

Improving Students' Retention of English Vocabulary by Using Guessing New Words Through Context

Nguyen Hien Luong¹, Duong Que Linh², Pham Minh Hoang³

¹Foreign Language Department, Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

²Foreign Language Department, Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

³Department of Student Affairs, Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

Corresponding Author: Nguyen Hien Luong

Abstract: Vocabulary is an indispensable part of a language. Vocabulary plays an important language element linking four language skills; speaking, reading listening, and writing to ensure a good communicative task performance. Recently the importance of vocabulary learning and teaching has been considerably emphasized. One of the most effective ways of vocabulary learning is guessing the meaning of words from context. The purpose of this study is to show the importance of guessing the meaning of unknown words from context to students' retention of English vocabulary. The study focused on three main points: first, Rationale for the Innovation; second, meaningful practice worked with students whose background knowledge of English was weak; and third, meaningful practice did, to some extent, make contribution to students' retention of vocabulary. The definition of innovation, classroom culture and culture context, and problem solving model are also confirmed about in literature review.

This study was conducted by quasi-experimental method with 135 students in the three randomly assigned groups. Two tests were administered and the data was analyzed by using Pre-Test and Post-Test to find out the answer to the research question; " Can Using Guessing New Words Through Context Help Students' Retention Of English Vocabulary? ".

Keywords: vocabulary, retention, TUEBA, guess, meaning, context

Date of Submission: 08-05-2019

Date of acceptance: 23-05-2019

I. Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the Innovation

Vocabulary is an important language element that links four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing together and makes communication flow smoothly. It is vitally needed to express meaning. Reality shows that many students have fairly good knowledge of grammar but are hardly able to express themselves properly because of their vocabulary deficiency. Teaching English vocabulary, an important field in language teaching, is worthy effort. Vocabulary learning is essential to the development of the development of language skills. If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh. Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. One of the concerns in vocabulary is how to help students increase their retention of learned vocabulary items.

A great number of Vietnamese students in general and students at Thainguyn University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) in particular find it difficult to remember all the meanings of English words that they have learnt in their previous lessons. Long lists of words from reading texts, listening passages, and vocabulary or grammar sections in the course books are of limited help to them if they do not know how to learn, remember and use these words. As a result, students have difficulties in communication; both in the oral and written forms as what have been learnt are forgotten soon.

In order to ensure a good communicative task performance, students need to be assisted with developing their vocabulary knowledge. So far, there has been little empirical evidence about the effectiveness of meaningful practice in vocabulary retention, defined as "an ability to recall or recognize what has been learnt or experienced; memory" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Oxford University Press, 1992: L: 773) or the ability to recall words that have been learnt or encountered for online communication; therefore, **whether meaningful practice increase students' retention of vocabulary** during the teaching and learning process is the question that the author tries to answer.

1.2. Aims of the study

The question as to which techniques or activities would help students learn more vocabulary and improve vocabulary retention levels plays a vital role in this study so the researcher set out this as the aim of this study.

1.3. Research question

In order to meet the aim, the study was carried out to find out the answer to the researcher question: "Can Using Guessing New Words Through Context Help Students' Retention Of English Vocabulary?"

1.4. Scope of the study

There is a wide range of language activities which can be used to help student memorize vocabulary effectively. However, in the current study, researcher intended to investigate the effectiveness of guessing new words through context to students' learning and retention of English vocabulary only because it is supposed to be infeasible to conduct a study on a larger scale with the timeframe of 8 weeks which can produce very convincing results.

Participants in this study were non-English major second year students of Thainguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) who were considered at the intermediate level of English and working with course book "Life A1 – B1" by John Hughes, Helen Stephenson, Paul Dummett. This study was implemented amongst 2 groups included 3 intact classes with 135 students for a duration of two months.

1.5. Significant of the study

The result of the study will be of great benefit to both teachers and learners of English. In addition, it would become a good source reference to those who concern for vocabulary teaching and learning. It is hoped that this study will help teachers find effective methods teaching English vocabulary in order to help students to learn English, especially, to memorize its vocabulary.

II. Literature review

2.1. The importance of vocabulary in second language acquisition

The support for the important role of vocabulary can be found in works of Nation and Coady (1988), Gu (1994), Nassaji (2003) and Alexander (2000). In her book "Understanding Vocabulary" (2000:16), Alexander wrote "comprehension improves when you know what the words mean" and "words are the currency of communication. A robust vocabulary improves all areas of communication - listening, speaking, reading and writing".

