

Analysis of Primary School Students' English Vocabulary Learning Needs and Their Countermeasures Research

Zhirong Lu^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

Email Address

799163450@qq.com (Zhirong Lu)

*Correspondence: 799163450@qq.com

Received: 8 April 2025; Accepted: 29 April 2025; Published: 22 May 2025

Abstract:

At present, the English vocabulary learning needs of primary school students are less valued by their English teachers. However, through an online questionnaire survey and interviews on the vocabulary learning needs of 1,576 primary school students in grades 3-6 from 89 primary schools in Hubei Province, it is found that they not only have vocabulary teaching needs in English vocabulary learning, but also have vocabulary learning affective needs and vocabulary learning strategy needs. Therefore, in order to help primary school English teachers carry out effective teaching based on students' vocabulary learning needs, the thesis analyzes primary school students' vocabulary learning needs in depth and proposes strategies based on primary school students' vocabulary learning needs by adopting methods such as literature analysis, classroom observation.

Keywords:

Primary English, Vocabulary Learning Needs Analysis, Vocabulary Teaching Strategies, Vocabulary Learning Strategies

1. Introduction

In the past 20 years, there are about 1667 studies on “teaching English vocabulary to primary school students”, which fully indicates that researchers have recognized the importance of vocabulary learning for primary school students. Researchers have also proposed very feasible vocabulary teaching methods. However, the research literature related to teaching vocabulary specifically to address the vocabulary learning needs of primary school students is almost nil, and teachers would focus more on teaching activities than on students' learning needs. Shu Dingfang and Hua Weifen (2009) clearly pointed out that foreign language teaching needs analysis is the first condition for foreign language teaching, the basis of foreign language curriculum design, and the basis for teachers to organize teaching, use teaching materials, decide on teaching methods and evaluate teaching. Individual needs analysis can help to tailor the teaching to the students' needs, and achieve twice the result with half the effort. [1] One of the conditions for “optimal language input” proposed by Krashen

(1982) is that the language input should be closely related to the needs of the learners. [2] Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the vocabulary learning needs of primary school students before implementing vocabulary teaching.

2. Questionnaire Design and Implementation

The content and data of the vocabulary learning needs analysis conducted in this paper are mainly obtained through questionnaires and interviews. Through these means, the specific needs of students' vocabulary learning were learned, so as to help elementary school English teachers to target effective teaching based on students' vocabulary learning needs.

In 2024, an online questionnaire survey and interviews were conducted with 1,576 elementary school students in grades 3-6 from 89 elementary schools in Hubei Province, taking advantage of the opportunity of the National Training for Primary School English. Its main content involved the following three questions:

- (1) What do you find most difficult in memorizing words?
- (2) Do you have any good methods for memorizing words?
- (3) What specific help would you like to get from your teachers to memorize words better?

By collecting responses from the students, we realize that there are three main needs for vocabulary learning: vocabulary teaching needs, vocabulary learning emotional needs and vocabulary learning strategy needs.

3. Results and Analysis of the Questionnaire Survey on Vocabulary Learning Needs of Primary School Students

3.1. Vocabulary Teaching Needs

As shown in Table 1, there are roughly nine different kinds of needs for vocabulary teaching and learning. After categorizing them, it is found that their needs for vocabulary teaching not only involve vocabulary teaching methods, but also vocabulary correction needs and vocabulary teaching language needs.

After further analysis, it is found that they desire to solve the spelling and spelling problems of long words and similar words by understanding and mastering the natural phonics and the specific structure of words; they hope teachers can create real contexts for vocabulary learning by displaying pictures, providing picture books, and combining vocabulary explanations with real-life situations; they want to participate in their teachers' vocabulary teaching, and they hope that their teachers can design vocabulary games for teaching, so that their enthusiasm for vocabulary learning and their sense of competitiveness can be activated.

For spelling errors in vocabulary, they would like teachers to use a variety of methods to correct them so that they can recognize the root cause of their errors and correct them.

