

DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO ELEMENTARY ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate major difficulties in teaching vocabulary to elementary adult learners at the foreign language center of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities Ho Chi Minh City. 20 hypothetical difficulties reviewed in the literature were used as a theoretical guide for the study. The subjects included 18 teachers and 298 learners who were teaching and learning in the elementary classes of English at this center. The data obtained were analyzed in terms of frequency, percentage, mean score and standard deviation. The analysis of data indicated six major difficulties in teaching English vocabulary to elementary adult learners at this center. The most common difficulties were learners' inability to recall new words, popularity of rote learning of Vietnamese equivalents and ill-equipped classrooms. In the light of the main findings identified, some suggestions were offered to help improve the teaching of English vocabulary to elementary adult learners at this center.

Key words

Elementary adult learners, integrative motivation, introversion, teaching strategies, immediate context, physical classroom environment

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

According to the latest research, English has played a prominent part in Vietnam in recent years. As insisted in Do (2006), English proficiency is now seen as a vital requirement for employment as well as economic cooperation and development, especially in higher education either overseas or at home. The results from the study by Phan (2009) also indicated that English would bring people to an international environment, especially regarding employment and study. She also added that "English is of great importance for seeking jobs in the domestic labor market, especially good jobs and jobs in foreign business and joint ventures as well as a chance to be granted a scholarship" (p.178). In order to be understood in English well, one has to enrich their vocabulary regularly. As McCarthy (1992) showed, vocabulary is considered as "the single and biggest component of any language course" (p.iii). It is likely impossible to master a foreign language without learning vocabulary (Schmitt, 2008). A rich stock of vocabulary will help English language learners to be good at other language skills as well as convey their feelings, emotions and ideas to others easily.

However, vocabulary "has not always been recognized as priority in language teaching" Celce-Murcia (2001, p.285). In cases when vocabulary is taught in foreign language classes, it is often taught in a poor and boring way, for example, by presenting a list of new words. For that reason, it is worth drawing attention to teaching vocabulary, not only in foreign countries, but also in Vietnam. In the context of Vietnam, although there have been many

studies done on teaching and learning vocabulary in recent years, very few of them have concentrated on the context of the foreign language center of University of Social Sciences and Humanities (abbreviated as FLC-USSH). Nguyen (2006) & Huynh (2007) demonstrated the benefit of using games in teaching vocabulary. Pham (2006) conducted an investigation on vocabulary learning strategies of English majors. Vo (2008) examined the difficulties in teaching vocabulary, but to students of information technology. As a teacher at the FLC-USSH, the researcher experienced that a large number of learners whose English proficiency level was relatively low had great difficulty with vocabulary and regarded vocabulary as their greatest problem in learning English. Learning vocabulary is a time-consuming and boring activity to those learners. For that reason, vocabulary and the improvement of the teaching of vocabulary to adult learners at the elementary level is worthy of attention and research.

1.2 Aim of the study

The study is conducted to find out the major difficulties in teaching vocabulary to elementary adult learners of English at the FLC-USSH. On the grounds of the major difficulties that may be found, some solutions are suggested to help improve the teaching of English vocabulary to elementary adult learners at this center.

1.3 Research questions

According to the above research objectives, the following research question will be addressed:

1. What are the major difficulties in teaching vocabulary as perceived by teachers and elementary adult learners of English at the FLC-USSH?

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of vocabulary

The definition of vocabulary differed enormously from linguist to linguist. For example, according to Oxford Advanced Learners' dictionary, "vocabulary is defined as all the words that a person knows or uses; as all the words in a particular language". On the contrary, Ur (1996) defined vocabulary "as the words we teach in the foreign language" (p.7). A new item of vocabulary can be a single word or more than a single word such as a compound of two or three words. Pyles & Algae (1970) defined vocabulary in a quite different way. They insisted that "vocabulary is in words that sound and meanings inter-lock to allow us to communicate with one another and it is words that we range together to make sentences, conversations and discourses of all kinds" (as cited in Vo, 2008, p.1). It can be concluded that although a new vocabulary item is defined in a number of ways, its central focus is on all the words to be taught in the foreign language, which can be a single word or more than a single word. It implies that teaching a new vocabulary item might be closely related to teaching various aspects of a single word or more than a single word.

