Investigation and Analysis of the Influencing Factors of English Vocabulary Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: Teaching and learning of English vocabulary are the most basic parts in the whole process of English acquisition. Based on the result analysis of an extensive on-line questionnaire about the vocabulary teaching situation among some Chinese and foreign teachers, this paper points out the existing problems in college English vocabulary teaching and learning. The corresponding vocabulary learning strategies are proposed to stimulate students' interest in English vocabulary learning, enhance the flexibility of vocabulary learning and use, and thus improve the effect of English vocabulary teaching and learning.

Keywords: Vocabulary; English Teaching and Learning; Influencing Factors.

INTRODUCTION
On-line Questionnaire

As the basis of language learning, vocabulary is not supposed to be underestimated. Vocabulary learning is a long-term and difficult process, thus how to effectively memorize English vocabulary has always been a problem for numerous Chinese English majors [1]. In order to deeply study the factors affecting English vocabulary learning, the authors conducted a web questionnaire which is about the influencing factors of English vocabulary learning and new vocabulary memorizing methods.

A total of 135 Chinese English majors filled out the questionnaire. These students come from different universities such as Beijing Normal University, Sichuan International Studies University, Southwest University, Central China Normal University and North China Electric Power University. The participation of English majors from different universities makes the results of this survey more fair and objective. Therefore, the conclusion and analysis are more convincing.

Learning Interest

Through this questionnaire, it can be seen that most of the participants' English vocabulary is about 5,000 to 9000, and only a small number of students can achieve a vocabulary of 10,000 or more. In fact, there is still a big gap between Chinese English majors and native English speakers. A question from the questionnaire reveals the reason for this phenomenon. Up to 68% of participants are going to memorize only 20 English words per day, and 20.74% of participants are going to memorize 20 to 50 English words per day. What caused such a low memory's capacity? At the root of it, just as the saying goes: "interest is the best teacher." According to the survey, more than half of the students think that English vocabulary learning is rather boring. They are not interested in memorizing English words, and they force themselves to do it only for fulfilling the learning tasks. There are a host of English vocabulary learning researchers who put the learners' learning interest at the forefront. For example, Zhang Yuchun, he clearly pointed out the importance of stimulating students' interest in learning English vocabulary in Application of Learning with Interest in Teaching of College English Vocabulary, putting forward that "to stimulate learning interest with humorous examples, associative memorizing method, and cultural background knowledge; to enhance learning interest with vivid pictures, body language, and real context." All in all, vocabulary learning must not become boring, and stimulating students' interest in learning English vocabulary is especially significant. Only in this way can students memorize English vocabulary effectively and use them properly.

Learning Approaches

It can be seen from the questionnaire that more than half of the participants still use the most traditional method of memorizing English words (repeated recitation). In fact, this is the reason why a great

number of students deem that English vocabulary learning is very boring. At the same time, many students accumulate English words by reading text resources such as English novels or magazines. This method is preferable to traditional memorizing method. In addition, the English courses offered by school are still one of the main ways for many participants to learn English vocabulary. It is worth mentioning that more and more students are using the Internet to learn English words. They download a variety of English vocabulary APPs to complete daily quantitative reciting tasks. There are a great deal of interesting pictures and videos in these APPs to help students deepen their understanding of the meaning of many words. As a result, the web app has already gained an irreplaceable place in English word learning by its unique charm.

Difficulties in Memorizing English words

According to the survey, inconspicuous word memory effect, confusion in structurally similar words, and secluded meaning of familiar words are the three most difficult problems for English vocabulary learners. The inconspicuous word memory effect is very obvious, and a host of students feel that they forget words quickly. The German psychologist Ebbinghaus found that forgetting begins immediately after memory, and the process of forgetting is not uniform [2]. The initial forgetting speed is very fast, and then gradually slows down. Based on his research results, he proposed the famous Ebbinghaus memory forgetting curve. Applying this curve to English vocabulary learning can effectively help learners memorize English words. Some English vocabulary APPs has fully utilized the rule of this curve to provide users with reasonable and efficient English word memorizing and review plans. As the number of users of these vocabulary APPs increases, the inconspicuous word memory effect will be hopefully overcome. The second difficulty is the confusion in structurally similar words. There are a great number of words in English that are very similar in structure, thus they are very confusing. For example, the words complement and compliment differ by only one letter, but their meanings are completely different. Huang Yongan clearly pointed out in Preliminary Study of English Structurally Similar Words that "in order to prevent spelling mistakes and ambiguity, it is necessary to carefully observe structurally similar English words and find out their general laws." Therefore, accurately memorizing structurally similar English words is supposed to be done to overcome such a difficulty [3]. The third difficulty is the secluded meaning of familiar words which means a commonly used English word has other meanings that are less useful. Here is an example. The word "accident" usually means an unpleasant event, especially in a vehicle, that happens unexpectedly and causes injury or damage. However, it has a relatively rare meaning. It can also express the meaning of opportunity. The second example is the

