

Research on English Vocabulary Teaching in Senior High School under the New Curriculum Standards—Taking a Senior High School in Yingcheng Hubei as an Example

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Abstract: Vocabulary is the core of language and the basis of communication. According to the 2017 new curriculum standards for the amount of senior high school English vocabulary and English discipline core accomplishment, i.e. language ability, cultural awareness, thinking ability and learning ability, teachers should adopt a variety of teaching methods to help students to achieve these requirements. Based on questionnaire surveys of 12 English teachers and 111 students in a senior high school in Yingcheng, Hubei province, this paper investigates the current situation of English vocabulary teaching and proposes some corresponding teaching methods to improve the current situation of English vocabulary teaching in senior high schools.

Keywords: English Vocabulary; New Curriculum Standards; Problems; Suggestions

1. Introduction

1.1. The Importance of English Vocabulary Teaching

English as a language course, vocabulary learning is the foundation of learning it. Only on the basis of mastering a certain amount of vocabulary, students can carry out high-level activities such as oral communication. As linguist David Wilkins once said, “without grammar, very little can be conveyed but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” [1]. However, English vocabulary learning is a great impediment in many students’ English learning. A number of students often memorize words and then forget them in a short period, and have to memorize them again, which leads most of them to give up English vocabulary learning. Krashen and Terrel express that “vocabulary is of prime concern because it plays a dominate role in classroom success” [2]. Therefore, English vocabulary teaching, the primary means of learning English vocabulary, is crucial in the overall process of English teaching.

1.2. The Requirements of English Vocabulary Teaching

Under the context of the implementation of the new curriculum standards, higher English vocabulary learning requirements are in place: students must learn and master 3,000 words, comprising 1,500 words for compulsory education and 500 words for compulsory English courses in senior high schools, for a total of 2,000 words; students in optional compulsory courses should learn and master 1,000 words, for a total of 3,000 words [3]. Furthermore, the new curriculum standards puts forward the English discipline core accomplishment. It includes four aspects: language ability, cultural awareness, thinking ability and learning ability. Based on these requirements, teachers should not only train students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities, but also improve their cultural awareness in vocabulary teaching, cultivate their logical thinking quality, help them establish lifelong learning consciousness, and form good self-learning ability and learning habits [4].

However, as more emphasis is now placed on reading comprehension in the English college entrance examination, many teachers believe that since objective questions account for an increasing proportion of the exam questions, it may not be essential to spend too much time on vocabulary. Therefore, it’s vital to investigate the situation of English vocabulary instruction in senior high schools.

2. Research Design

2.1. Research Purpose

For senior high school students, learning English vocabulary is critical for them because they must learn English to improve their college entrance examination scores or to communicate with foreigners in English. However, in view of the current English vocabulary teaching situation, it is not very hopeful. Most students believe that their vocabulary is limited and struggle with how to learn and expand their vocabulary. Teachers also believe that the efficiency of vocabulary teaching is low and the time invested is not proportional to the final result.

Based on the research on the current situation of English vocabulary instruction and analysis of the results from teachers' vocabulary teaching and students' vocabulary learning, this paper summarizes the main problems in English vocabulary instruction in senior high schools, which can help teachers comprehend the difficulties students face in the process of vocabulary learning. Furthermore, teachers are aware of the disparity between the existing state of vocabulary instruction and the need to achieve the English discipline core accomplishment so that they can improve their vocabulary teaching methods and put forward some English vocabulary teaching strategies and constructive suggestions, further improving the theory and system of English vocabulary teaching.

2.2. Research Method

The questionnaires are employed as the research method in this paper. 12 teachers and 111 students are asked to complete surveys. There are two surveys to fill out: one is for teachers, which investigates their ideas on the importance of English vocabulary teaching and the new curriculum standards and their methods used for English vocabulary teaching; another is for students, which looks into the problems in their current English vocabulary learning and their views on English vocabulary learning.