2.2. Aspects of vocabulary knowledge

According to Nation (2001), there are three key aspects of vocabulary knowledge as stated in the following table.

Table 1: Aspects of vocabulary knowledge (cited from Nation, 2001, p.27)

R = receptive knowledge, P= productive knowledge

Form	Spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	Written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?
	Word parts	R	What parts are recognizable in this word?
		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	Form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concept and referents	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	Grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?
	Collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use (register, frequency, etc.)	R	Where, when, and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

2.3. Aspects of teaching vocabulary

The three aspects of vocabulary knowledge identified in Table 1 sound significantly important in teaching vocabulary. It is known that a learner must know a great deal about each vocabulary item in order to use it well over and above the large vocabulary size (Schmitt, 2008). According to Schmitt, form and meaning are the most crucial aspects to acquire. In terms of form, Nation (2001) emphasized the importance of pronunciation, spelling and word parts. It is known that many beginning learners find it extremely difficult to pronounce a new word correctly the first time, especially for long and complex words. Additionally, as admitted by Nation (2001), “knowing a word can involve knowing it is made up of affixes and a stem that can occur in other words” (p.46). What should be taught in part of the word form could be word pronunciation, spelling, and word parts.

In addition to form, word meaning also helps learners express their mind easily and enhance their comprehension in the target language. The form-meaning connection assists learners to “retrieve the meaning when seeing or hearing the word form, or retrieve the word form when wishing to express the meaning” (Nation, 2001, p.47). It reveals that a word in one language may require several translations or convey different meanings in another language. In that case, the source of comprehending a word is its context.

Compared to meaning aspect, word use is deeply involved in the teaching of *grammatical functions*, *collocations*, and constraints on use to foreign language learners. According to Nation (2001), “in order to use a word, it is necessary to know what part of speech it is and what grammatical function it can fit into” (p.55). For example, *a beautiful girl* is correct but

**a girl beautiful is not.* For instance, if the word *woman* is taught, its plural form *women* should be also given. To sum up, it can be seen that teaching vocabulary has to concentrate on the important aspects of word knowledge which will equip learners with knowledge of form, meaning and use of the words being learned.

2.4. Elementary adult learners of English

Elementary adult learners are known to possess quite distinctive characteristics which strongly influence their foreign language learning. These apparent discrepancies can be explained in a number of ways. First, according to Kistler (2011), experience may possibly help adult learners enhance the learning process through connection between prior knowledge and their current learning. There would be more opportunities for adult learners to apply what they have experienced into their language learning. By doing so, Brown (2007) believed that learners would be given many opportunities to use language rather than knowledge of how language works. Second, it is extremely important to keep in mind that elementary adult learners need to be treated with respect because “most of English adult beginners strongly believe that they are not good learners” (Grundy, 2010, p.7). That is the reason why elementary adult learners tend to become “embarrassed by their lack of mastery of the language and develop a sense of inadequacy” (Light & Spada, 1998, p.42). In other words, the general tendency among elementary adult learners is to be filled with anxiety and lack of confidence in using English. Last but not least, as insisted in Mensah (2000) and Leberman, McDonald, & Doyle (2006), adult learners’ learning goal has a significant impact on their language learning. They would be highly motivated if their learning was directly related to their current needs. On the whole, the discussion demonstrates that learners’ experience, feelings of inadequacy, and learning goal have a profound effect on learning a foreign language for many adult learners of English.

2.5. Hypothetical difficulties in teaching English vocabulary to elementary adult learners

2.5.1. Difficulties from learners

To begin with, it is worth noting from the studies by Baljit (1999), Nguyen (2007), and Visnja (2008) that there is a tendency for adult learners to depend heavily on their mother tongue. Learners always have a great sense of not understanding any word unit without its translation into L1. Schmitt (2000), in his study, showed that it was also very common for adult learners to forget quickly what they had just learned and “adults may not have better memories than adolescents” (Ellis, 1992, p.109). Anxiety of adult learners also has a great effect on the teaching of vocabulary in the classroom. According to the research by Ellis (1996), “learners frequently experience language anxiety, a type of anxiety associated with attempts to learn a foreign language and communicate in it” (p.470).

