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Solving the Vocabulary Teaching and Learning Problem

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Abstract

Vocabulary is one of the hottest issues among Chinese students and teachers. Many students have difficulty in vocabulary learning, and teachers try their best in vocabulary, but the result is still not so pleasant. This phenomenon arouses many thinking and reflections. Someone pointed out there exist some misunderstandings in vocabulary teaching and learning. For example, the vocabulary teaching was cut off from the language situation; vocabulary learning without strategy guiding; and the enhancement of vocabulary lacked practice. The traditional way to vocabulary teaching is based on the word list in the textbook, which is boring for the students. Even the teachers make effort to complete the task, but the result is still unpleasant. Thus an action research was designed to try to solve the vocabulary teaching and learning problem. The results show that: The action research could improve students' vocabulary knowledge and the ability of language use, and then internalize the knowledge; the action research could guide students in effective strategy of learning and remembering words; the action research could enhance the review job; the personal notebook could help student form a good habit of systematically review. Also to the teacher, they could know the students' study condition. This can form a positive cycle between the teacher and the students.

Key words: vocabulary teaching, effectiveness, action research, contextual approach.

Introduction

In traditional English teaching, grammar is the priority of the English teaching, thus vocabulary teaching is devalued to some degree and it is considered to be the students' own job, the most direct way to solve vocabulary problem is to memorize. However, memorizing is not an easy job; many students can not totally remember words. No matter in daily dictation or some tests, students always failed in vocabulary parts. Most of them have difficulty in distinguishing part of speech, collocation, synonym and polysemy. Besides, some teachers' inappropriate way to treat vocabulary mistakes always results in disappointing endings in English teaching. For most teachers, the most popular way to deal with vocabulary mistakes is to transcribe the words for many times, which is really a boring work. Once the students hate the activity, their interest and

confidence for English is fading. According to the current problem, it is necessary to think about why effective English vocabulary teaching is so hard to reach: (1) is the teaching method inappropriate? (2) Don't the students think vocabulary is important? (3) Don't they have enough exercise? (4) Don't the students know some strategies about learning vocabulary?

The significance of the research

Considering the current problem in vocabulary teaching and learning, it's quite necessary to take actions to explore effective and useful ways to help students enhance the breadth and depth of their vocabulary knowledge, thus leading to effective and successful English learning.

As for action research, Wang (2002) thought action research was beneficial for teachers' further career development, and improving work efficiency. It emphasized teachers' self-reflection, and be more serious about the details in teaching. According to the immediate situation of teaching, teachers adjusted teaching plan and tried to find out more suitable and effective teaching method (Pang Ming, 2011).

Literature Review

The importance of vocabulary and vocabulary teaching

Vocabulary plays a vital role in English learning. A Chinese scholar Wang (2001) made a metaphor about the relationship of vocabulary and grammar: grammar is a string and vocabulary is the copper cash. The string is really necessary, however the coins can never been neglected. Without grammar, only limited information could be transferred, while if vocabulary is absent, nothing could pass by and then grammar is nobody. Grammar rules are limited but vocabulary is infinite.

The role of vocabulary to a language determined the place of vocabulary teaching during the language learning process. Vocabulary learning is a complicated process, which consists of remembering the form, understanding the meaning and usage. It requires students not only can recognize, pronounce, understand meaning but also can use flexibly in any situation. What's more, vocabulary itself is a huge system, which is complex relationship net. So if students deal with the task all by themselves, pleasant results could be rare.

Vocabulary teaching in context

Definitions about "context"

"Context" is a significant concept, different scholar have different understanding about it. He Zhaoxiong (2000) first explained "context" from six "Ws": why, what, who, where, when and how. Then he added "context" can both means linguistic context or co-text and context of situation. In Lyons's (1981) opinion, although "context" was just a theoretical concept, linguists extracted many constituents, which determined the form of discourse or speech, specifically grammar and vocabulary. Only equipped with a certain amount of knowledge, learners could distinguish the appropriateness of discourse, and this kind of knowledge was just the manifestation of "context".

"Context" is meaningful to vocabulary teaching and learning. Firstly, the "context" can facilitate to determine the part of speech. A word can only be accurately understood with the company of other vocabulary in a perfect system. Secondly, the "context" can help recognize the usage of vocabulary. Learners' practical ability could be improving step by step through different collocation and usage. Thirdly, the "context' can help memorizing. The "context" in a certain text can connect almost every vocabulary in the text, which is helpful for students to extract vocabulary from their prediction, in this way, it might easier to remember.