2.3. Research Results

2.3.1. Teachers' views on the importance of vocabulary teaching

Table 1: Teachers' views on the importance of vocabulary teaching

Questions	Items	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not important
Q1: Do you think it's important to teach English vocabulary?	Number	10	2	0	0
	Percent	83.33%	16.67%	0%	0%
Q2: What is the proportion of your vocabulary teaching in each unit of teaching?	Items	Less than 10%	10%-20%	20%-30%	More than 30%
	Number	1	1	7	3
	Percent	8.33%	8.33%	58.33%	16.67%

Table 1 is about teachers' views on the importance of vocabulary teaching. According to this table, all the teachers recognize the value of vocabulary teaching. However, some teachers' vocabulary instruction accounts for less in each unit of teaching, easily leading students to believe that vocabulary learning is unimportant. Therefore, teachers should place a greater emphasis on vocabulary.

2.3.2. Teachers' views on the new curriculum standards

Table 2: Teachers' views on the new curriculum standards

Questions	Items	Totally agree	Less agree	Less disagree	Totally disagree
Q3: In addition to language ability, the new curriculum standards lists thinking ability, learning ability and cultural awareness. Do you agree or disagree?	Number	12	0	0	0
	Percent	100%	0%	0%	0%
Q4: How much vocabulary do you think high school students should master?	Items	About 2,000	About 3,000	About 4,000	About 5,000
	Number	0	4	6	2
	Percent	0%	33.33%	50%	16.67%
Q5: Do you think you can complete the task of English vocabulary teaching required by the new curriculum standards?	Items	Totally	Basically	Totally not	
	Number	4	8	0	
	Percent	33.33%	66.67%	0%	

Table 2 contains three questions to present teachers' views on the new curriculum standards. In question three, all teachers fully agree with the four requirements of the new curriculum standards.

Although teachers have different opinions on the amount of vocabulary that students should master, all of them think that it should be more than 3,000, reaching the target of vocabulary instruction in the new curriculum standards. In question five, teachers can basically complete the vocabulary teaching task required by the new curriculum standards, and a few teachers can complete them all. Therefore, it clearly shows that the teachers take into account the new curriculum standards.

2.3.3. The vocabulary teaching methods adopted by teachers

Table 3: The vocabulary teaching methods adopted by teachers

Questions	Items	Show pictures	List them on PPT, etc.	Exercises	Texts	
Q6: How do you usually present new words?	Number	2	7	0	3	
	Percent	16.67%	58.33%	0%	25%	
Q7: What vocabulary teaching methods do you usually use?	Items	Intuitive teaching	Context teaching	Word formation	Storytelling method	Lexical categorization
	Number	8	2	10	0	3
	Percent	66.67%	16.67%	83.33%	0%	25%
Q8: Do you think it is necessary to supplement common collocations, synonyms, etc.?	Items	Totally necessary	Necessary	Less necessary	Unnecessary	
	Number	9	3	0	0	
	Percent	75%	25%	0%	0%	
Q9: How do you guide students to consolidate vocabulary?	Items	Copy and recite	Assign exercises	Recognition	Self-arrangement	
	Number	6	3	2	1	
	Percent	50%	25%	16.67%	8.33%	
Q10: How often do you check students' vocabulary?	Items	Before each class	Once a week	Once a unit	Once a month	
	Number	5	2	4	1	
	Percent	41.67%	16.67%	33.33%	8.33%	

Table 3 focuses on the vocabulary teaching methods used by teachers. According to the data, before vocabulary instruction, most teachers will list the terms taught on the PPT, etc. so that students can be aware of the words to be learned. While teaching vocabulary, almost all the teachers will use word formation to explain words, but few teachers use other vocabulary teaching methods, especially storytelling method. After vocabulary teaching, most teachers will adopt the method of copying and reciting, and lead students to consolidate vocabulary before class or at the end of each unit. However, such a single traditional teaching mode will easily make students feel bored. Therefore, teachers should adopt various teaching methods to carry out vocabulary instruction before, during and after teaching.

In a nutshell, teachers can recognize the value of vocabulary instruction and agree with the new curriculum standards' requirements for vocabulary instruction. In addition, they should improve the vocabulary teaching methods according to different stages of vocabulary instruction.

