

## สิ่งที่ผู้เรียนคิดเกี่ยวกับแบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์

What do Students Think about Vocabulary Exercise?

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### บทคัดย่อ

คำศัพท์จัดได้ว่าเป็นหนึ่งในปัญหาสำคัญของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ วิธีนึงที่จะช่วยผู้เรียนให้สามารถเรียนภาษาอังกฤษให้ดีขึ้น จะต้องเสริมความรู้ด้านคำศัพท์ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการทำแบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์ ซึ่งมีแบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์จำนวนมากหลายประเภท แต่ละประเภทแตกต่างกัน ซึ่งอาจไม่เหมาะสมกับผู้เรียนทั้งนี้เพราะครุ่นเครียดว่าผู้เรียนมีความคิดเห็นอย่างไรต่อการทำแบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์ในแต่ละประเภท ดังนั้นงานวิจัยนี้จึงมุ่งเน้นที่จะสำรวจความคิดเห็นของผู้เรียนที่มีต่อการทำแบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์ในแต่ละประเภท กลุ่มตัวอย่างได้แก่ นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 จำนวน 130 คน จากคณะเทคโนโลยี มนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ และวิทยาศาสตร์ เครื่องมือในการวิจัยได้แก่ แบบสอบถาม และแบบสัมภาษณ์ ซึ่งเน้นในเรื่องของประเภท แบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์แต่ละประเภทช่วยในการพัฒนาการเรียนคำศัพท์ด้านใดบ้างอาทิเช่น การรับรู้คำ การเข้าใจความหมาย และการนำไปใช้ และแบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์ในแต่ละประเภทช่วยในการพัฒนาคำศัพท์อย่างไร ผลการวิจัยพบว่าแบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์ แบบเติมคำ แบบจับคู่ และแบบเขียนโดยคำชี้แจง ช่วยให้ผู้เรียนเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ได้ดี

**คำสำคัญ:** แบบฝึกหัดคำศัพท์, คำศัพท์

### Abstract

Vocabulary is considered as one of the main obstacles in learning English. One way to help students learn more words is to provide them vocabulary exercises. There are some different types of exercises used to help increase students' vocabulary. However, some of these types of vocabulary exercises might not work well with most or some students. This is because teachers do not really know the students' perceptions on doing each type of vocabulary exercise. In order to explore their actual perceptions, a questionnaire and interview were used in this study. The sample group was 130 first year students studying at the Faculties of Technology, Science, and Humanities and Social Sciences, of Khon Kaen University. Their perceptions on which type of vocabulary exercises improve their lexical skills in terms of recognizing words, using words in context, and how effective each type of vocabulary exercise is were investigated in this study. All results of the study revealed that gap-filling, matching and words association exercises could help students improve their vocabulary learning.

**Key words:** vocabulary, vocabulary exercise

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## Introduction

Vocabulary learning problems are obvious for students learning English as a foreign language. Several studies have demonstrated that English as a Foreign Language learners have inadequate vocabulary to make use in their English language learning (Nurweni & Read, 1999; Evans & Green, 2007). Therefore, these learners have difficulties with vocabulary use that affect their four skills of English. Moreover, EFL learners do not have enough opportunities for vocabulary learning (Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Zimmerman, 1997).

Similar to vocabulary learning in Thailand, inadequate English vocabulary is a problem obstructing students to acquire the four skills of language, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Akbari (2008) pointed out that students do not only encounter problems of four skills, but they also face problems of pronunciation, grammar, especially an inadequate English vocabulary. Vocabulary learning is claimed by many researchers to be a major problem in English language learning (Liangpanit, 2002; Duadsuntia, 2008). Besides, the difficulties obstructing reading achievement of Thai students is the problem of inadequate vocabulary (Aegpongpaow, 2008). As mentioned above, there are several problems with vocabulary learning encountered by Thai students. To address the problems of vocabulary learning, Thai students need certain ways to facilitate their vocabulary learning.

One way to help students to learn more words is that they learn the words from doing more exercises. Exercises are important for students to practice English and for the teacher to see how much the students understand. It is used as a material in the classroom and outside the classroom. Numerous studies have showed that vocabulary exercises are helpful for learning foreign language vocabulary (Paribakht & Wesche, 1994; Zimmerman, 1997; Kim, 2008; Min & Hsu, 2008; Amiryousefin &

Kassaian, 2010; Laufer, 2010; Paribakht & Wesche, 2000).

## Exercise Types

Types of vocabulary exercises have been identified by various scholars.