Second, the results from a study by Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle & Watts (2006) supported the importance of repeated exposure and multiple sources of information in general vocabulary development. Apart from the factors identified above, learners’ motivation also has a significant effect on teaching vocabulary of a foreign language and is regarded as “the main excuse for success and failure of language learners” (Bassiri, 2011). From a standpoint of language learning, it was reported by Brown (2007) that integrative and instrumental motivation are those which directly influence vocabulary learning of adult language learners.

Integrative is identified as “an interest in foreign language, a desire to interact with native speakers of the target language culture, and positive attitudes towards these people and culture,” whereas instrumental is indicated as “a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowledge of a foreign language” such as improving an individual’s future employment opportunities or meeting the graduation requirement (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p.14, as cited in Sayadian & Lashkarian, 2010). Numerous previous studies have shown that instrumental motivation is perceived to be more important than integrative motivation in the EFL context. Learners’ personality is also considered to be important and plays “a major role in language learning success or failure” (Hicks, 2008, p.54). It is said that there are a wide range of personalities, but in terms of language learning there are only two basic types of personality - introverted and extroverted.

Third, lack of vocabulary knowledge remains the major obstacle to elementary adult learners. For the aspect of word form, there is a must for all foreign language learners to pronounce new vocabulary items correctly, specifically for long and complex words; and learn word spelling as well as word parts including prefixes, root and suffixes. In terms of word meaning, the most common difficulty facing most elementary adult learners is to learn lexical relations of a new word (for example its synonym, antonym, etc.) and to learn the meanings of a word through its immediate context. The aspect of use requires learners to study word grammatical functions and use the new word in the set of contexts in which the word might occur.

In short, as discussed earlier, particular difficulties from learners comprise several factors originated from both learners themselves and vocabulary knowledge. The first part points out six possible difficulties reviewed in the related literature, including learners’ habit of translation into L1, their inability to recall new words, their anxiety in communicating in English, their lack of exposure to English vocabulary, their lack of integrative motivation in learning English, and learners’ introversion. The second part concentrates on potential difficulties developing from word form, word meaning and word use.

2.5.2. Difficulties from teachers

Difficulties arising from teachers included those derived from teaching strategies and four approaches to vocabulary. The traditional approach is known as teaching vocabulary through a list of words and requires rote memorization. Contrary to the traditional method, the focus of the structural approach is to identify the meanings of a word by breaking the word into prefixes, root and suffixes. “When students encounter unfamiliar words, analyzing word structure can prove an effective way to find their meanings” (Orawiwatnakul, 2011). Aside from those discussed earlier, according to Sun & Zhou (2005), “the use of context clues plays a vital role in language acquisition” (p.49, as cited in Orawiwatnakul, 2011). Contextual evidence helps learners find out the meanings of the new words without a dictionary, but based on different contexts surrounding the words. If anything related to English was apparently boring and not enjoyable to learners, the use of context clues would probably be ineffective, or “when the surrounding words are not familiar, when the definite meaning is required, or when the word in question is a key word, using context clues might not be a good idea” (Orawiwatnakul, 2011). Compared to the others, the conceptual approach aims to integrate new knowledge with what students have known. In doing so, it may help learners

add the meaning of a new word to their existing concept and learners are predicted to remember the meaning of the new word longer. In addition to approaches to vocabulary, Visnja (2008) also asserted that the way teachers employ strategies to present and review the vocabulary in the classroom can also create difficulties for learners.

2.5.3. Difficulties from physical classroom environment

According to the study by Conway (2000, as cited in Hills & Epps, 2010), physical classroom environment included classroom technology, and classroom physical design (for example, classroom lighting, temperature, desk comfort, noise level, and seating arrangements, etc.). Physical settings sound very important, which can motivate or discourage many room occupants (Lackney, 1999, as cited in Lei, 2010). Earthman & Lemasters (2009) also confirmed that teachers in unsatisfactory classrooms usually get frustrated and neglect their teaching. It implies that the physical classroom environment (namely classroom technology and classroom physical design) might partly influence teaching a foreign language in general and teaching vocabulary in particular.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The teacher respondents included 18 out of 24 teachers who had experience in teaching English to elementary adult learners at the FLC-USSH. The learner respondents comprised 298 learners who were at the age of 18 or over and learning English in the elementary classes at this center by the time the study was carried out.

3.2. Instruments

In the current study, which is a survey, two questionnaires and interviews were employed to collect data. All of the response items in the questionnaires were specially designed as yes-no items and 5-point Likert scale items, with only two or three open items at the maximum. The interviews included four questions, aiming to help the researcher gain further insight into the issues being sought in the questionnaire to teacher respondents.

