

The Teaching Methods and Strategies of Vocabulary for Beginners in Mainland China

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Abstract: *The study investigates approaches and strategies for teaching vocabulary to students in Mainland China and compares the similarities and differences of a variety of teaching approaches as well as discussing the effectiveness of each of them. Literature review is used as a research method and offers an overview of different types of reviews. The analysis showed a strong correlation between teaching approaches and effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition of students in Mainland China.*

Keywords: *teaching methods and strategies, teaching vocabulary*

1. Introduction

There is a famous statement of Wilkins to indicate the importance of vocabulary learning for second language acquisition; "without grammar, little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" [17]. It is said and acknowledged by many researchers that vocabulary acquisition plays an important role in language development and significant participant of second language acquisition [7]. According to the description of Folse, getting sufficient vocabulary input is one of the effective approaches to achieve successfully communicative conversation with native speakers, and lexical learning is necessary for most second language learners because they confess that they are not able to master a high-level proficiency of a language through natural approach by having consistently communication with native speakers and lacking sufficient vocabulary is the major problem for them to communicate with other people [5]. Therefore, giving sufficient attention to the learning of vocabulary is very important for most second language learners. And this essay will focus on the beginners to analyze the way and strategies how they taught in China.

2. Study of Vocabulary Teaching Approaches and Strategies at Home and Abroad

According to the classification of Schmitt in Vocabulary in Language Teaching, the vocabulary teaching approaches could be divided into two types mainly which are intentional teaching and incidental teaching. And it could be known from the definition of intentional learning that intentional learning means that give enough attention directly on the information to be learned and incidental learning means that the purpose of language learning is not only for tests or exams but for communication. And people could find the similar definition description from the article from Hulstijn, intentional study refers to deliberately memorize thousands of words which includes lots of aspects like meaning and spelling and dozens of grammar rules while incidental learning engages in different communicative activities to learn new words but pays more attention to meaning rather than the form of language [9]. Therefore, it can draw a simple conclusion that intentional and incidental learning are two major vocabulary acquisition approaches for students to learn.

Schmitt claims that there is one strategy that most people would use to guide their vocabulary learning that is using a bilingual dictionary, verbal and written repetition, learning how to spell vocabulary, guessing from context and asking classmates for meaning [15].

Gu and other scholars who have done relevant researches about the learning strategies [6] put forward an idea that several types of vocabulary learning strategies are applied into classes by teachers such as contextual encoding, and activation of newly learned words.

3. Discussion of the Effectiveness of Different Teaching Approaches and Strategies

3.1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Incidental Learning.

Incidental learning has been defined as learning which apparently motive or a specific formal instruction and set to learn the activity or material in question ^[13].

And it could be realized in his research that incidental learning is beneficial for students to have personal understanding of the meaning the passage want to express. While some of scholars have different opinion and attitude about the effectiveness and usefulness for intentional learning and incidental learning. Some scholars hold the opinion that incidental learning promotes study because learners are learning new words or phrases mostly from the articles they read or the conversation they have with other people rather than solely by obtaining new words from the explicit instructions of teachers.

Lots of scholars have done related research to study how the advantages and disadvantages of incidental learning. One of them say in his study that incidental learning for vocabulary acquisition would be more suitable for adulthood to have more personal understand of the context they are going to learn.

Other scholars like Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst carry out research among Spanish-speakers children to test the influence that incidental teaching have for students. The present results of the study of them indicate that independent of the effects of the use of functional reinforces and the type of teaching situation, the timing of the presentation of verbal models is a relevant factor that contributes significantly to the success of incidental teaching ^[16]. And their study also show that the importance of incidental teaching is not the only way that teachers may use to use their children's attention and interests to teach them new labels.

Hart and Risley also demonstrate the effectiveness of incidental teaching by making a study about preschool children and they draw a conclusion that children prefer play in areas in which incidental teaching, with its immediate teacher attention and assistance, is available ^[8]. And it could be seen from the study that incidental teaching is more suitable for mediate level students who have already had the ability to analyze the context and learn vocabulary actively in sentences or contexts. Therefore, it is suggested that incidental teaching has its advantage for students, but this kind of teaching method is more suitable for those who already know the importance of study and are willing to learn it by themselves.