2.3.4. Students' attitude towards vocabulary learning

Table 4: Students' attitude towards vocabulary learning

Questions	Items	Interested	Less interested	Not interested	
Q1: Are you interested in English vocabulary learning?	Number	30	54	27	
	Percent	27.02%	48.64%	24.34%	
Q2: What is the main reason you want to study English?	Items	Personal interest	Need for entering a higher school	Need for social employment	Wishes of parents and teachers
	Number	24	87	9	6
	Percent	21.62%	78.38%	8.1%	5.4%
Q3: Which of the following situations do you fall into when you learn vocabulary?	Items	Active learning	Need to be pushed	Lack of initiative	
	Number	33	39	39	
	Percent	29.72%	35.14%	35.14%	

From table 4, students' attitude towards vocabulary learning can be presented. In question one, most students are not interested enough in vocabulary learning. This demonstrates that students' motivation in learning vocabulary is insufficient, which will make students feel it hard to learn vocabulary. In question two, 21.62 percent of students learn vocabulary out of personal interest, 78.38 percent for further study, 8.1 percent for work, and 5.4 percent for parents or teachers' expectation, which shows that most students do not really love vocabulary learning, but only learn vocabulary for certain purposes. In question three, 29.72 percent of the students learn vocabulary actively, while the rest of the students need other people's supervision or lack of initiative to learn vocabulary. The above questions show that students' attitude towards vocabulary learning is not so active. Therefore, teachers should fundamentally change students' attitude towards vocabulary learning. Students can only achieve twice the outcome with half the effort if they actively study vocabulary.

2.3.5. The sources of students' vocabulary learning

Table 5: The sources of students' vocabulary learning

Questions	Items	Textbook glossary	Extra-curricular materials	Dictionary	Network medium
Q4: What are the main sources of your English vocabulary?	Number	99	9	9	12
	Percent	89.18%	8.1%	8.1%	10.81%

Table 5 is about the sources of students' vocabulary learning. It clearly shows that 89.18 percent of students learn vocabulary mainly from textbook glossary, 8.1 percent from extra-curricular materials, 8.1 percent from dictionaries and 10.81 percent from network media. This illustrates that although a small number of students learn vocabulary from other sources, textbook glossary is the main source for students to learn vocabulary. Therefore, teachers should make students contact more vocabulary through a variety of vocabulary sources so as to expand their vocabulary.

2.3.6. Students' vocabulary memory

Table 6: Students' vocabulary memory

Questions	Items	Rote memorization	Memorization by pronunciation, word formation, etc.	Memorization by using context	Others
Q5: How do you remember and consolidate words?	Number	45	90	21	27
	Percent	40.54%	81.08%	18.91%	24.32%
Q6: Do you review your vocabulary learning regularly?	Items	Always	Sometimes	Never	
	Number	0	78	33	
	Percent	0%	70.27%	29.73%	

Table 6 presents students' vocabulary memory. It clearly shows that 40.54 percent of students memorize words by rote, 81.08 percent of students memorize words by rules such as word formation and pronunciation, 18.91 percent by context, and 24.32 percent by other methods. Although teaching students some word formation or other rules can assist them in memorizing vocabulary, nearly half of students still recall language by rote, resulting in a time-consuming and laborious process with a poor memory effect. Therefore, it is critical for teachers to teach students various ways of remembering vocabulary in light of the current situation. In addition, 70.27 percent of the students sometimes review words, 29.73 percent of students never review words, and there is no one of the students always review words. It is very important for students to review and consolidate vocabulary in time. Teachers should remind students to review the words in time and help students memorize and consolidate the words learned in class to deepen their impression of vocabulary.