3.3. Procedure

The first questionnaire (Vietnamese version) was distributed to all learner respondents in the beginning of May 2014, while the second questionnaire was administered to teachers in the middle of May 2014. All the questionnaires to learners were collected immediately, but the questionnaires to teachers were gathered a few days later.

The interviews with teachers were conducted by the researcher at her teaching center soon after the questionnaires to teachers were collected. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese (about 20 minutes each) so as to encourage free responses from the respondents. All the interviews were conducted near the end of May 2014, nearly at the end of the course, because it was believed that after 12 weeks of teaching, teachers would understand more about their own class and learners, and therefore, the data obtained would be also more reliable.

3.4. Data analysis

The data obtained was analyzed to fulfill two main goals of the study. The first objective was to find out teachers' major difficulties in teaching English vocabulary to elementary adult learners at the FLC-USSH. The second objective was to gather teachers' and learners' recommendations about the problems. In order to achieve such a purpose, the data was analyzed in terms of frequency, percentage, mean score and standard deviations. All data collected from the teacher interviews and all responses provided from yes-no and open questions in the questionnaires to teacher and student respondents were coded and calculated in terms of frequency and percentage and were presented in both charts and tables. However, all question items designed on a five point Likert scale were specially analyzed in terms of mean score and standard deviations. For the questionnaires to teacher respondents, the mean score above or equal to 3.0 showed low frequency of strategies employed to present and review the vocabulary, but below 3.0 demonstrated high frequency of using these strategies. For the questionnaires to learner respondents, the mean score revealed the degree of difficulties facing learners in learning English vocabulary. The mean score above or equal to 3.0 indicated that the factors in this section were unproblematic to learners, but conversely, below 3.0 were understood as particularly difficult factors for learners. All data analyzed in terms of mean score and standard deviations were presented in tables.

Overall, the data was interpreted on the basis of two main objectives of the study and led to the answers to the research questions and the findings of the study.

4. Results and discussion

This part of the paper presents the analysis of data, discussion and summary of main findings collected from the questionnaire to teachers, questionnaire to learners and teacher interviews. The main goal is to explore major difficulties in teaching vocabulary to elementary adult learners of English at the FLC-USSH. The results were used to answer the research question.

4.1. Test of reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal-consistency reliability of the study. As asserted in Brown (2001), Cronbach's alpha "provides an accurate internal-consistency estimate, and it can be used with answers that are coded dichotomously (right or wrong; yes or no) or are on a scale (such as a Likert scale)" (p.173). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of the internal consistency of all *yes-no* and *Likert scale* items asked in the questionnaires to teachers and learners. The alpha reliability analyses of the statements included in the questionnaires to teacher and learner respondents are shown below.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of the statements included in the questionnaire to teacher respondents

Statements	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
a1→a12	0.7530
b1→b5	0.8175
b6→b8	0.7407
b9→b18	0.7446
b19→b27	0.8221
c1→c3	0.8759
Average	0.7923

As Table 2 shows, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability estimate for 42 items (not including the open item and 4 items regarding demographic information) asked in the questionnaire to teacher respondents turns out to be 0.7923. This indicated that the data obtained from the questionnaires to teachers were very reliable.

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of the statements included in the questionnaire to learner respondents

Statements	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
a1→a12	0.7469
a13→a24	0.7685
b1→b5	0.7084
b6→b15	0.8132
b16→b24	0.7830
Average	0.7640

Table 3 revealed that the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability estimate for 48 items (not including 3 open items and 3 items concerning demographic information) asked in the questionnaire to learner respondents is 0.7640. It can be concluded that the statements in the questionnaire to learners were highly reliable.

Overall, the statements included in two sets of questionnaires are within an acceptable range of reliability.

4.2. Discussion of results and their significance

4.2.1. Difficulties from learners

From the data analysis, it can be concluded that teachers could run into several difficulties originated from learners during their teaching process, as depicted in Figure 1 below.

