

The Effects of Vocabulary Notebooks on Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract: This thesis reported the effects of and students' attitudes towards the use of the vocabulary notebooks method in relation to vocabulary learning. The specific problems pursued were as follows: 1. What are the learners' attitudes towards vocabulary learning including keeping vocabulary notebooks? 2. To what extent does the use of vocabulary notebooks affect students' vocabulary learning at Sonla College? The study was conducted at Sonla College. The data were collected through tests (pretest, posttest and delayed posttest) and a questionnaire with 30 first-year non-English major students at Sonla College. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with a smaller group of students. The findings are as follows: the mean score of the posttest (7.34) was higher than that of the delayed posttest (7.00) and of the pretest (5.44), the effects of the vocabulary notebooks on the students' vocabulary learning were mostly positive (more than 76.6%). Based from the findings, it can be concluded that: vocabulary notebooks strategy was an effective way of enhancing both short-term and long-term memorization of vocabulary items for the students.

Keywords: attitudes, vocabulary notebooks, vocabulary learning

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I. Introduction

Sonla College is situated in a remote mountainous area in Sonla province in the Northwest of Vietnam. Students who have been studying at Sonla College come from different districts in Sonla province so they are varied in their English background and English learning ability, which is a challengeable task for our teachers of English. Non-English major students from every department in Sonla College have to do a general English course at pre-intermediate level, which aims at increasing students' general proficiency in the language in order to prepare them for the subsequent English for specific purposes course. "New English File – Pre-intermediate" (2003) by Clive Oxenden, Cristina Latham Koeing and Paul Seligson is used as the textbook and students study this textbook in two semesters, equaling 105 periods of learning in class and 210 hours of self-study.

However, as far as I observed from my teaching experience at Sonla College, my non-English major freshmen were not interested in learning English in general and they had difficulty in learning English vocabulary. To find out more about the problem, the causes of the problem and what need to be done to address the problem, I interviewed some of my students and discussed with some of my colleagues. The collected information revealed that my students often had trouble in retaining new words. When encountering new words, they often asked the teacher, their classmates or looked up in the dictionary for the only one information, the meaning of the new words. After that, they quickly forgot the words because they did not practice these words. The students were not also introduced to apply vocabulary learning strategies which help them to learn new words better.

Being aware of the existence of the problem, I read the literature and found that keeping vocabulary notebooks could be a useful solution to my students' problem. Top researchers in the field of vocabulary learning claimed that keeping vocabulary notebooks is one of the effective ways which "emphasizes the incremental learning of vocabulary, and different aspects of word knowledge" (Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995, p. 133), "increases the learners' lexical competence and assists them in the development of autonomous modes of learning" (Fowle, 2002, p. 380), allows the exposure to a wide range of different vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) (Fowle, 2002), keeps teachers informed about students' progress in vocabulary learning and students themselves may evaluate their own progress in learning vocabulary (Fowle, 2002; Walters & Bozkurt, 2009). In summary, most researchers in general agree that the recording of new words in vocabulary notebooks is very useful and brings a lot of outstanding profits for students; hence it should be widely promoted in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning.

All the facts arouse me the interest to conduct this action research on the effects of using vocabulary notebooks on vocabulary learning for the first-year non-English major students at Sonla College. The purpose of my study is to help students change their attitudes towards vocabulary learning including keeping vocabulary

notebooks and then help them learn vocabulary more effectively. Doing this research, I hope that it may be of some help for learning and teaching English vocabulary at Sonla College.

II. Literature Review

2.1. Vocabulary in language learning and teaching

2.1.1. Definition of vocabulary

Various definitions are given by many authors such as Ur (1996, p. 60), Pyles and Algeo (1970, p. 96), Hatch and Brown (1995), Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1986). Moreover, Harmer (1991) provides discussion on “active and passive” vocabulary.

In short, it can be implied that vocabulary is the words of a language, including single items, and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning. Words serve as a means for people to communicate. Without vocabulary, mutual understanding between people may be hard to be obtained. In the following sub-section, the role of vocabulary in language learning and teaching will be discussed in detail.

