

## Developing English Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Primary School Students —Taking Supplementary Tutoring Class as an Example

Tingting Lin<sup>1</sup>, Yu He<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Foreign Languages, Xinhua College of Sun Yat-sen University,  
Guangzhou 510125, China;

<sup>c</sup>School of Foreign Languages, Xinhua College of Sun Yat-sen University,  
Guangzhou 510125, China;

<sup>1</sup> 2567261279@qq.com, <sup>c</sup>hedyfao@126.com

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author

**Keywords:** cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, social/affective strategies.

**Abstract.** Based on the theory of vocabulary learning strategies, this paper is to investigate the application of English vocabulary learning strategies by the questionnaire to 42 pupils who have participated in supplementary tutoring class to find out their problems of vocabulary learning. The results display the problems as follows: 1) students' failing to receive enough training on vocabulary learning methods; 2) cognitive strategies but not meta-cognitive or social/affective strategies being frequently used in vocabulary learning; 3) simple and concrete learning strategies being frequently used, such as learning based on pinyin. In order to solve such problems, the authors put forward relevant suggestions.

### Introduction

The first problem encountered by pupils when learning English is vocabulary learning. Vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar are the three elements of language. As linguist D.A. Wilkin[1] said, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". So vocabulary learning is the prominent part of English learning. Chinese students who have difficulties in learning English in school will find help outside the school, which can be proved by Fang & Xue's [2] survey that among the factors influencing students' participation in extracurricular tuition in China's compulsory education stage, academic performance ranks the first. That can best explain why such training courses have sprung up in China in recent years. However, compared with formal education, it is relatively difficult to observe and monitor the results of teaching in private tutoring institutions. The related data are difficult to collect so they have not been of concern to researchers. Therefore, by interviewing forty-two pupils who have participated in supplementary tutoring class and two teachers from formal primary school, the present study is intended to explore the results of vocabulary learning in such training courses, the problems confronted with and then propose relevant solutions.

### Literature Review

Foreign linguists start studying vocabulary learning strategies in 1970. Nation [3] and Stoffer [4] study and classify various strategies for vocabulary learning. Luppessw & Day [5] believes that vocabulary learning can be easily picked up in extensive reading. Anderson [6] points out that metacognitive strategies plays a crucial role in promoting the cognitive ability of learners and the development of vocabulary deep processing.

However, Mc Carthy [7] addresses that learners will apply various strategies for vocabulary learning, but not all of them do equally well in maximizing their strategic resources. The strategies

studied by foreign scholars are mainly directed at native speakers of foreign languages and therefore may not be valid for English as a second language learner.

It is until 1990 that Chinese scholars began to research vocabulary strategies. Wu and Wang's [8] study shows that significant differences will appear between advanced and poor students from non-English majors while they're using different vocabulary learning strategies. Feng [9] found that senior students are better at using vocabulary learning strategies than junior ones in English majors. Zhang [10] indicates that learners' vocabulary achievement can be predicted by the vocabulary strategy they use. However, there are few researches on pupils' vocabulary learning strategies, which usually target on college English majors or non-English majors, middle school students as well. Therefore, the authors want to make a research to the primary school students and help the pupils to learn words effectively.

## **Theoretical Framework**

O'Malley and Chamot' [11] classify the learning strategies into metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies, which is the most popular classification.

- 1) Metacognitive strategy refers to a strategy in which students (learners) manage and govern knowledge about cognitive processes through their own plans, management, and evaluation. In detail, Meta-cognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, selective attention and evaluation.
- 2) Cognitive strategies refer to the basic measures and methods used by students (learners) to solve problems in vocabulary learning. Cognitive strategies involve repetition, association, contextualization, classifying, dictionary, guessing, word formation, note-taking and pronunciation.
- 3) Social/sentimental strategies are vocabulary learning methods in which students (learners) use vocabulary learning to collaborate with classmates and ask teachers or foreigners who are native speakers of English to conduct emotional adjustments. Social/affective strategies include cooperation, seeking for help [12] .