The place of "context" in vocabulary teaching

Effective English vocabulary teaching is one of the hottest topics among teachers and experts. Many students think the reason why they can't learn English well is the vocabulary problem. They can't remember words and they don't want to recite words. And teachers try their best to explain and emphasize, but the condition is still less than satisfactory. Under the circumstance, some teachers find out there are a few problem in teaching activity: vocabulary teaching is lack of context supporting; vocabulary learning is lack of strategy; vocabulary consolidation is lack of practical use (Zong, Sun 2012; Qian, 2011). Traditional vocabulary teaching mostly is based on the word list, one unit always has about 30 new words, and there is few links among the words, which put pressure on students.

Some experts put forward one of the most effective way of vocabulary teaching is contextually teaching, which is also a main means of natural acquisition of vocabulary (Lu, 2001). Contextualism is the main part of constructivism. Under the real context, learners can use their acquired knowledge to assimilate new knowledge, and then the mixture of the acquired and the new can make a difference. No single encounter with a word, whether in instruction or in the course of reading or listening, can lead to any great depth of word knowledge.(Norbert & Michael)While if the acquired cannot assimilate the new, then an adaption process happen, which means reconstruct and recombine the acquired knowledge in cognitive structure. All in all, only through assimilation and adaption can new knowledge be constructed into one's cognitive system. Only in certain context, vocabulary is living and can be easily remembered and taken advantage (Lv Shuxiang, 1975). Evagelia(2009) also pointed out vocabulary learning will be more meaningful in context. In context, learners can get better understanding about words by collocations and meaning. Context is a macro concept and it isn't limited in a certain text, besides it can be connected with life. So in teaching activity, context construction should obey language learning aims and correspond with reality (Song, 2012). Tricia Hedge (2002) thought context can provide learners a kind of authenticity about language mentally, and reduce interference. If vocabulary teaching combines with text teaching, it may facilitate learners to have an overall understanding about text and vocabulary. Text analysis can provide opportunity for learners to predict word meaning and then confirm their prediction. This is a positive thinking process which is very valuable in learning.

Penny. Ur (2000) said that master a word's meaning consists of two aspects: knowing the dictionary meaning; knowing connotative meaning, which means learners should be clear about

when and how to use vocabulary in different situations, and also clear about the relationship between a certain word and the other words in the same semantic context. Laufer also supported Penny's opinion. He pointed out that to learn a word is never "symbol---meaning" or "English word---Chinese meaning" such simple pattern, but a process of thorough and comprehensive understanding (from Bai, 1999). How to understand a word thoroughly and comprehensively? Penny (2000) thought, if the learning process of a word can connect with other words or other acquired knowledge, no matter in meaning or pronunciation, can both be beneficial. Similar theory has been illustrated by David Ausubel in his meaningful learning theory. Meaningful learning could happen only when newly learned knowledge integrated with acquired knowledge (from H. D. Brown, 2001). So it is much better to teach vocabulary in context, because some information in the context can provide clues to reach accurate understanding about certain vocabulary.

The necessity of exercise to vocabulary

As for exercises after class, Paribakht. T.S. and M. Wesche (1997) conducted a comparison about the effect of different vocabulary teaching method. The result showed vocabulary learning based on context plus all kinds of exercise (reading+ exercise) superior in both quantity and quality compared to reading only. Zimmerman.C.B. (1997) also had similar finding in his experiment: after the basic vocabulary learning in context, then those who received some exercises promoted more than those who didn't do exercises. Zimmerman analyzed the reason for promotion was mostly because the exercise provided new condition for vocabulary learning, the new information in exercises provided learners opportunity to re-understand the vocabulary. Different collocation and new usage can consolidate memory and understanding.

The benefits of building personal vocabulary notebook

Building personal dictionary is one of the effective ways to improve vocabulary learning. About the learning strategy of vocabulary, Schmitt (1997) categorized into two: discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Consolidation strategies were those which can integrate new vocabulary into long-term memory. Under Schmitt's categorization, vocabulary notebook was one aspect in consolidation strategies. JoDee Walters and Neval Bozkurt (2009) once said: "a vocabulary notebook can best be regarded as a kind of personal dictionary." Imitating the form of a dictionary, and record some important and useful vocabulary according to personal study situation. Not only write down the meaning, but also part of speech, transformations and example sentences. Vocabulary notebook is one way supported by experts to vocabulary learning, and the first advantage is to consolidate (Schmitt and Schmitt, 1995); the second is to improve learners' ability of looking up dictionary and predict meaning from context (Ledbury, n.d); third, inform teachers the condition about students' study (Fowle, 2002; Nation, 1990) ; forth, facilitate students' independent study (Fowle, 2002).

