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**DIFFICULTIES IN IMPROVING LEARNING AND TEACHING
VOCABULARY STRATEGIES OF INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS**

Vocabulary is an important component of language proficiency. The main dilemma faced by English educators is choosing a strategy that facilitates the memorization and application of new lexical units to help students improve their vocabulary.

This study intends to investigate difficulties in improving the vocabulary of international students at the Kyungdong University, South Korea in the 2021-2022 academic years. The main objective of the study is to improve the existing teaching vocabulary strategies and help students avoid typical vocabulary mistakes in the IELTS exam.

The participants of the educational experiment were students of the «English for Academic Purposes - EAP» program, the discipline «Preparation for the IELTS». 21 international students, aged from 17 to 19, took part in the study, Female students made up 9.5% of the group, while the remaining part was male students.

The study included three stages:

1. Vocabulary task (take-home);
2. Student's attitude survey (take-home);
3. Face-to-face interview with the main instructor of the program.

Stage 1: Vocabulary Task was designed and assigned via the Edmodo educational platform with a deadline of two weeks. Its purpose was to examine the

degree of students' autonomy in dealing with vocabulary, which includes their appropriate method use as well as accuracy of their vocabulary knowledge. It was comprised of 66 questions in ten parts, based on the target lexical patterns. Table 1 presents the details of the Vocabulary Task.

Table 1 – The Organization of Vocabulary Task

Task section	Types of task	Types of questions	Numbers of Questions / points
Part I	Appropriate use of collocations, Verbs + Prepositions	Matching	1 / 15
Part II	Appropriate use of collocations, Adjectives + Nouns	Multiple choice (one correct answer)	5 / 5
Part III	Appropriate use of collocations, Verbs + Nouns	Multiple choice (one correct answer)	7 / 7
		Matching	1 / 4
Part IV	Appropriate use of collocations, Adverbs + Adjectives	Multiple choice (one correct answer)	5 / 5
Part V	Appropriate use of collocations Verbs + Prepositional Phrases	Multiple choice (one correct answer)	10 / 10
Part VI	Conjunctions	Multiple choice (one correct answer)	10 / 10
Part VII	Part of speech	Multiple choice (one correct answer)	7 / 7
		Matching	1 / 9
Part VIII	Words families	Matching	1 / 11
		Multiple choice (several correct answers)	2 / 15
		Multiple choice (one correct answer)	5 / 5
Part IX	Countable and Uncountable Nouns	Multiple choice (several correct answers)	1 / 10

Part X	Connotation	Multiple choice (one correct answer)	10 / 10
Total			66 / 123

The types of collocation were chosen based on Lewis [2010] and McCarthy and O'Dell [2005] and were covered in Part I, Part II, Part III, Part IV, and Part V. The rest of the Vocabulary Task was designed based on McCarthy and O'Dell [2010], Redman and Gairns [2011], McCarthy and O'Dell [2017], and Redman and Edwards [2017].

Once the data were obtained, it was coded, tabulated and analyzed, keeping in mind the objectives of the study. Appropriate statistical tools were used to draw meaningful inferences. The statistical tools used in the present study are given in Table 2.

Table 2 – Statistical Tools Used for Analysis of Data

Statistical tools	Formula	Purpose
Mean (x)	$X = \Sigma X/N$ where, X = Variable, N = No. of observations	To find out the average scores of variable used in the study.
Standard Deviation (S.D.)	$\sigma = \sqrt{\Sigma X^2/N}$ where, X = Deviation from actual mean N = number of observations.	To find out deviation from the mean scores of the variables.

Based on the result of each Vocabulary Task section in Table 3, the students show the greatest performance in verbs + prepositions collocations (Part I) with the average score 81.000 and the worst performance in adverbs + adjectives collocations (Part IV) - 43.810. Moreover, students achieved the average scores of less than 60.000 in adjectives + nouns collocations (Part II), verbs + nouns collocations (Part III), words families (Part VIII), countable and uncountable nouns (Part IX).

Nevertheless, the standard deviation varies from 3.338 to 25.995, which shows immensely different levels of English displayed by the students and supports the main program instructor's opinion that the students' initial level of English ranges from very poor to average.