word "spell." The common meaning of this word is to say or write the letters of a word in the correct order, while the secluded meaning of it is that something, usually bad, happens. There are numerous common words in English that have relatively rare meanings. Based on this point, learners are obliged to memorize the meanings of one word as much as possible. When reading English articles, the learners are also not supposed to understand some unfamiliar words only by their own habitual thoughts. The correct approach is to combine context with words to understand the meaning of unknown words. Otherwise, the wrong understanding will eventually lead to fail to grasp the meaning of the article correctly. In addition to the above three difficulties, there are also other factors can be seen in the survey such as inaccurate spelling of words and difficulty in memorizing long words are also causing trouble to many Chinese English majors. Learning English words is not an easy task, but it is by no means difficult to learn. As long as learners master the rules of learning and memorizing English words scientifically and reasonably, they will succeed.

New Vocabulary Memorizing Methods

The new vocabulary memorizing methods are efficient and practical approaches to memorize English words, represented by associative memorizing method, divergent memorizing method, prosody memorizing method, contextual memorizing method and mind-map memorizing method[4]. In the questionnaire, it can be understood that a large number of participants have already learned about new vocabulary memorizing methods, and firmly believe that this innovative memorizing method can effectively help them learn English words. Among these new methods, the most popular one is the associative memorizing method. In A Study of Effectiveness of Memorization through Association for Freshmen on Vocabulary Learning, Zhang Xiaoyu conducted an associative memorizing experiment towards 74 freshmen at university. The experimental results verified the validity of the associative memorizing method which is an efficient memorizing method that conforms to cognitive psychology, linguistic theory, and human brain information processing and memory laws. For example, the word "schedule" means planning. Utilizing the associative memorizing method, learners can memorize the word in this way: Chinese Pinyin "che du s le" means cars are blocked, so the original plan or arrangement cannot be carried on, then learners reorganize these Chinese Pinyin to get the word "schedule." This method can strengthen students' impression of a certain word, and it is of great help to students to learn words by themselves. The second method is the divergent memorizing method, which mainly uses human divergent thinking to help learners memorize words, and is especially helpful for learning new words systematically. For instance, when a student

is memorizing the word "volcano", the second word he or she will learn is "eruption", and the third word will be "lava," because volcano eruption is going to produce lava. Such a systematical learning method is not only going to arouse students' interest in learning, but also has a better memory effect than traditional memory method. Divergent memorizing method has another advantage which is that students can learn the words as well as their fixed match at the same time. The third method is the prosody memorizing method. As the name implies, this method uses word pronunciation rules to achieve a better memory effect. The characteristic of it is that a word is divided into several parts, and then learners learn to remember this word by putting its pronunciation together. In this way, the learners' auditory memory will be enhanced. When students use this method to learn new words, not only can they memorize the words correctly, but also learn their correct pronunciation at the same time, which is a matter of killing two birds with one stone. The fourth one is the contextual memorizing method. In the article how to expand English vocabulary, Zhang Lixia pointed out that the contextual memorizing method is a method of memorizing English words based on these factors such as sentence meaning, context and causality. This method allows students to use interesting contexts to memorize English words so that learning words is no longer boring. In addition, it has a great advantage, that is, learners can learn how to use a word correctly while memorizing it, thus the inappropriate use of words can be effectively avoided. The final method is mind-map memorizing method which is mainly used to memorize cognate words. It uses a tree diagram of mathematics, starting from a certain root and extending to several words with the same root but different meanings. By using this method, learners can accurately memorize cognate words, and avoid the confusion caused by the same root words.

