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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VOCABULARY TEACHING METHODS FOR MONGOLIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract-Since Mongolia transitioned to a capitalist economy market 30 years ago, the education sector has been in constant transition, trying to move away from the central-planning curriculums used during the period of subsidies under the Soviet Union to more effective, student-centered teaching methodologies. While the private education sector has made great strides in this regard, and progressed towards meeting international standards in teaching English, the same cannot be said for public or state-owned educational institutions. In 2011, the Government of Mongolia adopted the Cambridge International teaching methods and assessment standards with the aim of training a globally competitive, skilled labor force [1]. The situation in public high schools was then thrust under the spotlight when Government mandated that in order to enter universities, graduating students had to possess B1 Levels on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in English vocabulary and language skills. This research was conducted to explore the various vocabulary teaching methods used by teachers and identify the most effective or preferable strategies to assist students attain and maintain the appropriate skill levels in English to succeed in tertiary education. Teachers and students of various levels were surveyed to explore the different forms of vocabulary pedagogy used in classrooms to prepare students for, as well as get them through tertiary education in Mongolia.

Keywords- Pedagogy, Vocabulary Teaching Methodology, CEFR Level, Imagination, Constructivist Theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

Three decades have passed since Mongolia transitioned to a capitalist economy, and while English teaching methodologies have been developed and implemented, the teaching of English vocabulary in public high schools has basically remained unchanged from the teacher-centered approach, which has proven vastly ineffective for students entering tertiary education. The teacher-centered methodology has been primarily used to teach English since 1992 in public or state-owned high schools. This strategy involves teacher input or output with students generally working alone. Information considered essential is provided by the teacher and students passively receive that information. Language learners are positioned lower than teachers [2].

An analysis on the results from Placement Tests of 1600 students who enrolled with the University of Finance and Economics over the past two academic years (2020-2021 and 2021-2022) clearly showed that students from public high schools scored considerably lower than students from private high schools. The considerable majority of students from public high schools have English language competency ranges from A1 to B1 levels on the Common European Framework of References to Languages (CEFR), while the majority of students from private high schools' place within the B1-C1 ranges. It is evident that the teaching methodologies being implemented in public high schools have to be re-examined, amended and improved in order to gain the appropriate levels of effectiveness to prepare students for higher education. As a result of globalization, the Mongolian educational system has to become more competitive and internationalized [3].

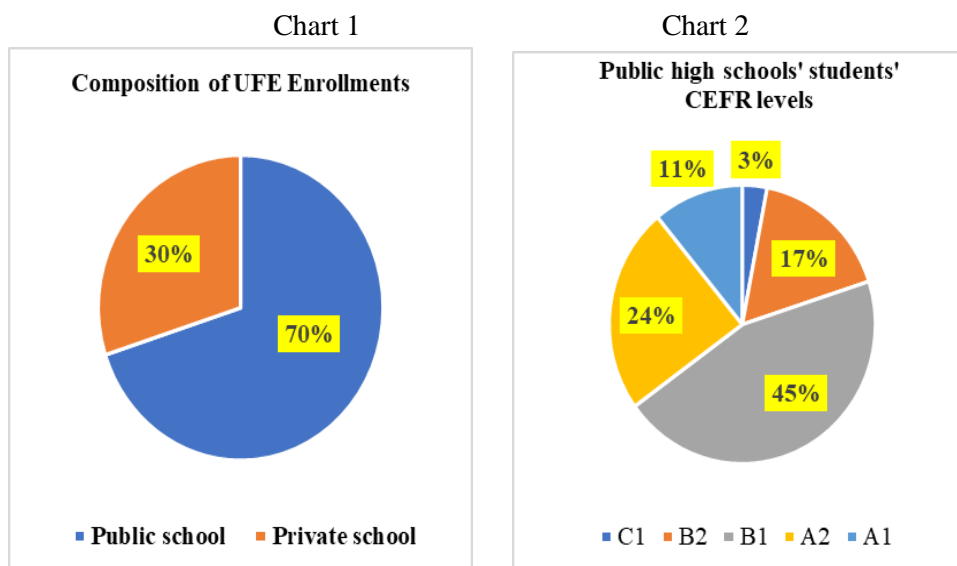
Based on the information gathered through questionnaires from 800 freshmen and sophomores, along with results from a survey of 100 English teachers in public high schools and universities, a transition to more student-centered approaches to learning vocabulary and the English language were warranted. The student-centered approach focuses on meaning-making, inquiry, and authentic activity in contrast to the traditional form of teaching. In some areas, this approach was being viewed as intervention or differentiation. Educators seek to utilize student-centered learning when a student is not successful in the traditional school or classroom environment [4]. The aim of this strategy is to formulate an environment where teachers and students work together in the development of knowledge rather than it being transmitted by the teacher.

