主学习? 在课堂上, 你如何学习英语词汇的? 在家里, 你又是如何学习词汇的?
- 11 你运用哪些工具学习英语单词?
- 12 你有字典吗? 什么样的字典? 你在什么情况下用字典? 主要查阅单词哪些方面的内容? (音、形、意、搭配、用法、例句)
- 13 你学习词汇的方法主要来自哪儿?

Appendix B 教师访谈调查表

- 1 你主要通过何种方法扩大学生的词汇量?
- 2 你经常运用什么方法教授新词?
- 3 你认为学生学习的最大障碍是什么?
- 4 你开展过调动学生扩大词汇量的积极性吗?
- 5 你利用单词表教学法教授新单词的频率?
- 6 你认为老师运用单词表教学法而不用语境教学法教授新单词的最主要原因是?
- 7 你调查过学生词汇量的大小吗?
- 8 你在英语词汇教学中有什么困惑?