Each of these new vocabulary memory methods described above have their own advantages. In practice, they are supposed to be used comprehensively instead of only focusing on a certain memory method. In order to achieve a better memory effect, students are supposed to use these methods flexibly and synthetically.

Results Analysis of Interviews with Foreign and Chinese English Teachers
Teaching status
Hu Chundong, a professor at Beijing normal university, believed that "vocabulary teaching in the broad sense is the whole English teaching." Vocabulary learning is worthy of attention. A relatively sufficient vocabulary is the fundamental guarantee for fluent use of English in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, English teachers should pay great attention to English vocabulary teaching. However, nowadays,

many English teachers only pursue the rapid development of communicative goals, and overemphasize the rapid improvement of ability of reading and writing. As a result, it neglects the teaching and training of vocabulary, which affects the possibility of English learners furthering their English study.

Major Problems
Through interviews with a number of Chinese and foreign English teachers and surveys of hundreds of college students' English vocabulary learning situation, there are several common problems that affect English learners' vocabulary building.

First of all, the different basic forms of English and Chinese words are one of the original causes of difficulties of English vocabulary learning and memory. The English language belongs to the Indo-European language family, it is a kind of Hypotaxis Language（Hypotaxis: The dependent or subordinate construction or relationship of clauses with connectives.）. Its words are made up of 26 unchangeable letters. The changes of 26 letters including recombination and twists and turns have created numerous close words, synonyms, and homophones in English vocabulary. This unconsciously puts great pressure on English learners and English teachers in terms of vocabulary learning and teaching. Usually，English teachers only give students some specific constructive method of English words, but neglect to explain the formation of this constructive method. This leads to a lack of generality which can be applied to deep vocabulary learning. Some teachers only tell students that a certain root plus a certain affix can form a new word, but do not explain the use of these roots and affixes from the perspective of lexicology. This is not good for students to master the formation of English vocabulary. To a certain extent, students' vocabulary knowledge will be confused, which is not conducive to the in-depth teaching and learning of vocabulary. Chinese English learners who are accustomed to square Chinese characters sometimes feel helpless when they need to change their way of thinking to learn the complicated English vocabulary composed of 26 boring letters. Moreover, each word is composed of 26 unchanging letters, which are confusing and cause visual aesthetic fatigue easily. This is one of the reasons why many Chinese English learners cannot persist in vocabulary learning for a long time

Secondly, just as the saying goes: "use your mind and you will make progress, or you will fail". Compared with native English speakers, Chinese English learners have fewer opportunities to use new English words in a timely manner after learning them or to encounter them again [5]. In the same way, English teachers only explain new words they meet in the textbook, and then they will not repeat the explanation

to students if they do not meet again. In addition, many English teachers urge students to learn words by dictating English words. However, teachers often dictated the words only once, and found that the students remembered the words well and dictated the other words the next time. In fact, this only enables students to remember the words temporarily. After dictation, students will not review again, and soon forget again. If the new vocabulary cannot be consolidated in time, then English vocabulary learners will fall into a vicious circle of learning the new words and forgetting the old words soon. In the long run, English learners cannot enlarge their vocabulary at last. Therefore, the lack of appropriate language environment and the lack of new vocabulary contact and repetition rate are also the important reason for the rapid forgetting of English vocabulary.

In addition, many English learners only memorize the Chinese meaning of English words mechanically when they learning new words. They do not pay more attention to the specific meaning of words in the English context. The same is true for many English teachers, who simply and directly tell students the Chinese meaning of English words when they encounter new words, and do not explain them by English sentences or contexts at all. In this way, teachers' workload will be much less, but it will not only make English learners feel that learning English vocabulary is very boring, but also make them unable to accurately and comprehensively understand the meaning of English words. Generally, an English word always has multiple Chinese meanings. If you come across a new word just to remember one meaning of it quickly and easily, then you need to repeat the word again when you meet other meanings of the word. Such a vocabulary learning method can only get half the result with twice the effort, but in fact, it indirectly increases the learning burden of vocabulary learners.