This article aims to improve the vocabulary teaching methods by exploring, comparing, and contrasting the current pedagogical approaches being implemented in high schools

and universities in Mongolia. The ideas presented in this article are based on the comparison of past and current teaching methodologies, and the authors' experiences in teaching general and academic English vocabulary in the context of the University of Finance and Economics.

2. SURVEY RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Over the past two academic years, more than 1700 students enrolled with UFE. Of this figure, approximately 70 per cent were students that graduated from public high schools. See Chart 1. Results from placement tests taken at the beginning of the academic year show that 11% of students stand at A1 levels, about 24% are at A2, 45% at the B1 level, 17% at B2, and 3% at C1 level. See Chart 2.



Following these English placement tests, the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL) at UFE conducted additional vocabulary tests and found that students possessed a vocabulary bank of about 900-1000 words. As a result, these students were required to undertake mandatory bridging English language lessons to improve their skills and bring them up to the B1 level as mandated by the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Mongolia for any student entering tertiary education. With vocabulary considered a key to language learning, students need to be taught appropriate vocabulary learning strategies in order to comprehend, acquire, and memorize key points as well as find solutions to communication challenges. There have been various studies conducted on

vocabulary teaching and learning strategies, but very few have been done on the Mongolian education sector. According to Tserenjav [5], “Vocabulary learning is an important process that ESL/EFL learners must pass through in order to acquire adeptness and competence in their chosen language since word power has been proven to be capable of facilitating fluency in speaking and effectiveness in writing”.

2.1 STUDENT SURVEY

A survey was conducted on 110 students enrolled in the UFE Academic English Courses at different levels. The students were freshmen and sophomores that enrolled with UFE in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years. The participants in this study are Mongolian freshmen and sophomores, who have been studying English as a foreign language for more than 10 years, before enrolling at UFE. They are 18-19-year-old students majoring in Finance, Business, Economics, Law, Accounting, and Marketing. All students at the University who successfully pass the Placement Tests have English lessons three times a week. Those who are unsuccessful in the placement tests, receive bridging lessons twice a week until they are able to attain the B1 level and enroll into the Core English Courses. In the questionnaires provided to students, they were given 12 different vocabulary learning methods and were required to identify which ones they had been exposed to and rank them in order of effectiveness. See Table 1. Students were also asked to provide reasons for their preferences and give other methods they have used or continue to use in order to improve and maintain their English languages skills.

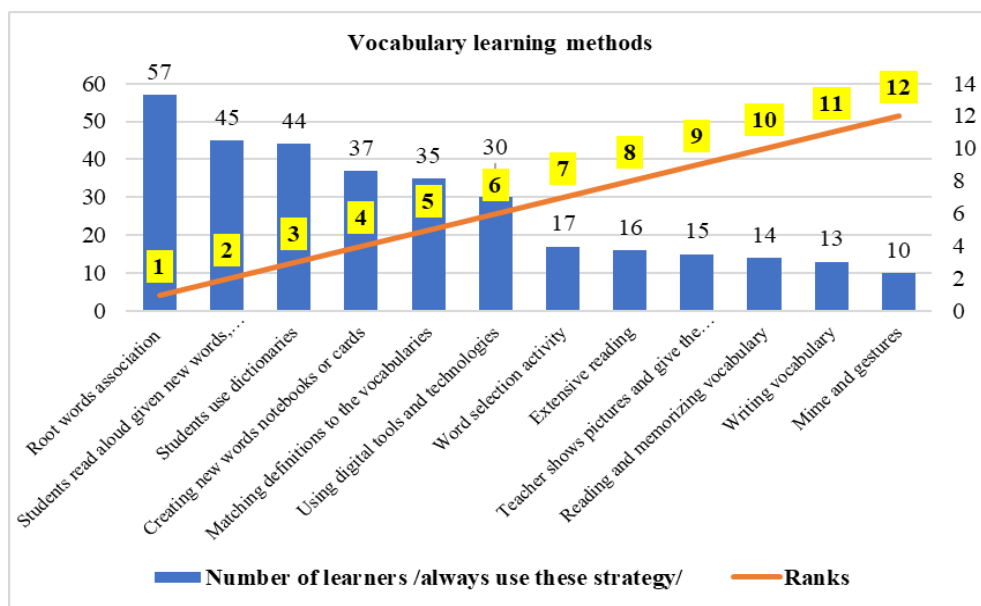
<Table 1> The vocabulary memorization teaching methods