As second language acquirers, although the use of full English helps them to learn by immersion, the appropriate use of their mother tongue can help them to grasp the semantics more quickly, so they hope that teachers can occasionally use their mother tongue to improve their comprehension ability, thus enhancing their confidence in learning.

Table 1. Analysis of vocabulary teaching needs and their classification.

Vocabulary teaching needs	Concrete vocabulary teaching needs	Classification of vocabulary teaching	Vocabulary teaching method needs
	Teach more natural phonics	Natural phonics teaching	
	Explain the specific structure of a word		
	Show Pictures	Context teaching	
	Provide picture books		
	Combine vocabulary explanations with real-life		
	Teach through play	Game teaching	
	Conduct a vocabulary spelling competition		
	Help correcting errors	Error correction needs in vocabulary instruction	
Communicate with learned words and don't always explain in English.	Language needs for vocabulary instruction		

3.2. Affection needs for vocabulary learning

As shown in Table 2, students also have six broad emotional needs for vocabulary learning. According to Maslow's classification of human needs, these needs belong to the second level of security needs and the third level of social needs, and they also hope that the content and language can stimulate their interest in learning.

Table 2. Analysis of affection needs for vocabulary learning and their classification.

Students' affection needs for vocabulary learning	Concrete affection needs	Classification of needs	
	Be patient in correcting errors.	Security needs	Maslow's human needs
	Don't be angry.		
	Be encouraging.	Socialization needs	
	Show more concern.		
	To urge rigorously.		
	Be interesting.	Language of instruction characterization needs	

3.3. Vocabulary Learning Strategy Needs

As shown in Table 3, students also have learning strategy needs for vocabulary learning. A questionnaire survey of 1576 primary school students found that 375 students (23.79%) memorized words by rote, and 195 students (12.37%) never experienced a sense of accomplishment in memorizing words. They longed for teachers to teach them word memorization skills and efficient ways to memorize words.

Table 3. Analysis of vocabulary learning strategy needs and their categorization.

Vocabulary learning strategy needs	Vocabulary learning strategy
Efficient memorization methods	Brain science mnemonics
Tips for memorizing words	Word-based memorization methods

4. Teaching Strategies Based on Elementary Students' Vocabulary Learning Needs

In order to teach students according to their aptitude and to achieve twice the result with half the effort, it is necessary for primary school English teachers to listen to the

voices of primary school students and design teaching from the perspective of the learners, so as to satisfy the needs of primary school students for vocabulary teaching, vocabulary learning affection needs and vocabulary learning strategy needs.

4.1. Designing flexible and diversified teaching methods to meet the vocabulary teaching needs of primary school students

4.1.1. Designing phonics teaching method

Phonics teaching method can help primary school students to be able to read when they see words and write when they hear the words. In the past five years, there are 404 papers on phonics on the Internet, and all of them explore phonics teaching. Hou Yunjie believes that the basic mode of exploring phonics teaching in China is: firstly, introduce the corresponding pronunciation of letters, then carry out spelling training in different combinations, and finally add picture books to internalize the knowledge of phonics on the basis of context and meaning. [3] Most of these teachings are teaching monosyllabic words using phonics.

However, according to a questionnaire survey of 1,576 students, the words they found most difficult to spell are: long words, similar words, etc., and they expect to be able to spell these words, so teachers need to design the teaching of these words, using the methods of syllable segmentation and syllable blending of words in phonics.

For example, for the sixth-grade word “bicycle”, the syllables can be segmented into bi-cy-cle; where “i” is the sound of the letter itself pronounced under the influence of syllabic stress, and the letter “y” is pronounced as /i/ when there is no syllabic stress, as opposed to the pronunciation of y in the word cycle, where it is pronounced as the diphthong /ai/ under the influence of syllabic stress. This comparison of “bicycle” to “cycle” also reinforces students' impression of word stress in word pronunciation.

4.1.2. Creating contexts for vocabulary learning

Using various methods to create a context that can be more effective to help students learn, understand and flexibly use vocabulary.