Developing a solid vocabulary is essential to gaining proficiency in the students' target language. Vocabulary itself is multi-faceted and should be considered as part of the larger language structure and use, involving spelling, pronunciation, and grammatical behavior. In the very first part of his book on vocabulary, McCarthy (2000:2) "It is the experience of most language teachers that the single, biggest component of any language course is vocabulary. No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express the wide range of meaning, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way". Many language teachers can argue that an appropriate way of communication is far more important than words, however, one's communication ability in general depends a lot on his/ her vocabulary size, because "words are the tools we use to think, to express ideas and feelings, and to learn about the world" (Johnson and Johnson, 2004:1), to communicate about something very concrete to something very abstract.

In order to maximize vocabulary development, teachers should design activities in which students need to employ context and students' background knowledge so that they engage more deeply with the material and ensure that students are retaining information and can properly apply it. Overall, second language instructors should use suitable teaching methods and techniques to develop students' vocabulary knowledge as an integral part of language acquisition.

2.2. Meaningful practice and vocabulary acquisition and retention

Practice has a wide variety of benefits. Firstly, it involves learners in working together and helping each others on the meaning of unfamiliar language, including new vocabulary items (Nation and Newton 1997:244), which is a good chance for learners to be exposed to repeated use of the new items during the course of activity that serves to generate better input. Secondly, it creates a learning environment for learners to express their understanding or misunderstanding without the fear or shame of exposing their weakness to the superiors. This is a very good chance for the learners to actively use their own words to convey opinions or ideas. Thirdly, through negotiation, learners can sharpen the word after initial input by getting additional information for the known words, and therefore, avoid forgetting and atomize the existing knowledge (Moras: 2001). Brown

(2000:83-84) describes meaningful practice as “a process of relating and anchoring new material to relevant established entities in cognitive structures”. That is, meaningful practice is the practice with teacher’s guide aiming at increasing student’s retention and fluency development. Wilkins (1976) has defined meaningful practice as one where the student has to understand part or the entire sentence in order to be able to respond to it. With regard to meaningful practice, Hubbard, et al. (1983) state that it is possible for practice to be meaningful and yet highly artificial, which also helps students to produce what they want to say using the lexical items introduced in the class and serves as a lead - in for communicative task.

Gairns and Redman (1986) assert that meaningful practice has a variety of advantages. The first, the students have the means to perform the learning task; otherwise they will become frustrated and lose motivation. The second, it enables students to be more-reliant because vocabulary consists of single words, sets of phrases, variable phrases, phrasal verbs, and idioms so once students have performed their learning tasks frequently, the possibility of retrieving these lexical items successfully for online communication will be very high. The third, it requires learners to analyze and process language more deeply, which should help them retain information stored in long-term memory and take back from memory as a whole, reducing difficulties.

Meaningful practice can be applied through many classroom activities. Each practice activity relates to a relevant learning strategy that helps the learners process message content and test out hypotheses about the target language learning manner (Swain, 1995 in Ellis, 2000). Below are two of the tasks that are well documented in the literature.

2.3. Guessing words through context and students’ schemata

Learning vocabulary in context means that you learn new words when you are reading or listening. You learn a new word by seeing how it is used in a sentence. Many learners try to memorize a list of individual words.

Guessing words is one of strategies for vocabulary development and can be used as a meaningful practice in the classroom as well. Read (2000:47) found evidence for his hypothesis that “the amount of mental effort that the learners put into understanding an unknown word would positively influence their chances of retaining its meaning”. His study discovered that when students had to work out the meaning themselves, they remembered it better than if they were simply given a synonym or translation. The teacher has to train his/her students in identifying contextual clues available and making guesses the meaning of unknown words. Whenever a guessable word occurs, the teacher trains the learner in the strategy of guessing from context. Contextual guesswork means making use of the context in which the word appears to derive its meaning. Knowledge of word formation, e.g. prefixes and suffixes, can also help guide students to discover meaning (Read, 2000:53). Teachers can help students with specific techniques and practice in contextual guesswork. The fact is that learning isolated word without context is just waste of time and effort. It will not work. You can learn many words, maybe 10 to 20 new words a day. But you don’t know how to use them and you will forget them in the short period of time. Besides focusing teaching on these activities, vocabulary exercises (from textbooks, workbooks...) should be used to consolidate students’ understanding of the words. Exercises which are commonly used in meaningful practice such as using given words to complete a specific task (to make meaningful sentences or to write a paragraph), filling a gap in a sentence, matching words-to-words for collocation can help students a lot in increasing their vocabulary retention. By learning vocabulary through context, students can remember new words longer. Research shows that the more information you have for a certain word, the longer you will remember it. Just repeating a word over and over again does not help. You have very little information about its meaning and how to use it so you cannot remember it for a long time.