## **Research Methodology— Questionnaires**

The questionnaire are made in terms of Gu & Johnson[13] 's lexical learning Questionnaires that is often employed by the foreign and domestic studies, and based upon the authors' background reading concerning about the papers of vocabulary learning strategies and interview with teachers and students.

The questions are divided into two parts. Part one is concerned about the basic information of gender, English learning interest, English vocabulary learning concepts, learning motivation and vocabulary learning strategies training needs, which is formed of six questions. Part two is used to investigate the pupil's acquisition of vocabulary learning strategies, which includes meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies. In detail, meta-cognitive strategies cover Pr-planning, Selective attention, Self-management and Self-evaluation. Cognitive strategies cover Repetition, Association, Contextualization, Classifying, Dictionary, Guessing, Word information, Note and Pronunciation. Social/affective strategies cover Cooperation, Seeking for help, Self-encourage. There are 19 questions in this part which target one kind of vocabulary learning strategies and cover the three strategies. Among these questions, question 7-10 are designed within meta-cognitive strategies, question 11-20 are designed within cognitive strategies, question 21-25 are designed within social/affective strategies. Each question has 5 options, which represent the frequency of the behavior. The 5-point scale rating system is adopted. "1" represents "Absolutely disagree", "2" stands for "Almost disagree", "3" means "Sometimes agree", "4" stands for "Nearly agree", "5" means "Absolutely agree". SPSS (Statistics Package for Social Science) and Excel will be employed to analyze the collected datas.

## Results

### Low frequency of using English vocabulary learning strategies

According to the Oxford Language Learning Strategy Scale (SILL), the average size of each strategy represents the frequency of respondents using the strategy. The average between 1.0-2.4 represents a low applicative frequency, 2.5-3.4 means medium, and 3.5-5.0 represents high frequency. Table 5.1 shows the overall uses of the three vocabulary learning strategies.

Table 5.1 Overall Uses of the Three Strategy Categories

Strategy categories	Mean	Frequency scale	Rank
Cognitive	2.47	Low	1
Meta-cognitive	2.41	Low	2
Social/affective	2.17	Low	3

Table 5.1 reflects that the cognitive strategy is the highest uses ( $M=2.47$ ), Meta-cognitive strategy ranks second ( $M=2.41$ ) and Social/affective strategy is the last one ( $M=2.17$ ). It can be found from the table that the average of three strategies is all under 3, which means that three strategies are not frequently used. It can be inferred that the pupils are not use vocabulary learning strategy frequently and they apply the cognitive strategy frequently.

Besides, we can find that cognitive strategy ( $M=2.47$ ) > Meta-cognitive strategy ( $M=2.41$ ) > Social/affective strategy ( $M=2.17$ ). The result is the same as the research of Liu & Yan & Fan & Li & Niu [14], who had investigated 677 pupils' English learning strategies in their research. They also pointed out that since elementary school students are just starting to get involved in English, the learning and mastery of English strategies is also at the initial stage, and students can rarely master strategies spontaneously.

### Poor self-study ability

Question 7-10 are designed within Meta-cognitive strategy. Meta-cognitive strategy is secondly used by the pupils. But which is the highest use among the Meta-cognitive strategy? Table 5.2 shows that: Selective attention ( $M=2.83$ ) > Self-evaluation ( $M=2.55$ ) > Self-management ( $M=2.19$ ) > Pr-planning ( $M=2.07$ ).

Question 8 is about Pr-planning. Question 7 is about Selective attention. Question 9 is about Self-management. Question 10 is about Self-evaluation. Most of the pupils can selectively learn and memorize words and reflect on their own deficiencies and progress. But a small portion of them can plan and manage their study in reciting vocabulary. They may rely on the school teachers and just finish the tasks given by the teachers.