(1) Showing pictures or objects

Now many teachers do present pictures to help students to memorize vocabulary, but if teachers can use concrete objects so that students can not only see but also be able to perceive, which can stimulate students' curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. For example, when teaching words like “rice, beans, and tea”, teaching students with real objects can activate their desire for bilingual expression in terms of sight, touch, and smell.

(2) Integrating picture book stories skillfully

Many picture book stories are vivid and interesting, with a high recurrence rate of new words, which can really help students understand, memorize and use the vocabulary they have learned, so English teachers should skillfully incorporate picture book stories into English teaching as much as possible. For example, the following vocabulary can be taught with the picture book Gossie (1) colors: red, yellow, white; (2) phonics: eat, sleep; hide, ride; (3) adverbs: backward, forward; uphill, downhill; (4) animals: gosling, bird, pig, bee, tortoise etc. In addition, teachers can also guide students to create some picture book stories by using the vocabulary they have learned.

(3) Connecting students' life closely

Creating vocabulary learning contexts that are closely connected to students' real lives is what makes students feel immersed and willing to participate. These connections include students' own life experiences, knowledge from other books, or from the network, movies, television, and so on.

For example, when teaching Unit 2 A new student, students have some difficulties in using the word "stop", and they are easy to feel confused about the two usages of "stop to do" and "stop doing". To deal with this situation, the teacher guides the students to analyze it with specific examples: "It's seven o'clock. I stop to have breakfast." "It's time for me to go to school, so I stop having breakfast to go out." At the same time, the teacher asks the students to look for the difference between "stop to do" and "stop doing", so that the students can have a deep memory. [4] The close connection with students' life enables them to experience and understand the differences of phrases.

4.1.3. Designing Vocabulary Learning Games

Playing is the nature of children. Playing games can be a real fun way for children to release this nature and they have a relatively high level of concentration while playing games. Creating a classroom atmosphere full of fun by playing vocabulary games is a powerful antidote to the fear of making mistakes that hinders learning. Ms. Chen from Zhang Juzheng Primary School in Jingzhou City, Hubei Province, uses a variety of games in her English classroom teaching of PEP Grade 6, and the following two games are typical:

(1) Simon Says game

This game is enjoyable and students' participation in class is very high. The game consists of three different forms: (1) I say, you do: Students perform "start to bark/jump/sing/have a lunch" when they hear the teacher say them; (2) You say, the others do: Students say English phrases "start to read a book/play" one by one and other students perform according to the meaning of the phrases; (3) I say Chinese you say English: Teachers say Chinese "开始野炊", students immediately translate the Chinese into English "start to have a picnic".

This kind of game incorporates students' ability to listen, act and translate, which can not only stimulate students' sense of competition, but also cultivate their good habit of reviewing after class.

(2) Games + Students' exploitation

This teaching mode not only involves students in the vocabulary game, but also encourages them to reflect on what are doing. For example, students are asked to stand up and sit down, and say different weather words. The students were very enthusiastic and said "rain, rainy; snow, snowy." Then the teacher listed the words: rainy, cloudy, sunny, windy, snowy, and asked the students to observe and summarize their common features. The students conclude that these words ending in the letter "y" are adjectives that express the weather. The teacher repeats and adds an example: be + adj. For example: It will be cloudy, and then asks the students to write their analysis of the common features of the words and their usage in the appropriate places in their books.

This kind of game not only can stimulate students' output of the words they have learned, but also at the same time cultivate their good habits of observing, analyzing and exploring the rules.

4.1.4. Utilizing a variety of lexical error correction methods

Errors are inevitable for second language learners. However, it is necessary to use different error correction methods for different individuals. Error correction methods include: explicit error correction, recasting, clarification, meta-linguistic error correction, elicitation, repetition and so on. However, many primary English teachers use explicit error correction more often to correct errors orally or in writing. However, explicit error correction may demotivate some students. Therefore, other methods of error correction can be tried.

