

Research on Current Situation and Countermeasures of English Vocabulary Teaching in Junior High School — A Case Study of Qiming Middle School of Guangzhou, Baiyun

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Abstract

This study examines vocabulary instruction and learning at Qi Ming High School. It addresses issues and offers practical suggestions. Two key questions are explored: the current situation of English vocabulary learning in middle school and current situation of English vocabulary teaching in junior high school. 183 students and 13 English teachers participated in the survey. Findings reveal that traditional teaching methods prevail due to time constraints and exam pressure. Students heavily rely on memorization techniques like word lists, hindering practical use. Teachers should teach effective memory techniques, such as recognizing vocabulary and using roots or affixes.

Around 50% of students improve vocabulary through extensive reading, emphasizing its importance. 86% of students use vocabulary in listening, speaking, and writing, underscoring its relevance to language skills. Teachers should leverage this method to enhance lexical competence. Students lack initiative and depend on textbooks. Teachers should guide them to employ diverse methods. Control strategies for autonomy are rarely used, indicating a need for teacher guidance. Students primarily use textbooks for vocabulary, limiting their resources.

Teachers should encourage the use of diverse materials like reading resources. Communication strategies vary among students, with some active and others lacking confidence. Teachers should promote communication both in and outside the classroom to enhance speaking skills and develop communication habits.

Keywords: English Vocabulary Teaching; Junior High School; Current Situation; Countermeasures.

Introduction

English vocabulary is vital for language learning, playing an increasingly important role in education, work, and daily life. However, vocabulary teaching in junior middle schools in

China often falls short, lacking effective strategies. Students face difficulties in memorization and fail to grasp contextual meanings.

The new curriculum standards require students to acquire a substantial number of words and develop comprehensive language proficiency. Language skills and knowledge are essential for achieving this goal.

Many teachers still rely on traditional methods, teaching words in isolation without considering context or cultural background. This hampers students' mastery of vocabulary. Students struggle with memory and make errors in word tasks. Equipping them with effective learning strategies is key to improving their English proficiency. Vocabulary learning should encompass structural changes and word functions. In order to better study the difficulties faced by junior middle school students in vocabulary learning, the author compiled a questionnaire on junior middle school students' English learning in Baiyun district based on the current situation.

In order to test the validity and reliability of the characteristics of vocabulary learning difficulties, different methods are adopted, such as listening to lectures, consulting teaching plans, tracing and understanding the cases of teachers and students, and describing the learning process of students with learning difficulties. The first and second sections highlight the significance of the paper and the related literature review.

The third chapter briefly introduces the current situation of junior high school English vocabulary teaching and learning. The fourth section introduces the research methods, and describes the research questions, participants, tools and analysis in detail. The fifth section reports the results and discussions of this study. It is carried out by questionnaire to show the teaching status of teachers and students, and further points out the main problems of teaching and learning. The English vocabulary of Qiming middle school was analyzed and the main reasons were analyzed. The sixth section summarizes the whole thesis, and summarizes the research by literature review, questionnaire survey and data analysis.

Review of the Literature

Vocabulary Learning Theories

From the philosophical point of view, knowledge is the understanding of the attributes and connections of things. From the psychological point of view, knowledge is a state of the mind. Famous contemporary cognitive psychologists believe that "knowledge is a subject to their environment or thinking and object exchange in consciousness. General knowledge can be divided into declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. (Ballantyne, 2021). Declarative knowledge refers to the knowledge that an individual can directly state by providing meaningful clues, mainly answering "what is the world". It is static knowledge. Procedural knowledge refers to unconsciousness of the extraction of clues, and only by means of some kind of operation methods to indirectly infer its existence form, mainly a set of operating procedures, to answer the

"how to do" . Modern cognitive psychologists believe that declarative learning can be divided into three stages. In the first stage, new information enters the short-term memory, and establishes the connection with the related knowledge activated in the long-term memory, thus emerging the new meaning construction.