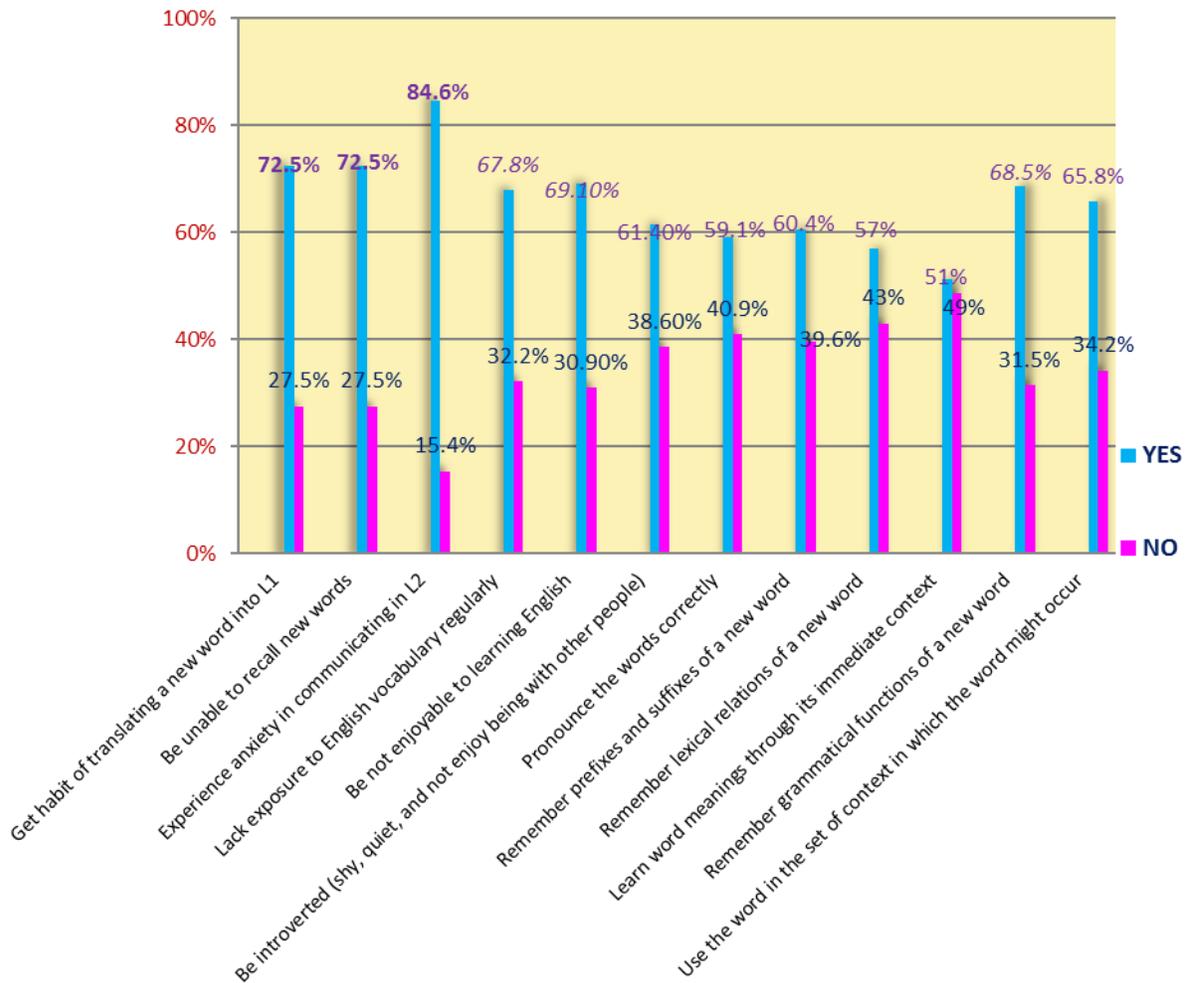


Figure 1: Difficulties arising from learners

The general trend seen obviously in Figure 1 illustrated that the columns of *yes* responses were much higher than those of *no* responses. It represented the fact that most of the participants had difficulty in learning English vocabulary. The largest proportion was for those experiencing anxiety in English communication (84.6%). The number of learners who could not remember new words and had the habit of translating words into Vietnamese was slightly lower (both at 72.5%). It was also very surprised to see that 69.1% of the sample showed no interest in learning English. Moreover, of all the people surveyed, 67.8% revealed that they lacked exposure to English vocabulary regularly while 68.5% felt a sense of boredom with words' grammatical functions. In brief, the results proved the existence of English communication apprehension, inability to recall new words, and rote learning of Vietnamese equivalents among elementary adult learners at the FLC-USSH.