2.4. Definition of innovation

Innovation is a process that makes something new or finds a new thing to replace for the old one. There has been variety of definition about the innovation. The researcher would like to confirm to some definitions taken from theory of the authors as follow: White (1988) has emphasized organizational behavior; this means that every innovation has been applied in a collective or organization not a person himself. Rogers (1983: 11) paid attention to the personal perception and interpretation of innovation. As for Nicholls (1983:4), an innovation is regarded as an idea, object or practice perceived as new by an individual or individuals, which brings about the improvement in relation to objectives being fundamental in nature, planning and deliberating.

2.5. Classroom culture and culture context

Most of students at TUEBA seem to be not really interested in learning English; therefore, their exposure to English outside the classroom was very limited. Even in English lessons they tended to use mother tongue more often than the target language. In fact, their motivation in English learning was quite different. For a majority of students, English because it is a compulsory subject so they learn it just to pass the examinations. A small number learnt English because they wanted to further their study abroad after graduation or study for

their future jobs. Consequently, the researcher tried to find out the effective way to improve students' ability of guessing new words through the context. Therefore the innovation which was carried out by the researcher belonged to problem-solving.

2.6. Problem –solving model

According to White (1988) this approach aims at modifying and improving curriculum practice. The researcher clearly identified the problems of the first research, and has applied the new technique in teaching speaking during two months of experiment. The study is also closely related to the social interaction model with the aim to get the results by using pre-test and post-test. After two months of experiment, 96 test-papers were randomly chosen from two classes: K1, K2 to be the data analysis. They were asked to do the tests. In the study, the social interaction model is clearly shown during teaching and learning. The students discussed and shared ideas about ways of using guessing vocabulary to learn English. Two classes at Thainguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) getting involved in an innovation are the stakeholders according to (White, 1988). The researchers that work as teachers at Thainguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) found out the problems of learning and teaching in general, and speaking in particular would like to innovate teaching speaking. They were then adopters. The researchers who implemented the innovation in the classes were the implementers. They were also the suppliers who designed the speaking tasks and curriculum. All the students from two classes received the innovation from researchers were the clients. The collectivist societies were organized by group work. (Brown, 2000, p.190) stated that in the investigation, the collectivist culture was found in the students' answer for the tests and the opinions got from their working in groups during their learning in the class and outside the class as well. The students worked and discussed, gave their ideas in small groups in a cooperation atmosphere. When the researchers asked students to do exercises during teaching and learning, he got the results from the groups, all of the groups tried to work hard to compete with each other because they wanted to be the winners. This might reflect a collectivist society in the classroom. Hofstede (1986) defined that **power distance** was regarded as a characteristic of a culture and the inequality in power that the less powerful persons accept and consider as normal. In the study, the researchers introduced the ways to guess vocabulary. The teacher always asked students to work in groups and individual, but sometimes they did not understand what the teacher requested them, which can be explained by three main reasons: Firstly, the students at Thainguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) are from different provinces in Vietnam, some of them are not confident enough to say in front of the crowd. Secondly, the slow students do not want to lose face in front of the class because they did not understand the things that the teacher had asked. Thirdly, they might not pay attention to the teachers' explanation for the tasks. In this case, the teacher asked students to do as he sampled and even requested them to repeat again and again until they learnt by heart. The power distance is clearly shown in such cases.

In summary, all the things relating to the innovation were shown in the above literature reviews. Those literatures reviews were applied in practice through the English lessons during two months, and the concrete plan was carried out in methodology, and findings and discussions.

III. Research method

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 120 male and female second year students aged 19 to 21 of 2 intact classes coded as subgroups K1, K2, B1 and B2 who had completed 2 semesters learning general English. The number of students in subgroups was K1, K2, and B1, B2, were 27, 28, 28, and 28, respectively. They all took tertiary education at Thainguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) and had different levels of proficiency in English when entering the course: some were real beginners, some were false beginners and some were quite good. Both experimental and the control groups enrolled in an English course which lasted for 20 weeks (2 hours a day, 5 days a week). The textbook used for this course was Life A1 – A2 by John Hughes, Helen Stephenson, Paul Dummett, published in 2015, Cengage Learning. The researcher taught both groups.