2.1.2. The role of vocabulary in language learning and teaching

Nation (2001) states that “vocabulary learning is not a goal in itself; it is done to help learners listen, speak, read, or write more effectively” (p.362). Likewise Wilkins (1972) and Harmer (1991), Folse and Bologna (2003) strongly confirms the importance of vocabulary knowledge that “without syntax, meaning is hindered, but without vocabulary meaning is impossible” (p.113). Moreover, Schmitt (2000), Rubin and Thompson (1994), McGinnis and Smith (1982) and Laufer (1997) share the same view to the significant role of vocabulary in communication

2.1.3. Vocabulary learning

2.1.3.1. Knowing a word

(Nation, 2001), Gairns and Redman (1986) state that knowing a word consists of two aspects: word’s meaning and word’s forms. According to Schmitt and Schmitt (1995), knowing a word means knowing the words’ spoken and written forms, its meaning and its grammatical characteristics. Actually, knowing a word is far more than just understanding its meaning. In other words, as indicated by Gu and

2.1.3.2. Incidental and Intentional vocabulary learning

Nation (2001) defines incidental vocabulary learning as the process of learning vocabulary without specific intention of doing so. On the other hand, intentional learning of vocabulary is the method of learning vocabulary by using tools to attract learners to direct contact with the form and meaning of words, such as dictionaries, vocabulary lists and direct vocabulary explanation (Subon, 2013). Schmitt (2000) demonstrates that intentional vocabulary learning focuses attention directly on the information to be learned and usually preferred by EFL learners.

2.2. Attitudes in language learning

2.2.1 Definition of attitudes

Smith (1971), Eagly and Chaiken (1993 as cited in Maio & Haddock, 2009), Tahaine and Daana (2013), Gardner (1985, p. 91), Fazio (1986) and Maio and Haddock (2009) all emphasize that an attitude involves making a decision about liking versus disliking, or favoring versus disfavoring a particular issue, object, or person. However, some researchers (Gardner, 1985; Smith, 1971; Spada & Lightbown, 2006; Wenden, 1991) consider attitude (a set of beliefs) as motivation (a reason for doing something) in language learning because a set of beliefs can be a reason for doing something. According to Ellis (1994), there are both negative and positive attitudes towards the second language being learnt in which positive attitudes can be expected to enhance learning but negative attitudes can impede language learning.

Nevertheless, students’ attitudes can change (Ellis, 1994). Having the same opinion with Ellis (1994), Smith (1971) indicates that “an attitude is relatively enduring because it is learned, it can be unlearned. Because it is learned, it can be taught.

2.2.2. The role of attitudes in language learning

Gardner and Lambert (1972, p. 101) agree that “success in mastering a foreign language would depend not only on intellectual capacity and language aptitude, but on one’s attitudes towards representatives of that language as well”. (Spolsky, 1969). Also, Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) clarify that “attitude provides primary impetus to initiate learning language and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process” (p.994). Spada and Lightbown (2006) affirm that attitude is fundamental to the success or failure that

we experience in learning. Sharing this view, Brown (1994) points out that language learners benefit from positive attitudes while negative attitudes may lead to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency.

2.3. Vocabulary notebooks

2.3.1. Definition and benefits of vocabulary notebooks

Lewis (2000) states that vocabulary notebooks are assumed to have many advantages for L2 word learning. Firstly, vocabulary notebooks allow the integration of a variety of different vocabulary learning strategies (Fowle, 2002).

2.3.2. Design of vocabulary notebooks

In consideration of the format of vocabulary notebook, Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) propose the new vocabulary notebooks with combination of both formats of word lists and word cards.

2.3.3. Implementation of vocabulary notebooks

According to McCrostie (2007), the quantity of words recorded by learners varied widely. Due to the level of students participating in this study, at least five to ten words per week were recorded in the students' vocabulary notebooks. What about the word knowledge? Some researchers (e.g. McCrostie, 2007; Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Yung, 2008) argue that in order to get the highest results in implementing vocabulary notebooks, researcher should take account of what entry information should be included in students' vocabulary notebooks. The information recorded can help learners recycle target words, enhance deeper processing of word knowledge and develop learners' strategies (Nation, 2004). In the current study, my students' vocabulary notebooks contain eight kinds of word knowledge of a particular word entry as mentioned in the previous section (2.3.2. Design of vocabulary notebooks).

III. Subject and Methodology

3.1. Restatement of the research questions

The present study sets out to look for answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the learners' attitudes towards vocabulary learning including keeping vocabulary notebooks?
2. To what extent does the use of vocabulary notebooks affect students' vocabulary learning at Sonla College?

3.2. Participants

The participants of the study were 30 non-English major freshmen from class Social Work K52 of the school year 2015-2016. They are all Vietnamese native speakers who range from 18 to 21 years old and a majority of them are ethnic minorities. These students started learning English either in Grade 3 or Grade 6. However, their levels of English were quite low at elementary level.