In order to find out the degree of the difficulties found in Figure 1 earlier, the participants were requested to respond to 12 question items which were especially designed on a 5-point Likert scale: from most difficult (1) to least difficult (5). A mean score below 3.0 implied that

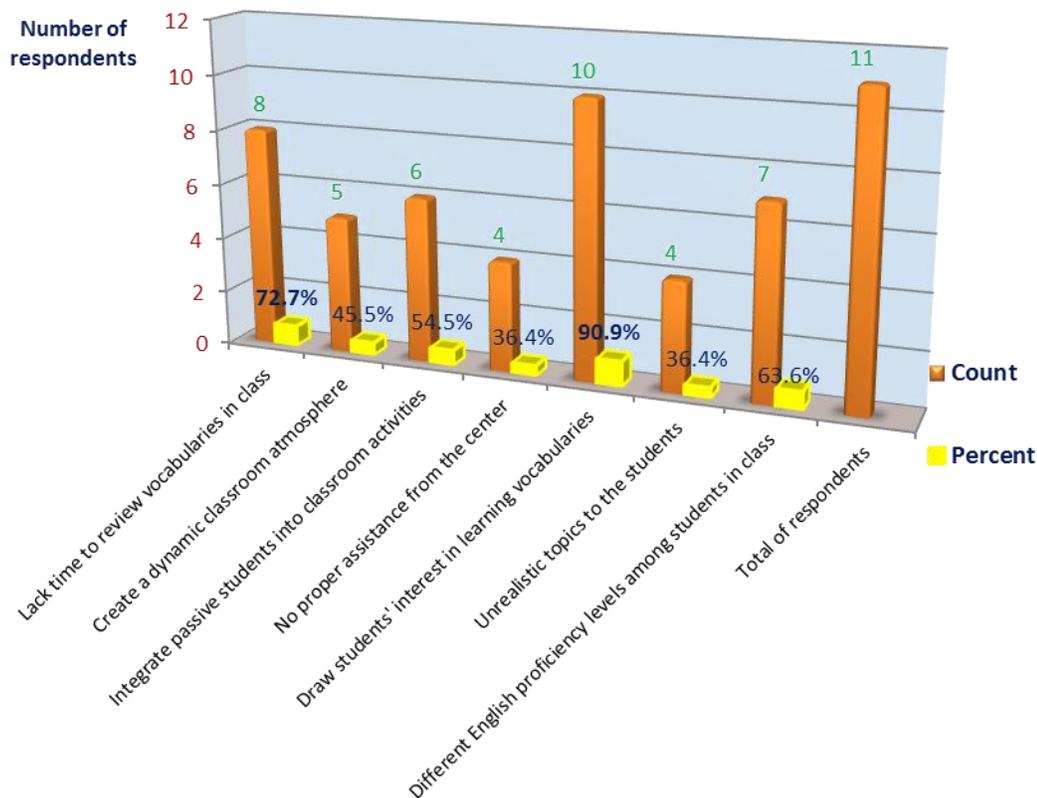


Figure 2: Further difficulties from teachers

As provided in Figure 2 above, the most particular difficulties that teacher respondents might experience were lack of time to review the vocabulary in class (72.7%) and attracting learners' interest in learning vocabulary (90.9%). As recommended by the learner respondents, 89.4% of the learners desired to learn vocabulary through English songs, vivid illustrations and practical examples. However, because of limited time, teachers at this center tend to request their learners to review vocabulary by themselves outside the classroom. This accidentally results in ignorance of vocabulary among teachers and learners. The present findings of the study also demonstrated that teaching word meanings by providing Vietnamese equivalents seems very common and far preferable, while many learner respondents did not favor learning a list of new words by rote because it was very boring, tiring, and exhausting. Saying it differently, the traditional method was seemingly not enjoyable to many elementary adult learners at the FLC-USSH. The survey showed that oral repetition, real objects, diagrams, vivid illustrations and regular review of learned words were ideally suited to elementary learners.

4.2.3. Difficulties from physical classroom environment

The data collected from the interview provided other likely difficulties from the physical classroom environment. The answers of 15 teacher respondents are summarized in Figure 3 below.