3.2. Plans of Introducing the Innovation

The study was designed to test the hypothesis that "Meaning practice helps to increase students' retention of English vocabulary". Thus, the null hypothesis is "Meaningful practice has no effect on students' retention of the target vocabulary." Like in any experimental study, if the result of the experiment rejects the null hypothesis, the tested hypothesis is naturally accepted and this means that meaningful practice does have impact on students' retention of vocabulary, and vice versa. The innovation was carried out for two months, from the beginning of May to the end of July, 2011. During two months of innovation, the researcher taught students how to guess new words through the context. As this study was conducted on the students in 2 classes which

were assigned by the university where the researcher was working, a quasi - experimental method was naturally chosen.

This study was conducted by quasi-experimental method with 2 classes of the experimental group and two classes of the control group, it was quasi - experimental assigned, and therefore were not of equal proficiency levels of English. In fact, they were intact groups (Wiersma, 1995). The duration of the experiment was 8 weeks and 2 vocabulary tests were administered to measure students' retention of vocabulary. The results of the tests were analyzed based on the data collected after the tests being done by the students of experimental and control group to find out the gain for each group, but data analysis will be processed and calculated basing on the real number of 96 test-takers after the researcher had had computer made randomly among 120 test papers.

3.2.1. Test designing

Two tests used in this research were designed to measure the changes in students' ability to retain vocabulary (if there were any) when meaningful practice was employed in teaching and learning process. These two tests were constructed by the researcher basing on the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) design and validation which was developed by Paribakht and Vesche (described in Read, 2000:132-137). These tests were used as "generic instrument, which can be used with any set of words that the tester or researcher is interested in assessing" and "to measure quality of vocabulary knowledge in a practical manner" (Read, *ibid*: 132). The tests were designed to test students' ability to recall lexical items for language production. Most of the vocabulary items and the distracters in the tests were selected from the new lexical items of the students' book, glossary and the accompanying workbook taught and used during the course. Despite the fact that these two tests had not been established formally and had not been checked yet, the scores reflected the students' real ability; so their validity and reliability could be asserted. Before both pre-test and post-test, the students were not told that there would be a test in the next class.

3.2.2. Test administering

Pre - test

The pre-test was conducted before the treatment, which was 3 weeks after the semester had started and after the students had finished 3 units of the course book. No special techniques or language practice were in focus when teaching vocabulary in these units. The pre-test consisted of 3 parts. In the first part, the students were expected to provide the words in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese underline the English words' stress and give their part of speech, and then in part 2 they were required to do a writing task based on the words given in part 1. Part 3 involved word completion. In each sentence there was an important word which was intentionally deleted except for the first letter of the word. Students were obliged to write the missing words. The time allocation for the whole test was 30 minutes.

The pre-test was given to the two groups in the same week to test their memory of important lexical items learnt in the first three units, mainly in unit three. The primary purpose of this test was to measure students' vocabulary size and their level of vocabulary retention, and how much information about each word was comprehended and what level of language reproduction they were in.

Post-test

The post-test was constructed in the same format applied to the pre-test and was implemented 5 weeks after the pre-test. This test consisted of 3 parts. Part 1 tested the learners' vocabulary knowledge; part 2 dealt with language production which required them to write a paragraph briefing the operation of a company (its organization, production, and trend changes) that they knew or hard learnt/ read about; part 3 required them to supply the target hidden words in the blanks. This test covered 30 core business lexical items that they had learnt from unit 4 to unit 10 of the course book. These words were of high frequency in business world and the teacher had applied meaningful practice, guessing, in teaching them to the experimental group. The test duration was 30 minutes.

The purpose of this test was to measure progress or changes in students' vocabulary size (if there were any) after 8 weeks learning and to find out whether there was any difference in retention of vocabulary between the two groups.

The reason why the researcher chose using a Quasi 0 experimental method of the study is clearly seen in the section as follow;

3.2. 3 Rationale for using a Quasi 0 experimental method

"Experiments are carried out to explore the strengths of the relationship between variables" (Nunan, 1992:25. The former, in this study was the students' scores in their vocabulary tests (their retention of vocabulary) while the latter was meaningful practice. Despite the advantage of the experimental method in the

study which sets out to investigate the correlation between the intervention and its outcome, it is not “always feasible to carry out a true experiment” (Nunan, 1992:40). This is because of the impossibility of randomly assigning subjects to experimental and the control groups in many educational contexts. Instead, a quasi - experiment is employed with the subjects for both the experimental group and the control group being the intact groups of students (Nunan, 1992; Wiersma, 1995).

