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The Essential Importance of Vocabulary Instruction in Language Proficiency: An Examination of Methods and Strategies Across Educational Approaches in China



Abstract: - During this research, the vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) used by college students who were studying English as a foreign language (EFL) were investigated. This study used a VLSs questionnaire with a sample size of seventy-one students from a Chinese college who were majoring in English. The students belonged to both undergraduate and graduate levels of education. Based on the findings of the study, it was found that students often used cognitive and determination strategies. Using visual and textual repetition, practicing spelling and sound, taking notes with a focus on meaning, memorising fixed phrases and sentences, using bilingual dictionaries, making informed guesses about the meanings of words, and learning Chinese equivalents were all strategies that they used. Additionally, students learnt self-talk techniques to alleviate anxiety associated with language acquisition. The mechanical procedures that students used were linked to comprehension, and their primary emphasis was on learning the meanings of words. Metacognitive and social/affective tactics, on the other hand, were hardly used. Additionally, fewer people used memory techniques like associating words or remembering their grammatical forms. Vocabulary expansion and word association were more noticeable in students with greater levels of education. Hence, students' selections of VLSs were influenced by their learning maturity. More kinds of VLSs, including memory and metacognitive methods, should be used by students in these situations. It is recommended that English professors provide students with approach instructions and facilitate vocabulary learning via class discussions. Furthermore, it is advised to think about learning vocabulary on the side via both heavy and lengthy reading.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs), Cognitive strategies, Language proficiency, China's educational approaches.

1. INTRODUCTION

Because expanding one's vocabulary is synonymous with gaining knowledge of new words, students' inability to do so hinders their progress in learning a second language. Vocabulary knowledge encompasses several aspects. There are three important things to keep in mind. The three fundamental components of a word's meaning, form, and application are thereby acquired when one knows the term. The many components of a word, as well as its spelling and pronunciation, make up its form. A word's usage which includes its grammatical form or limitations on use—is an integral part of the word's meaning, and learning its meaning entails making connections between the two. Students only employ a small subset of the words they memorise for everyday use or schoolwork when they depend only on memorisation to acquire English. Learning new words might be challenging in an EFL classroom. Evidence suggests that many English as a foreign language (EFL) classes do not use vocabulary acquisition instructions and instead rely on students to independently acquire new terms. It is necessary to resolve these vocabulary acquisition challenges mentioned earlier. It is beneficial to study EFL learners' usage of VLSs because of the relevance of strategy use training and the requirement of VLSs for efficient vocabulary acquisition. Findings from the research have important implications for how educators might best support their pupils in their quest to build a larger vocabulary in the classroom (Krashen, 2021).

Language competency and vocabulary is an essential component since it serves as the foundation for good communication and understanding. There is no possible way to overestimate the significance of vocabulary training in the context of language education, especially in China. It is becoming more important for students to be able to communicate not just in their mother tongue, Mandarin, but also in other languages, including as English, since the global landscape is constantly shifting. This is because English has become an essential ability in a world that is increasingly linked. The educational system in China, which has a long and illustrious history and employs a wide variety of instructional methods, has historically placed an emphasis on rote memorisation and standardised assessment. Despite the fact that these strategies have been shown to yield significant results in vocabulary acquisition, they often fail to take into account the development of critical thinking and the application of language abilities in real-world situations. Recent educational reforms are starting to move the emphasis towards teaching practices that are more interactive and communicative. The goal of these changes is to encourage students to participate in more meaningful activities and to practise their language skills in real-world

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situations. The purpose of this research is to investigate the significant role that vocabulary training plays in improving language competency. Specifically, the study will investigate the many techniques and tactics that are used across a variety of educational systems in China. The purpose of this study is to discover best practices that may be used to assist holistic language acquisition. This will be accomplished by comparing the efficacy of conventional teaching methods to that of current instructional methods. In the end, having a grasp of the value of vocabulary education will help to the creation of more successful teaching approaches, which will in turn prepare students for the difficulties of global communication (Lai, 2022).

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As the researchers travel down the coast of China, they may come across speakers of seven primary dialects in addition to a great number of additional variants of the Chinese language. Cantonese, Hakka, Amoy, Foochow, Wenchow, Shanghainese, and Mandarin are the seven primary variations of Mandarin Chinese. Mandarin is the largest of these kinds. The spoken variants of Mandarin and Cantonese are so unlike to one another that a person who is competent in Mandarin is unable to understand a speaker of Cantonese or any of the other southern dialects. Despite the fact that there are many different dialects of Chinese, the written form of the language is widely understood and used over the world. The significance of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in the figures from enrolments in languages other than reveal that the number of students interested in learning Chinese has been rapidly rising in the United States. This is due to the fact that China's influence in global politics and the economy continues to grow. To give you an example, there were 412 schools that offered Chinese language programs in the year 1990. However, by the year 2013, there were a total of 866 universities that offered these programs. The number of students enrolled at the school in 1960 was just 679. The number of students who are enrolled in Chinese lessons has been growing on an annual basis (Lestary, 2019).