2.3.7. Students' ability to use vocabulary

Table 7: Students' ability to use vocabulary

Questions	Items	Always	Sometimes	Never	
Q7: Do you take notes while the teacher is explaining vocabulary?	Number	33	63	15	
	Percent	29.73%	56.76%	13.51%	
Q8: What difficulties do you have in using English vocabulary?	Items	Part of speech	Tense and voice	Singular, plural variation	Others
	Number	72	72	51	72
	Percent	64.86%	64.86%	45.95%	64.86%
Q9: How do you usually figure out a new word's meaning in an article?	Items	Ask others for help	Consult the dictionary	Guess word meaning from contexts	Ignore the new words
	Number	24	63	24	21
	Percent	21.62%	56.76%	21.62%	18.92%

Table 7 is about students' ability to use vocabulary. From this table, we can see that students who always take notes account for 29.73 percent, sometimes take notes account for 56.76 percent, and never take notes account for 13.51 percent. Obviously, most students do not take notes regularly. Therefore, teachers should attach importance to remind students to take notes in time so as to prevent students from forgetting vocabulary usage. In question eight, 64.86 percent of the students have problems with part of speech, tense, voice and other aspects, and 45.95 percent of the students have difficulties in the choice of singular and plural variation, which indicates that most students are unable to grasp the usage of words completely and thoroughly. In question nine, more over half of the students choose to use the dictionary to search up new words, but there are still a few students who ignore new words, which is not conducive to their learning of new words.

2.3.8. Students' comments and suggestions on the current English vocabulary teaching

Some students give their own comments and suggestions on the current English vocabulary teaching. Firstly, some students think that with little time and few vocabulary exercises, they'll easily forget the words and notes they've taken, so they expect that teachers can provide them enough time to digest the words and their notes and assign them more exercises to grasp those words. Secondly, some students suggest that teachers should specially arrange some courses to teach them the general law of changes of part of speech. In addition, when teaching words in textbooks, teachers can classify and group words according to some relations such as synonymy, antonymy and derivation to form word families, which aids students in memorizing words from less to more. Thirdly, it is useful to integrate vocabulary teaching with some English songs and movies, etc. For example, some students choose Japanese, because they like Japanese animation, songs, etc. Then English teachers can assist students in learning vocabulary in a positive environment accordingly and give students more opportunities to contact English. These suggestions are quite useful so that teachers can timely understand students' needs for English vocabulary and help them to improve their English vocabulary teaching.

To sum up, students have problems in four aspects of vocabulary learning. First, students are not motivated enough to learn vocabulary. Second, for students, there are few sources of vocabulary learning. Thirdly, students have difficulty in memorizing vocabulary. Fourth, students have problems in vocabulary usage, and their vocabulary learning habits are not good. Furthermore, teachers should pay attention to students' comments and suggestions for their vocabulary teaching, which is quite useful and necessary to enhance their vocabulary teaching quality.

3. Suggestions on English Vocabulary Teaching

3.1. Making Clear English Vocabulary Teaching Objectives

The goal of vocabulary teaching determines teachers' understanding of vocabulary instruction and their methods of putting vocabulary instruction into practice. The new curriculum standards clearly gives the amount of vocabulary that needs to be taught to students, and puts forward English discipline core accomplishment. Therefore, teachers should cultivate students' cultural consciousness, thinking quality and learning ability in addition to teaching students the prescribed vocabulary.

First, in terms of the cultivation of cultural awareness, for example, in *Body Language* this unit, although there are many diverse body languages, the same gesture may have different meanings. Therefore, teachers should raise the students' good cultural awareness to help them become successful cross-cultural communicators. Secondly, thinking expressed by English words is quite different from that expressed by Chinese, and students will be inevitably influenced by their mother tongue, so many students often use "Chinglish". In order to develop students' English thinking ability, teachers should help students construct English thinking mode through a number of teaching methods. For example, in *body Language*, teachers can use task-based language teaching to assist students to achieve vocabulary learning goals through English dialogues, etc. in order to avoid Chinese thinking. Furthermore, cultivating students' vocabulary learning abilities can help students expand their English vocabulary. Teachers can supplement corresponding synonyms or antonyms for certain words. For example, when teaching the word "solve", teachers can add "address", "handle" and "tackle", etc., which is conducive to systematically improve students' English vocabulary learning effect.