3.2.4. Measurement instruments

Two vocabulary tests were used to measure possible differences between the two groups at the beginning and at the end of the study. The total number of students of the both groups was 120; however, some of them did not take either of the two or took neither of the 2 tests during the research time, so data analysis will be processed and calculated basing on the real number of 96 test-takers.

Both groups received the usual training based on the procedures suggested in the **Business Objectives Teacher’s book**. Words were presented to both control and experimental groups in the same manner with attention given to their forms (more attention to pronunciation with transcription), meaning, grammar and combination in common expressions and common usage. Only the experimental group received explicit instruction on how to guess new words and practice in doing so.

IV. Findings

4.1. The results of the pre-test scores of participants in both experimental and control groups

As can be seen from the table bellow, the results of the pre-test of both experimental group and control group were not very good. As the results of the tests, students in each group were graded into 4 levels: very weak, weak, average, and good. The score ranged from 2.0 to 8 in the experimental group and from 2 to 9.5 in the control group.

Table 1: Results of pre-test scores of the two groups

Experimental group (N = 56)			Control group (N = 55)		
Cases	Class K1	Class K2	Cases	Class B1	Class B2
1.	2	8	1.	2	3
2.	5.5	-	2.	5.5	4.0
3.	5.0	4.0	3.	5.5	4.0
4.	5.5	3.5	4.	7.0	4.0
5.	5.0	6.5	5.	4.5	4.0
6.	4.5	7.0	6.	-	6.0
7.	4.0	-	7.	5.0	8.5
8.	4.5	7.0	8.	5.0	5.5
9.	5.0	6.0	9.	7.0	7.0
10.	4.0	7.5	10.	7.5	7.0
11.	4.5	4.0	11.	5.0	4.0
12.	4.0	2.5	12.	4.0	4.0
13.	6.0	5.0	13.	5.0	3.5
14.	3.5	4.5	14.	5.0	6.5
15.	4.5	6.5	15.	4.0	5.5
16.	7.0	4.5	16.	2.5	-
17.	5.0	-	17.	5.0	5.0
18.	4.5	5.0	18.	6.0	5.0
19.	7.0	5.0	19.	5.0	6.5
20.	4.0	3.5	20.	4.0	4.0
21.	5.5	7.5	21.	3.5	5.0
22.	3.5	4.5	22.	6.5	7.0
23.	4.0	6.5	23.	4.5	3.5
24.	-	4.5	24.	8.0	2.5
25.	5.0	-	25.	4.5	6.5
26.	4.0	5.0	26.	9.5	5.0
27.	5.5	5.0	27.	4.5	7.0
27.	5.5	5.0	27.	4.5	7.0
29.	4.0	6.0	28.		4.5

1.2. Pre-test score frequencies of the two groups

Table 2: Pre-test score frequencies of the two groups

Experimental group				The control group			
		Frequency	Valid percent			Frequency	Valid percent
Valid	2.50	2	3.9	Valid	2.0	2	4.0
	4.00	9	17.6		4.00	6	13.3
	4.00	9	17.6		4.00	6	13.3
	4.50	9	17.6		4.50	5	11.1
	5.00	12	23.5		5.00	9	20.0
	5.50	3	5.8		5.50	6	13.3
	6.00	3	5.8		6.00	1	2.2
	6.50	3	5.8		6.50	2	4.4
	7.00	3	5.8		7.00	5	11.1
	7.50	3	5.8		8.00	1	2.2
7.50	3	5.8	8.00	1	2.2		
Total	29			100.0	8.00	1	2.2
Median = 5.00					9.50	1	2.2
				Total	45	100	
				Median = 5.00			

There appeared from the table that high frequencies of the 2 groups were at marks 4 and 5, and the experimental group had no very good students. Despite the wide range of scores, they were mainly at par and rather well under par value: 46, 9% students in the experimental group and 37, 6% in the control group. Highest frequencies of the both groups went to mark 5. Six out of 51 students in the experimental group got marks 7.0 and 8.0, whereas the number of the control group was 9 out of 45, which was equivalent to 11.6% and 19.9% respectively. Two students in the control group obtained excellent marks of 8.0 and 9.5. The percentage of students getting scores below average and that of the ones performing at good level shows that, in general, the English proficiency and vocabulary size of students of the control group was better than those of the control group.

