French Vocabulary Learning Strategies of French Majors at Khon Kaen University

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Abstract

The present study sought to investigate learning strategies and French vocabulary memorization strategies as well as to examine French vocabulary learning strategies employed among French-majored students at Khon Kaen University with high, moderate and low levels of GPA. In particular, the participants were 89 French-majored students, including second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students. In data collection, the instruments used in this study were a 38-item questionnaire concerning learning strategies and French vocabulary memorization strategies adapted from Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (2000). Statistics used to analyze the collected data included percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results demonstrated that the most frequently used strategy for the discovery of a new word's meaning was determination strategies, the most commonly used of which were using a French-Thai dictionary application and guessing word meaning from textual context respectively. Concerning strategies for consolidating a word, the most frequently employed was memory strategies. Pronouncing the word aloud while studying and practicing its spelling were two of the most frequently used strategies. In the meantime, in terms of cognitive strategies, most often employed were written repetition and the use of an application for taking notes and memorizing words. Lastly, regarding metacognitive strategies, most frequently utilized among the students were learning and memorizing words through social media as in Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Comparing strategies employed among the students with high, moderate and low levels of GPA, it was found that the strategy for the discovery of a new word's meaning most frequently employed among all these groups was using the French-Thai dictionary application. Despite that, the students with a high GPA tended to employ more various vocabulary memorization strategies than those with a moderate and low GPA did. It was also discovered that all three groups rarely opted for concept mapping or mind mapping to memorize vocabulary.

KEYWORDS : strategies, vocabulary, learning new vocabulary, discovery strategies, consolidation strategies

The significant finding:

The most frequently used strategy for the discovery of a new word's meaning was from determination strategies. While the most commonly used were a French-Thai dictionary application and guessing word meaning from textual context respectively.

ARTICLES

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary which is employed as a medium of meaning communication, knowledge transfers and idea conveyance, serves as one of the most important language elements and is the first aspect in which applied linguists are interested (**Richards & Rodgers, 2000**). According to **Schmitt (2000)**, it acts as the foundation of language. The first aspect which language learners are required to understand is the meaning of a word in a particular language (**Burton, 1982**). Therefore, vocabulary knowledge is viewed as a fundamental factor in enabling learners to achieve goals in language learning.

In learning French as a foreign language, it is necessary for learners to learn about the

pronunciation system and grammatical rules and simultaneously to study and develop all four skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They are also required to acquire knowledge about the French culture and identity. Vocabulary learning and memorization is regarded as a vital factor which allows learners to attain learning goals. In addition, it is beneficial to French communication. Possession of inadequate vocabulary knowledge can pose difficulties for learners in communicating in French and eventually result in a low level of all four skills. Simply speaking, they will have difficulty in listening or be unable to speak, to read, to comprehend reading texts, and to write. On the contrary, having considerable vocabulary knowledge and a vast repertoire of vocabulary will enable the learners to use a variety of words for communication and, in turn, will increase their success in language learning, along with their ability to communicate in French. As stated by **Dolsophon** (**1999: 45**), "a lack of vocabulary accuracy or vocabulary knowledge can pose difficulties in learning a particular language and developing four skills as in speaking, listening, reading and writing. On the other hand, having vast vocabulary knowledge and being able to recall and use it correctly will contribute to effective language learning. Thus, vocabulary is invariably necessary for foreign language learning".

Learning strategies are referred to as techniques utilized by learners to facilitate their learning, which will ease and accelerate learning, enhance effectiveness of learning itself and allow for transfer of their learning to new contexts. They also serve as an instrument to overcome potential learning problems. Hence, learning strategies play a prominent part in language learning, especially foreign language learning. Successful learners tend to employ learning strategies which suit their needs and abilities effectively (**Gu & Johnson, 1996**).

Vocabulary knowledge is, indeed, considered as a crucial factor in learning French or any foreign language. As a result, development of vocabulary learning is necessary for language learning. Vocabulary learning strategies used by learners to help themselves learn and memorize vocabulary, particularly meaning of difficult one, with greater ease and at an accelerating pace may vary depending on their individual preferences. As stated by **Nation** (**2001**), vocabulary learning strategies are part of language learning strategies and beneficial to learners' second language acquisition. Moreover, **Schmitt** (**2000**) states that a number of researchers have made attempts to classify vocabulary learning strategies and to compile them as techniques to facilitate learners' learning.