Table 5.2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Use for Meta-cognitive Strategy

Items	Strategies	M	SD
Meta-cognitive Strategies	Pr-planning	2.07	0.92
	Selective attention	2.83	1.25
	Self-management	2.19	0.97
	Self-evaluation	2.55	1.15

### Rote memorization used most in vocabulary learning

Question 10-20 are designed within cognitive strategy. Cognitive strategy is frequently used by the pupils. Table 5.3 shows that: Repetition ( $M=2.76$ ) > Guessing ( $M=2.69$ ) > Association ( $M=2.64$ ) = Pronunciation ( $M=2.64$ ) > Note ( $M=2.55$ ) > Dictionary ( $M=2.48$ ) > Word information ( $M=2.17$ ) > Classifying ( $M=2.14$ ) > Contextualization ( $M=2.12$ ).

Among the Cognitive strategy, repetition strategy is the most used strategies for students. Many students remember words by reading and writing repeatedly, which is called rote. They also can

associate the words with real object. However, they rarely use Contextualization, Classifying and Word information, which are the best way to master English words appropriately and effectively.

Table5.3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Use for Cognitive Strategy

Cognitive Strategies	Repetition	2.76	1.19
	Association	2.64	1.39
	Contextualization	2.12	0.86
	Classifying	2.14	1.2
	Dictionary	2.48	1.27
	Guessing	2.69	1.32
	Word information	2.17	1.06
	Note	2.55	1.37
	Pronunciation	2.64	1.1

### Lack of cooperative learning

Question 21-23 are designed within Social/affective strategy. Social/affective strategy is rarely used by the pupils. From table 5.4, the following ranking can be reached: Self-encourage (M=2.55)> Seeking for help (M=2.24)> Cooperation (M=1.74).

Cooperation strategy is the lowest among all the vocabulary learning strategies, which means that the pupils don't have enough activity of learning English at class.

Table5.4 Mean and Standard Deviation of Use for Social/Affective Strategy

Social/Affective Strategies	Cooperation	1.74	0.96
	Seeking for help	2.24	1.03
	Self-encourage	2.55	1.23

### Lack of training in English vocabulary learning strategies

As is shown in Table 5.4, the average of three strategies is all under 3, which means that three strategies are not frequently used. This may be because students do not understand much vocabulary learning methods or strategies. And from table 5.5, many students think it is difficult for them to recite the words and they want to get training for vocabulary learning methods.

In the discussion of teachers and students, some students said that they did not receive guidance on vocabulary methods from the teachers. They only remembered the words again and again. Few students remembered words according to phonetic symbols. In interviews with teachers, teachers used to read words and explain meanings when they were teaching words. And then let the students recite themselves, and rarely train students to use learning strategies in vocabulary teaching.

Table5.5 The Percentage of each Item about Student's Vocabulary Learning Concept

Item	Item	Percentage(%)□
1. Gender	Girl	48.8
	Boy	51.2
2. Do you like learning English?	Yes	25.6
	Middle	44.2
	No	30.2
3. Do you think learning English words is important?	Yes	72.1
	Middle	20.9
	No	7
4. Do you think it's hard to recite English words?	Yes	62.8
	No	37.2
5. Do you want to get training for vocabulary learning methods?	Yes	74.4
	Middle	23.3
	No	2.3

### **Measures to Solve the Problems**

**Students should update their learning concepts and learn more autonomously.** Yang &Gong [15] proposed to pay attention to the cultivation of English vocabulary learning concepts, who studied the relationship between junior middle school students' English vocabulary learning strategies and their academic performance. According to the survey, 72.1% students think that it is hard to learn English and 62.8% students consider it hard to recite words. But they rarely try to find the reason. Because of their limited amount of knowledge, they do not know English vocabulary learning strategies. They can only memorize words and remember words by repetition. Therefore, primary school students should update their learning concepts. Students should learn to make plans to memorize words, review the learned words regularly, and reflect on their own progress and shortcomings in learning.