Tables 1 and 2 reveal more detailed facts about the number of students sitting for pre-test as well as the results of each group in small sections.

In section 1 of the pre-test, students were required to write down 20 lexical items which they had learnt in three previous lessons, mainly the ones in unit 3. This section played the most important role in the test and was designed to serve the main purpose of checking students' memory and understanding information of the words: written form, meaning, word stress, and transcription. Most test-takers of both groups got high score for word and meaning, ranging from 16 to 20. 15 test-takers in the experimental group and 14 others in the control group reached maximum marks of 20. However, 6 in the former and 5 in the later groups showed very poor performance: They could write down only 10, 11 or even 8 single words compared to 20 words as required.

It was supposed that the learners did not know or remember word stress, or even had not idea about it because almost of them did not and could not identify stress of the language items that they had written down. The most common scores got for this part were 0, 2 and 3 out of 10.

The widespread situation in teaching and learning vocabulary in Vietnam is that for a long time the relation between a word and its sound has been neglected. This leads to the fact that many learners can write a word down but fail to say it in sound, or cannot recognize a word in oral communication as they can do in written form.

The results of section 2 of the test disclosed a fact that the majority of students did not know how to make use of the words they had remembered (i.e. to produce sentences or convey ideas). 31 out of 51 students in the experimental group and 4 out of 45 ones in the control group left paper blank in this section! That many language learners who could get high score in individual lexical items but could not produce a sentence seemed amazing but it was true to our learners. This was resulted from their low English language fluency and low ability of generating ideas.

A close look at section 3 exposed a fact that many of the students of the both groups did not have a good retention of the words that they had been introduced in to the previous lessons, especially business terms. 68% of students in the control group exceeded the average scores of this part whereas 54% of the students in the experimental group could do so.

4.3. Results of the post-test scores of the two groups and discussion

The posttest was delivered in week 8 of the study with guessing skills applied to students of the experimental group. The results of the test were demonstrated in the table below.

Table 3: Results of the post-test scores of the two groups

Experimental group (N = 68)			Control group (N = 67)		
Cases	Class K1	Class K2	Cases	Class B1	Class B2
1.	6.5	6.0	1.	5.0	4.0
2.	5.5	5.0	2.	6.0	5.5
3.	5.5	6.0	3.	5.0	5.0
4.	6.0	6.0	4.	5.5	4.5
5.	3.5	7.5	5.	5.5	4.5
6.	4.5	7.0	6.	5.0	5.0
7.	3.5	7.5	7.	7.5	5.5
8.	7.5	6.5	8.	6.0	6.0
9.	4.5	6.5	9.	7.0	7.0
10.	4.5	6.0	10.	-	6.0
11.	5.0	5.0	11.	6.0	-
12.	5.5	8.0	12.	7.0	-
13.	7.0	6.0	13.	6.0	5.0
14.	5.0	8.0	14.	4.0	4.5
15.	5.0	6.0	15.	7.0	6.0
16.	7.0	4.0	16.	5.0	-
17.	5.0	6.5	17.	6.0	6.5
18.	7.0	4.5	18.	-	7.0
19.	5.5	5.5	19.	5.0	-
20.	5.0	5.5	20.	5.5	-
21.	4.5	8.0	21.	4.5	4.5
22.	6.5	6.0	22.	6.0	5.5
23.	6.0	6.5	23.	5.5	-
24.	5.0	4.0	24.	6.0	5.0
25.	6.0	5.5	25.	5.0	-
26.	6.5	5.5	26.	4.5	6.0
27.	5.0	4.0	27.	5.0	5.5
28.	3.0	4.0	28.	-	-

All 67 students of the experimental group took the final test, and 45 out of 67 students in the control group did it. However, 5 students of the former group did not sit for pre-test so their test scores were not accepted to be analyzed for discussion. Tables 4 below compares mean the score and t-score of the students in the two groups.