In the second stage, the meaning of the new construction is stored in the long-term memory. If there is no review or new learning, the meaning will be forgotten as time goes on. The third stage is the extraction and application of meaning. (Cui,2007) The study of procedural knowledge can also be divided into three stages. The first stage is the learning of declarative knowledge. The second stage is to transform the declarative form of rules into the procedural form by applying the rule's variation practice. The third stage of procedural knowledge learning is the highest stage of procedural knowledge development. As a special procedural knowledge, the learning of strategic knowledge also has such three stages. First to know what strategy is to learn and to practice, by applying the relevant strategies to make rules about learning, memory, or thinking which dominate their own cognitive behavior and it can smooth apply the relevant rules under changing conditions, control and adjust their own cognitive behavior, improving the effect of learning and memory. (Zhou,2017)

Memory and Information Processing Theory

In vocabulary learning, memorizing words is very important. Memory is an important component of IQ.To a large extent, it can determine the success or failure of learning. This is especially true in foreign language learning. Memory is the reflection of past experience in the human brain and the process of imprinting, retaining, and function of the experience. Memory can be divided into intention Memory and unintentional memory. Intentional memory is intended for a predetermined purpose of knowledge, and is sometimes required by certain methods. (Zhang ,2014)

Unintentional memory refers to the memory that has no predetermined purpose, does not require any method, or effort. According to the information processing and retention time of the memory process, it can be divided into instantaneous, short-term, and long-term memory. The basic elements of memory are memorization, retention, re-recognition or recall. Memorization is the first part of memory, retention is the second part of memory, and recognition or recall is the third part of memory. These three steps influence, depend on and have close connection each other. (Zhang, 2014)

Second Language Acquisition Theory

As an independent subject, the study of second language acquisition was formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This led this study systematically explore the nature and process of second language acquisition describing how learners acquire a second language and explain why learners acquire a second language. Second language acquisition is not built on the basis of mother tongue,only when we put the second language acquisition as a relatively independent

phenomenon to explore and analyze the inherent law of the acquisition process and the external factors which affect the development of it, it is likely to be understood the process of second language acquisition.

Krashen strictly distinguishes the concepts between acquisition and learning. He pointed out that language acquisition can only be achieved through the unconscious acquisition of language, and language acquisition cannot be achieved under the conscious condition. He believed that the language acquisition would be completed through language input and teaching should be focused on providing students with as much as language input. (He, 2003)

According to the 'input theory', Swain proposed 'output theory', He thinks that language acquisition cannot succeed only input without output. He emphasized the role of output in language learning, if students fail to get knowledge preparation or internalize the complex structural rules of the language, they will feel monotonous under this kind of parrot-like mechanism. (He,2003)

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Since the beginning of the 20th century, many researchers in the field of foreign language education have done a lot of foreign language learning strategies. A reliable theory is to use effective foreign language learning strategies. It can not only improve the way of foreign language learning, improve the learning effect and quality, but reduce the burden. In addition, the cultivation of learning strategies should be penetrated into teaching so as to reduce the difficulties of students' learning. The results also show that less successful foreign language learners can learn from successful foreign language learners' learning strategies. Autonomous learning is the prerequisite for lifelong learning, and the formation of effective learning strategies is the only way to develop autonomous learning ability. The study strategy of teachers can promote and adjust their teaching strategies and methods. Additionally, Teachers should guide and help students develop learning strategies in teaching. (Zhou, 2017)

Research Methodology

In order to understand the current situation of vocabulary teaching and learning in junior high school better, the author carried out a variety of investigations including questionnaires and interviews in Qiming middle school from January, 2023 to May,2023. This school can basically represent the comprehensive level of teachers and students in junior high school in Baiyun district.

Research Questions

The purpose of research addresses the following questions through questionnaires and interview in order to make a deeper survey into the present condition of English vocabulary teaching and learning in middle school.

- (1) What is the present condition of English vocabulary learning in middle school?
- (2) What is the current condition of English vocabulary teaching in junior high school?