3.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Intentional Teaching

And there are several advantages of intentional teaching. According to the statement Cobb, intentional teaching has been found that leading to better results compared with incidental learning ^[3]. And his statement is supported by Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat that intentional learning is more effective than incidental teaching because it has specific study tasks and exercises for practicing what learners have studied at class ^[11].

When it comes to the effect of mastering form-and-meaning connection only, some studies have shown that learning vocabulary in an isolate way would be more effective than learning words in context sometimes ^[10]. According to my own experience, most primary school students lack the self-discipline which may be one of the reasons why lots of schools in China apply intentional teaching as the main approach to guide their teaching. Students may spend very little time to focus on their study when they are given more time to do incidental study but spending time to do something else. However, intentional teaching also its limitation. Intentional teaching is too strict and limited from time to time because it neglects the level of students and always give the same tasks and exercises for students, which it is not suitable for those students who already have the ability to study by themselves to have higher understand of the context the teachers are going to teach.

According to the description Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat, the term intentional learning has been used for lots of years in education and it is an important skill to develop in nursing students ^[11]. And what his statement is from one of the previous famous scholars, Bereiter and Seardamalia said in 1989 that intentional learning is the cognitive process wherein learning is the It is suggested by some scholars that intentional learning are more suitable for beginners to learn vocabulary ^[1].

It is no surprise that there are a large number of people consider that Chinese students are rote learners because they study the context that they do not really understand the meaning ^[6]. However, there are few research to investigate how Chinese students become successful with, so-called rote learning strategies

which is known as intention learning for most people, It is suggested by an linguist that learning requires conscious and explicit leaning mechanisms when it comes to knowledge aspect and which involves implicit learning and memory when it comes to skill aspect^[4]. The importance of knowledge-oriented strategies and skill-oriented strategies should not be neglected.

When I was a primary school student there was no doubt that the way for vocabulary learning is intentional. There were specific tasks and excises needed to complete every day for refreshing and consolidating what we learned on that day. According to the description and activities described by Laufer, there are some typical activities that teachers will arrange for students like gap-filling, translation, and matching exercises^[11]. By doing these exercises, students have a chance to review what they learn at class. I remember the time when I was still in primary school, English teachers would like to inquire us to memorize the words before learning the context.

Like most forms of vocabulary learning discussed above, there are lots of forms of exercises for students to do after class like translation and matching exercises. Usually, these exercises are bilingual both English and native language, in China, then must be English and Chinese. Instead of matching one English word to several meanings in Chinese, teachers prefer to ask students to memorize only one meaning which is most frequent used for people rather than memorizing different meanings.

It is said that intentional teaching should be learned by specific instructions and incidental learning should be learning the vocabulary in the process of reading or listening other materials. However, they are combined without awareness. have done similar research about the topic. It is suggested by some people that intentional learning could be known as dependent learning.

3.3. Similarities and Differences between Intentional Learning and Incidental Learning

There is no right and wrong between the intentional learning and incidental learning. For different stages of learning, students need instructions to learn. When it comes to beginners in China, it is suggested by researchers that most of them still choose the intentional learning for beginners' level. One of reasons for that is most teachers think it is efficient and useful for starters to learn vocabulary by arranged tasks and exercises. The other reason for it is that it would easier to assess students because students are instructed to study the same context and tested by totally the same questions at the end. However, when it comes to senior students like middle school students or high school students. It is believed that those students should be treated and taught by incidental instruction because they already had the ability to read articles and carry out basic conversations. This essay is focusing on the beginners' level rather than senior level.

It is no surprise that there are a large number of people consider that Chinese students are rote learners because they study the context that they do not really understand the meaning^[6]. However, there are few research to investigate how Chinese students become successful with so-called rote learning strategies which is known as intention learning for most people, it is suggested by a linguist that learning requires conscious and explicit leaning mechanisms when it comes to knowledge aspect, and which involves implicit learning and memory when it comes to skill aspect^[4]. The importance of knowledge-oriented strategies and skill-oriented strategies should not be neglected.

As a matter offset both intentional and incidental teaching have influence to the acquisition of new words. There are lots of researchers have done relative works to figure out by which way do intentional and incidental influence vocabulary learning and what level are these two ways do have for lexical learning and which one is more popular for most second language learners. Some of teachers prefer to use intentional approach to guide their students to memorize vocabulary while some of them would rather use incidental teaching to carry out the vocabulary acquisition of students. And many of them reach an agreement that both intentional teaching and incidental teaching have their own advantages and disadvantages.