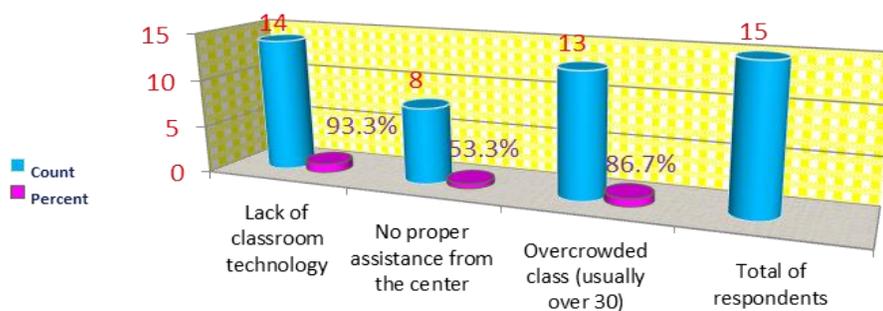


Figure 3: Difficulties from physical classroom environment

The chart indicated three major obstacles derived from the physical classroom environment. 93.3% of the teacher respondents had difficulty with lack of classroom technology when teaching English at the FLC-USSH. According to the analysis of recommendations from teachers, 55.6% of the sample expected some improvement in classroom technology at this center. As Figure 3 depicts, the second difficulty that teachers might suffer was overcrowding in English language classrooms (86.7%). Such an overcrowded class may prevent teachers from approaching every learner for advice and mistake correction. Only 53.3% of the respondents were deeply concerned about proper assistance from the center. To sum up, according to our investigation, classroom technology and classroom physical design greatly influenced teaching methods employed in class. The survey found that there were very few items of teaching facilities available for foreign language classrooms at the FLC-USSH (e.g. cassette players, microphones, blackboards, tables, etc.). The number of USB cassette players and lab rooms were very limited at this center. Moreover, there were no projectors to be in use in all foreign language classes. Moreover, class overcrowding was found to be an obstacle to teachers approaching every learner for constant advice and mistake correction.

5. Conclusions

The study has enabled us to gain further insight into the issues to be researched. The data analyzed pointed out certain difficulties in teaching vocabulary as perceived by teachers and learners at this center. First, the results proved the existence of English communication apprehension, inability to recall new words and rote learning of Vietnamese equivalents among elementary adult learners at the FLC-USSH. The present findings also demonstrated the popularity of teaching word meanings by providing Vietnamese equivalents.

Classroom technology and classroom physical design had special effects on the methods to be employed. The amount of teaching facilities available for foreign language classrooms at this center is extremely limited. Poorly equipped classrooms accompanied by class overcrowding resulted in an obstacle to teachers approaching every learner for constant advice and mistake correction, as well as lesson planning.

The findings of the study are of great importance to teachers and administrators in improving teaching of vocabulary to elementary adult learners at the FLC-USSH and helping learners learn English better.

5.1 For the administrators

First, lack of classroom technology was proved to be a big barrier to teaching vocabulary at the FLC-USSH. Most foreign language classrooms at this center are only equipped with unmovable tables, a blackboard, and CD players (just a few USB cassette players). There is no other equipment useful for teaching vocabulary such as computers, projectors, posters, etc. Although all classrooms are already installed with a projector screen, projectors are not allowed to be in use. This prevented teachers from using pictures, video or films to teach vocabulary. Hence, in order to help enhance teaching efficiency, some improvement of classroom facilities should be made.

Second, classroom overcrowding was found to be totally ineffective for learning a foreign language. According to the survey, the number of learners in an elementary class was normally over 30, which is not very suitable for learning English. It was thus suggested cutting down this figure in order that every learner can approach their teacher for advice easily and vice versa. Moreover, the administrators should provide teachers with more proper assistance, for instance free course books and audios, photocopies, supplementary materials, a free library card, and so on.