3.3. Teaching material

The currently used textbook for non-English major students at Sonla College is "New English File – Pre-intermediate" (2013) by Clive Oxenden, Cristina Latham Koeing and Paul Seligson, which was taught in two semesters. The 9 units included in the textbook are arranged in order of difficulty, from easy to more challenging. Each unit consists of four sub-units (for example, 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D) and three supplementary sections: practical English, writing and revise and check. Within the scope of this study, the only first three units of the textbook were introduced in ten weeks.

3.4. Action research

3.4.1. Rationale for an action research design

An action research is suitable for the present study because it helps to identify problems, solves the problems and then to bring about improvements in her classroom activities. Particularly, it helps the teacher to know what is actually happening in our classrooms, what learners are thinking, why learners are reacting in the ways they do, what aspects of the classroom we should focus on to develop our teaching most effectively, how we should change in these aspects, and what the effects of such a change are. As presented in Chapter 1, through teaching experience, observation and interview, the teacher-researcher discovered that her students had problems in remembering and learning vocabulary which reduced their interest in learning English. Therefore, an effective strategy needed developing and putting into action with the hope of bringing better change for students' vocabulary learning in this institution. The action research model proposed by McBride (1989 as cited in Sadeghi, 2013) is adopted in the current study.

3.4.2. Action research procedure of the current study

The intervention was applied in teaching English lessons within 10 weeks from 22nd February, 2016 to 29th April, 2016 in the first three units in the second term of the school year 2015-2016. First, every student was asked to prepare her or his own vocabulary notebooks in advance following the instruction of the teacher.

In the first week, the teacher-researcher introduced the strategy to the students. After that, the teacher together with her students develops a completed card on PowerPoint. In the next step, the teacher divided the class into five groups and gave each group one new word and then asked them to develop the card. When the groups completed the task, they stuck their cards on the board for the teacher to check the quality of the cards. The problems appeared during the process of developing cards were discussed thoroughly with the whole class in order to help them avoid making mistakes the next time. The students were then guided to organize their cards in the binder with dividers. The students could arrange the cards according to topics, themes, alphabet order or how well they feel they know them.

In the following week, the lexical information that students put in their vocabulary notebooks at home was shared and checked by their partners in first five minutes of new lesson. Follow up activities were organized to encourage students to use the words in their vocabulary notebooks. These included writing a short paragraph about themselves, a story behind a photo and an informal letter or word games. These activities took about 10 to 15 minutes in a lesson as warm-up activities or at the end of the lesson and were adapted from memorization and revision activities suggested by Schmitt and Schmitt (1995).

As also mentioned elsewhere, the students' vocabulary notebooks contained different aspects of word knowledge including phonemic transcription, synonym and antonym, part of speech, L2 definition, example sentences, collocations and word's derivations. In order to measure students' progress and give them a push to quickly complete their vocabulary notebooks, a vocabulary quiz was administered every three weeks to review all the words they have learnt before.

3.5. Data collection instruments

In this study, the data was collected from three instruments namely questionnaire, interviews and tests. The 60-minute pre-test was implemented in the first lesson of the action plan. In the last week of the treatment period, a post-test was delivered to students with the aim of seeing whether a change occurs in the learners' vocabulary knowledge. One month later, a delayed post-test was carried out to investigate whether vocabulary notebooks can help students remember new words over a long period of time. A questionnaire and interviews were implemented to find more information about the usefulness of keeping vocabulary notebooks and evaluate the students' attitudes towards the vocabulary learning strategy that they have just experienced.

3.6. Data analysis procedure

The study included both quantitative and qualitative data. The data collected from the test was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22.0. The mean scores and the standard derivations of the test were calculated and compared; the statistical difference of the findings was verified by paired sample t-test. For the statements in the questionnaires, percentage count was calculated. The qualitative data from the interviews with the students was analyzed according to a procedure described by Seidman (2013).

IV. Results of the study

4.1. Results of the tests

4.1.1. Results of pretest and posttest

The mean score of the posttest was much higher than that of the pretest by 1.93 points (Pretest: M = 5.44 versus Posttest: M = 7.37). Moreover, the p-value is .000 which is much smaller than the specified alpha value of .05. Furthermore, the improvement was not only reflected in the total mean score but also in the mean scores for all types of word aspects. The results of paired samples t-test indicated that there was significant difference in positive direction between pretest and posttest results in all aspects of word knowledge ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$).

