SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVE USE OF ENGLISH VOCABULARY FOR FIRST- YEAR STUDENTS AT DONG THAP UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: *English is an international language and a compulsory subject in teaching and learning programs in many countries, including Vietnam. The use of this language not only enables learners to acquire new knowledge but also serves as a means of connecting with international friends, thereby creating greater opportunities for integration and development. However, in order to master English effectively, learners are required to make considerable efforts and establish a solid foundation from the very beginning of their learning process. English possesses a rich and relatively complex vocabulary system; therefore, learners, especially first-year students who begin studying English as a specialized subject, encounter numerous difficulties.For these reasons, this study was conducted to identify the causes of these difficulties and to propose appropriate solutions for improving English vocabulary learning among students.*

Keywords*: vocabulary, integration, difficulties, solutions.*

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I. RESEARCH CONTENT

1.1. The Current Situation of Students' Vocabulary Practice

In practice, vocabulary plays a crucial role in helping students achieve proficiency in English. However, not all students are able to perform well in this area. After conducting a survey of 100 first-year students majoring in English Language, the results were presented as follows:

Table 1: Difficulties in Learning English Vocabulary

Difficulties	Percentage (%)
Inability to pronounce words correctly	49
Lack of interest in learning a large amount of vocabulary	39
Lack of effective vocabulary learning methods	38
Difficulty remembering word meanings	37
Uncertainty about where to begin learning vocabulary	36
Inability to distinguish parts of speech	30

As a consequence of not selecting appropriate vocabulary learning methods, students often encounter difficulties in remembering word meanings, which is a crucial aspect of using English effectively. In practice, some students may pronounce vocabulary correctly but fail to understand its meaning, while others may recognize the meaning of a word but be unable to pronounce it accurately. Another significant difficulty is the inability to distinguish parts of speech, as students frequently fail to remember vocabulary items or lack knowledge of grammatical rules and exceptions used to identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, and other word classes, as well as their meanings in different contexts. For example: doubt, love, laugh, and walk can function as both nouns and verbs.

The difficulties mentioned above have resulted in 36% of students being uncertain about where to begin learning English vocabulary, how to study effectively, and which methods should be applied in order to improve and expand their vocabulary knowledge. Consequently, students continuously raise questions for themselves regarding vocabulary learning; however, without appropriate solutions, many eventually lose motivation, give up learning vocabulary, and become unable to achieve proficiency in English.

1.2. Vocabulary Learning Methods

Table 2: Percentage of Students Using English Vocabulary Learning Methods

Learning Methods	Percentage (%)
Learning through flashcards	7
Learning through images	30
Learning through songs or films with English subtitles	63
Learning through English newspapers and magazines	26
Learning through traditional methods (rote memorization of new words)	60

The survey results indicate the percentage of students using different English vocabulary learning methods, with as many as 63% of students choosing to learn vocabulary through English songs or films with English subtitles. According to M. G. Blasco et al. (2006, pp. 94–96), the use of films in teaching and learning plays an important role in stimulating learners' reflective processes and attitudes. However, Joseph E. Champoux presented an opposing viewpoint, arguing that the use of films in the classroom may strongly distract students and reduce the amount of time available for theoretical discussions (Champoux, J., 1999, pp. 206–217). Due to the highly entertaining nature of English films and music, students may pay greater attention to images and entertainment content rather than language acquisition itself. Therefore, although 63% of students selected this method, the survey findings also revealed that up to 78% of students self-assessed their grammar and vocabulary competence as being only at an average level. This relatively high percentage suggests that students have not fully exploited the educational value of English-subtitled films and English songs in their learning process.

According to the survey, 60% of students learned vocabulary through traditional methods, namely rote memorization of long vocabulary lists. This is considered one of the passive learning approaches commonly used by students merely to cope with classroom requirements and teachers' expectations. As a result of relying on rote memorization, many students have not developed strategies to diversify and expand their vocabulary knowledge, such as identifying synonyms or antonyms. The survey findings revealed that 55% of students were unable to identify synonymous or antonymous words while learning new vocabulary items. This limitation contributes to students' passivity in both critical thinking and vocabulary retention.

II. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY

Based on the existing difficulties in students' English vocabulary learning, this study proposes the following three recommendations:

2.1. Learning Vocabulary through Sentence Construction

This method is proposed with the expectation that students will be able to retain vocabulary more effectively by creating their own sentences. At the same time, this approach helps students pay greater attention to grammar usage and recognize as well as correct their mistakes in future learning situations.

Example 1: detective (adj.): relating to detective stories

I have read a detective novel.

Example 2: sanitary (adj.): hygienic

Conditions in the kitchen are very sanitary.

2.2. Identifying Word Relationships

Recognizing relationships among words is considered a useful strategy for helping students enrich and expand their vocabulary knowledge. This method also enables students to understand and remember different word forms when completing exercises related to parts of speech.

Example 1: From the verb detect, students can learn additional word forms such as the noun detection and the adjective detective.

Example 2: car – scar – cart – card – carp

2.3. Using Vocabulary and Grammar to Create Stories

It is believed that this method can produce highly positive effects due to its engaging and flexible nature. For students with relatively strong

English grammar and vocabulary competence, this approach can greatly support the use of vocabulary, linking words, sentence construction, creative thinking, logical organization of ideas, and the expansion of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Story creation through vocabulary use can become both an effective teaching strategy for teachers and an enjoyable learning activity for students when applied appropriately, depending on learners and contexts.

III. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING

For society to develop and advance toward industrialization and modernization, people need not only to understand, live, study, and cooperate with one another within their own countries, but also to expand cooperation with neighboring countries and the international community. To achieve this goal, education serves as a fundamental prerequisite for development, while language acts as a tool and key that brings people closer together. This study aims to emphasize the importance of learning English, which is considered one of the most widely used languages and an international means of communication. With the objective of improving the effectiveness and quality of English learning, this research focuses on the integrated teaching and learning of English grammar and vocabulary rather than treating them separately as in traditional approaches. Such an approach contributes to a more active teaching and learning process from both perspectives: teachers and learners. Students become more proactive and develop stronger critical thinking skills during learning, while teachers are encouraged to explore and develop more effective teaching approaches of their own. A teacher, Jesse Peterson, shared with VnExpress that: "The current English teaching methodology in Vietnam is primarily based on grammar and vocabulary as its foundation" (Community, 2014, October 07). Starting from the premise that vocabulary and grammar serve as the core elements of language learning, teaching and learning practices should therefore be developed in more creative and engaging ways so that English learning becomes more attractive and less monotonous or rigid for both students and teachers.It is hoped that, through the solutions proposed in this study, the process of teaching and learning English will be partially improved, enabling both teachers and students to overcome immediate difficulties, and making English acquisition less of a distant or unattainable goal for learners.

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