Finally, many English learners want to improve their English in a short time. On the contrary, the learning and accumulation of vocabulary cannot be achieved quickly and easily. Many Chinese college students, in order to pass the CET-4 and CET -6 or other English tests have bought very thick vocabulary books and want to rapidly increase their vocabulary so that they can pass all kinds of English tests. But each time they gave up because it was boring and had little effect. Over and over again, it is still not effective, which will reduce English learners' interest in vocabulary learning and make them dislike and reject English vocabulary learning. In the end, not only do English learners fail to improve their English quickly, but this hinders their further English learning motivation.

Methods and Strategies

Through the analysis of the suggestions given by many Chinese and foreign teachers, there are some common and effective methods for English vocabulary learning.

Firstly, in order to learn English vocabulary deeply, it is necessary for English learners to understand the composition of English vocabulary. The most basic methods, such as derivation and affix of English words, can help English learners remember a large number of English words accurately and efficiently. In addition, English teachers should also explain to students the general word-formation methods in English vocabulary, so that students can understand the formation of English vocabulary in essence, and thus make a comprehensive study of it. English teachers should also explain to students the composition of English vocabulary from the perspective of English lexicology, and use a large number of examples to enable students to master English word-formation. In this way, students can use word-formation to learn vocabulary when they encounter new words, which is convenient and effective. This method can make English learners to learn the composition of vocabulary fundamentally, so that the vocabulary can be firmly remembered by English learners. Moreover, after being familiar with word formation, English learners can also guess the meaning of new words through word formation and quickly master new words.

Secondly, almost all language learners usually use associative and divergent memorizing methods to memorize English vocabulary. Many vocabulary reference books and mobile phone vocabulary learning software in the Chinese market now use associative and divergent vocabulary memorizing methods. For example, teachers can present the short videos or pictures using associative memory in some English vocabulary learning software in advance, which is a good vocabulary teaching method. This method avoids the tedium of memorizing words and makes them more vivid and interesting, so that English learners are more likely to remember the words and not easy to forget them. In English classes, English teachers can also use vocabulary association to teach English vocabulary. This will make the course more vivid, and make the vocabulary teaching more interesting, and also can mobilize the students' enthusiasm to learn English vocabulary. As a result, the efficiency of English lessons and students' vocabulary learning will be improved.

Another strategy is to learn English vocabulary through English articles and contexts. The biggest advantage of this method is that English learners can understand the specific meaning of English words accurately through the context. They can also learn how

to use the words accurately from the discourse. So, English learners can not only remember the spelling of words, but also understand the meaning of the words and use the words appropriately. In the class, English teachers should not only talk about the meaning of important words, but also put the words in the article for students to learn. English teachers should also apply this excellent method to English teaching so that students can fully master English words.

Finally, there are some interesting and vivid ways for English learners to learn vocabulary through playing, such as making English word cards，watching English movies and using English-Chinese dictionaries flexibly. These methods are very flexible. For example, watching English movies can create a real English learning environment for English learners. This will enable learners to understand how native English speakers use English words, and summarize their own feelings and experiences. In this way, they will get twice the result with half the effort. English teachers can also play cherry-picked short English video clips in class and pick out important words to explain. Moreover, making English word cards and using English-Chinese dictionary can help English learners fully understand the multiple meanings of an English word, thus reducing the trouble by repeatedly learning a word.

CONCLUSION

As Chinese and English are fundamentally different, Chinese English learners will inevitably encounter many difficulties in the part of vocabulary learning. Although the methods mentioned above cannot be applied to all vocabulary learning and English learners, it should be emphasized that these methods and strategies must be used synthetically and flexibly. A single method cannot deal with English vocabulary which is relatively complex. Therefore, English teachers must integrate these methods and use them in the classroom in order to achieve the best results. Moreover, these methods and strategies have certain application scope and limitations, so English learners and teachers should use these methods flexibly to achieve the effect of one plus one greater than two. It's also a recipe and shortcut for learning English vocabulary. English learners should not be too hasty and pay attention to the natural process of language acquisition. After learning new vocabulary, it is impossible for English learners to master them well if they cannot review or use them before forgetting them. Only by constantly reviewing and using English vocabulary frequently can English learners make use of them and never forget them for lifetime.

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