Table 4. 1. Paired samples t-test for pretest and posttest

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	5.4400	30	.53473	.09763
	Posttest	7.3733	30	.50782	.09272

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pretest & Posttest	30	.595	.001

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-1.93333	.47002	.08581	-2.10884	-1.75782	-22.529	29	.000

The results of the pretest and posttest with each aspect of word knowledge were summarized in Table 4.2.

Table 4. 2. The pretest and posttest results according to aspects of word knowledge

Tests	Pretest	Mean	SD	Mean difference	P
Pronunciation	Pretest	0.5033	0.1066	0.2167	0.0000
	Posttest	0.7200	0.1031		
Collocations	Pretest	1.1133	0.2209	0.3800	0.0000
	Posttest	1.4933	0.1574		
Antonym & Synonym	Pretest	1.1967	0.2059	0.3233	0.0000
	Posttest	1.5200	0.1606		
Derivation	Pretest	1.1167	0.2151	0.3467	0.0000
	Posttest	1.4633	0.1847		
L2 Definition	Pretest	0.4867	0.0937	0.2233	0.0000
	Posttest	0.7100	0.0960		
Example sentences	Pretest	0.5000	0.1050	0.2133	0.0000
	Posttest	0.7133	0.1074		
Part of speech	Pretest	0.5233	0.1040	0.2300	0.0000
	Posttest	0.7533	0.0973		
Total	Pretest	5.4400	0.5347	1.9333	0.0000
	Posttest	7.3733	0.5078		

4.1.2. Results of posttest and delayed posttest

As shown in tables 4.3 and 4.4, the difference between posttest and delayed posttest results was not statistically significant. The mean score reached 7.37 in the posttest and slightly declined to 7.00 in the delayed posttest. With each strategy, there were also a little bit decreases in mean score of the posttest and delayed posttest results. The decreases, however, were not considerable changes with the small difference in the p-values from 0.000 to 0.007 (< 0.05).

Table 4. 3. Paired samples t-test for posttest and delayed posttest

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	7.3733	30	.50782	.09272
	Delayed posttest	7.0033	30	.53142	.09702

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Posttest & Delayed posttest	30	.940	.000

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Posttest - Delayed posttest	.37000	.18223	.03327	.30196	.43804	11.121	29	.000

Table 4. 4. The posttest and delayed posttest results according to aspects of word knowledge

Tests	Posttest	Mean	SD	Mean difference	P
Pronunciation	Posttest	0.7200	0.1031	0.0433	0.0070
	Delayed	0.6767	0.1104		
Collocations	Posttest	1.4933	0.1574	0.0533	0.0002
	Delayed	1.4400	0.1574		
Antonym & Synonym	Posttest	1.5200	0.1606	0.0700	0.0000
	Delayed	1.4500	0.1503		
Derivation	Posttest	1.4633	0.1847	0.0600	0.0000
	Delayed	1.4033	0.1938		
L2 Definition	Posttest	0.7100	0.0960	0.0500	0.0002
	Delayed	0.6600	0.0932		
Example sentences	Posttest	0.7133	0.1074	0.0467	0.0008

	Delayed	0.6667	0.1061		
Part of speech	Posttest	0.7533	0.0973	0.0467	0.0015
	Delayed	0.7067	0.1112		
Total	Posttest	7.3733	0.5078	0.3700	0.0000
	Delayed	7.0033	0.5314		

In short, there was no remarkable difference between the posttest and delayed posttest performance. It can be concluded that vocabulary notebooks could help students retain the words that they enter into their vocabulary notebooks for a long time.

4.2. Results of the questionnaire

4.2.1. The effects of the vocabulary notebooks on the students' vocabulary learning

The details of the students' responses and the results of the statistical analysis were presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. The effects of vocabulary notebooks on vocabulary learning

Items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly agree		Total (Agree + Strongly agree)
	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	
1. Vocabulary notebook is an effective vocabulary learning strategy	0	0.0	2	6.7	1	3.3	11	36.7	16	53.3	90
2. Vocabulary notebook helps me remember new words faster	1	3.3	3	10	2	6.7	10	33.3	14	46.7	80
3. Vocabulary notebook helps me remember new words for a long time (e.g. one month)	0	0.0	2	6.7	5	16.7	10	33.3	13	43.3	76.6
4. Vocabulary notebook helps me recall vocabulary easily.	1	3.3	4	13.3	2	6.7	11	36.7	12	40	76.7
5. I learn how to use words through vocabulary notebook	1	3.3	2	6.7	0	0.0	10	33.3	17	56.7	90
6. Vocabulary notebook is an organized way to learn new	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	16.6	17	56.7	8	26.7	83.4
7. Using vocabulary notebook is very convenient for learning and reviewing the	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	6.7	9	30	19	63.3	93.3
8. Vocabulary notebook is more useful in helping me to learn new words than other vocabulary learning strategies that I already know (e.g. word lists or written repetition)	0	0.0	2	6.7	3	10	10	33.3	15	50	83.3
9. The classroom atmosphere is exciting when the teacher uses vocabulary notebook to teach vocabulary.	0	0.0	2	6.7	4	13.3	9	30	15	50	80
10. Vocabulary notebook is suitable for my learning style	0	0.0	2	6.7	4	13.3	9	30	15	50	80