The Western Languages program, French Major, at Khon Kaen University has provided French instruction as major courses at an undergraduate level since 1988. Despite that, there had not been a study conducted by the program on French-majored students' French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies. Based on the researcher's experience as a teacher of French courses which develop all four skills for French communication, it was observed that students possessed different understanding of word meaning, which affected their learning achievements in such courses. The present study was intended to investigate French-majored students' French vocabulary learning strategies. It was carried out in the hope that the strategies employed by those with a high GPA could be drawn on to provide French instruction for those with a low GPA in

order to promote effective French vocabulary learning.

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II. METHODOLOGY

The present study was survey research. In particular, a questionnaire was utilized to probe opinions regarding the use of vocabulary learning and memorization strategies among 100 French-majored students in their second, third, and fourth years in the academic year 2022. As a result, the purposive sample comprised 89 respondents in total.

The research instrument in this study was a questionnaire. It was derived from Schmitt's concept on vocabulary learning and memorization strategies (2000). Specifically, there were two main strategies each of which featured 38 sub-strategies as follows: 1)

strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning comprised two sub-strategies, namely eight determination strategies and five social strategies; and 2) strategies for consolidating a word consisted of four sub-strategies, including three social strategies, ten memory strategies, five cognitive strategies, and seven metacognitive strategies.

The questionnaire employed in this study was the Google Forms online questionnaire. It was divided into three parts as follows:

Part 1: general background of respondents consisting of four items, including gender, year of study, and GPA;

Part 2: strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning;

Part 3: strategies for consolidating a word.

In Part 2 and Part 3, the questions were in the form of the rating scale to allow respondents to assess themselves on their use of strategies. The rating scale consisted of five points, with 4 designated as always use, 3 as often use, 2 as sometimes use, 1 as rarely use, and 0 as never use.

Data Analysis

1) The responses in Part 1 on general background of respondents were analyzed to determine frequency and percentage. The results were tabulated and presented descriptively.

2) Those in Part 2 and Part 3 regarding 38 vocabulary learning and memorization strategies which the respondents used were analyzed to find mean and standard deviation. The mean scores were interpreted, and subsequently, the results were presented descriptively. Mean scores were interpreted according to the criterion for interpreting mean scores of rating scale questionnaires: the

highest score minus the lowest score, divided by all points. In this questionnaire, the highest and lowest scores were 4 and 0 respectively. Consequently, the score range employed to interpret mean scores was (4-0)/5 = 0.80. Thus, the criterion for interpreting mean score is given below.

Mean scores of 4.21 – 5.00 refer to the strategy which students always use.

Mean scores of 3.41 – 4.20 refer to the strategy which students often use.

Mean scores of 2.61 – 3.40 refer to the strategy which students sometimes use.

Mean scores of 1.81 – 2.60 refer to the strategy which students rarely use.

Mean scores of 1.00 – 1.80 refer to the strategy which students never use.

III. FINDINGS

1) Results of Analysis Part 1 of the Questionnaire

Based on the analysis of the respondents' general background, it was found that 89 respondents who were studying in their second, third and fourth years in the first semester of the academic year 2022 were constituted by 69 female (77.52%), 18 male (20.22%), and 2 LGBTQ+ students (2.24%). In terms of year of study, the sample was dominated by 39 second-year students (43.82%), followed by 31 fourth-year students (34.83%), and 19 third-year students (21.34%).

Table 1. The respondents' average GPA.

GPA	Level	Number of students	Percentage
3.01-4.00	High	24	26.96
2.01-3.00	Moderate	51	57.30
1.01-2.00	Low	14	15.73
Total		**89**	**100**

As illustrated in **Table 1**, more than half of the respondents, accounting for 57.30%, obtained a moderate GPA, followed by 26.96% with a high GPA and 15.73% with a low GPA.

2) Results of Analysis of Part 2 of the Questionnaire

With regard to the respondents' use of strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning, the results demonstrated that determination strategies were identified as most frequently employed among the respondents ($\bar{x}$ = 4.59, S.D. = 0.98). Considering each of sub-strategy under this category, it was uncovered that most commonly used was using a French-Thai dictionary application ($\bar{x}$ = 3.53, S.D. = 1.01) while guessing word meaning from textual context was sometimes employed ($\bar{x}$ = 3.34, S.D. = 0.82). Consulting a Thai-French dictionary was never utilized ($\bar{x}$ = 1.26, S.D. =1.12).