When 2013 came to a close, the total number of students enrolled had reached 61,055. As the number of students enrolling in Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) programs in the United States continues to climb, it has become more important than ever before to do in-depth study on strategies for learning Chinese vocabulary. This is because the various phonological and orthographic characteristics of Chinese are likely to provide challenges that students who speak English encounter. With the exception of the method of writing that employs the alphabet, Chinese is a logographic language. This is in contrast to English, which is a phonetic language, in which each letter approximately reflects a phoneme. In a language in which a letter represents a phoneme and the meaning of that phoneme at the syllable level, as Sun had previously established in 2006. When studying Chinese, it is important to be able to regulate the shape (character), sound (phonetics), and meaning (in Chinese) of the word, as well as how to pronounce it. The normal number of characters in a Chinese word is one or more. Each individual character is created using a three-step procedure, which includes the stroke, extreme, and personality stages. The smallest unit of character is called a stroke, and it may be turned into radicals via a variety of configurations. These radicals, when combined with other radicals, can produce diverse personalities. Chinese is a language that is orthographically deep, and because of this, there is no one-to-one link between how the Chinese characters sound and how they are written. This is not to mention the fact that Chinese is often thought of as being different from English. It is not uncommon for students of English to be able to determine the right pronunciation of a word based just on its spelling. Numerous Chinese characters are now spoken differently from their phonetic counterparts, despite the fact that some Chinese letters include phonetic elements that explain how to pronounce the letters. This is due to the fact that Chinese has evolved into multiple separate languages. When it comes to phonology, the fact that the Chinese language makes use of tones presents those who are native English speakers with a significant challenge. A neutral tone is one of the five tones that are utilised in Chinese as a spoken language. These tones are used to differentiate between different meanings (Li, 2021).

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In light of the varied educational environments in China, this research aims to better understand the significance of vocabulary in developing fluency in a target language. The purpose of the research is to evaluate different vocabulary teaching tactics and approaches based on how well they improve students' ability to understand and express themselves. The study aims to uncover best practices that match with the growing needs of language learning by examining the influence of various educational methods on vocabulary acquisition. These approaches range from classic rote memorisation to current, interactive methodologies. The ultimate goal of this research is

to help improve methods of teaching vocabulary that promote comprehensive language competence and equip students to communicate effectively in today's increasingly globalised environment (Meara, 2022).

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on language-learning strategies and the study on vocabulary-learning strategies employ similar categories of approaches and procedures. Why? Because studies focussing on methods for expanding one's vocabulary are a significant part of the larger area studying methods for acquiring new languages. In this section, we will go over (a) how we categorise language-learning strategies, (b) why it's important to study these strategies through the lens of second-language learning theories, and (c) what the results of the most important studies have shown regarding the connection between these strategies and how proficient a learner becomes. This section covers all of these subjects. Researchers in the field of second language acquisition have been increasingly curious by the wide range of individual differences among students of the language since the 1970s. The second-language acquisition strategy is one individual difference variable that has been extensively studied to provide light on the process of language learning. The term "language-learning strategies" was first used to describe "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations." That is to say, one may use language learning methodologies in a variety of ways. Many different methods for learning a new language have been identified and classified in different ways. The researchers have made significant contributions to our understanding of how languages are acquired, and the classification schemes they have proposed have had a major impact (Song, 2020).

Direct and indirect methods are the two main types of learning approaches according to the dichotomy classification scheme. Two indirect techniques round out the set of six direct approaches. Aside from verification and clarification, the six direct techniques include memorisation, guessing (sometimes called inductive inference), deductive reasoning, practice, and monitoring. Two indirect ways that are being employed are the creation of practice opportunities and the utilisation of production strategies. Learning processes were identified by the researchers as falling into three main categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and social and emotional. Metacognitive strategies include planning, self-management, advance organising, selective attention, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, among others. Tools for the mind include the following: elaboration, organisation, inference, summarisation, deduction, imagery, and transfer. Included in this group as well is repetition. Using social and emotional techniques may take many forms, including working together, seeking clarification via questioning, and self-talk. According to the research, there are two types of techniques for learning a language: direct strategies that include the target language directly and indirect strategies that do not. Using the target language directly is an example of a direct strategy. Direct strategies are further broken into memory, cognitive, and compensatory strategies within the framework of the classification system, while indirect strategies are further subdivided into emotional, social, and metacognitive (Taft, 2019).