The responses to the ten statements regarding the effects of the vocabulary notebooks on the students' vocabulary learning were mostly positive (more than 76.6%). This may mean the respondents already recognized the beneficial effects of the vocabulary notebooks on their vocabulary learning.

4.2.2. Students' attitudes towards the vocabulary notebooks

Table 4.6 summarizes information on the students' interest level when they used the vocabulary notebooks to learn new vocabulary items.

Table 4. 6. Students’ attitudes towards vocabulary notebooks

Items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly agree		Total (Agree + Strongly agree)
	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	
11. Learning vocabulary from vocabulary notebook is very interesting	0	0.0	1	3.3	1	3.3	11	36.7	17	56.7	93.4
12. I enjoy learning new words with vocabulary notebook	1	3.3	2	6.7	2	6.7	10	33.3	15	50	83.3
13. I feel relaxed when using vocabulary notebook to learn vocabulary	1	3.3	2	6.7	4	13.3	8	26.7	15	50	76.7
14. Vocabulary notebook helps me overcome the boredom of learning new vocabulary items	0	0.0	1	3.3	2	6.7	9	30	18	60	90
15. Vocabulary notebook makes me feel motivated in	0	0.0	4	13.3	0	0.0	12	40	14	46.7	86.7
16. I feel it is easier in learning new words through keeping vocabulary notebook	0	0.0	3	10	2	6.7	9	30	16	53.3	83.3
17. I have developed a habit of studying new words through vocabulary notebook everyday	1	3.3	3	10	2	6.7	7	23.3	17	56.7	80
18. I even use vocabulary notebook technique to learn vocabulary at home	1	3.3	2	6.7	2	6.7	13	43.3	12	40	83.3
19. I will keep using vocabulary notebook in	0	0.0	1	3.3	3	10	11	36.7	15	50	86.7
20. I will recommend vocabulary notebook to other learners	0	0.0	1	3.3	2	6.7	9	30	18	60	90

In summary, most of the students showed positive attitudes towards vocabulary notebooks. They had good feelings about this kind of activity, believed in its positive effects on vocabulary learning and showed their interest and readiness of using vocabulary notebooks routinely as way of learning new words and introducing this technique to others.

4.3. Results of the interviews

Six students were interviewed to find more information on the effects of the vocabulary notebooks and their attitudes towards keeping vocabulary notebooks. These students were selected based on the results in the post-tests and divided into three groups: high-achievers (equal to or over 8 points), middle-achievers (from 7 to 7.9 points) and lower-achievers (from 6.4 to 6.9 points). The information that students provided through interviews was summarized in different themes namely usefulness of the vocabulary notebooks, positive points that students focused on vocabulary notebooks, students’ likes and dislike about vocabulary notebooks, difference between previous study methods and vocabulary notebooks, and intention to continue the use of the notebooks. Through analyzing information from interviews, it can be seen that students’ attitudes towards using vocabulary notebooks were quite relevant with their response to the questionnaire.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Based on findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Vocabulary notebooks strategy was an effective way of enhancing both short-term and long-term memorization of vocabulary items for the students.
- With vocabulary notebooks, the students can expose to a wide range of vocabulary learning strategies.

5.2 Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions, the following are recommended:

1. It is suggested that leadership encourage, motivate and create the favorable conditions for the teachers and students to practice using the vocabulary notebooks method for vocabulary teaching and learning.
2. Teacher should encourage their students to use this strategy not only in classroom but also in their own time in order to improve their English vocabulary learning and enrich their repertoires of VLS. Additionally, teachers should teach their students as many aspects of word knowledge as possible because that generates a deeper processing of information in vocabulary notebooks. Another suggestion is that teachers need to create more activities to encourage students to use vocabulary notebooks and help them revise words that they learnt.
3. As for students, the vocabulary notebooks should be used frequently to set up a habit in learning words and to reinforce their vocabulary learning.

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