Brooks (1960) presents the following forms of exercises as being useful in practicing language skills: repetition, transformation, replacement, rejoinder, restatement, completion, transposition, expansion, contraction, and integration. Nation (1981) states that exercises in language can be done as distinguishing exercises, identification exercises, matching exercises, selection words, ordering exercises, repetition exercises, substitution exercises, translation exercises, question and answering exercises, completion exercises, and direction or command exercises.

Ur (1996) states that the types of exercises in vocabulary are: multiple choice, matching, odd one out, writing sentences dictation, gap-filling, translation sentences, and completion. James Ward (1980) presents a clever way to practice word-meaning. These are word expansion, anagrams, fill in the blanks, question and answer, cloze, and multiple choice. These are the same as the proceeding paragraphs.

Wallace (1990) states that vocabulary exercises have two parts: word-meaning exercises and word-structure exercises. Word-meaning exercises are subdivided into: inference exercises, synonym/antonym exercises, semantic field exercises, definition and dictionary exercises. Word-structure exercises are subdivided into those concerning word structure, collocation, cohesion, and variety. Similarly, Ur (1996) states that the types of exercises in vocabulary are: multiple choice, matching, odd one out, writing sentences dictation, gap-filling, translation sentences, and completion. Ward (2001) presents other types of exercises,

namely, word expansion, anagrams; fill in the blanks, question and answer, cloze, and multiple choices.

However, Paribakht and Wesche (1996) propose the types of vocabulary exercise based on the typology of the text-based vocabulary exercise, comprising five main stages: 1) selective attention corresponds to Gass's most basic level 'apperceived input' or noticing. This type of task (selective attention) is designed to draw the attention of learners to the target words and, thus, seems to require the least mental effort. Examples are having students read the target words before reading and then notice where the target words appear in the text or underline the target words in the text any time they see those words, and boldfacing, italicizing, circling, or making other visual signs on the target words. 2) Recognition is the second level parallel to that of Gass's 'comprehended input' or input comprehension. This type of task requires learners to recognize the target words and at least one of their meanings, hence, requiring only partial knowledge of learners. This type of task seems to require more mental effort than the first type (Selective Attention) and it seems to correspond to Level 1 (Association Processing) of word mastery of Stahl (1985). Examples of this include: matching the target word with a definition or synonym, recognizing the meaning of the target word from multiple choices, choosing the picture after seeing or hearing the target word, or seeing or hearing the target word in L2 and giving its synonym or definition in L1; 3) Manipulation may refer to Gass's third level, and is called 'intake'. 'Manipulation' tasks correspond to this level in that they require deeper mental processing than the previous categories. These tasks involve morphology and grammatical knowledge of the words and seems to correspond to Level 2 (Comprehension Processing) of the word mastery of Stahl (1985). Examples are giving other forms of words (i.e., changing the part of speech of

the target word, such as from noun to adjective, or from verb to noun and using roots and affixes to form words; 4) Interpretation corresponds to Gass's 'integration'. This level is claimed to involve more precise semantic and syntactic analysis, including the relationship of target words with other words in context (e.g. collocations, synonyms, and antonyms). Thus, this type of exercise seems to require more mental effort than the previous categories. It seems that Level 2 of Stahl (1985) corresponds to both the Recognition and Interpretation types of Paribakht and Wesche (1996). Examples are choosing the odd word out of a set of collocations, understanding the meanings and grammatical functions of the target word in the context (i.e. in the reading text), and recognizing words that could be substituted in the text, and multiple choice cloze exercises; Finally, 5) The production level corresponds to the 'output' level in Gass's (1988) framework. This type of task requires learners to recall and produce the target words; hence this involves a deeper level of word processing. This kind of exercise is claimed to require the deepest level of mental effort and may correspond to Level 3 (Generation Processing) of the word mastery of Stahl (1985). Examples of this deep level processing task are open cloze exercises, labeling pictures, answering a question by using the target word, seeing or hearing the meaning of the word in L1 or the L2 synonym of the word and providing the target word, finding mistakes in the idiom, and presenting the incorrect word and correcting it using contextual clues.

It can be seen that vocabulary exercise types can be divided into two main groups; 1) no text-based exercises, including matching type, multiple choice, gap-filling, translation, question and answer cloze, and 2) text-based exercises based on Gass's theory. These exercises include matching the target word with a definition or synonym, identifying the meaning of the target word from multiple

choices, choosing the picture after seeing or hearing the target word or seeing or hearing the target word in L2 and giving its synonym or definition in L1, identifying which part of speech the target word is, open cloze exercises, labeling pictures, answering a question by using the target word, seeing or hearing the meaning of the word in L1 or the L2 synonym of the word and providing the target word, and finding the mistake in the idiom presented in the context, and correcting it. These two main groups, as mentioned above, were both utilized in this study.