Approaches and methods in English vocabulary teaching

There existed many approaches or methods for English vocabulary teaching and learning. Such as direct presentation, meaning explain, comparison, association, word-formation, contextual approach. An English teacher should be able to explain English vocabulary in English (Allen,

2005). How to explain a word? Usually it can be done through definition, or using the features or relationships between subjects to explain. Besides, taking advantage of the situations is also a smart way to explain words. This kind of method not only can explain words accurately, but also can enlarge students' vocabulary. And help students to review the old knowledge, what's more, to help them to think as a native speaker (Sun, 2004).

English vocabulary is a scientific system. The total number of vocabulary is huge, but the elements which forming words are countable. It is said the common roots are around 300 and there are around 100 affixes. If the students are equipped with this kind of knowledge, when they meet a new word, they can analyze the word through the rule of word formation. In this way, it can help them remember and understand the words better.

Situation or context, playing an important role in vocabulary teaching and learning, can provide students huge amount of comprehensive input and hints, which could lead students to proper understanding through the relationships among words, and then reach deep connotative meaning or even cultural connotation. This method is advocated now in our new English curriculum standard.

Direct presentation is also a very effective and vivid way to vocabulary teaching. The teacher use pictures, objects, models, videos and even gestures and expressions to teach some vocabulary. The biggest advantage of the method is funny and vivid. For high school students, even they are mature enough to understand some abstract concept, but when encounter some proper nouns or expressions; direct presentation is more effective than any other ways. Direct stimulations to eyes and ears can help them to remember and understand words.

Association is also a popular way to vocabulary teaching. In English vocabulary teaching process, the teacher should take advantage of relationships of vocabulary and association rules to help students learn and review learnt knowledge. There exist special, time and meaning associations among words. Using these associations to help students to build vocabulary net or system, in this way the students could be motivated and then improve learning efficiency.

Proposed Design
Problem investigation and analysis
Pre-questionnaire and analysis
In order to find out the reasons behind the current vocabulary teaching and learning problems, which described before, an investigation was conducted in class 22, senior two, Nan Chong High School. There were 67 students, including 38 girls. All the 67 students did the questionnaire, and 64 pieces of questionnaires had been brought back. The questionnaire was made up of 7 questions. The first one was about students' attitude towards vocabulary. The next 3 questions were about teaching method and its effect. The fifth one was about the time they spend on vocabulary; the sixth one was about vocabulary learning strategy, and the last one was about practical use of vocabulary. For the first question, do you think vocabulary is important or not? 64 admitted the significance of vocabulary to English learning. From the second question, it was

easy to find out some teachers' teaching method was too traditional, still based on the words list, which cutting off the link between words and context. And for the third question, 78.81% students prefer contextually explain vocabulary. And there were 9.52% chose C. for the fourth question, there were76.51% students thought the current English learning was a little bit tired, but the result was not so happy. And for the fifth question, 6.23% said they can't catch up in class or sometimes made mistakes in recording. And about the time they spent on vocabulary, 58 students admitted they spent 15 minutes or even less on vocabulary everyday. Most of the students thought vocabulary was significant but so many of them did ignore it in daily study. Review was a crucial process in study. And 78.33% students thought vocabulary learning strategy would be helpful for them. About the practical use of vocabulary, 83.5% of them chose B. they can properly use some, but mistakes usually happened.

Through the questionnaire, it was obvious that almost every student has realized how important vocabulary was and they know what kind of teaching method was more helpful. Vocabulary was tensely linked with context. But they had trouble in flexibly using vocabulary in different situations, and they had difficulty in taking advantage of proper vocabulary learning strategies to help themselves, and they didn't realize the importance of review or enhancement.

Pretest and analysis

The test was made up of three parts: blank filling, sentence, and multiple choices. And the total score was 40. The blank filling took up 10 scores, and required students to fill the blanks according to Chinese or initial letters. For most of the students, it was easy to fill the blanks according to Chinese, but initial letters were more difficult. No one got full score in this part, and the average score was 6.59. Sentence part took up 20 scores and required students to complete sentences according to Chinese and hint words. No one got full score in this part, too. And the average score was 13.08. The multiple choices took up 10 scores, and seemed easier for the students, and there were 25 of them got full score. And the average score was 8.73.