**Students should understand their own learning style and find out suitable vocabulary learning strategies.** Ding [16] posed the crux to determining the success of vocabulary learning is using vocabulary learning strategies appropriately, not using them frequently. It also means that the students need to find out suitable vocabulary learning strategies for themselves. Just as everyone has different learning methods, everyone will have different learning strategies that are suitable for them. Students should find suitable learning strategies and use effective vocabulary learning strategies to help them quickly memorize words and overcome the suffering of vocabulary recitation.

**Students should be good at learning with others.** In the survey, cooperation strategy is the lowest among all the vocabulary learning strategies. English vocabulary learning Social/sentimental strategy is the most important part of vocabulary learning strategies. Students should learn to communicate with others and solve the difficulties of learning English vocabulary through collaborative learning.

### **Summary**

The previous research explores the patterns of English vocabulary learning strategies employed by the pupils from supplementary tutoring class, who have trouble in learning English and even vocabulary learning. The study is made through interviews, questionnaire and data analysis. However, there are some limitations in this research. First, the study is carried out on the basis of 42 fifth grade and sixth grade pupils from supplementary tutoring class, and most of them have trouble in learning English, so they attend an English tutoring class. The authors found out the problems of the pupils' use of English vocabulary learning strategies through questionnaires, interviews, and data analysis and proposed related solutions. But the limited data might not be sufficient enough to prove the validness of these findings.

### **Acknowledgement:**

Yu He, Selected readings on international business & economics, Xinhua College of Sun Yat-sen University (2017ZD01) , Research and Teaching Affairs Office, 2017

### **References**

- [1] Wilkins.D.A., *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. Edward Arnold, London, 1972.
- [2] Chengcheng. Fang, & Haiping. Xue, *Research on Factors Influencing Students in Compulsory Education Participating in Extra-curricular Tuition*, Primary and secondary school management, Beijing, 2015, pp. 51-53.
- [3] Nation. I.S.P., *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*, Newbury House Publishers, New York, 1990.
- [4] Stoffer.I. , *University foreign language student's choice of vocabulary learning strategies as related to individual difference variables*, University of Alabama: Unpublished PHD Dissertation, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,1995.

- [5] Luppew. S. & R. Day., Reading Dictionaries and Vocabulary Learning, Language Learning, 1993.
- [6] Anderson.N. J., Using Telescopes, Microscopes, and Kaleidoscope to Pet Metacongition into Perspective, TESOL Matters, 2002, pp. 1.
- [7] McCarthy. M., Vocabulary, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990, pp. 127-129.
- [8] Xia. Wu, & Qiang. Wang, Non-English Majors' Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Foreign Language Teaching and Research, Beijing, 1998, pp. 53-57.
- [9] Yufang. Feng, A comparative study on vocabulary learning strategies of English majors at different proficiency levels, Foreign Language World, Shanghai, 2003, pp. 66-72.
- [10] Ping. Zhang, Regular Prediction on the Results of Students' Vocabulary Learning Strategies, ForeignLanguagesandTheirTeaching, Beijing, 2004, pp. 21-23.
- [11] O'Malley J.M., Chamot A.U., Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition, Cambridge UniversityPress, 1990.
- [12] Ellis, Rod., The Study of Second Language Acquisition, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai, 1999.
- [13] Gu, Y. & Johnson, R. K. Vocabulary learning strategies and language learning outcomes, Language Learning, Hongkong, 1996, pp.46, 643-79.
- [14] Dianshi .Liu, Huiyi . Yan, Feng. Fan, Liyan. Liu & Zhihui. Niu, A research on Status and Developmental Characteristics of Students'English Learning Strategy in Primary School—Taking Southern Regions of Jiangsu as an Example, CURRICULUM, TEACHING MATERIAL AND METHOD, Beijing, 2013, PP. 102-108.
- [15] Jinfeng. Yang, & Yuer . Gong,The relationship between English vocabulary learning strategies and academic performance, Foreign Language and Literature Studies, Fujian, 2004, pp.40-44.
- [16] Ding, Yi., A Compar ison of Learning Strategies Used by Good Learners and Poor Learners of English Vocabulary, Foreign Languages Research, Jiangsu, 2006, pp. 47-51.