### Research Questions

1. Which type of vocabulary exercise do Thai undergraduate students think helps improve their vocabulary in terms of recognizing words, knowing word meaning, and using words in context?
2. How did each type of vocabulary exercise help students improve their vocabulary in terms of recognizing words, knowing word meaning, and using words in context?

### Methodology

#### Participants

Khon Kaen University undergraduate students from several faculties were randomly selected to take part in the study. The participants were 130 first year students from the Faculties of Technology, Science, and Humanities and Social Sciences.

#### Instruments

##### Questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed to the participants at the end of the academic year 2012. It consisted of 2 sections: 1) personal information and 2) students' perceptions on the each type of vocabulary exercise.

##### A semi-structured interview

In collecting the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was used in this study. An interview with guidelines was carried out to 130 participants studying in the three faculties mentioned. The semi-structured interview was used as the main method in the final phase of data collection, in order to ask the participants on their perceptions concerning how each type of exercise improve their vocabulary learning. The questions from the semi-structured interviews comprised 7 items.

#### Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were tallied in order to obtain the frequency of responses. Then the data were analyzed by percentage, standard deviation. Semi-structure interview was administered and interpreted by using content analysis.

#### Results and Discussion

Findings of Research Question 1: Which type of vocabulary exercise do Thai undergraduate students think helps improve their vocabulary in terms of recognizing words, knowing word meaning, and using words in context?

Table1: Types of exercise that help recognize words

Types of exercise that help recognize words	x
1. The matching exercise helps me to recognize the words	4.51
2. The gap-filling exercise helps me to recognize the words	3.15
3. The association words exercise helps me to recognize the words	4.02
4. The multiple choice exercise helps me to recognize the words	3.82

Table 1 shows that the students think matching exercise (4.56) helps them to recognize the words the most, followed by association words exercise (4.02) and multiple choice exercise (3.82) respectively.

**Table 2: Types of exercise that help in understanding the meaning of words**

Type of exercise that help in understanding the meaning of words	x
1. The matching exercise helps me understand the meaning of words.	4.75
2. The gap-filling exercise helps me understand the meaning of words.	4.04
3. The multiple choice exercise helps me understand the meaning of words.	3.50
4. The association words exercise helps me understand the meaning of words.	2.50

Table 2 shows that the participants think that the matching exercise helps them understand the meaning of words, with a mean score of 4.75. The participants also point out that the gap filling exercise helps them understand the meaning of the target words with a mean score of 4.04, followed by the multiple-choice with the mean score of 3.50.

**Table 3: Type of exercise that help use the words in context**

Type of exercise help use the words in context	x
1. The gap-filling exercise helps me use the words in context	4.72
2. The multiple choice exercise helps me use the words in context	4.02
3. The association words exercise helps me use the words in context	3.50
4. The matching exercise helps me use the words in context	2.50

Table 3 shows that the gap-filling exercise was one of the most effective types of vocabulary exercise can help the participants use the target words in context with the mean score of 4.72 at "Very High" followed by the multiple choice exercise at the level of "High," with 4.02. It was found that matching exercise can help the participants to use the words in context the least at the level of low at 2.50.

**Findings of Research Question 2:** "How did each type of vocabulary exercise help the students recognize the words, understand the meaning of the words, and correctly use the words in context?"

In order to obtain more in-depth data for the answer of Research Question 2, the semi-structured interview was conducted. The aim is to find out how each type of vocabulary exercise help the students improve their vocabulary learning in terms of recognize words, understand the meaning of words, use the words in contexts, respectively.

### Recognizing words

Approximately 80% of the interviewees who have high, mid and low English proficiency

grade reported that matching exercise could help them recognize the target words better. They can learn word spelling and the written forms of the words. They became familiar with these words so they were able to recognize the words when they were heard or seen. Some examples of students' reports are given below.

*"I can recognize the words when I did matching exercise."*

*"The matching exercise could help me to recognize the target words. I learned their spelling, the written form of words correctly."*

*"I can recognize words when I see those words again because I learned word form and word spelling from matching exercises."*

It can be seen that the participants thought that matching exercise helped them to recognize words because they are familiar with this type of exercise both in and outside the class. Matching exercise is designed to match the words with correct definition both in Thai and in English so the participants can recognize the words easily.

