

# A Survey of Vocabulary Level and Vocabulary-learning Strategies of Non-English Majors in Blended Teaching

Haiwen Xu

College of Foreign Languages, Inner Mongolia University of Finance and Economics, Hohhot, 010070, China

**Abstract:** In blended English teaching for non-English majors, online assignment lacks effective supervision, and students ignore vocabulary-learning just for completing their task. Moreover, students often complain of inadequate words to employ. How to effectively learn vocabulary has been an urgent matter. To obtain timely feedback, a vocabulary level test and a questionnaire of vocabulary-learning strategies were conducted for non-English major sophomores from different natural classes in our university, with the purpose of investigating their vocabulary-learning situation as well as guiding teaching. Analyzing the data, it found the vocabulary level was around 2,750, a certain gap with the basic requirement of 4,500 for national college English, and most respondents learned them in improper methods. It implied more vocabulary learning strategies could be taught for evaluating and improving the vocabulary level in blended teaching.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary level; Vocabulary-learning strategies; Blended teaching

## 1. Introduction

Scholars believe vocabulary-teaching plays a pivotal role in English teaching<sup>[1,2]</sup>. No matter how good a person is in grammar and phonetic imitation, it is difficult to convey ideas smoothly without rich vocabularies<sup>[2]</sup>. The linguist D. Wilkins claims without grammar, there are few things one can express; without words, one cannot express anything<sup>[3]</sup>. In this survey, when students completed the online assignment, they learned words more for Chinese meaning, seldom acquiring English meaning. This resulted in their insufficient vocabulary in the test of reading, listening and especially writing. Common problems of vocabulary-learning concerned short memory of words and misuses of them. To analyze the causes, the questionnaire and the vocabulary test were designed for sophomore non-English majors in our university to investigate their vocabulary level and vocabulary-learning strategies. It would provide references for students in vocabulary-learning and teachers in blended English teaching.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Survey subjects

The survey subjects were 115 non-English major sophomores in our university, 61 of science and engineering and 54 of liberal arts.

### 2.2 Survey method

According to Nation vocabulary test and questionnaire<sup>[4]</sup>, a questionnaire was designed for investigating students' vocabulary-learning situation, as well as a detailed list of 31 vocabulary-learning strategies based on Oxford<sup>[2]</sup> was designed, in which the mean value (3.5-5.0) in Linkert 5 belongs to high-frequency use, with medium-frequency use (2.5 -3.4) and low-frequency use (1.0-2.4). The questionnaire was given to the students by teacher before class and the respondents answered truthfully under the supervision of teacher and timely completed the questionnaire to ensure the validity.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Analysis of the overall situation of English learning

In Table 1, respondents (> 60.4%) learned English after class within 0.5 h, about 1 h learning occupied 35.1%, and only 4.5 percent learned English over 2 h. 44.1 percent responded listening and speaking were too difficult, while 26.1 percent thought vocabulary most difficult, with 15.3 percent thought grammar difficult. However, words memory after class occupied 57.7%, while

on reading 15.3%, on practicing English 9.9%, and on listening and speaking only 3.6%. During learning English vocabulary, 41.4% of the students could control the difficulty of words, 40.5% difficult to control, and 15.3% out of control. As to vocabulary learning strategies, only 4.5 percent had systematically used them, 19.8 percent often used, and 64.9 percent occasionally used. Although these strategies were mentioned in class, 88.3% of students still required more of them should be explicit teaching (Table 3).

Table 1. The overall situation of English learning

Items		Frequency	Percent
The time on extra class English learning	< 1/2 hour	67	60.4
	About 1 hour	40	35.1
	About 2 hours	8	4.50
	Total	115	100
The most difficult part in learning English	Grammar	17	15.3
	Vocabulary	29	26.1
	Listening & speaking	49	44.1
	Writing	10	7.20
	Reading	10	7.20
	Total	115	100
The difficulty level of learning vocabulary	Very difficult	17	15.3
	Difficult	45	40.5
	Normal	46	41.4
	Easy	7	2.70
	Total	115	100
The extent of using vocabulary learning strategies	Always	6	4.50
	Usually	23	19.8
	Sometimes	73	64.9
	Never	13	10.8
	Total	115	100

### 3.2 Analysis of vocabulary-level test

In Table 2, scores of 13.41 and 10.23 was within vocabulary of 2,000 and 3,000; scores of 4.51 and 4.29 was within 5,000 and college vocabularies. With a perfect score of 72, the total score (mean 32.4) is lower than the vocabulary required by the College English Syllabus (2004) (4,500 words).