All in all, when teachers strive to complete the vocabulary teaching objectives and cultivating students' language ability, they should also attach great importance to the cultivation of students' cultural awareness, thinking ability and learning ability to develop students' abilities comprehensively.

3.2. Using Various English Vocabulary Teaching Methods

Optimizing vocabulary teaching methods is a necessary way to improve the effect of vocabulary teaching. According to the above survey, teachers often adopt a single teaching method to teach students vocabulary, which will easily lead them to feel bored. Therefore, teachers should use different vocabulary teaching methods to assist students in enhancing their vocabulary learning efficiency.

3.2.1. Lexical categorization

Teachers can classify words to help students remember the words according to different categories. When talking about some words of one category, they can think of the corresponding other words. For example, with professions, students can think of teachers, doctors, lawyers, actors, etc. Another example is that when it comes to music, students can get flute, jazz, orchestra, pop, opera, etc. In this

way, students can remember more new words and improve the efficiency of vocabulary memory.

3.2.2. *Storytelling method*

Students will become bored if teachers always employ those traditional vocabulary teaching methods. A relatively novel method is storytelling. “Storytelling brings heightened awareness, a sense of wonder, of mystery, of reverence for life to the listeners”^[5], which shows that storytelling can create an enjoyable context for students. For example, there is a pest, wearing a vest, flying to the southwest, but finally it hit a nest^[6]. Telling stories not only provides context for vocabulary, but also increases students’ enthusiasm in learning vocabulary.

3.2.3. *The use of context*

Learning words in a specific situation or context is a method worth advocating. It can be achieved by the following ways: firstly, the practice of completing words can improve students’ sensitivity to the meanings and parts of speech of words. For example, _____ he got angry with me. In this sentence, students can find that the word that needs to be filled in modifies the whole sentence, so they may fill in this blank with the adverb “obviously” to make the meaning of the sentence complete; secondly, students can use the words they have learned to make a composition to memorize those words deeply. For example, “in a school in some province, an *enthusiastic* teacher is searching for some *academic information* on the *website*. His *comprehension* of teaching *method* is brilliant, and his *instruction* and *description* impress his students”^[7]. Thirdly, teachers can make extensive use of texts to strengthen students’ memory in the linguistic context, which is a smart choice for teachers to teach vocabulary.

3.3. *Using Various Evaluation Methods to Vocabulary Teaching Results*

After vocabulary teaching, teachers should assess whether the students have grasped the vocabulary and help the students to consolidate the vocabulary. Teachers should excel in the aspects listed below: first, measuring teaching results should be phased and reasonable. For example, before class they can ask students some words to assist students in quickly recalling what they have learned in the last lesson. In terms of the content of classroom examination, it should be basically specific. Weekly and monthly assessments should cover all the vocabulary over the previous weeks or months. The mid-term or final exam should detect all the vocabulary mastered before, so students can know what they still lack so as to complete them accordingly. Second, teachers should also follow English discipline core accomplishment proposed in the new curriculum standards to test students’ vocabulary learning. For example, teachers can design some tests to examine students’ listening and spelling, namely language ability and learning ability, or let students translate literary fragments and have some daily communicative dialogues to test students’ cultural awareness and thinking ability. Finally, teachers and students should evaluate each other. Teachers should evaluate students’ recent vocabulary learning state to push students to make progress in the next stage. Students can evaluate teachers’ vocabulary teaching and help teachers improve their vocabulary teaching so as to make mutual progress.

4. Conclusion

The most important part of language learning is vocabulary. If learners don’t grasp vocabulary well, let alone communicate with others through language. Therefore, the importance of vocabulary teaching is self-evident. Through questionnaire surveys of the teachers and students in a senior high school in Yingcheng, Hubei province, this paper shows the problems in vocabulary teaching and puts forward specific suggestions for improvement, which is conducive to the development and progress of vocabulary instruction. For English teachers, they should constantly explore and choose appropriate vocabulary teaching methods to help students enhance their English proficiency.

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