For the blank filling, most of the errors were about word spelling and part of speech. After reading the whole sentence, the students might know which what meaning it was, but they were not able to distinguish the synonyms or distinguish part of speech. For example, "He became a to the drug." They know it should be "沉迷", but incorrectly use "addictive". They forgot the collocation of "be/ become addicted to". Both "addictive" and "addicted" were adjectives and have same Chinese meaning, but they were different in usage.

Completing sentences mainly tested collocations, "be curious about", "have/no difficulty in doing sth/ sth", "apply for", "despite of", "impress sb" and so on. Specifically, the collocation of "impress" took up the highest rate of error. Because "impress" can collocate in different forms, and different forms have slight difference, which was very difficult for students to distinguish. For the multiple choices, it required to find the one which was similar to the underlined words. The reason why students performed well in this part might the sentences had provided enough information to reach accurate understanding, thus it showed how important the context to vocabulary learning. The condition of the control group had no big difference with the

experimental group in the aspect of average score. The average score of each part was 6.68, 13.09, and 8.67. Except the multiple choices, the control group even acted better than the experimental group in the former parts.

Research topic identification

According to the investigation, in order to help students learn vocabulary more effective, some actions were designed:

(1)   About how to teach vocabulary in class, one of the most useful way is to teach in context. When they meet new words in reading, they might catch the meaning from the context, getting clue from synonym or antonym, or even guessing according to word formation rules , and in this way they can get better understanding about the usage of words, which is much better than rote memory. Teaching vocabulary in context was strongly supported by constructivism which emphasizes the link between learning and situation; Learning should be learner-centeredness; and advocating teaching should be based on actual situation, problem or text (Wang, 2002).

(2)   Stress the importance of review. Kachru, J.N. (1962) once claimed a word could be remembered at least 5 or 6 times' repetition. (a) Enhancing practical use by all kinds of exercises, like dictation, rewriting text or writing and so on. (c) Set up personal vocabulary notebook. According to personal situation, write down words including part of speech, collocation, synonym, antonym and example sentences.

Action research procedure

The action research lasted for ten weeks due to the tight internship practice. At the beginning of the second week of September, which was the beginning of this action research, a few questions about vocabulary learning and teaching had been thought about, and then a pre-test and a questionnaire were done first. After doing brief analysis about the test and questionnaire, students' problems were explored and research topics were identified. The first week was busy as so much work to do, and all the preparation had to be made within the week. The action research started from the second week, from Module two in their text book.

During the research, contextual approach to vocabulary teaching had been used in every module, and daily exercises in workbook or newspaper required to be completed regularly, and at the end of each module, text rewriting required to be done. Besides, students were required making sentences with the key phrases in each module, and last building their personal vocabulary notebook according to their own learning situation. In the notebook, each word should be equipped with part of speech, meaning, example sentences, collocations, synonym or antonym.

At the middle of the research, an interview and the second test were carried out. The interview was conducted within a 5 students group, who were chosen randomly. "(1) Do you think teaching vocabulary in context is more helpful than teach according to word list? (2) Did you really build your own vocabulary notebook? And review your notebook? (3) The exercises are

helpful or not? (4) Do you have any suggestions about English study?" the four questions had been asked to see how the action research went on. And the second test was done to see how the students acted in the research. After each week, some feelings about teaching and important details would be recorded in journal by the teacher. At the end of the research, a post-test and post-questionnaire were conducted to see the result, whether the actions in the research were helpful or not.

The implementation of the action research
The implementation of the contextual approach to vocabulary
From the second week on, the action research began. In class, the vocabulary teaching was mainly based on the contextual approach, which refers to guess the meaning of new words from the context. Nation (2010) said it was the most important of all the strategies for coping with and learning unknown vocabulary items. And he put forward a five-step strategy for guessing word meaning:

"1. looking at the unfamiliar word and determine the part of speech of the word;

2. looking at the immediate context of the word, that is, how does it relate to the words around it;

3. looking at the wider context of the word, that is, how the clauses relate to the preceding and following clauses;

4. guessing the meaning of the word;

5. checking the guess. "