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

- How can educational resources in China's many language classrooms improve students' vocabulary development and overall performance?

6. METHODOLOGY

China's many different organisations were responsible for carrying out the research. A technique that is quantitative was chosen by the researcher because of the restricted resources and the short amount of time available. Through the use of a random sampling process, each and every respondent was contacted for the survey. Following this, a sample size was determined using Rao Soft, and the total number of samples was 1489. Individuals confined to wheelchairs or who are unable to read and write would have the survey questions read aloud by a researcher, who would then record their answers word for word on the survey form. While participants waited to complete their surveys, the researcher would inform them about the project and field any questions they may have. On occasion, it is asked that people finish and send back questionnaires simultaneously.

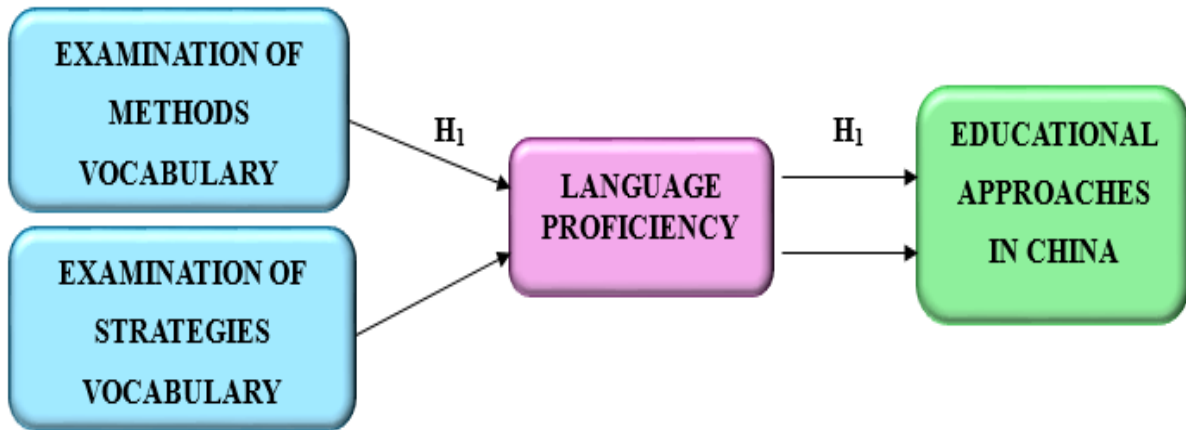
Sampling: Research participants filled out questionnaires to provide information for the research. Using the Rao-soft programme, researchers determined that there were 1489 people in the research population, so researchers sent out 1510 questionnaires. The researchers got 1456 back, and they excluded 46 due to incompleteness, so researchers ended up with a sample size of 1410.

Data and measurement: A questionnaire survey was used as the main source of information for the study (one-to-correspondence or google-form survey). Two distinct sections of the questionnaire were administered: Both online and offline channels' (A) demographic information, and (B) replies to the factors on a 5-point Likert scale. Secondary data was gathered from a variety of sites, the majority of which were found online.

Statistical Software: SPSS 25 was used for statistical analysis.

Statistical tools: To get a feel for the data's foundational structure, a descriptive analysis was performed. A descriptive analysis was conducted to comprehend the fundamental characteristics of the data. Validity was tested through factor analysis and ANOVA.

I. Conceptual Framework



7. RESULT

Factor Analysis

A common use of Factor Analysis (FA) is to confirm the underlying component structure of a collection of measurement items. It is thought that elements that cannot be seen directly impact the scores of the variables that have been examined. One method that relies on models is accuracy analysis (FA). Building causal pathways that link observable events, hidden causes, and measurement errors is the main focus of this work. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Method may be used to determine whether the data is suitable for factor analysis. We check whether the sample is enough for the whole model and for each individual variable. The statistical analysis measures the potential degree of shared variation among several variables. Factor analysis is often more appropriate for data sets with smaller percentages.

For integers between 0 and 1, KMO delivers a value. If the KMO value is between 0.8 and 1, then the sampling is considered sufficient. If the KMO falls below 0.6, indicating insufficient sampling, corrective measures must be implemented. The range is 0.5 to 0.6, so you may use your best judgement; nonetheless, some writers take 0.5 as this.

- The researchers can see that the partial correlations are much larger than the overall correlations when the KMO is near to 0. They repeat big correlations are a huge roadblock for component analysis.

Here are the standards that Kaiser uses to determine acceptability:

Something pitiful between 0.050 and 0.059.