In addition, it is also very necessary for teachers to analyze the root causes of students' mistakes and then explain and correct them in class. For example, in a composition in the second book of the sixth grade of the Humanist version of primary school, a student wrote this:

"Last Monday, I went to Beijing with my falim (family). It is in the north of china(China). I went to the Graet weak(Great Wall). I went to the Tiananmen. I ate some Beijing Roast Duck. It was very beautiful and dictionear(delicious). I had a good time there. The teacher of the class was very serious in helping him or her to make corrections one by one. But is this way of correcting errors effective? After analyzing the students' mistakes, it is easy to find that the root cause of their spelling mistakes is that the students are not able to spell correctly. The best way is to point out the errors in writing, then analyze and summarize them in class, help the students to spell correctly, and finally let the students correct the errors themselves, so that the students can remember and master the correct spelling methods.

4.1.5. Using bilingualism flexibly

In the interviews, the reason why primary school students expressed the need for their teachers to "use the words they have learned to communicate and not to explain in English all the time" is actually because their teachers do not balance the use of mother tongue and English in teaching. Although there are many advantages of using English in the classroom, there are times when using the mother tongue would be more beneficial to primary school students. Especially when teaching different tenses, teaching with the terms of English tenses can be more confusing for primary students.

It is also important to allow students to speak Chinese in the English classroom, especially when they cannot express themselves in English, because speaking Chinese also shows that they are actively thinking and that learning is happening as well.

4.2. Attaching importance to the affection needs of primary school students

4.2.1. Suppressing negative emotions so as to make students feel safe

From the first day of school, teachers need to make all students understand that the school classroom is a safe place where mistakes are allowed. Never let mistakes stop students from trying again and mistakes are proof that they are trying. Therefore, teachers should encourage students to be brave enough to try and make mistakes.

At the same time, teachers should be an emotionally stable person. They had better not get irritated because of the students' learning mistakes, instead they need to help

students analyze the errors, and find solutions to the problems together. For example, when students wrote “family” as “falim”, teachers should first analyze whether students can read aloud correctly and reflect on whether they have used the method of syllable segmentation in the process of teaching, because syllable segmentation is easier for students to memorize than reading aloud as a whole. They also need to reflect on whether they have used a variety of methods to help students memorize. For example, they can teach students to say “Father and mother, I love you.” and let them observe the initials and put the initials together to form family, which also makes them realize that a loving family is a real family.

4.2.2. Creating a motivating atmosphere for students’ active cooperation

When second language learners experience positive emotions in the process of learning, such positive emotions are enough to enhance their awareness of language input, enhance the acquisition of language forms, and can support them in using multiple strategies to solve problems. [5] Positive attitudes, self-esteem, and affective engagement can enhance deep processing of language as it helps to activate the neural pathways of the brain while obtaining multidimensional presentation. Therefore, in the English classroom, teachers should encourage students as possible as they can, especially when they are faced with the students with learning difficulties in the class. They can provide them with language scaffolding, allowing them to speak Chinese or seeking help from their classmates so as to encourage them to think positively and express themselves boldly.

4.2.3. Using verbal humor to make students happy to learn

Exciting information is remembered more clearly than unemotional information. Verbal humor includes the teacher’s classroom language and the selection of teaching materials. In the process of teaching vocabulary, teachers can use the humor of word pronunciation and associative memory to help students remember. For example: “sand” has the similar pronunciation as “loose” in Chinese, then teachers can help students to memorize “sand” by associating its pronunciation with its nature; the word “strong” has the similar pronunciation as “Si Zhuang” in Chinese which means “very strong”, so teachers can teach “strong” in a quite humorous way.

This method of memorizing word meanings or word shapes through harmonization can not only ignite students’ excitement, but also enable them to be able to enjoy the fun of word literacy in a happy atmosphere.

4.3. Offering vocabulary learning strategies

In vocabulary teaching, teachers should not only flexibly use various vocabulary teaching methods and pay attention to the affection needs of primary school students, but also offer efficient memorization methods and word memorization skills to help primary school students who can only memorize words by rote learning to get out of the dilemma.