According to Nation (2010) learners with a vocabulary of about 3000 words are capable of guessing, around 60%--70% of the new words in a reading text. So this way could be very meaningful in vocabulary learning. Deciding the part of speech is the key step for accurately words guessing. Then for the second step, the immediate context of the word, that is, the word is neutral, positive or negative. The wider context refers to the conjunction relationships around. With these preparation, guessing work then begin. After the previous step, the learner should try to guess the meaning and check guess. For checking work, what exactly should be done? The first one is absolutely the part of speech. Is your guessing the same with what it should be? Then, see the word formation. If the word has a prefix, root, or suffix that may suggest the meaning. Last but not least, put your guessing word in the passage and see if it makes sense. For example, in the following sentence, "The earthquake killed or injured thousands of people and crippled the city." The word "crippled" might be unfamiliar to learners but it can be guessed according to the formula:

"The earthquake Verb the city". "The earthquake" did something to "the city", thus the part of speech of "crippled" can be identified as a verb. Then, how does it relate to the others words around? From the "earthquake", "killed", "injured" and the conjunction "and" these clues, learners might be able to think of such ideas as "damage" or "destroy", which have similar meaning with such negative words.

Finding clues is vital in word guessing. Usually, the most common clues are definition, synonym and juxtaposition, antonym, cause and effect, examples. For definition, especially for nouns or

noun phrases, often followed by a definition, an apposition, an attribute or a relative clause, which help define or explain them. In this kind of situation, the most common signal words are "that is to say", "that means", "means", or a dash and so on. Take the word "gynecologist" for instance, which appeared in the students' reading exercise book. It was easy for most students to guess the meaning of "gynecologist" after reading the whole sentence: "Betty became a gynecologist after several years' effort, who major in women's disease." Through the relative clause here, the students could know the meaning and the part of speech of the word. For synonym and juxtaposition, in English, it is common to use synonym or juxtaposition to express the idea more clearly. For example, in the sentence "Victoria spoke fast. Later, she regretted such a hasty action." The students had difficulty in identifying "hasty", but it would not take them much time to guess the meaning since "hasty" obviously corresponded to "fast". Antonyms are important clues for guessing work. For example, "The museum looks normal outside, while it is quite exotic with fabulous subjects on display." Although the students may unfamiliar with the accurate meaning of "exotic", they might tell it is "not normal" according to "while". In English, signal words like "as a result", "since", "such…as", "so that", "for", "because of" and so on indicate cause and effect relationship. The effect depends on the cause, so it is very useful in identifying the meaning of words. "As a result of abusing, experts claimed the oil supply might diminished by the end of century." Through "As a result of abusing", students can infer "diminished" may means "used up". No matter in Chinese or English, many writers prefer to use examples to make ideas more vivid. In this sentence "many celebrities attend the fashion show, like Beyonce, Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, and the Owl City and so on." The students can easily find out "celebrities" might means "super stars". In China, English learning almost happened in class, but there is no enough time for learners to learn every word in class under the teachers' guidance. Thus, the skill of guessing words can help learners learn vocabulary independently and deal with more reading work could lead in large vocabulary expansion. Besides, in English, most words have different meaning in different situation, if the learners are good at interpreting the immediate contextual meaning of words will help increase the command of the words, which lead to high efficiency.

The implementation of exercising

From the week two on, the action research began. In class, the contextual approach was applied to vocabulary teaching. Then, after every English class, the students were required to finish some exercise in their work book, or newspaper. When a module finished, a dictation would be carried out, including words, phrases, and sentences. Besides, the students were also required to make sentences with some important words and phrases, and to retell or rewrite the text in this module.

The implementation of the personal notebook

After every module, the students were required to write down important words or phrases on their notebook, along with part of speech, meanings, collocations, and example sentences. These words and phrases can be their errors or mistakes in exercise, or what they feel difficult or important keys. Anyway, the content is based on personal study situation.

The adjustment of the action research

Interview

At the end of the fourth week, a brier interview was carried out. 5 students were collected randomly, and the following four questions were asked: (1) Do you think teach vocabulary in context is more helpful than teach according to word list? (2) Did you really build your own vocabulary notebook? And review your notebook? (3) The exercises are helpful or not? (4) Do you have any suggestions about English study?

For the first question, five of them agreed learning vocabulary in context was helpful. The practice of guessing words from context arouse their attention even when they did reading tasks after class. Especially, one student said, when she did reading after class, even met unknown words, she would not be entangled about the exact meaning of the words or worried about whether such words could hinder the whole comprehension. She just went on reading, sometimes; the meaning of the words can be inferred from the following or previous clauses. And this way was more helpful in doing cloze. The other four also agreed her idea.