Table 3 – Statistical Data of Vocabulary Task

Task section	N	M	SD
Part I	15	81.000	13.101
Part II	5	57.143	12.197
Part III	11	53.323	4.441
Part IV	5	43.810	4.387
Part V	10	71.429	14.997
Part VI	10	75.238	6.293
Part VII	16	70.684	5.960
Part VIII	31	56.337	3.338
Part IX	10	55.714	25.995
Part X	10	71.429	11.910

Stage 2: Student's Attitude Survey was designed in Google Forms and assigned via the Edmodo educational platform. The aim of the survey is to understand difficulties in improving vocabulary of 21 international students who have prepared for the IELTS at the Kyungdong University, South Korea. The survey consists of five sections:

1. Vocabulary Task taking strategies;
2. Language learning confidence and understanding;
3. Attitude towards learning vocabulary;
4. Vocabulary learning control (Usability);
5. Learning English vocabulary difficulties.

Questions regarding autonomy (vocabulary learning control) were created based on Scharle & Szabo [2000].

In total, the survey consisted of 45 questions as follows: One question yes/no/I don't know. Thirteen yes/no questions. Thirty-one questions were rated on a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program.

The data analysis of the Vocabulary Task taking strategies (Section I) showed that the students used quite different resources when they tried to find the answers in the Vocabulary Task, Figure 1:

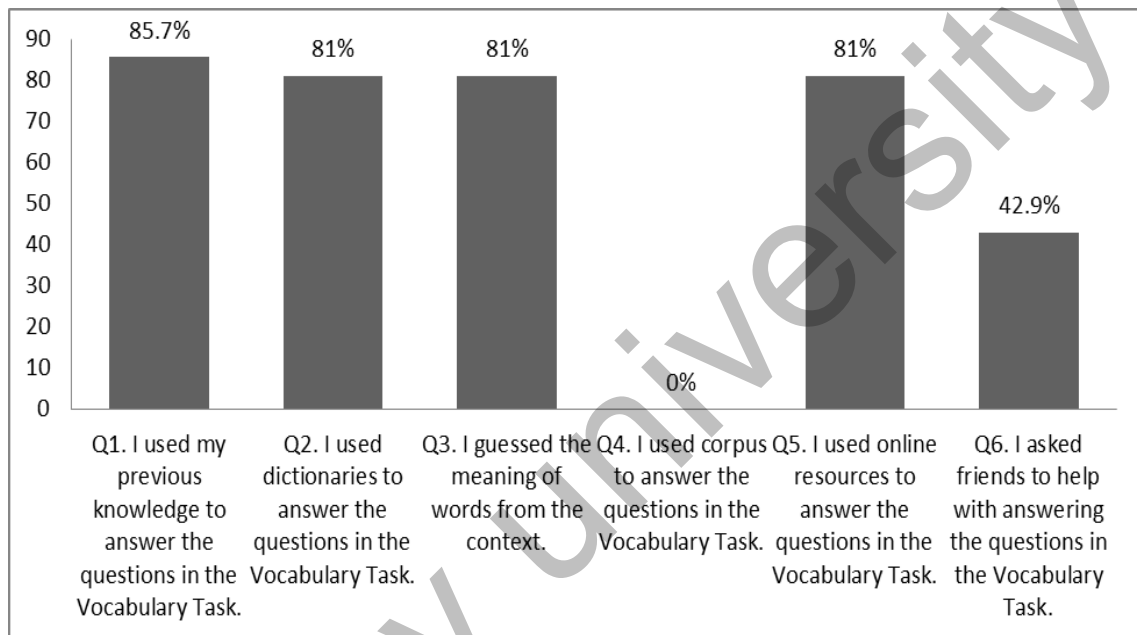


Figure 1. Analysis of the Student's Attitude Survey, Section I

Furthermore, the data analysis of the Section I reveals that students considered different types of methods to answer the questions related to vocabulary task except corpus. However, they heavily depend on online sources for their answers. It was clear that students have lack of knowledge about corpus and how to apply it to improve their vocabulary learning strategies.

