

Reviewing Empirical Research On Vocabulary Teaching In The Thai Efl Classroom During 2010-2020

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Abstract

This research paper aims to critically examine the existing body of literature on the integration of vocabulary research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Thailand, with a specific focus on vocabulary learning and teaching during 2010-2020. The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive review of recent research studies conducted in the Thai EFL context that have implemented vocabulary pedagogy within classroom environments. The paper initiates by presenting a thorough introduction to pertinent research studies that have investigated the outcomes of recent research conducted in Thai EFL classrooms during 2010-2020, with a particular emphasis on vocabulary instruction. Through meticulous analysis and scholarly discourse, this paper elucidates the implications of these research findings for enhancing the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching and learning practices in the Thai EFL context.

Keywords: vocabulary teaching, vocabulary learning, EFL classroom

Introduction

Vocabulary holds significant importance in the process of mastering a foreign language (Nation, 1990, 2001; Folse, 2008). Proficiency in vocabulary is crucial for effective communication in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities (Lewis, 1993; Schmitt, 2000). However, empirical studies conducted in Thailand have consistently revealed that vocabulary poses a significant challenge for Thai students in language learning (Duadsuntia, 2008; Chasin, 2007; Liangpanit, 2002; Deesri & Patanasorn, 2002; Pongpairroj, 2002; ThepAckrapong, 2005; Anusornnorakarn, 2002; Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2003; Wangkangwan, 2002; Aegpongpaow, 2008). In order to address this issue, Thai researchers, including educators and graduate students, have undertaken research on vocabulary in various contexts. However, these valuable insights are scattered across different studies, lacking a consolidated synthesis. Therefore, it would be highly beneficial and motivating for Thai educators, teachers, course designers, and learners to have access to these significant findings and their implications, specifically tailored for Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in the Thai EFL context.

This paper aims to review the current research on vocabulary learning and teaching in the Thai EFL classroom, focusing on the findings and implications derived from recent

studies. The paper initiates by examining the outcomes of relevant research conducted in the Thai EFL context, which has implemented vocabulary pedagogy within classroom settings. Subsequently, the paper presents a discussion of these findings and their implications.

Objectives Research

To examine the relevant research conducted in the Thai EFL context, which has implemented vocabulary pedagogy within classroom settings.

Research Methodology

To compile and search for research conducted in the field of vocabulary teaching and learning, testing, and vocabulary analysis published in research journals between 2010 and 2020, follow these steps:

Firstly, access a computer database that indexes research articles from various journals, with a focus on databases covering education or applied linguistics. Secondly, specify the main search keywords, including "vocabulary teaching," "vocabulary learning," "vocabulary testing," and "vocabulary analysis." Thirdly, set the publication date range from 2010 to 2020 to retrieve relevant articles. Fourthly, conduct the search using the specified keywords and date filters. Next, review the search results and identify articles that center on vocabulary teaching and learning, testing, and analysis, paying close attention to abstracts and keywords for relevance.

Afterwards, compile a list of research articles that meet the specified criteria, recording the title, author(s), journal name, publication year, and other relevant information. For collecting data from various libraries, identify libraries with strong collections in education or applied linguistics. Then, inquire about access to relevant journals during the specific period between August and September 2011. Request access to the desired journals, either physically or digitally, based on the library's resources and policies.

Subsequently, search for specific journal issues published between August and September 2011 that focus on vocabulary teaching, learning, testing, and analysis. Retrieve the identified articles and document essential information from each, including the title, author(s), journal name, publication year, and other pertinent details.

Next, design the evaluation form with fields for general information (researcher's name, contact, and affiliation), research topic, academic year, and types of research (experimental, correlational, qualitative, mixed methods). Additionally, create sections in the evaluation form to record research objectives, variables (independent and dependent),

hypothesis or research questions, sample characteristics (size, demographics), research instruments used, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and results.

Moving on, to choose a research study for analysis, review the compiled list of research articles. Analyze their general characteristics (title, author(s), journal name), and consider the relevance of the research topic, objectives, publication year, types of research, and researcher's affiliation. Select studies that align with your interests and goals, using preferred research methodologies and prioritizing reputable institutions or researchers with relevant expertise.

Finally, record the relevant data from the chosen research article into the corresponding fields on the evaluation form, ensuring accuracy and addressing any discrepancies throughout the process.

Data analysis

This study employs content analysis as the primary research methodology. Content analysis is a systematic and objective approach used to analyse and interpret the qualitative data present within textual or visual materials. By utilizing this method, the study aims to examine and extract meaningful insights from the selected research articles.

To conduct content analysis, the chosen articles will be carefully reviewed and analysed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and key concepts related to the field of vocabulary teaching and learning, testing, and analysis. This systematic examination will involve a rigorous coding process, where specific categories and subcategories will be developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature.