- Below-average by 0.60 to 0.69

Normal range for middle school: 0.70-0.79 cm.

Ranging from a quality point value of 0.80 to 0.89.

Astoundingly, it spans from 0.90 to 1.00.

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.952
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3252.968
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

The overall significance of the correlation matrices was further confirmed by using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. A value of 0.952 is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy. By using Bartlett's sphericity test, researchers found a p-value of 0.00. A significant test result from Bartlett's sphericity test demonstrated that the correlation matrix is not a correlation matrix.

- ❖ **Test for Hypothesis**
- **Dependent Variable**

Educational approaches in China

In line with current educational trends worldwide, there has been a recent movement towards emphasising the development of analytical thinking, imaginative capacity, and practical competence. Academics and moral education are both emphasised in the curriculum. On top of that, more and more technology is finding its way into classrooms, which improves student-teacher interaction. Efforts to equip students for a dynamic economy and society via the use of collaborative and project-based learning approaches are on the rise, all the while honouring the traditional Confucian values that place a premium on reverence for educators and the educational process. The Confucian principles of reverence for elders, self-control, and the quest of knowledge form the bedrock of Chinese educational practices. There are those who believe that the conventional gaokao-style high-stakes assessment and emphasis on rote memorisation leads to anxiety and stunts students' imaginations. Recent changes have sought to diversify teaching techniques by introducing collaborative learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving into the curriculum (Krashen, 2021).

- **Mediating Variable**

Language proficiency

It is additionally the language taught in schools throughout the country. Because there are so many regional dialects and minority languages spoken throughout the nation, proficiency levels may range greatly. Chinese competence tends to be greater in urban areas, whereas local dialects may persist in rural areas. Many kids start learning English in elementary school, and it is becoming more of a priority in the education system overall. The availability of resources, however, tends to put urban pupils in a better position to succeed academically than their rural counterparts. Even with all the English-centric efforts, there are still problems, such as an overemphasis on memorisation over real-world communication abilities. Although the significance of language competence is becoming more recognised, there are still discrepancies across various groups and areas (Lai, 2022).

- **Independent Variable**

Examination of methods vocabulary

Research on vocabulary learning in China has focused on approaches that combine more contemporary teaching practices with more conventional forms of memorisation. The other standardised assessments measure students' vocabulary via reading, writing, and language use; they are the main emphasis here. Flashcards, repeating exercises, and context-based learning are common strategies used by educators to enhance vocabulary memory.

More recent trends in communication theory support the use of interactive learning tools, such as discussion boards and multimedia resources, to pique students' interest and foster deeper retention. Vocabulary building applications and digital tools are also becoming more popular since they allow for individualised lessons. There are still obstacles to overcome, especially with the current focus on high-stakes testing, which may stifle imagination and the ability to apply what students learn in the classroom to real-world situations. As a whole, Chinese vocabulary-building practices are changing, aiming for a happy medium between the old and the new (Taft, 2019).

Relationship between Educational approaches in China and Examination of methods vocabulary through Language proficiency

The curriculum and teaching techniques are greatly impacted by the traditional Chinese focus on rote memorisation and high-stakes exams. Students acquire words in isolation rather than in meaningful situations as a result of this reliance on memorisation and testing as a technique for vocabulary acquisition. More and more, there is a movement towards teaching languages via conversation and interaction as the importance of fluency in English and Mandarin grows in today's globalised society. Instead of focussing only on test prep, these strategies promote real-world vocabulary use, which in turn encourages critical thinking and practical application. Thus, educational reforms are endeavouring to build a more balanced approach to vocabulary assessment, including vocabulary acquisition within larger language competence objectives that prioritise comprehension, communication, and critical engagement. Currently, examination techniques are dominating this field. Aiming to better equip pupils for the challenges of contemporary life, this change reflects an effort to improve their language abilities generally. The Confucian principles of discipline and reverence for authority have long informed China's educational system, which has traditionally placed an emphasis on regimented curricula and rote memorisation. This kind of instruction often leads to a concentration on information transmission, with pupils learning new words by rote memorisation in order to be ready for challenging tests. Tests are very influential in determining how schools operate. Students' vocabulary is tested via reading comprehension, grammar, and writing components of these high-stakes exams, which contribute to a culture where test scores determine educational and occupational chances. The test system tends to prioritise memorisation of new words above developing students' ability to think critically and creatively with language (Krashen, 2021).

Based on the above discussion, the researcher formulated the following hypothesis, which was to analyse the relationship between Educational approaches in China and Examination of methods vocabulary through Language proficiency.