The data analysis of the learning English vocabulary difficulties (Section V) in Table 4 showed that the least difficulties students have with choosing the correct part of speech in sentences (Q4) with the average score 2.67 and the greatest difficulties in selecting the suitable meaning of the vocabulary (Q2) - 3.48.

Table 4 – Statistical Data of the Student’s Attitude Survey, Section V

Questions	N	M	SD	SE
1. I have difficulties in using verbs with prepositions.	21	3.33	1.317	0.287
2. I have difficulties in selecting the suitable meaning of the vocabulary.	21	3.48	1.030	0.225
3. I have difficulties with appropriate use of collocations.	21	3.05	1.284	0.280
4. I confuse with choosing the correct part of speech in sentences.	21	2.67	1.197	0.261
5. I have problems with applying correct prefixes or suffixes.	21	3.19	1.250	0.273
6. I understand which nouns are countable and uncountable.	21	2.95	1.161	0.253

Stage 3: The interview was conducted to find out difficulties in improving the vocabulary of 21 international students who have prepared for the IELTS at the Kyungdong University, South Korea.

According to the main instructor of the program:

— Teaching vocabulary strategies are «variety of exercises including word building activities, matching, sentence creation, completion, word form exercises, collocation activities, synonyms, quizzes, use of vocabulary in subject-specific contexts, reading of academic texts/excerpts from passages using academic language, etc.

— The factors that cause students’ difficulties in learning vocabulary are «generally poor base level of academic and non-academic vocabulary to begin with, lack of knowledge of different forms of relatively common words, weak lexical resource, lack of knowledge of parts of speech and identifying parts of speech in context», and «difficulty in understanding words within context (not just academic), problems with spelling and word forms»;

— The main obstacles of teaching vocabulary to students are «students have vastly different levels of English which creates an atmosphere where students are left either bored due to having a stronger ability or – on the opposite end of the spectrum – feeling lost due to lower ability, and it can be difficult to scaffold and find a medium where all students are feeling challenged and rewarded from the lesson content» and «students do not take personal accountability for their own vocabulary studies, and often rely on the instructor to teach/drill new words».

In conclusion, based on our research data, we can point out the following:

1. The results of the vocabulary task reveal students lack of vocabulary knowledge, especially in adverbs + adjectives collocations.

2. The student's attitude survey provides clear feedback on students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary and their willingness to use online sources, but at the same time lack of corpus method application awareness to build one's word power.

3. The interview with the main instructor of the program provides information on multifaceted problems affecting English language teaching and learning such as students' lack of background knowledge, motivation, etc.

Therefore, one of the suggestions could be the consideration of corpus to be adapted as one of the main vocabulary learning strategies in order to increase University students' motivation and language learning autonomy in their vocabulary acquisition.

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ОРТА МЕКТЕП ОҚУШЫЛАРЫНЫҢ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІ САБАҚТАРЫНДА ОҚУ САУАТТЫЛЫҒЫН ДАМУДЫҢ ТИІМДІ ӘДІСТЕРІ

Оқу - бұл жазбаша мәтіндерді түсіну, қабылдау мен ойлауды қамтитын күрделі әрекет. Ол екі өзара байланысты процестерден тұрады: сөздерді тану және түсіну. Сөздерді тану дегеніміз жазбаша таңбалардың ауызекі тілге қалай сәйкес келетінін қабылдау процесін білдіреді. Түсіну-бұл сөздерді, сөйлемдерді және байланысты мәтінді түсіну процесі. Оқырмандар әдетте жазбаша мәтінді түсінуге көмектесетін негізгі білімді, лексиканы, грамматикалық білімді, мәтіндік тәжірибені және басқа стратегияларды қолданады. Шет тілінде оқу арқылы оқушы айналасындағы әлем туралы білімдерін байытады. Ол оқытылатын тілде сөйлейтін елдермен танысады.

Оқу оқушылардың интеллектісін дамытады. Бұл олардың жадын, ерік-жігерін, қиялын дамытуға көмектеседі. Оқушылар кітаптармен жұмыс істеуге дағдыланады, бұл өз кезегінде әрі қарай оқудағы тәуелсіз тәжірибені жеңілдетеді.