4.3.1. Valuing brain science mnemonics

Teachers should respect and utilize the rules of human brain reasonably to help primary school students to memorize vocabulary efficiently. They can remind their students to make best use of the following methods:

(1) Utilize the best time for memorization so as to improve the efficiency of memorization: Both before breakfast and before going to bed at night are the best time for memorization. (2) Use multi-sensory memory which includes visual memory, auditory memory, olfactory memory and haptic memory. (3) Use repetition memory: repeat after one day; repeat after one week; repeat after one month. (4) Memorize chunks: divide the information into multiple groups to make it easier to memorize. [6]

4.3.2. Sharing vocabulary memorization methods

In 2005, Lv Ping stated that in teaching students should be instructed to carry out meaning memory, association memory, music memory, image memory, harmonic memory, comparison memory and so on, so as to improve the effectiveness of students' memorization. This is a necessary element to make students learn to learn [7]. In 2021 Ma Shasha emphasized that elementary school English teachers actively innovated English vocabulary teaching methods, consciously penetrated situational memory, comparative memory, logical memory, repetition memory, associative memory, and other English vocabulary memory methods into vocabulary teaching, and they taught students more vocabulary learning methods suitable for themselves, and improved the effect of students' English vocabulary memorization [8]. Borgia, Horack and Kiley proposed 10 word memorization methods from the multimodal perspectives of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic senses, from the musical and artistic perspectives, and from the perspectives of syllabic splitting, contrasting, and using. (1) Say the word. (Auditory) (2) Stretch the word. (Segmenting) (3) See the word. (Visualizing) (4) Clap the word. (Kinesthetic/rhythmic) (5) Compare the word. (Analogies) (6) Draw the word. (Visual/Spatial) (7) Sing the word. (Musical) (8) Make the word. (Artistic) (9) Write the word. (Kinesthetic) (10) Use the word. (Application; Meaning) [9]

Students are taught to use these methods to memorize vocabulary words in the classroom, and they are allowed to try out different methods of vocabulary memorization so as to find their own vocabulary memorization method that suits them best.

5. Conclusions

Approaching students, listening carefully to their English vocabulary learning needs, analyzing the needs, redesigning the vocabulary teaching curriculum based on the needs, attaching importance to the emotional needs of vocabulary learning, and implementing vocabulary learning strategies can truly realize the “student-centered” concept of education.

Based on the vocabulary learning needs of primary school students, we find that English teachers, in addition to broadening their knowledge, enriching their teaching theories, and improving their teaching skills, should also investigate and analyze the learning needs of each student, help them learn to learn, and master the learning strategies, so that they can enjoy the fun of learning in the process of learning.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Shu, D.F.; Hua, W.F. Sixty Years of Theoretical Research on Foreign Language Teaching in China: Review and Prospect. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2009, 30(6), 37-44.
- [2] Karshen, S. 1982. *Principles and Practices in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- [3] Hou, Y.J. Research, Problems and Countermeasures of Natural Spelling Teaching in Domestic Elementary School English. *English Learning*, 2019, 11, 11-15.
- [4] Sha, C.Y. Practical Exploration of English Vocabulary Teaching Based on Independent Learning. *Primary School Teaching Reference*, 2021, 9, 55-56.
- [5] Boudreau, C.; MacIntyre, P.D.; Dewaele, J.M. Enjoyment and anxiety in second language communication: An idiodynamic approach. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2018, 8(1), 149-170.
- [6] Yuji, I. Exam Brain Science: Efficient Memorization Methods in Brain Science. Beijing: People's Posts and Telecommunications Publishing House. 2019.
- [7] Lv, P. Brief Study of Brain Science on Memory and its Teaching Significance. *Journal of Tianjin Academy of Education*, 2005, 4, 47-49.
- [8] Ma, S.S. Promotion of Vocabulary Memory Methods in Elementary School English Teaching. *New Education*, 2021, 29, 56-57.
- [9] Borgia, L.; Horack, D.; Kiley, T. Terrific Teaching Tips. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 2005, 33(3), 46-49.



© 2025 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)