Literature Review

Among the numerous empirical research studies conducted in Thailand over the past few decades, a total of 147 studies have focused on vocabulary. These studies can be categorized into three prominent themes that have received the highest frequency of investigation. The first theme revolves around the design of vocabulary learning materials utilizing computer-assisted language learning (CALL) techniques. The second theme centres on exploring various vocabulary learning strategies employed by students. Lastly, the third theme pertains to the strategies and methods utilized in vocabulary teaching. These three areas of research have emerged as the most prominent and extensively studied topics in the context of vocabulary research in Thailand.

Findings

Over the past decade, a considerable number of Thai teachers and graduate researchers have dedicated their efforts to creating vocabulary teaching and learning materials through computer-assisted language learning (CALL) approaches. The primary objective of these endeavours has been to integrate the vocabulary component into

English courses, thereby enabling students to expand their word knowledge and enhance their overall vocabulary acquisition (Chaikum, 2010; Maneeganont, 2012; Liangpanit, 2010; Thuleechan, 2011; Panchalae, 2012).

Several notable examples of Thai research on CALL-based vocabulary learning programs can be highlighted. Maneeganont and Liangpanit (2012) developed a theme-based vocabulary learning program (TVLP) tailored for Mathayomsuksa 1 students. The program aimed to enhance their vocabulary learning and also assess their attitudes towards the program. The findings revealed that students exhibited improved vocabulary learning outcomes and displayed positive attitudes towards the vocabulary program. Another instance involves the design of a corpus-based business vocabulary learning program (BVLP) by Liangpanit (2010) for Business English students. The results demonstrated that students experienced enhanced vocabulary learning through engagement with the program. Additionally, Kulphimai (2002) developed a VCD cartoon for teaching English vocabulary related to 'my body' to kindergarten-level students. The results indicated that the VCD cartoon was efficient and effective, with an index score of 0.55, suggesting its suitability for learning purposes.

The majority of these findings suggest that utilizing computerized media and a multimedia learning environment can effectively support the acquisition of foreign language vocabulary. These results align with numerous studies conducted internationally (Al-Seghayer, 2001; Groot, 2000; Hulstijn, 2000; Laufer & Hill, 2000; Brett, 1998; Duquette, Renie & Laurier, 1998; Plass, Chun, Mayer & Leutner, 1998), further reinforcing the efficacy of incorporating CALL in vocabulary instruction.

Over the past two decades, extensive research has been conducted on the utilization of vocabulary learning strategies by EFL/ESL learners. Previous studies, such as Stöffer (1995), explored the relationship between gender and the choice of vocabulary learning strategies, with mixed findings. While Gu (2002), Catalán (2003), and Tercanlioglu (2004) indicated a significant association between gender and strategy preference, Intaraprasert (2000) and Siriwan (2007) found no strong correlation between gender and strategy choice among Thai students.

Furthermore, the research demonstrated that students with higher proficiency levels reported a more frequent use of vocabulary learning strategies compared to those with lower proficiency levels.

Other studies have investigated the use of vocabulary learning strategies among language learners at different educational levels. The findings indicated that vocabulary learning strategies employed by language learners across different levels of study can be categorized into various categories, including memory, cognitive, metacognitive, social, and determination. Additionally, it was observed that Thai students studying English primarily

utilized three main categories of vocabulary learning strategies: discovering the meaning of new vocabulary items, retaining the knowledge of newly-learned vocabulary items, and expanding their vocabulary knowledge. Strategies such as using English-Thai and Thai-English dictionaries, guessing meaning from contextual clues, listening to English songs and conversations for word retention, and taking notes in class and using English media for vocabulary expansion were commonly employed by proficient language learners.

Vocabulary teaching

In Thailand, with the enthusiastic intention of helping Thai students enhance their vocabulary knowledge, several Thai researchers and language teachers have sought to find appropriate methods for teaching vocabulary effectively. Although no single method has emerged as the accepted best way to teach vocabulary, researchers and language teachers have attempted to discover suitable methods for teaching vocabulary to Thai students in the Thai EFL classroom context. Some recent examples of research studies on vocabulary teaching research studies conducted by using communicative approach in teaching vocabulary shown by Shi (2010) explored the benefits of teaching vocabulary through cognitive communication and creativity activities for Mathayomsuksa 6 students. The findings revealed that the target group had gained higher scores after learning through these activities. Choothong (2007) investigated the effect of direct vocabulary teaching on reading and vocabulary. The findings revealed that students taught by direct vocabulary teaching methods gained higher scores than those of the control group. It was also found that direct vocabulary teaching can affect students' reading achievement. Raksawong (2005) examined the effectiveness of the teaching of vocabulary instruction and a bilingual list. It was concluded that the deeper processing, concordance and rehearsal of lexical items in context afforded by the IPI method lead to stronger memory traces and a significantly higher likelihood that lexical items will be transferred into the long-term memory store. Limsiri (2010) compared English vocabulary knowledge, retention and the opinion of students through direct and indirect approaches. The findings of this research were as follows: 1) the achievement mean scores of students taught through the indirect approach were higher than those taught through the direct approach at the 0.01 level of significance; 2) the retention mean scores of students taught through the indirect approach were higher than those taught through the direct approach at the 0.01 level of significance; and 3) the opinion mean scores of students taught through the direct approach and the indirect approach were both at moderate level. Wanilthip (2007) studied the effects of communicative-based English language provision on kindergarten students' vocabulary understanding. The research results showed that after the study, the scores on the vocabulary understanding of the experimental group were significantly higher than those