It can be seen from our educational system that some teachers are beginning to apply both methods to guide their teaching more often than before. According to my experience, some forms of incidental teaching strategies and approaches are applied into students learning process. For example, some teachers would still choose to prepare multiple choice or matching question for s students, however, some teachers prefer to put the question into context for students to practice enabling students to have better understand that how the words or vocabulary is used in the practical way and in which context that the words are suitable or appropriate to use without misunderstanding or confuse.

After comparing the advantages of intentional and incidental learning of students and some scholars

draw a conclusion that instructors should adopt different teaching methodologies for students according to various elements which have influence for determining which method should be used like time available, the levels of learners, context, and vocabulary targets. While some of them say it should combine two of them rather than only apply one of them to maximum study effect of student's strategies applying in the study of vocabulary.

After realizing the importance of vocabulary learning and two main ways to instruct the study to carry out vocabulary learning, it should be questioned by some people that how many vocabularies or how many words do second language learners needed to have a conversation with other native speakers or enable them to carry out their academic study. And the answer for it is that second language learners need to know a lot of vocabulary to use a language well. Therefore, the function and significance of vocabulary learning strategies cannot be ignored, and they should be given sufficient importance in order to have better study effect. According to the description of Bereiter, and Scardamalia, language learning strategies could be known as specific actions, behaviors; steps or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language^[1]. Therefore, the vocabulary strategy could be understood as specific actions for students to have an effective way to learn and memorize vocabulary.

Schmitt claims that there is one strategy that most people would use to guide their vocabulary learning that is using a bilingual dictionary, verbal, and written repetition, learning how to spell vocabulary, guessing from context and asking classmates for meaning^[14].

Other scholars who have done relevant research about the learning strategies, Gu and Johnson put forward an idea that several types of vocabulary learning strategies are applied into classes by teachers such as contextual encoding: and activation of newly learned words.

It is suggested by Zhang and Lu that the strategy has great influence to the study effectiveness of studying vocabulary^[18], and they agree that teachers should more or less apply some strategies into their teaching in order to achieve better understand of the context or material they are going to learn or study.

Lawson and Hogben once had done research to study about the strategies of vocabulary for foreign language learners they found out that the great majority of the procedures they used involved some form of repetition of the new words and their meanings—mostly a simple reading of the dictionary-like entries provided, or repetitions of the word-meaning complexes^[12].

There is very common phenomenon for beginning learners to learn how to read and memorize vocabulary in China which might not be understood by most people is that Chinese beginning learners especially for primary school students, they prefer to use Pinyin which is kind of Chinese alphabet to memorize English vocabulary. Most beginning learners in primary schools do not be required to learn alphabet until middle school or high school, therefore, the way they try to memorize the words is marking the Pinyin beside the vocabulary rather than writing the alphabet next to it. Usually, the teachers will teach them how to read at the very beginning but most instructors at primary schools would not teach international alphabet therefore the way for students to remember the pronunciation is putting the Chinese alphabet beside words when teachers teach them how to pronounce them. There are some tools or methods which it is believed that most teachers in China would prefer to use some tools in their teaching. One of them is that teaching with games as standard learning tools in order to activate the passion and enthusiasm of students to memorize vocabulary^[2].

As we get into the time of internet, lots of electronic products provide us more accessible approaches to the world which change our ways to communicate and study. It is suggested by González-Fernández and Schmitt that improving the usage of mobile tools in learning vocabulary is really a good way to boost their efficiency^[7]. In China, lots of children begin to use the English study applications in their phones. There are lots of homework needed to finish online now, so, it is much more common than before to introduce phone applications into study.

4. Conclusion

It is believed that intentional and incidental learning do exist their own advantages and disadvantages for students while teachers should according to the need and level of students to choose the suitable learning method for them enable them to have the maximum study effect. Chinese beginners are mostly taught in the intentional way but most of teachers nowadays preferring to combine two methods together but use intentional method as the main approach and incidental method as auxiliary method to assist teaching. Besides, there are lots of vocabulary learning strategies might be adopted by students and teachers to achieve the study targets or goals, by applying those strategies can students have better

understand and effect of study. In a word, intentional teaching is still the most popular among beginners in China and using Chinese alphabet to assist memorizing the spelling of vocabulary.

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