4.4. Post-test score frequencies of the two groups

Table 4: Post-test score frequencies of the two groups

Experimental group				Control group			
Valid		Frequency	Valid percent	Valid		Frequency	Valid percent
		3.00	1		1.9		4.00
	3.50	2	3.9		4.50	6	13.3
	4.00	3	5.8		5.00	11	24.4
	4.50	5	9.8		5.50	8	17.8
	5.00	7	13.7		6.00	11	24.4
	5.50	7	13.7		6.50	1	2.2
	6.00	10	19.6		7.00	5	11.1
	6.50	7	13.7		7.50	1	2.2
	7.00	4	7.8		Total	45	100.0
	7.50	2	3.9	Median = 6.0			
	8.00	3	5.8				
	Total	28	100.0				

The exciting feature of the frequencies is that both groups demonstrated better results at the post-test compared to the pre-test. Instead of high frequencies at 4.0 - 4.5 - 5.0 at the pre-test, those at post-test were 5.0 - 5.5 - 6.0. Score range of the experimental group was wider, i.e. this group had more students of higher scores and lower scores than those of the control group. It can be seen that the number of very weak students in the experimental group was only 3, twice less than in the pre-test (6). However, it was this group that exceeded in number of above - average and good students. The highest scores of the pre-test fell into the control group, but the highest scores of the post-test went to the experimental group. A closer look into the subsections of the post-test will give a clearer insight of the test results.

Section 1 shows a progress in students' "concept" of word transcription and word stress. Having observed students' performing pre-test, the researcher noticed that students in both groups tended to ignore word

transcription and word stress and most of them did not meet the requirement of the test. Students in the experimental group got slightly higher scores than the ones in the control group. The most common score in this part of the pre-test was zero (0) whereas it was mark 4 (out of 10 marks - scale) for the post-test. This noticeable improvement might help to assume that using dictionary had positive affect on vocabulary retention of students of the experimental group.

Section 2 illustrated improvement in language production ability of students of both groups: they were able to generate some meaningful sentences from recalled lexical items to write a paragraph about a company as required by the test. Although the quality of their writing work was still limited, only 12 students of the experimental group and 5 students of the control group left the paper blank compared to 31 and 4 in pre-test.

Section 3 exemplified the difference in memory ability of students in both groups with scores varied from 1 to 9. Subgroup K2 of the experimental group did better than the rest (16 out of 28 test takers achieved marks from 6.5 to 9). All items in this section were based on the content of the course book so with the first letter provided in the clue sentence it was not difficult for the students to evoke the target hidden word. Also, scores of performers in the experimental group, in the whole test, were not noticeably higher than those of the ones in the control group.

V. Discussion

Concerning student' problem in retaining vocabulary when learning a foreign language, this quasi - experimental research was carried out to check the hypothesis "guessing has positive impact on increasing students' retention of vocabulary". In this last part of the thesis, the teacher - researcher would like to summaries the findings as well as discuss limitations of the research. The researcher also gives some suggestions for further study and classroom implications for teachers wanting to apply meaningful practice to their language learners.

5.1. Summary of major findings

The major findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

First, when learning vocabulary many students tended to try remembering the written form and meaning of words, ignoring other information such as phonetic transcription and word stress, i.e. the connection between sound and spelling of lexical items, which resulted in their ineffective recalling the words when necessary. Thus, their limited knowledge and understanding of words should be of the teacher's notice when presenting new words in the class. Secondly, students' knowledge of English was varied so the impact of the meaningful practice on each individual was not the same. Meaningful practice which served as pre - communicative preparation really worked with students whose background knowledge of English was. Practice exercises of sentence completion, matching, and fluency had made constructive assistance in putting new words in these students' long term memory. Thirdly, students of both the experimental group and the control group in this research were generally rather good at recalling hidden target words in provided sentences. This was just a success at the sentence level, not at a discourse level or in an open language context. However, this might be assumed that meaningful practice did, to some extent, make contribution to students' retention of vocabulary.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for further study

In the light of theoretical knowledge of teaching vocabulary to second language learners and the application of meaningful practice into my lessons at university, some success has been experienced. However, it was acknowledged that there were some inevitable limitations of the study.

Firstly, 8 weeks was not quite timely sufficient for an experiment to produce very persuasive results. If the time budget was expansive and there was a delayed test conducted four or six weeks after the application of these meaningful practices, the outcomes of participants could be more convincing.

Secondly, participants in this study were intact groups, not randomly assigned samples. This method of sampling was chosen for the sake of convenience because it was really difficult, if not impossible, to conduct a true experimental study in the context of a university. Therefore, some of the possible intervening variables such as students' motivation and task motivation were not controlled. For this reason, further students in the form of true experiments are needed to validate the impact of meaningful practice on students' vocabulary retention.