of the control group at the .01 significance level, and their satisfaction with English language learning was at the high level.

Numerous Thai researchers have attempted to implement vocabulary games into teaching vocabulary for students at tertiary level in order to improve their vocabulary learning (Supakaew, 2007; Chamniprasart, 2007; Ditjareon, 2004; Mumak, 2004; Kanlayason, 2010; Kullaya, 2009; Chaihao, 2011; Sritakpolrob & Damjang, 2008; Songthong, 2003; Menyam, 2002; Palawong Na Ayuthaya, 2010; Pilachai (2005) Taweechart, 2006). The results obtained revealed that students gained more achievement and retention in memorizing the vocabulary through games. There was a significant improvement in students' vocabulary learning through games.

Furthermore, some Thai researchers have also investigated the effectiveness of using pictures, storytelling and telling jokes implemented into vocabulary learning classes (Pilachai, 2005; Kuntong, 2007; Chatchawalwong, 2008; Rianthong, 2007; Duansin, 2008). The results revealed that learning vocabulary through pictures, telling jokes and storytelling could help students recognize words, remember words and have better knowledge of the meaning of words. These techniques also promoted motivation and positive attitudes towards learning English.

Some example of successful materials used for constructing vocabulary exercises for Mathayomsuksa 5 students can be seen in Liangpanit (2002) and involved designing supplementary vocabulary exercises in the news section of the Student Weekly. The results showed that this could be used in class for these participants. The Student Weekly, which is one of the English newspapers published in Thailand, can help students to learn more words and, in particular, vocabulary in the Thai context. Chuenboon (2009) also developed supplementary vocabulary learning exercises from songs for students with poor proficiency. The results revealed that exercises designed from songs can reduce their anxiety and help motivate them in vocabulary learning. Waisaen (2010) developed English vocabulary exercises for foreign language subject strands to compare their achievement and to study their satisfaction with these exercises. The results revealed that the English vocabulary exercises received an efficiency index score of 87.3/87.91 which was higher than the assigned criteria of 80/80.

The effectiveness of vocabulary exercises were also determined as shown in the work of Tangsakul (2013) examining the use of reading-based vocabulary exercises for third-year business vocational students at Nakhon Phanom Technical College. The results showed that the participants agreed that the use of reading-based vocabulary could help them improve their vocabulary learning in terms of recognizing the target words, understanding meaning of words and more effectively using the target words in the context. Wongsirichan (2008) compared some common reading-based vocabulary exercises that

require learners to use the unknown word in the new context with those that do not require learners to do so to see which type is the most effective in promoting vocabulary gain. The result indicated that Type B exercises (new context exercises) are supposed to promote more gain in vocabulary learning than Type A (no new context exercises). However, difficult exercises may promote better gain and retention but exercises that are too difficult may not yield a good result in learning. Similarly, Liangpanit (2010) mentioned in the findings of her thesis how students improved their vocabulary learning through learning from the constructed program: they could recognize the words, understand the meaning of words and correctly use the words in business contexts. The results also revealed that the gap-filling exercise helped them to understand the meaning of target words. Similarly, the students revealed that this exercise helped them to correctly use the target words in business contexts. The matching exercise made it easy to recognize the words and to understand the meaning of the words both in Thai and English. The findings also indicated that seven to 10 repetitions of words helped the students to remember the target words better. The study of 10 words for each lesson was an appropriate number for the students to learn. Seeing the repeated words at least seven to 10 times helped them to remember the words more quickly and easily.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) or task-based instruction (TBI) focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. A few research studies were found that used TBLT in vocabulary teaching. Summat (2009) improved students' vocabulary learning with task-based activity and investigated students' opinions towards the activity. The results showed that the students learnt more vocabulary after studying with task-based activity. The participants could improve their vocabulary learning and were confident that they could read and pronounce the target vocabulary after learning by themselves. Thongsawang and Pealad (2007) examined five objectives of vocabulary teaching after using project work teaching methods. The results students' scores before and after training in vocabulary project work were significantly different at 0.01 significance level in terms of English vocabulary skills: spelling skill, sentence skill, and listening and speaking skills.