Research Participants

The author took teachers and students as the research participants so as to make the survey more comprehensive and show the current situation of vocabulary teaching in junior high school from different angles. The participants involved in this research are from Qiming middle school in Baiyun, Guangzhou city. The author chose 13 teachers in total, of which 4 are from Grade seven, 4 are from Grade eight and 5 are from Grade nine. The teachers are of different teaching ages and genders. Only two teachers are males while the rest are all females. One teacher has been teaching for 15 years while one teacher has just been teaching for one year. There are also 183 students involved in the research. They are all from Grade seven and helped to do student questionnaire. 177 questionnaires were returned and the returning rate reaches 97%. 174 questionnaires are valid. and the questionnaire-reclaiming efficiency reaches 95%. 172 tests are returned, and the returning rate reached 94%. 169 are valid and the reclaiming efficiency reached 98%. The research participants are selected randomly and have strong willingness to cooperate, which enhances the validity and credibility of the research so that the research is more objective to reflect the real situation of English vocabulary teaching and learning in junior high school.

Questionnaires

To investigate the current situation of vocabulary teaching and learning in junior high school, two questionnaires are compiled from two aspects. One is from the perspective of English teachers in junior high school and the other is for junior high school students. Each questionnaire involves two parts. One part is about the basic information of participants and the second part is the body of the questionnaire. The teacher questionnaire includes teachers' strategies of vocabulary teaching used by teachers in junior high school. There are ten multiple-choice questions, and the teachers get the meaning of each question as well as make a choice. As for student questionnaires, methods and strategies of vocabulary learning and factors affecting vocabulary learning are compiled into questions. Meanwhile, there are thirty multiple-choice questions.

Research Findings

Table-1.1 Teaching Method and strategies

| Always | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Never |
|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| 13% | 60% | 27% | 0% | 0% |

Table1.2 Occasion of Vocabulary teaching

| At the start of each new unit | Before each learning item | After each learning item | In the process of exercises | Others |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|
| 26% | 38% | 5% | 5% | 26% |

Table1.3 Time Proportion of Vocabulary Teaching in One Class

| Less than 30% | 30%--40% | 40%--50% | More than 50% |
|---------------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 66% | 24% | 10% | 0% |

Table1.4 Frequency of Reviewing Vocabulary

| Every day | A week | A month | Mid or end term |
|-----------|--------|---------|-----------------|
| 40% | 38% | 12% | 10% |

Table1-5 Way to Check Students' Vocabulary Learning

| Dictation | Making a dialogue | Writing | Translation |
|-----------|-------------------|---------|-------------|
| 30% | 18% | 21% | 31% |

Table1-6 Approaches to Vocabulary Teaching

| Read the word list | Read the text | Create situation | Translation |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|
| 30% | 30% | 21% | 19% |

Table1-7 Methods of Vocabulary Teaching

| Direct method | Contextual Method | Dictionary Method | Word--guessing Method | Game Method | Translation Method |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 25% | 17% | 10% | 16% | 10% | 22% |

Table1-8 Content of Vocabulary Teaching

| Pronunciation | Part of speech | Meaning | Phrase or collocation | Synonym or antonym | Specific meaning |
|---------------|----------------|---------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 19% | 18% | 18% | 18% | 14% | 13% |

Table1-9 Means of Vocabulary Teaching

| Blackboard | Multimedia | Both |
|------------|------------|------|
| 0% | 10% | 90% |

Table2-1 Pragmatics Usage

| | Always | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Never |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| Extensive reading | 14% | 19% | 31% | 31% | 7% |
| Word-formation Or context | 24% | 28% | 28% | 15% | 4% |
| Listening ,Speaking and Writing | 26% | 37% | 23% | 10% | 4% |

Table2-2 Use the dictionary

| | Always | Often | Sometime | Occasionally | Never |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|
| Frequency | 16% | 26% | 27% | 26% | 5% |
| Phrase or collocation | 16% | 21% | 32% | 22% | 9% |

Table2-3 Choice of dictionary

| English-Chinese dictionary | Chinese-English Dictionary | Learner's English-Chinese | No dictionary |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 36% | 8% | 46% | 6% |