For the second question, all of them build their personal notebook. But two boys admitted they didn't make sentences about the words. But all of them indicated although the task was somewhat difficult, they had to admit it was really helpful. Another girl said, once she didn't know how to make sentence, she would look up the dictionary or search on the internet. Both ways had systematic explain about the words, which could help memorizing and understanding. But only one of them reviewed the notebook. The other four just make the notes, seldom review their notes. For the third question, all of them said although they didn't like homework, the exercises after class did really help to vocabulary learning. Sentences dictation was sometimes difficult and text retelling to rewriting was very challenging.

For the last question, one boy said he like English movies and music and he hope the teacher can present some for them.

Mid-test

After the interview, the mid-test was conducted. For the blank filling, there were 6 blanks were about nouns, and the other 4 were about verbs. The average score was, 6.88and no one got full score. No.10 had the highest error rate. 80.12% students can not complete the blank. "S is the system by which some people are owned by others." Most of the students didn't understand what did "some people are owned by others" mean. About the verbs, mistakes focused on forms. In different times, different situations, verbs should transform accordingly. In sentence part, still no one got full score, and the average score was 12.98. The first sentence troubled the students. "Who knows what the future ?" Most of the students were unfamiliar with the collocation "in store", so most of them were depressed at the very beginning. Another trouble was about "tired of" and "tired from" in No. 9. Multiple choices were remain easier for the students because of the complete information. And there were 22 students got full score in this part, the average score was 8.64.

Since the two groups had similar English level, there was still no significant difference between them. And the average score of each part was 6.78, 12.89, and 8.65. What they did worst was still the two items mentioned above.

The adjustment

Compared to the pre-test, the students didn't show much progress in vocabulary learning. They still had problem in word forms and collocations. But from the interview, the teacher still could get some positive information; at least the students accepted the whole teaching method then. So according to the interview and the mid-test, the plan of the action research had been adjusted a little. First about the context approach, it didn't have big problem, but one thing should be clear was the cultural knowledge. Culture and language had close relationship (Hu, 1999); this kind of background knowledge can help words understanding. Take the sentence "S is the system by which some people are owned by others" as example, if the students knew something about slavery or slave, they can get the score. Why they lose score was not about vocabulary knowledge, was about the absence of certain cultural background knowledge. Thus, in the later teaching activity, the teacher would pay attention to the situation and added some culture knowledge if necessary.

Second about the text retelling or rewriting, the students thought it was challenging. So for the later texts, the teacher would provide an outline for them to retell to rewrite. With some clue, it might be easier for students to go on the task.

Third about the notebook, almost every student carried on the program but they did poor in review job. Thus, the teacher decided to check some students' notebooks and asked some questions according to their notes during the morning reading.

Fourth about the movie and music, but there was no time for movies. So playing some English songs before the first class every afternoon would interest the students. For someone who loves English songs, maybe they would try to study and remember the lyrics, which was also a useful way to English learning.

Results and discussion

Post-test

This test still consisted of 3 parts: blank filling, completing sentence, and multiple choices. The total score was 40. In blank filling part, there still 6 items about nouns and 4 about verbs. This time, there were 5 five students got full score. And the average score for this part was 6.98. In sentence part, the result was not so pleasant. The average score was 12.82. The students were still had problem in the usage of collocations. And the multiple choices, most of the students didn't have much trouble for the students and the average score was 8.74.

For the control group, the results were not as good as the experimental group. There was no one got full score in blank filling, and the average score was 6.75. For the sentence part, the result was still no so pleasant, and the average score was 12.77. For the last part, multiple choices, they got 8.72 average score.

Post-questionnaire

This questionnaire consisted of 5 questions. And all the 67 students completed the questionnaire, and 67 had been brought back. The first one was about students' English learning interest during the applying of contextual approach. Only 14.9% of them felt very interested in the skill. And 22.4% of them chose B, having some interest. There were 53.6% of them chose C, they felt just– so- so. And 10.5% felt not into the way. The second one was either the traditional approach or the contextual approach was more helpful in English learning. There were 2.9% of students thought the former one was more helpful, while 67.2% of them preferred to the later one. And 29.9% of them thought both were helpful. No one chose D for this question. The third one was about the interaction in class between the teacher and the students. There were 22.4% of students thought they interacted with the teacher well. And there were52.2% of them felt good with teacher in class, and 7.5% felt nothing special. And 1.8% of them thought there was no clear change for them in class. The fourth question was about how the present teaching method affected their autonomous learning. The aim of this question was to see whether all the means the teacher used during this time could guide the students to learn and review vocabulary knowledge systematically after class by themselves. 14.9 of the students thought the means were definitely helpful, and 55.2% of them thought the means did have benefit for them. And 26.9 of them thought the means were just-so-so. And 2.9% of students thought the means were not so helpful. The last question was about students' progress. After the ten-week's action research, did these actions help them in English vocabulary learning? 11.9% of the students said they made great progress in vocabulary learning. And 49.3% of them said they made a few progress, 32.8% of them said they had made a little progress, but 5.9% of the students said they didn't make much progress.

