Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Their effects
on Japanese EFL Learners' Vocabulary Sizes

The present research was designed to examine relationships between the growth of vocabulary size and the vocabulary strategies the participants preferred to use.

The other purpose of this study is to examine qualitative differences in vocabulary among student groups divided by scores. The relationship between individual word accuracy rate in each participant group and their strategy use will be investigated.

It would be beneficial to analyze and report some of the most effective strategies to acquire English vocabulary so that teachers could teach them to all their students to build vocabulary. To find out some effective vocabulary learning strategies, I had four classes of second-year high school students participate in this study.

The participants took both a vocabulary size test (VST) and a vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) survey during a 50-minute class in February, 2008. They spent approximately 20 minutes on the VLS survey and 30 minutes on the VST. In July, approximately five months after the first survey, they took another vocabulary size test, which consisted of the same words in a different order. First, participants’ VST scores were classified into three categories: high, mid-range, and low after each vocabulary size test. On the first VST, low scores were defined as below 2500 points, mid-range scores were defined as between 2501 points and 2799 points. High scores were defined as between 2800 points and the maximum score of 4000 points. Based on the results of the two tests, participants were classified into nine groups from HH, HM, HL, MH, MM, ML, LH, LM, and LL.

A Vocabulary Learning Strategy survey containing exactly the same content as Okada's survey (2006) was administered in this study. Since we needed to make the questionnaire more appropriate for our learners, these 65 items were reviewed after having conducted the survey and eight of them were eliminated because they seemed impracticable or infeasible in our contexts. The remaining 57 items were classified into eight categories which included Auditory

Chapter 1 presents some problems of high school students' vocabulary learning and reviews the previous studies on vocabulary learning strategies in EFL contexts and their effects on vocabulary sizes.

Chapter 2 shows the research questions and describes the participants, procedures and the methodology including vocabulary learning strategy surveys and vocabulary size tests employed by this research study. Okada's (2006) learning strategy questionnaire and Mochizuki's (1998) vocabulary size test were chosen because they seemed most suitable to Japanese high school students.

Chapter 3 shows some statistics of the two vocabulary size tests and vocabulary learning strategy survey mentioned in chapter 2. The results include the mean scores of vocabulary learning strategies in six groups of the participants, correlation between some learning strategies and the changes of vocabulary sizes, and qualitative differences of the vocabulary knowledge among six groups.

One of the most evident results is the group HH's significant correlation between their vocabulary size changes and the Resolving meaning strategy category in which there are strategies such as asking the teacher for meanings. On the other hand, the LL group's increase of vocabulary has a negative correlation with Resolving strategies such as consulting a bilingual dictionary.

Chapter 4 analyzes the results of the study and discusses particular characteristics of each group of participants in terms of strategies, what kind of vocabulary learning strategies seem effective and what kind of strategies should be learned. The analysis of the qualitative difference in vocabulary seems to suggest that the knowledge of both the sound and word parts are two of the most useful devices to acquire vocabulary.

It is reasonable to teach the most effective strategies to students, but what is clear from this study is that there is no universal strategy which will work for anybody and for all learning contexts.

Chapter 5 concludes this study by discussing the importance of vocabulary learning strategies, examining some limitations of the study and suggests some remaining issues for future research.

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