Methods	Number of learners	Ranks
Root words association	57	1
Make example sentences after discussions.	45	2
Students use dictionaries	44	3
Creating new words notebooks or cards	37	4
Matching definitions to the vocabularies	35	5
Using digital tools and technologies	30	6
Word selection activity	17	7
Extensive reading	16	8
Teacher shows pictures and give the meaning of the words	15	9
Reading and memorizing vocabulary	14	10
Writing vocabulary	13	11
Mime and gestures	10	12

From the survey, students identified the root word association learning method as the most effective. Under the root word association method, students are required to work in groups making connections from their background knowledge, cultures, and environment to the new vocabulary item. Using the information, they have drawn through discussions, they create short stories linked to the new word. Students unanimously stated that they preferred this method because it increased their participation and control in the learning process. Children learn more, and enjoy learning more when they are actively involved, rather than passive listeners [6].

The second most popular method was identified as the creation of new sentences following discussions and knowledge sharing with classmates. Students found the interaction with their peers as more effective in terms of learning definitions and proper usage of words in sentences. The use of dictionaries, creating new vocabulary notebooks or flashcards, as well as the use of digital applications followed. Students found methods such as extensive reading, context clues, word selection activities, and matching definitions as the less effective for them.

Chart 3. Vocabulary learning methods



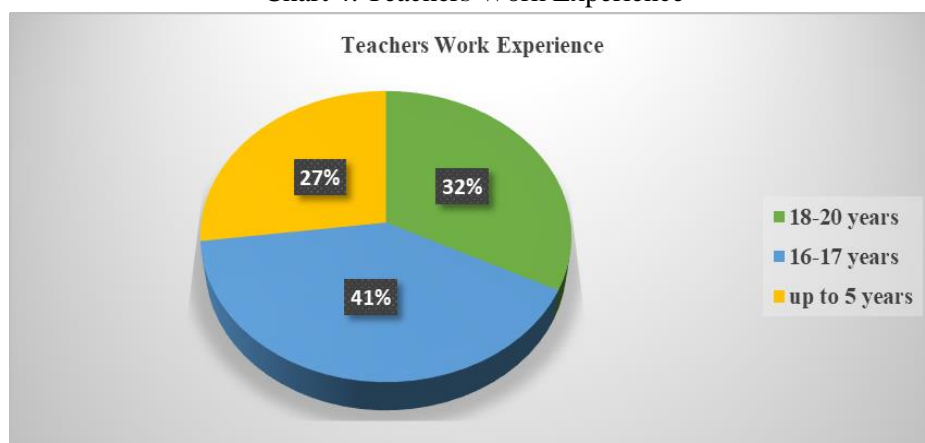
Alternative methods they found interesting and effective in developing their vocabulary and English language skills were watching movies, listening to music, speaking with friends in English, and rewriting new vocabulary. The research also showed that the traditional methods of teacher-centered learning was considered as less

effective by students. Students regarded mimes and gestures, writing vocabulary as well as reading and memorizing vocabulary the least effective vocabulary learning methods.

2.2 TEACHER SURVEY

A questionnaire containing 6 questions was sent to 100 English teachers in private and public high schools, and universities. 20 responses were received from private high school teachers, 50 from public high school and 30 responses from university lecturers. 30 percent of the teachers have been teaching English for 16-17 years, 24 percent between 18-20 years, and 20 percent with five years' experience.