From the questionnaire, it was clear that for most of the students, they accepted the actions which were planned by the teacher to reach effective English vocabulary teaching and learning. The contextual approach encouraged students to guess words meaning from context by themselves. This was also a kind of autonomous study skill training. And during the class, if the students had difficulty in guessing, the teacher gave guidance and hints to inspired them to think, and then they guessed bravely, and checked from the teacher, which was the best interaction in class. All kinds of exercises and personal notebook could enhance the command of words and force students to review. But one thing must be emphasized---interest, which was not dealt with well in the research. There was an old saying: "Interest is the best teacher." If the teacher could cater to the student's wishes, English learning might be more relaxing for them. During the research, because of much emphasis on the command of vocabulary knowledge, neglecting the importance of interest. This was what should be improved in the future. These actions can help students to some degree, but the progress was not so clear due to the time limitation.

Comparisons of the three tests

There were three tests in the action research. In order to see how the action research went on, it was necessary to make a comparison about the tests, whether the actions could be really helpful.

The following table showed the difference in the three tests, as for average score, range, and standard deviation. It was obvious that the average score was improving. And comparing to the pre-test, the mid-test and the post-test had small range, that was to say the scores of each student was getting closer. And from the standard deviation, the difference among students was also getting closer step by step.

Table-1

	Average score	range	Standard deviation	
Pre-test	28.42	5.5	1	3.76
Mid-test	28.50	2.5	1	3.51
Post-test	28.55	2.5	1	3.50

Table-2: The average score of each part

	Blank filling	Completing sentence	Multiple choices
Pre-test	6.59	13.08	8.73
Mid-test	6.88	12.98	8.64
Post-test	6.98	12.82	8.74

In order to further the analysis, the table two: the average soccer in each part would show the results from another aspect. The table mainly showed the average score of each part in the three tests. Blank filling was the popular pattern to test the students' command of the usage of words in specific situation. And this was contextual approach did in class. While doing this kind of exercise, many factors must be considered, such as tense and voice. After much training, the students got familiar with these skills, thus they could get better in test, as the table showed. Besides, there were five students got full scores in this part, in the post-test. Completing sentences was demanding for the students. Students should not only know the collocations, but also know how to use them in different situations correctly. This was the reason why the students were required to build personal notebook. Writing down vocabulary, and keeping down meanings and example sentences. This was a time consuming job, so they didn't make much progress according to the data. Multiple choices mainly tested students' accurate understanding about vocabulary, especially in a certain situation. They must have the ability to distinguish the most appropriate one from others. From the table, they acted well in this part all the time.

Comparisons of the two groups

The groups had similar English level in the same grade. From the former two tests, it can be clearly found out there was no big differences between the two groups. Even at the beginning, the control group acted a little better than the experimental group. But, through the ten weeks' action research, the experimental group acted better gradually than the control group. No matter in average score, or the amount of who got full score in some part, the experimental group progressed.

Journals and reflections

During the ten weeks, ten brief journals about the action research had been down. In the first week, the students were introduced the requirement of the teacher, and their job in the later study process. From the second week, the action research began. In the class, they were somewhat quiet, but still showed support. In the later class, they got used to the teacher and the class atmosphere, if there were any problem, they could ask in or after the class, which improved the interaction between the teacher and the students. For their exercise, everyone could finish in time. In their notebook, there were some mistakes in example sentences. As for this problem, the students were required to look up dictionary to ensure that what in the notebook were definitely correct. For text retelling or rewriting, at first it was really difficult for most of the students to finish the task. They didn't know how to do it. But after the outline added by the teacher, they found the way to the task gradually. Looking at the outline, and searching for some key words and points, most of them could complete the task. And they felt encouraging.

Through the three tests, the post-questionnaire, the interview and the journals, it can conclude the action research was effective indeed.