5.3. Classroom implications

Despite the limitations of this study it suggests some useful ideas of vocabulary teaching in the classroom. Firstly, increasing vocabulary is a key learning need identified by most learners. Secondly, the world, as we know, is changing quickly and the demand for a workforce with good English language competence to deal with international counterparts is increasing. These situations require teachers to actively seek out new, less time - consuming and more effective ways to teach vocabulary. Teachers need to expose learners to different learning strategies and apply appropriate types of language practice in the classroom and then find the ones which work best for them.

Learners whose natural language environment is limited will do better if they have access to some form - focused instruction and some fluency - focused practice. The teacher's comprehension - bases presentation of word together with the learners' meaningful and fluency practice can facilitate students' vocabulary retention to serve good preparation for their communication tasks. It is the teacher's job to identify the learning burden of each lexical item to decide what to teach in accordance with time budget, learners' needs and interest. Also, important and high frequency lexical items should be reviewed and tested regularly to avoid forgetting. It is also a strong suggestion that meaningful practice should be accompanied with other types of classroom practice in order to produce a better learning outcome in general and better vocabulary learning in particular.

References

- [1]. Allen, V., *Techniques in teaching vocabulary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- [2]. Brown, D.H, *Principles of language learning and teaching (4thed)*, New York: Longman, 2000.
- [3]. Brown, J.D. and Rodgers T.S (2002). *Doing Second Language Research* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- [4]. DeCarrico, J.S., *Vocabulary Learning and Teaching In M.Clece - Murca (ed), Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language 3rdv*, Boston. MA: Heinle & Heinle, 2001, 285-300.
- [5]. Dimond, L. & Gutlohn, L. *Teaching Vocabulary*, <http://www.readingrockets.org>, 2006.
- [6]. Dulay, H. Miller, L.and Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- [7]. Ellis, R., "Sources of variability in Interlanguage", *Applied Linguistics*, 6, 1985, 118 - 131
- [8]. Felder, R.M & Henriques, E.R., *Learning and Teaching styles in Second and Foreign Language Education*. Foreign Language Annals, 1995, 21-31.
- [9]. Alexander, F., *Understanding vocabulary*. November 2006 from <http://www.content.scholastic.com./browse/article.html>
- [10]. Gairs R. & Redman S., *Working with Words - A Guide to Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- [11]. Hollett, V. *Business Objectives* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- [12]. Hubbard, P., Jones, H. Thornton, B., Wheeler, R. *Training course for TEFL*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- [13]. Huckin, T., & Bloch, J., *Strategies for inferring word meaning in context: A cognitive model*. In T. Huckin, M. Haynes, & J. Coady (Eds.) *Second Language Reading and Vocabulary Acquisition*, London: Macmillan. 1993, 153-178.
- [14]. Hulstijn, J.H., *Memoric methods in foreign language vocabulary learning: Theoretical considerations and pedagogical implications*. In Coady, J. and Huckin, T. (Eds) *Second language Vocabulary Acquisition* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- [15]. Izumi, S., Bigelow, M., "Does output promote noticing and second Language acquisition?" *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 2000, 239 - 278.
- [16]. Jenkins, J.R., Stein, N.I., & WYsowski, K., "Learning Vocabulary through Reading American" *Educational Research Journal*, 21 (4), 1984, 767 - 787.
- [17]. Katamba, F. *English Words*, London and New York St Edmunds bury Press Ltd (in London) and Routledge (in New York), 1994.
- [18]. Lacey, C., Mahood, J., Trench, J., Vander pump, E. *Increase your vocabulary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- [19]. [19] Lessard - Clouston, M., "Language Learning Strategies: An Overview for L2 Teachers", *The Internet TEST Journal*, Vol. III, No. 12, December 1997, <http://iteslj.org>.
- [20]. Lewis, M., *The lexical approach - The state of ELF and a way forward*. Thomson and Heinle, 1993.
- [21]. McCarthy, M., *Vocabulary* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- [22]. Murray, H., *Working with Definitions in Nation, P., (Ed), New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.1994, 78-94.
- [23]. Nation, I.S.P., & Coady, J. *Vocabulary and Reading* In Carter, R.& McCarthy, M. (Eds), *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*, London: Longman, 1988, 97-110.
- [24]. Nation, P., *Teaching and learning vocabulary* New York: Newbury House, 1999.
- [25]. Nation, P., *New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary* Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1994

Nguyen Hien Luong. "Improving Students' Retention of English Vocabulary by Using Guessing New Words Through Context ". *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)* , vol. 9, no. 3, 2019, pp. 39-48.