“H0: There is no significant relationship between Educational approaches in China and Examination of methods vocabulary through Language proficiency.”

“H1: There is a significant relationship between Educational approaches in China and Examination of methods vocabulary through Language proficiency.”

Table 2: H₁ ANOVA Test

ANOVA					
Sum					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	38514.620	843	5655.517	994.742	.000
Within Groups	495.370	566	5.356		
Total	39009.99	1409			

The outcome is noteworthy in this investigation. F is 994.742, with a p-value of.000 (below the.05 alpha threshold), reaching statistical significance. By rejecting the null hypothesis, they find that *“H1: There is a significant relationship between Educational approaches in China and Examination of methods vocabulary through Language proficiency”* is correct.

8. DISCUSSION

This agrees with the findings of the researchers, they found that students in China used a diverse range of VLSs. This would mean that Chinese EFL students are open to using VLSs in their lessons. Although Chinese students tried to apply a range of VLSs, mechanical techniques were the most generally adopted. This result is associated with the idea that rote memorisation was the favoured method of vocabulary learning among Chinese students. Speaking specifically, the most common strategies used by Chinese EFL students to retain new vocabulary were written and oral repetition. Word repetition was more common among Chinese EFL learners, according to this study, which is in line with previous research. In addition, the majority of the Chinese EFL students in this research memorised fixed collocations and phrases and learnt vocabulary by looking up their Chinese counterparts. The researchers did not find rote-based methods to be popular, but they did find that dictionaries and guessing words were popular. This contradicts the findings stated above. It seems that diverse cultural backgrounds tend to impact VLSs usage, and the discrepancy might be a result of the varied study environments. Most students in this research either looked up terms in dictionaries or tried to deduce their meanings from their circumstances. This confirms what other researchers have found: that EFL students often consulted dictionaries and made educated guesses while learning new terms. The study also found that students used bilingual dictionaries to check the Chinese explanations instead of the English definitions, and that bilingual dictionaries were more commonly used than monolingual dictionaries. This conclusion runs counter to previous research showing that students gained knowledge beyond definitions from monolingual dictionaries. This was caused by the fact that in EFL classes, Chinese students mostly spoke their L1 and seldom utilised English for conversation. The current VLSs questionnaire has more tailored strategy questions, which is why it yielded these fresh results. Last but not least, mechanical VLSs including remembering, practicing, and taking notes were associated with Chinese pupils. When it comes to the least popular VLSs, this study confirms what they found: flashcards and word lists aren't popular among students. Not only that, but Chinese students also don't use them very often because they think they waste time. The result confirms what Liu had suspected: students preferred memorisation of set example phrases over actively learning new vocabulary via sentence construction. Students in this research also failed to use metacognitive tactics. This data lends credence observation that EFL learners seldom put themselves to the test. Furthermore, this research confirms what Wang and Ma had found: that social tactics, such as group activities and asking for assistance, were not popular among Chinese EFL learners. The VLSs questionnaire presents novel results that differ from earlier research due to the increased number of strategy questions. In particular, the use of emotional strategies and memory techniques like the keyword approach and grouping and association was lower among students owing to the inspiration and setting for learning.

9. CONCLUSION

This study attempted to examine how students in an intensive language program for Chinese as a foreign language acquired new vocabulary terms and how this strategy connected to their overall learning outcomes. Hearing and reading proficiency test scores were used as endpoints. Because of orthographic differences, English-speaking learners of Chinese have had to modify their learning methodologies and adopt tactics peculiar to the Chinese language in order to overcome the obstacle of memorising a huge number of characters. Supporting this viewpoint is the fact that participants commonly mentioned employing orthographic knowledge-based methods. However, in this study, the students' orthographic knowledge-based strategies mostly revolve on the visual traits of the characters. The mentally taxing process of learning the appearance of a huge cast of characters may have distracted students from the phonological elements of those characters. This may provide light on the underutilisation of crucial phonological methods like pronouncing the character and visualising it. Since Chinese is an orthographic language without a sound-to-script link, students of the language would do well to focus their vocabulary-building efforts on the phonetic features of Chinese characters. Better one's educational experience. These strategies need to take precedence in the course material or in the classroom. The findings indicate that the classroom setting significantly influences choosing an approach from among students. Due to the demanding nature of the course work, students attending this students participating in research are expected to use a wider range of metacognitive abilities in comparison to those in a less demanding applications that can stay up with the dynamic nature of learning. Writing is not a component of the evaluation process. Leads students to fail to recognise the significance of mastering the alphabet. The availability of apps that help people learn new words has contributed to their rising popularity. Use as a main tool for enhancing one's vocabulary in Chinese.

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