Table 2. The scores of vocabulary level test

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
2000-word level test	115	5	18	13.4	3.11
3000-word level test	115	1	18	10.2	4.33
5000-word level test	115	0	16	4.51	3.24
University word level	115	0	17	4.29	3.54
Total score	115	12	64	32.4	10.9

### 3.3 Analysis of vocabulary-learning strategies

In Table 3, 6 vocabulary-learning strategies were frequently used with an average value (> 3.0). The mean of writing words repeatedly and reciting words list is around 3.6. Word guessing is frequently used with the mean 3.39. However, other strategies as using E-E dictionaries, asking teachers for help, cooperating with other students showed obviously the lower mean of 1.87, 1.95, 1.97 respectively.

Table 3. Higher/lower rank of frequency use of vocabulary-learning strategy

Frequency	Specific vocabulary-learning strategy	N	Mean	Std. deviation
High frequency	9. Remember words by writing repeatedly	115	3.65	1.08
	10. Recite word list	115	3.60	1.02
	20. Guess from context	115	3.39	0.992
	31. Self-encouragement	115	3.23	1.17

	12. Look up E-C dictionary	115	3.18	1.12
	11. Know many meanings of a word	115	3.03	0.919
Low frequency	29. Cooperate with others	115	1.97	1.01
	30. Ask teacher	115	1.95	0.952
	13. Look up E - E dictionary	115	1.87	0.992

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 The situation of vocabulary-learning

The respondents had a mean of 32.4 (vocabulary of 2,745), lower than 4,500 as basically required by College English Teaching Syllabus (2004). It found 97 percent recognized the importance of vocabulary-learning strategies. Around 60 percent responded words memory was difficult, while 70 percent wanted effective vocabulary-learning. They had self-encouragement (the mean 3.23) but not realized the problems.

They just focused on the Chinese meaning of words (the mean 3.18) not the English meaning (the mean 1.87), as 85 percent responded. Some of them skim the words' Chinese explanation through words books, ignoring the English explanation <sup>[6]</sup>. Words memory is not composed of many isolated words piled together without any regularity or order <sup>[2,7]</sup>. Lexical chunk is combined with pragmatic functions, beneficial for discourse comprehension <sup>[8]</sup>.

Still, vocabulary-learning encounters polysemy, and different meaning are given to different culture <sup>[9]</sup>. Linguists claim that the meaning of most words not only refers to the word itself, but also includes their cultural connotation <sup>[10]</sup>. During the translation, exactly equivalent meanings do not appear in different cultures<sup>[11]</sup>.

### 4.2 Limitations and suggestions

As to the choose of respondents, non-English major sophomores were not from the same natural classes, but from different classes by the college-entered English test scores from 90 to 110. Therefore, they only represented academic performance of above average students in our university. In addition, as juniors and seniors (no college English course) were not included, the data only covered part of the university undergraduates.

It suggests that students could master knowledge of words rules and formation in the way that corresponding lexicology could be taught offline; teachers could provide more cultural reading materials with semantic field of words for deeply remembering the words easily.

## References:

- [1] Wilkins, D. A. Vocabulary Linguistics in Language Teaching [M]. London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1972
- [2] McCarthy, M. Vocabulary [M]. Oxford: OUP, 1990.
- [3] Yuping Wang. On the Application of English Lexicology [J]. Journal of Inner Mongolia University of Finance and Economics, 2003, 1: 78-81.
- [4] Nation, I. S. P. Teaching and Learning Vocabulary. Beijing: Foreign Language and Research Press, 2003.
- [5] O'Malley J., & Chamot, A. Learning Strategies in Second Acquisition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- [6] Hui Chen. Strategies for Learning English Vocabulary for non-English majors in China: An Analysis of Vocabulary Learning Strategies [J]. Foreign language teaching, 2001, 22, 46-51.
- [7] Harmer, J. The Practice of English Language Teaching [M]. Longman: Longman Group Limited, 1991.
- [8] Xinghui Liu. Interaction between Words and lexical Chunks in English Vocabulary Teaching from a cognitive Perspective [J]. Journal of Inner Mongolia University of Finance and Economics, 2017, 15, 140-142.
- [9] Robinett, B. W. The vocabulary system[A]. Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: Substance and Technique [M]. Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 1978.
- [10] Genyue Liu. Investigation and Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies of non-English majors [J]. Chinese Adult Education, 2007, 12: 173-174.
- [11] Gairns, R. & S. Redman. Working With Words [M]. Cambridge: CUP, 1986.

## About the author:

This research was funded by the Inner Mongolia education science research “13th Five-Year Plan” planning project (NGJGH2020239).