5.2 For teachers

The findings suggest that learners' anxiety in English communication was a big trouble facing teachers in teaching vocabulary to elementary adult learners at the FLC-USSH. It is evident that fear is provoked when learners are asked to speak English in front of class, which partly prevents them from joining classroom activities. Therefore, removing learners' fear of speaking English in front of people and avoiding troublesome situations during the class was of great help. Teachers firstly should reduce their speed of speaking English in class due to learners' low proficiency. It is also necessary to let learners know that making mistakes is unavoidable in learning a foreign language. A warm classroom atmosphere should be created so as to help learners overcome their fear. Such a classroom must be quite friendly, encouraging and motivating. In order to create such a classroom, it is suggested that teachers use songs and games regularly. For the songs, the lyrics chosen must be related to the topic and grammar being learned. Learners should be divided into groups to sing the songs along with many illustrations for the songs like posters, clothes or body language. As for games, teachers can provide a wide range of games before and after the lesson, or encourage learners to design a kind of vocabulary game according to the topic being learned. Telling jokes and using a series of comic sketches from a television program or movie seem highly efficient for building up such a classroom. After the movie or the story, learners can be required to work in groups to rebuild the story by their own words and illustrations. In general, teachers should increase cooperation among learners in class and establish good relationships with their learners.

Further obstacles in the current study relate to learners' habit of learning Vietnamese equivalents by rote and their inability to remember new words. As noted in the review of the literature, rote learning cannot help learners facilitate long term retention of word meanings. It is, therefore, recommended that vocabulary instructions focus on both definitional and contextual information about word meanings. As for definitional information, teachers can provide L1 equivalents of the word together with its synonyms, antonyms, and word family

or word parts. Contextual information may include context (the situation in which the discourse is produced) and co-text (the actual text surrounding any given lexical item). Teachers can provide their learners many contextualized examples of the words, which might be taken or adapted from authentic materials in order to help learners increase exposure and practice with the words to be learned. Discourse-grounded activities are very varied, including stories, informative texts, cartoons, interactive role plays and problem-solving tasks. Informative text concentrates on the excerpts selected from spoken or written texts where the target word is used. Interactive role plays aim to find out the differences in language, culture and history between L1 and the target language. Learners are required to play the same part in the role play in their L1 and the target language so as to identify the target language vocabulary needed to carry out the role play in that target language. Problem-solving tasks consist of a wide range of activities, for instance retelling, preparing summaries, preparing a class publication of essays, poems, and so forth. The main purpose of the activities is to help learners review and reuse new vocabulary in meaningful and contextualized practice because constant review is of great help to elementary adult learners.

In order to avoid rote learning of Vietnamese equivalents, it is very necessary for teachers to know what their learners are really interested in so as to select attractive and stimulating activities ideally suited to their needs and interests. The main materials to be in use should meet learners' requirements, providing them with more opportunities to use English in real-life situations, probably inside and outside of the classroom. Such a material should include color illustrations and many photographs to stimulate appearance. Its contents must be new and different to help learners gain a number of language skills. In addition to the textbook, other updated supplementary materials alongside with visual aids and word illustrations should be provided. It is also essential to help learners reduce language anxiety and remind them about the importance of English for their further career. Teachers should assist their learners to remove uncertainties about their English competence by providing praise and encouragement commonly. The lessons should not be taught in a regular way but must be changed from time to time. The activities should also be new and updated every day, being different from the previous ones. According to Pham (2006), these activities should not be too difficult or too easy compared to the learners' current level since adult learners are easily discouraged and frustrated.

5.3 For learners

Lack of conditions to rehearse what they have learned also stopped them from improving their English and relieving their language anxiety. Therefore, it is suggested that learners should take chances to practise English as much as possible. They should work in groups and practise English regularly with their group members outside the classroom. Moreover, it is also very fruitful to increase exposure to English everyday through some such factors as music, song lyrics, internet, radio news, newspaper, magazines, television, reading stories, etc. Above all, before memorization, learners have to make sure that they can pronounce the words correctly. By doing so, it is believed that learners can remove their fear of learning English as a difficult language day by day. Generally, no one (including their teacher) can help them progress without their own effort.

6. Recommendations for further study

To begin with, the current study only concentrated on three major sources of difficulty in teaching vocabulary, so further research can place emphasis on other potential sources of difficulty.

Second, the focus of the study was on learners with low English proficiency level. Therefore, further research can examine those whose English proficiency level is a lot higher.

Third, the sample size of the present study was relatively small, including 298 learners and 18 teachers at the FLC-USSH. Thus, it is recommended that the sample size in future studies be expanded to increase the reliability of the findings.

After all, the study was only conducted at the FLC-USSH. The population of the study just included teachers and learners from English foreign language classrooms at this center. Accordingly, it is suggested that future studies can consist of teachers and learners from many other educational institutions.

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