Chart 4. Teachers Work Experience



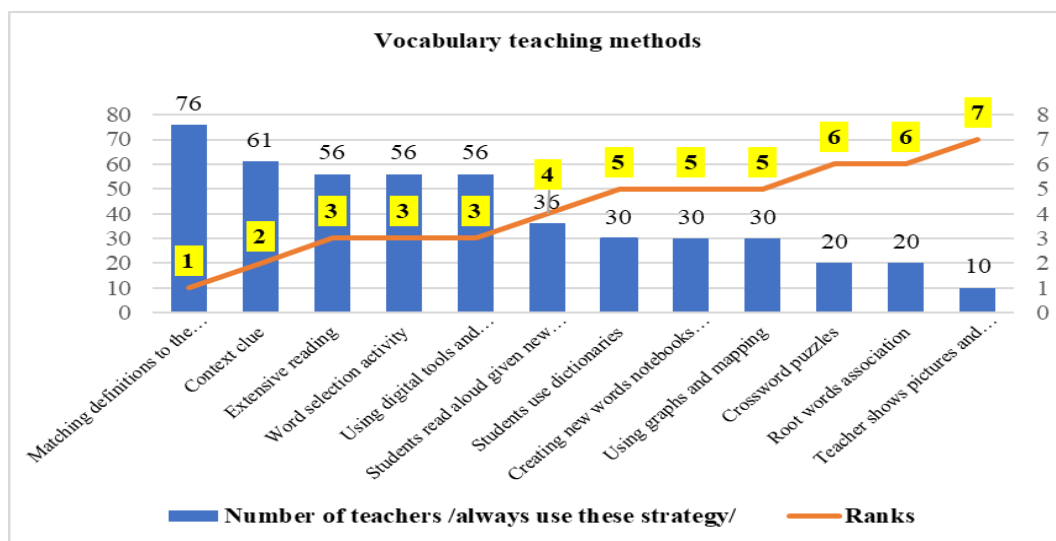
The research aimed at finding out the most frequently and least frequently used teaching methods first, sourcing teachers' opinions on ranking these methods on effectiveness, and identifying other methods used. It was focused on comparing the experiences and opinions of both teachers and learners regarding the various vocabulary teaching methods being used. See Table 2.

Table 2. The vocabulary teaching methods (VTMs) used by Mongolian teachers /rank, frequency/

Methods	Number of teachers	Ranks
Matching definitions to the vocabularies	76	1
Context clue	61	2
Extensive reading	56	3
Word selection activity	56	3
Using digital tools and technologies	56	3
Students read aloud given new words, memorize and make sentences.	36	4
Students use dictionaries	30	5
Creating new words notebooks or cards	30	5
Using graphs and mapping	30	5
Crossword puzzles	20	6
Root words association	20	6
Teacher shows pictures and give the meaning of the words	10	7

The most common VTM is matching definitions to the vocabularies used by 76 teachers from a total of 87, while context clue is second, facilitated by 61 lecturers. These are followed by word selection activity, using digital tools and technologies, extensive reading, students read aloud given new words, memorize and make sentences methods are repeatedly used whereas, creating new words notebooks or cards, using graphs and mapping, students use dictionaries, and root words are the quite new for teachers. See Chart 5.

Chart 5. Vocabulary teaching methods



Other methods used by teachers that weren't listed in the survey questionnaire were miming, translations, running dictations, and identifying synonyms and antonyms, quizlet applications, gaming, role plays, and revision of previous vocabulary in different sentence types.

3. RESEARCH OBSERVATIONS

Research results clearly showed that there was a contradiction between the perceptions of effectiveness of learning vocabulary amongst students and teachers. While teachers generally prefer teacher-centered methods, students opt to learn vocabulary through constructivist-based approaches. Constructivist learning theorists view the learning process as an active construal of new information in relation to each learner's past experience, beliefs, and individual perceptions [7]. The theory of constructivism involves the process in which learners develop their own knowledge rather than passively receiving it from teachers.

According to students, the most effective methods for them were when they were completely involved in the learning process, learning, and practicing new vocabulary with peers. Students believe it is easier to learn new vocabulary when they are involved in interesting, enjoyable, and entertaining activities. However, for teachers, the perception is the use of activities such as matching definitions and context clues are the most effective.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly show that the vocabulary teaching methodologies being implemented in public or state-owned high schools need to be developed and improved for students to be at the state required level when they enter University. As the study reveals, the traditional teacher-centered approach being implemented in most state-owned high schools leave the students with a lack of vocabulary and place them at a disadvantaged position when they enter University as freshmen. 35% of the students that graduated from public high school fell short of the government mandated threshold of B1 level to enroll in core Academic English Courses at university.

To ensure high school students have the necessary language skills when they enter tertiary institutions, and university graduates have the competency when they enter the labor market, more student-centered learning strategies have to be implemented in high

school classrooms. If students have the adequate vocabulary base, they are able to improve in all English skills and become more competent learners. In the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 88 tertiary institutions, 37 universities, 48 higher education institutions, and 3 colleges.


Comprehensive research needs to be conducted to identify the full impact of current teaching strategies on enrollments in all Mongolian universities. While this research explored the current situation being experienced by freshmen and sophomores at UFE, more needs to be done to assist the more than 147,000 graduate and undergraduate population in the tertiary education system.

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