First the context approach enabled the students the skill of guessing words from the context, which enhanced their understanding and commanding of the vocabulary knowledge.
Second, the exercises, such as dictation, making sentences, or text retelling or rewriting provide the opportunity to know and understand the vocabulary again, which was helpful for truly memorizing.

Third, the personal notebook was a conclusion of their personal study. Every letter in the notebook was in a system, which could help the student to remember scientifically and systematically.

Conclusion
Summary of the research
The important role of vocabulary to English learning required the teachers could guide and assist the students. This action research followed this idea. As an English teacher, it was crucial to create a kind of active language learning environment to improve vocabulary learning. Contextual approach could create a positive atmosphere for the students to learn vocabulary and language at the same time. Active thinking and participation could improve learning efficiency

and learning interest. If they could guess a word accurately through their own thinking and efforts, they could gain a sense of achievement from learning, and then they might feel more encouraging in learning, thus might forming a positive cycle in learning process, which would benefit the students for their further study. Also beyond class, the teacher should monitor the study condition according to work or exercise. The aim of doing exercise was to enhance learning. Words in different situation may have different meaning and usage. The students could get thorough understanding about a word in all kinds of exercise. Besides, doing exercise was a way of review, which was a very significant process in learning. Doing exercises regularly, text retelling or rewriting and building personal notebook could provide students opportunity to review in meaningful language situations. In order to solve vocabulary problem and then reach effective English vocabulary teaching, the ten-week action research had been conducted. And through the data analysis, it can be concluded as:

The action research could improve students' vocabulary knowledge and the ability of language use, and then internalize the knowledge. Through the three tests, it can be clearly seen that the average score was improving, the range was narrowing and the standard deviation was decreasing. That was to say, most of the students was progressing, the method and the requirement made by the teacher could really help them in vocabulary learning. Especially the contextual approach, the students were required to guess words from context instead of rote memory, which could inspire them to think.

The action research could guide students in effective strategy of learning and remembering words. If they could command the vocabulary knowledge in the class under the teacher's guidance, it would not take them much time after class to repeat. Guessing words from the context provided meaningful situation to understand the words; the exercise and notebook could also be considered as effective memorizing strategy. Especially the personal notebook, students recorded words systematically. When they did the notes, actually it was also a process of knowledge summarizing.

The action research could enhance the review job; the personal notebook could help student form a good habit of systematically review. Also to the teacher, they could know the students' study condition. If a word or phrase appeared in most of the students' notebook, that must be the key point for them. So the teacher might adjust teaching plan according to this kind of information. This can form a positive cycle between the teacher and the students.

Pedagogical implications

According to the Relevance Theory, which was put forward by Sperber and Wilson (1986), verbal communication was an ostensive-inferential process and involved the code model and inferential model. Simply speaking, that was to say different words had different meaning in different verbal situations. The simplest example was "have". In "I have the dinner." It means "eat"; while in "I have a book." It means "own". Thus, when the teachers made teaching plan, what should be emphasized was how to help students reach the optimal relevance of vocabulary

but not the quantity. Contextual approach to vocabulary learning was an effective way to reach the Relevance Theory, which required learning words in actual verbal situations.

Besides, another difficulty of the vocabulary teaching was to understand the cultural meanings. What troubled the students was not the pronunciation or spell, but how to use vocabulary appropriately. Thus, in teaching activity, it would be better for the teachers to introduce or add some relevant cultural knowledge. For example, in the mid-test, "S is the system by which some people are owned by others." troubled many students. There were no complicated words in the sentence, but most of them failed due to the lack of background knowledge.

The new curriculum standard emphasized the aim of English learning was not just language knowledge and skills, but also focused on emotional attitude, which including interest, motivation, confidence and cooperation. As for vocabulary teaching, vivid and interesting situations could trigger learning motivation. Especially for high school students, they were full of curiosity. They may love to learn English because of a song or a movie. Thus in English teaching activity, the teacher should pay attention to improving learning interest. Songs, movies and dramas were effective ways to improve learning interest.
Teaching activity should be learner-centered. Teachers were the organizers, guides and should be good at encouraging students to think.

Limitations of the study
Although the action research had some achievement, it certainly had some limitations.
The sample just was made up by 67 students, the number was quite small. And the students were from the experimental class of a key school. And their motivation and ability of study were relatively higher to some degree.
As for the limited time for internship, the action research only lasted for ten weeks. So there must be some problems neglected.
Also the questions in the interview and questionnaires should be polished to better reflect real problems.

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