### Understanding the meaning of words

Approximately 70% of the interviewees who have high, mid and low English proficiency grade said that the gap-filling exercise could help them understand the meaning of target words better. They expressed their conception on this issue that exercise could help them understand the meanings of words well, and that especially the gap-filling exercise helped them understand the meaning of words better. They revealed that they can fill in the blank with the correct word because they could guess the meaning of unknown words from contexts. Some examples of students' opinions are given below.

*"I think gap-filling exercise can help me understand the meaning of the target word, I can choose the correct word in the fill in the blank exercise because I can guess the meaning of the word from contexts. That helps me understand the meaning of words well."*

*"I think that the type of gap-filling exercise is the best for me because it helped me understand the meaning of the words through context by using this context in guessing the unknown words."*

*"I like the gap-filling exercise that helped me a lot in understanding the meaning of words well. I can understand the meaning of words when reading."*

It can be concluded that gap-filling exercise can help the participants to understand the meaning of words because the participants can easily guess the meaning of unknown words from context. This

showed similar results with the findings of Mameeganont (2011) mentioning that the learners can understand the meaning of word if they learn words from context.

### Correctly using the words in contexts

Approximately 50% of the interviewees who have high, mid and low English proficiency grade reported that the gap-filling exercise and the word association exercise could help them correctly use the words in context better. They expressed their conception that these exercises could help them use the words properly. They tried to guess the meaning of words from context so the gap-filling exercise, which would also enable them to use these words correctly depending on the context.

Some examples of students' opinions are given below.

*"I think I like gap-filling exercise. I can read news with understanding because the words I learned are mostly found in business fields and everyday life."*

*"I am able use the words in business contexts correctly because I learned the words through gap filling exercise."*

*"I think word association exercise helps me use the words accordingly because I guessed the unknown words from context."*

It can be concluded that gap-filling exercise and the words association exercise could help them correctly use the words in context better.

Apart from the students' conception on their vocabulary learning in terms of recognizing words, understanding the meaning of words, using the words in contexts as mentioned above, the others benefits obtained from learning the exercises were reported by students in terms of improving students' vocabulary and reading skills, motivation stimulation, and positive attitudes towards exercises.

Moreover, the students expressed that doing exercises stimulated their motivation and gave them the confidence to improve their vocabulary.

25% of the interviewees said that the matching exercise is the first step to help them recall the target words and help them gain more understanding of the meaning of words directly. An example is provided by a student's report.

*"I think that the matching exercise is the first step to help me recall the target words and understand the meaning of words directly."*

The remaining 10% of the interviewees revealed that the word association exercise could help them remind other words related to the same meaning of the target words.

Surprisingly, it was found that the students who have high English proficiency level also revealed that they like the gap-filling exercise the most because they think that it is a good type of vocabulary exercise in helping them guess the meaning of words using contexts clues correctly. This enables them to understand the meaning of words and use the words appropriately at the same time. In contrast, those with low and intermediate English proficiency said that they like the type of matching exercise the most because it is easy and quick to understand and remember the meaning of words, particularly that it is easier for them if the meaning of words is provided in Thai. However, the results of the study demonstrated that the four types of exercises, namely, gap-filling exercises, matching exercises, multiple-choice, and words association exercises can be beneficial for students in learning and improving vocabulary. Gap-filling exercises can help the students to understand the meaning of words from context that also enables them to use the words correctly. Matching exercise is the first step for the students to recognize the target words because it is easy and quick to

understand and remember the meaning of words both in Thai and English, particularly in reading. Words association is a rather difficult type of exercise in the students' opinions but it is useful for them to recognize and understand the meaning of similar and different words. These results may be driven from the fact that the students were familiar with matching exercises because they can acquire the meaning of unknown words by searching for the meaning in their mother language. Gap-filling exercises can help them understand the meaning of words well since the students have to understand the meaning of words by guessing the meaning of words corresponding with the correct meanings in each context. That makes them understand the meaning of words and remember the words better.

## Conclusions

The results also revealed that four types of vocabulary exercises namely: matching, gap filling, words association, and multiple choices could help them improve their vocabulary learning. The gap filling exercise can help them understand the meaning of target words. Similarly, the students revealed that it can help them to correctly use the target words in a given context. It is easy to recognize and understand the meaning of words both in Thai and in English with matching exercise. As a matter of fact, it would be a better idea to conduct a further research to get students to take a vocabulary test using gap-filling vocabulary exercises, matching, and multiple choice and words association in order to know their actual range. However, teacher should train students to learn vocabulary strategy related to vocabulary exercises provided to students in their classroom.

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