3) Results of Analysis of Part 3 of the Questionnaire

Under strategies for consolidating a word, most frequently utilized among the respondents were memory strategies ($\bar{x}$ = 4.38,

S.D. = 1.08). By considering each sub-strategy, the results showed that three strategies achieved the highest mean scores, including saying new word aloud when studying ($\bar{x}$ = 3.30, S.D. = 0.85), learning and memorizing words through social media as in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram ($\bar{x}$ = 3.18, S.D. =0.97), and written repetition ($\bar{x}$ = 3.12, S.D. = 0.99) respectively. Despite that, they were found to be sometimes employed among the respondents.

4) Results of Analysis of Part 2 and Part 3 by GPA

The vocabulary learning and memorization strategies used by the respondents were analyzed in isolation by their GPA levels divided into three groups, including a high GPA group, a moderate GPA group, and a low GPA group. The results are displayed in Table 2.

As shown in **Table 2**, the comparative analysis on the use of French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies among three groups of the respondents with a high, moderate and low GPA showed that all groups did not have significantly different mean scores on the use of French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies. Simply put, high GPA, moderate GPA, and low GPA groups achieved the overall mean scores of 2.37 (rarely use), 2.35 (rarely use), and 2.15 (rarely use) respectively. However, with each sub-strategy looked into separately, it was uncovered that there were differences in the most frequently used strategies across three groups. Specifically, those with a high GPA adopted verbal and written repetition while those with a moderate GPA used a French-Thai

dictionary application, and those with a low GPA asked classmates for word meaning.

Table 2. The use of vocabulary learning and memorization strategies by GPA levels.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Mean and S.D / GPA levels					
	High		Moderate		Low	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
I. Strategies for Discovery						
1.1Determination strategies	2.52	1.38	2.68	1.20	1.97	1.28
1.2 Social strategies	2.26	1.02	2.67	1.08	2.11	1.02
II.Strategies for Consolidating						
2.1 Social strategies	2.01	1.31	1.86	1.33	1.83	0.83
2.2 Memory strategies	2.45	1.32	2.04	1.35	1.88	1.04
2.3 Cognitive strategies	2.60	1.39	2.60	1.22	1.93	1.02
2.4 Metacognitive strategies	2.40	1.31	2.29	1.23	1.46	1.02
Overall mean	**2.37**	**1.28**	**2.35**	**1.23**	**2.15**	**1.03**
Level of frequency	Rarely use		Rarely use		Rarely use	

IV. DISCUSSIONS

The overall results showed that regarding the strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning, most frequently employed was using a French-Thai dictionary application, while guessing word meaning from context was sometimes used and consulting a Thai-French dictionary was identified as never used. It can be noticed that the choice of the strategies identified as most often and never employed among the students resulted from the evolution of information technology. Simply put, searching for a word's meaning through applications can be done with greater ease and convenience than consulting a dictionary.

Hence, consulting a Thai-French dictionary was never utilized among the students.

In relation to the strategies for consolidating a word, the most frequently used was memory strategies, namely saying new word aloud when studying, learning and memorizing words through social media as in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and written repetition. Essentially, memory strategies are regarded as important for learning French or other foreign languages. To memorize a particular subject, learners are required to speak, listen to certain materials, read certain texts, or write repeatedly until they are able to organize ideas about it and remember it, which will in turn contribute to increasing their learning of such a subject (**Gu & Johnson, 1996**).

Based on the comparative analysis on the use of French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies among the students with different GPA levels, it was uncovered that the sub-strategies employed by each group were clearly different. Particularly, the students achieving high GPAs opted for verbal and written repetition while those earning moderate GPAs used a French-Thai dictionary application, and those with low GPAs asked classmates for word meaning.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Research recommendations

(1). In this study, activities should be held to allow the students to practice using French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies in conjunction with investigating their use of strategies.

(2). To ensure data dispersion, the present study should examine French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies based on the students' year of study, given that students at different years of study are more likely to adopt different strategies.

5.2. Recommendations for further studies

(1). Further studies are urged to compare the use of French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies between students with basic French knowledge from upper secondary school studies and those without such knowledge.

(2). They should also investigate French reading achievements among the students using different French vocabulary learning and memorization strategies.

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