Prakongsri (2007) compared Mathayomsuksa 1 students' English vocabulary learning before and after being taught by the project work approach. The research findings revealed that the English vocabulary learning scores of Mathayomsuksa 1 students after being taught by the project work approach were higher than their scores before being taught by this approach at the significance level of .01.

Discussions

According to the above review, I would like to provide the following recommendations in teaching vocabulary:

1. Computer technology can be used to help teach vocabulary effectively. Students had positive attitudes towards learning vocabulary through technology. These results were related to numerous studies conducted abroad which have shown that computerized media and a multimedia environment can be helpful for learning foreign language vocabulary (Al-Seghayer, [2001](#); Groot, [2000](#); Hulstijn, [2000](#); Laufer & Hill, [2000](#) Laufer and Hill, [2000](#); De Ridder, [2002](#)). When teaching vocabulary, the language instructor should integrate technology into the lesson because they could improve their vocabulary in language learning through computerized instruction and stimulate their motivation as well. Many scholars, for example, Gu (2003); Hughes (2003); Nagy (1997); Nation (1990); Read (2000); Schmitt (2000); and Thornbury (2002) Cook (2001) point out that guessing the word's meaning through context is an effective strategy for dealing with unknown or unfamiliar words. This is similar to findings in Thailand (Intaraprasert, 2000; Charnsin, 2007; Siriwan, 2007; Sarnthong, 2010) which mentioned that Thai students used the dictionary to discover the meaning of vocabulary items through their context. They utilized contextual clues from sentences and paragraphs to discover the meaning of new words. Therefore, teachers should help language learners to learn the meaning of vocabulary items by guessing from the context, using a dictionary, making deductions from the word form and linking vocabulary items to cognates. They may acquire vocabulary items by repetition and rote learning, organizing words in their mind and linking words to existing knowledge.

3. Previous Thai research studies (Intaraprasert, 2004; Charnsin, 2007; Siriwan, 2007; Sarnthong, 2010) found that students employed the discovery strategy of using English-Thai dictionaries and Thai-English dictionaries as well as guessing the meaning from contextual clues. Therefore, dictionary use should be promoted to students as an effective strategy for learning vocabulary.

4. The main focus in teaching vocabulary is to consider the vocabulary learning goals by focusing on determining the word form, word meaning and word use which was mentioned by Nation (2001) as the most effective kind of vocabulary learning. Liangpanit (2010) and Maneenkanont (2012) undertook research based on the three main vocabulary learning goals to construct the vocabulary materials on CALL. The results revealed that students could achieve the goals in improving their vocabulary learning.

5. Stahl (2005) mentioned "simple repetition or drill of the word", emphasizing that vocabulary instruction should provide students with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in a variety of contexts. As indicated by Liangpanit's (2010) research and Maneeganont's (2012) findings, seven to 10 repetitions of words helped students to

remember the target words better. These findings are similar to Nation (1982); Wallace (1984); and Tinkham (1993) who suggested six or seven repetitions of the same word.

7. In teaching vocabulary, the direct and indirect vocabulary learning should be integrated in class. Keyword method and the use of vocabulary cards should be promoted to use in EFL class. Rodrigue and Sadowki (2000) showed that the keyword method produced superior recall achieving retention of vocabulary in EFL classrooms. It is also primarily a way of making a strong link between the form of an unknown word and its meaning. The keyword method has positive effects on both immediate retention and long-term retention (Nation, 2001).

9. Task-based activity is beneficial in learning and teaching vocabulary. In the Thai EFL context, students do not have much opportunity to communicate with native speakers of English. Therefore, the focus of language teaching should be on changing the classroom practice from the traditional Thai lecture to more active group learning so that Thai students can be more easily exposed to English language use.

10. When teaching reading, it is recommended that reading-based vocabulary exercises should be integrated together. Reading-based vocabulary exercises are one of the effective tools to improve vocabulary learning (Paribakht & Wesche, 1994; Zimmerman, 1997; Min & Hsu, 2008; Amiryousefin & Kassaian, 2010).

11. Playing vocabulary games is one of the activities which require students to actively communicate with their classmates, using their own language in a communicative way. Some experts have also worked out the characteristics of games that make vocabulary learning more effective (Ersoz, 2000). Therefore, games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of vocabulary games is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and effective.

Conclusions

This paper has discussed the current findings on vocabulary learning and teaching in the Thai EFL classroom focusing on its findings and the implications based on empirical Thai research. The paper begins by using the presentation of the findings of current related research conducted in the Thai EFL context that implemented the vocabulary pedagogy in classrooms. Teachers or course designers can incorporate the knowledge from research studies and apply it to make vocabulary instruction more useful to Thai students. In summary, learners' development of vocabulary knowledge is not based only on particular teaching methods but it also depends on teachers' decisions to choose the appropriate methods for their students' context.

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