Table2-4 Strategies of Vocabulary Learning

| | Yes | No |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Clear vocabulary learning objectives and plans | 63% | 47% |
| Fixed vocabulary learning time | 46% | 54% |
| Relevant strategies | 52% | 48% |
| Booklets of vocabulary accumulation | 42% | 58% |

Table 2-5 Regular Check or Test

| Always | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Never |
|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| 12% | 25% | 35% | 18% | 10% |

Table 2-6 Resource Strategy

| Word list | Reading material (newspaper,magazine) | Dictionary | Internet, Television Medium |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| 55% | 15% | 14% | 16% |

Table2-7 Communication strategy

| | Always | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Never |
|--|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| In the classroom or outdoor activity | 12% | 19% | 34% | 30% | 5% |
| Communicate with classmates | 11% | 19% | 35% | 25% | 10% |
| Ask teacher questions | 13% | 16% | 35% | 23% | 13% |

Responses

Reveals that traditional vocabulary teaching approaches still dominate, driven by time constraints and the pressure of senior high school entrance exams. Consequently, vocabulary learning becomes tedious and inefficient. Students heavily rely on traditional memorization methods like word lists, which hinder practical use and lead to short-term retention. To address this, teachers should provide instruction on effective memory techniques, such as recognizing vocabulary and memorizing based on roots or affixes.

Around 50% of students enhance their vocabulary through extensive reading, highlighting the importance of prioritizing vocabulary learning and assessing mastery. Furthermore, 86% of students utilize vocabulary in listening, speaking, and writing, emphasizing the significance of integrating vocabulary into language skills development. Teachers should leverage this effective method to improve students' lexical competence.

The findings also indicate that students lack initiative in learning and overly depend on textbooks. To master a wide range of vocabulary, learners need to employ various learning methods. Control strategies, essential for autonomy and self-management in vocabulary learning, are rarely employed by students, underscoring the need for guidance and encouragement from teachers.

Students primarily rely on textbooks for vocabulary resources, demonstrating limited resource strategies. Teachers should guide students in utilizing diverse resources, such as reading materials, to strengthen vocabulary learning.

Communication strategies vary among students, with some actively using vocabulary in daily life while others lack confidence. Teachers should encourage students to communicate both inside and outside the classroom to enhance speaking skills and develop English communication habits.

Conclusion and Implications

Through the investigation into the current situation of vocabulary teaching in junior high school for almost one month, the author found out that vocabulary still plays an important part in

English teaching. the author summarizes the research and put forward implications to provide reference for English teachers engaged in vocabulary teaching.

First, teachers should place much emphasis on teaching methods and strategies of vocabulary learning and encourage students to use them. Teachers should spare no effort to provide as many methods and strategies of vocabulary learning for students as possible. Under teachers' assistance, students will feel it easy to access the approaches and strategies of vocabulary learning and make good use of them. At the same time, teachers should pay great attention to students' autonomous learning. Teachers are supposed to learn how to cultivate and encourage students' learning initiatives and passion because students in middle school hold the independent learning ability such as self-check, self-control. The fundamental approach to improve the quality of English teaching is to teach students effective methods and strategies of learning.

Second, teachers should improve the means of inputting vocabulary knowledge. The main aspect of language learning is language input. According to the present situation of vocabulary teaching in junior high school, correct ways of vocabulary input are indispensable to make students master more comprehensible vocabulary input. Teachers should create as many as chances for communication in English as they can in order to expose students to various ways of comprehensible vocabulary input. Teachers should often communicate with students in English. Teachers should encourage students into communicating in English with each other.

Last, teachers should learn how to cultivate students' vocabulary consciousness. According to the SLA, the effective way to teach learners vocabulary is to create their vocabulary awareness rather than vocabulary exercise. Because the junior high school is the most important period for students to lay a solid foundation of English learning, teachers are supposed to show students to nourish their own English vocabulary consciousness positively and assist students break through the dominant mode of Chinese vocabulary sense to form the habit of using English vocabulary awareness to address whatever they want to deliver. (Wang Jianli, 2014, 62-63)

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