

Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the transitions of Japanese university students' beliefs about and use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). They were examined with two surveys administered in April and October. The participants were 119 university students who used to focus on studying reading and grammar for university entrance examinations, and started to study other skills as well in university. In the new environment, they were expected to develop their productive vocabulary knowledge, because they needed to improve their speaking and writing proficiency. For the participants, using VLSs which are useful to develop their productive vocabulary knowledge was important. Whether or not the participants started to use such VLSs was mainly investigated through quantitative research. The reasons of the results were also examined from the participants' descriptions in the open-ended questions. In addition, based on the results, implication for VLS instruction was suggested.

The study has five main significant points. First, the study can provide useful suggestions for language teachers who would like to develop their students' VLS use. Vocabulary is essential in language acquisition. Even speaking proficiency, which may be regarded as having the weakest relationship with vocabulary knowledge among four skills (i.e., reading, listening, speaking and writing), is considerably affected by vocabulary knowledge. However, acquiring sufficient amount of vocabulary is often challenging.

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Therefore, it is essential for language learners to use VLSs appropriately and develop their vocabulary knowledge efficiently. In particular, for learners who cannot receive sufficient input of the target language outside classes, it is very important to learn vocabulary in strategic ways. For these reasons, language teachers who teach such students are expected to teach VLS use. The study can help the teachers consider how to conduct effective VLS instruction.

Second, the study focuses on English learners who used to study reading and grammar mainly, and started to study other skills such as speaking afterward. In Japan, many English junior or senior high school students study English mainly for entrance examinations which usually evaluate only grammar and reading skills. Thus Japanese learners who would like to develop their communicative English abilities tend to start studying English after they graduate from high schools. Such learners seem to exist in other East-Asian countries, such as China, Taiwan, and South Korea where studying for entrance examinations is important. Nevertheless, except a few studies, the learners have not been focused on.

Third, the study investigates not only learners' VLS use but also their beliefs about VLSs. Most of the previous studies on VLSs only examine VLS use. However, especially when suggestions for VLS instruction are considered, investigating beliefs is also important. This is because VLS instruction needs to change in accordance with learners' beliefs. If learners have a positive belief about a VLS, just teaching how to use it might be sufficient.

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On the other hand, if they have a negative belief toward it, teachers would need to convince them of the effectiveness of the strategy before or during the instruction. Consequently, this study surveyed both of them.

Fourth, the study uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The majority of previous studies on VLSs uses either quantitative or qualitative research method. However, in order to investigate not only general tendency of VLS beliefs and use but also the reasons, using both research methods is essential. I believe that the study could analyze the data deeply through employing Likert scale questions and open ended questions, and be a good model of VLS research using both kinds of research methods.

Finally, the study investigates whether learning environment affects VLSs through examining the transitions of learners' VLS use. Language learners can change their VLS use in accordance with changes of their learning environment and learning goals. However, the majority of previous studies on VLSs has surveyed learners' VLS use at one point, and has not focused on the transitions. Therefore, it has not been unclear what factors affect learners' VLS use in detail yet. If it was revealed, the findings would be meaningful when teachers consider how to change learners' VLSs into more appropriate ones.

Results and Discussion

The results of April's survey indicate that the participants had positive beliefs about all of the 13 VLSs which the survey examined. In particular, they had strong positive beliefs about VLSs which are effective for developing their productive vocabulary knowledge. On the other hand, the results also show that the participants did not necessarily use frequently the VLSs about which they had positive beliefs.

Next, the transition of the beliefs and use in April and October is discussed.

The results of the surveys suggest that learners' beliefs on VLS hardly changed between April and October. Though frequency of some VLS use decreased, frequency of no VLSs use increased. To sum up, the statistical data shows the participants scarcely changed their beliefs and learned to use new VLSs even if they started learning speaking and had goals which required them to develop their productive vocabulary knowledge.

The qualitative data in the open ended questions show some reasons why they did not change their VLS beliefs and use. For example, some learners lost their motivation for English learning in general, and had strong confidence in their use of VLSs which they had been using for many years. In addition, there were learners who believed that developing vocabulary was not so important for developing speaking skills, which they tried to develop the most seriously.

On the other hand, there were also some participants who had changed their

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perceptions about their vocabulary knowledge or vocabulary learning through studying speaking, though the number was not large enough to affect statistical interpretations. This result shows that speaking can be a motivating factor for vocabulary learning as well as a demotivating factor. Furthermore, there were a few learners who had chanted their VLSs for other reasons, such as learning language acquisition theory and meeting friends with high English proficiency whom the participants would like to keep up with.

Pedagogical Implication

As the results suggest, many of the participants did not start to use new VLSs which are effective for developing productive VLSs. Therefore, it seems to be important for teachers to give VLS instruction.

The participants comment in the open ended questions provide some clues to give successful VLS instruction. First, teachers need to get learners to recognize the importance of vocabulary. The result suggests that there are learners who focus on studying speaking and do not recognize the necessity of developing vocabulary. However, such learners do not seem to be ideal. Teachers should get the students to realize how important learning vocabulary is to improve speaking proficiency and attain their goals.

In order to convince learners of the significance of vocabulary learning and the effectiveness of VLSs to teach, encouraging them to reflect their experiences during

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speaking seems to be meaningful. The result of the study shows that some English learners had recognized the significance of vocabulary in speaking. It seems to imply that even if learners do not notice the importance of vocabulary in speaking at the present, reflecting their experiences that they could not speak well because of poor vocabulary knowledge could let them notice it. In addition, reflecting the experience can be a trigger for students to consider effective VLSs as well as notice the importance of keeping learning vocabulary. If learners recognized the fact from their experiences, they would recognize the necessity of changing their VLSs. This phase would be effective especially for learners who have strong positive beliefs about their existing VLSs with which they overcame the entrance examinations.

Another reasonable method to promote changes of learners' beliefs about and use of VLSs is to teach second language acquisition theory to students. There were participants who had mentioned that studying it was a trigger to consider their VLSs. Other students might be motivated in considering appropriate VLSs in the same ways.

Moreover, asking learners who have changed their VLSs autonomously to share their experiences with other students appears to be effective. Not only teachers' advice but also classmates' advice can be influential for students. In fact, a few participants in the study stated that their classmates had encouraged them to reflect their vocabulary learning. The present study suggests that there are participants who have changed their VLSs autonomously. Such learners can be good models for their classmates who have not recognized the

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importance of changing VLSs yet or do not know how to change them. Therefore, it seems to be effective for teachers to find out students who can be models of others, and ask them to talk about their learning experiences and vocabulary learning methods.

Conclusion

One of the limitations of the study is that many parts of the findings and implications are based on participants' short comments. It is needed to admit that more research is essential to deepen our understanding. However, at least, the study will become a trigger to do further research which would give meaningful suggestions to teachers who attempt to stimulate the students' motivation in vocabulary learning and change their VLS use.

Vocabulary learning is tough but essential to acquire second language. Further research making use of this study's suggestions will contribute to change students into good language learners who can learn vocabulary effectively, actively, and enjoyably.