

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the effects of vocabulary learning strategy instruction on mastery of strategies, vocabulary learning, and motivation of senior high school students. Based on the data analyses and findings in Chapter Four, this chapter first summarizes the major findings. Afterwards, some pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are provided.

Summary of the Major Findings

The results of the present study have been discussed in detail in Chapter Four. In this section, the major findings are summarized in accordance with the five research questions proposed in Chapter One.

First, there were similarities between the experimental group and the control group in mastery of overall vocabulary learning strategies throughout the study. For one thing, before the instruction, both groups used the overall strategies only with some mastery; even after the instruction, they did not gain much mastery over the overall strategies. For another, throughout the whole study, all the participants adopted shallow strategies with more mastery. They favored the strategies used to process words at a superficial level such as rote learning and studying the sound/spelling of a word. Besides, all the participants did not like to use study aids and they adopted memory strategies with little mastery. However, after the instruction, VLSI led to some differences between the experimental group and the control group in mastery of strategies. VLSI helped the experimental group master one of the memory strategies “group words together within a storyline” better while the control group still did not master this strategy. Another difference lay in the use of verbal repetition. After receiving VLSI, the experimental group seemed to get rid of

repeating individual letters and to turn to learning words by repeating syllables while the control group favored verbal repetition of individual letters throughout the study. In short, though VLSI did not have obvious effects on increasing overall strategy mastery, VLSI benefited the participants in learning memory strategies and in directing them to the correct way of repeating English words by syllables.

Second, regarding the mastery over the six instructed strategies, VLSI was not found significantly effective in increasing mastery of strategies in the two posttests. No significant difference in strategy mastery between the experimental and control groups may be due to the experimental group's lack of motivation during the instruction. Without motivation, the experimental group may not have used and practiced the strategies instructed. The factor "treatment" did not play a significant role in increasing the mastery but the other factor "time" did. The mastery of the target strategies by both groups was increased significantly after VLSI. This may be due to the massive amount of vocabulary they had to deal with in senior high schools, the way of presenting vocabulary in their textbooks, and the test formats in their exams. A great many unknown words might motivate them to look up words in a dictionary. In their English textbooks, a group of derivational words was provided when a base word was introduced in the vocabulary section. Therefore, the control group might also learn word-part analysis by themselves. Besides, in taking English exams, all the participants were required to make sentences. Probably, in the tense teaching schedule, the six types of instructed vocabulary learning strategies were not mastered well by the experimental group. Therefore, no significant difference existed between the two groups but significant changes were found between the pretest and the immediate posttest, and between the pretest and the delayed posttest.

Third, as for participants' performance on the vocabulary tests, the differences between the experimental group and the control group in recalling the meanings of the

target items reached the significant level in the two posttests while the differences in retrieval of the spellings of the target items were not significant. That is, VLSI played a significant role in development of receptive vocabulary knowledge in the two posttests. In other words, VLSI can help the participants memorize the meaning of words significantly better and retain the meaning longer than the traditional vocabulary instruction. However, VLSI achieved a different effect on vocabulary production. No significant differences between the two groups were found in retrieving the forms of target words in the two posttests. The reason why VLSI was significantly effective in recognition, not in production, may be due to the essence of vocabulary learning—receptive leaning is easier than productive learning (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004; Nation, 2001). Both experimental and control groups, therefore, made more progress in receptive knowledge than in productive knowledge. Comparing the results in the immediate posttest with those in the delayed posttest (four weeks after VLSI), no significant loss was found in vocabulary recognition and production of the target words. This may be due to the fact the target words were commonly used words in reading and that the participants had done these vocabulary tests with the same target items three times. Based on the analyses of two different parts of vocabulary knowledge, it can be concluded that it is more difficult to retrieve the spelling of a word than to recognize its meaning. Therefore, vocabulary production needs more time and repeated efforts to master. That is probably why VLSI benefited the participants more in recognizing the word meaning than in spelling out the word form.

Fourth, as far as vocabulary learning motivation is concerned, after the study, no significant differences between the two groups were found across three different testing times. That is, the VLSI treatment in this study had no significant effects on increasing motivation. Though the treatment factor did not play a significant role in

increasing motivation, the other factor “time” did. For all the participants as a group, their motivation significantly improved at the end of the instruction. The reason may be the huge vocabulary gap the participants needed to bridge between junior high and senior high schools. They were driven by awareness of the gap to spend more time and efforts building their lexicon. During the instruction period, the experimental group did not increase their motivation while as VLSI ceased, their motivation significantly improved. It seems that during the treatment, VLSI offered little help to the experimental group in improving vocabulary learning motivation. This may be due to the participants’ preference for traditional spoon-feeding way of vocabulary instruction over VLSI and their laziness in applying certain instructed strategies even though they were aware that vocabulary learning strategies are important and may help them learn.

Finally, the participants’ attitude and feedback toward the six instructed vocabulary learning strategies as well as the researcher’s VLSI were revealed in the questionnaire. The strategies that the participants in the experimental group reported to be the most interesting, the most effective, and the most frequently used were the keyword method, phonological analysis, and word-part analysis respectively. Though the keyword method was considered the most interesting, it was reported to be the least frequently used. This may be due to the participants’ inability to think of a keyword and a linkage between the L1 keyword and the meaning of a to-be-learned word. The other strategies claimed to be used the least frequently were two learning tools: dictionaries and vocabulary cards. It seems that the experimental group was not active enough in their own vocabulary learning. Their laziness hampered them from employing the strategies to build their lexicon even though they considered vocabulary learning strategies crucial in improving their vocabulary in the second section of the questionnaire. More importantly, though the twelve-week VLSI did not

succeed in motivating the participants to become active independent learners and boosting their confidence in learning vocabulary, VLSI did arouse their awareness of the importance of vocabulary learning strategies and their responsibility of independent learning. They showed great appreciation toward VLSI and demanded more training on these strategies.

Pedagogical Implications

A large vocabulary stock is often viewed as an asset, just as Johnson O'Connor (n.d.), an American psychometrician and educator, stated "Aptitudes point the way you should take; vocabulary determines how far you go." Through reading, listening to, speaking and writing words, learners can develop their minds. As for language learning, possession of a good vocabulary stock enables learners to communicate more effectively and subtly than a limited one. However, for EFL learners, acquisition of sufficient vocabulary is not always easy and is even an obstacle to their language learning process due to the open system of English lexicon and the lack of English exposure. With insufficient vocabulary, EFL learners often feel frustrated in performing four skills.

Learners should not be left alone in vocabulary learning, and teachers should equip learners with the ability to build vocabulary. Especially for Taiwanese senior high school students, the considerable amount of vocabulary, which they are supposed to learn, is difficult to memorize, let alone using productively. It seems impossible for teachers to spoon all the words to them. Therefore, EFL teachers should move from teaching *what* to learn to introducing *how* to learn vocabulary. That is teachers should introduce a variety of vocabulary learning strategies to students and provide strategy training so that their students can learn independently in the long run. Based on the findings in the present study, several pedagogical implications for EFL teachers can

be provided.

Investigation of senior high school students' vocabulary learning strategy use in this study reveals that some shallow strategies like learning a word by simple repetition is favored over more complex ones requiring deeper manipulation of information (semantic maps and imagery). In fact, rote rehearsal can be applied effectively to memorizing vocabulary (Gu, 2003; Waring, 2004; Yeh & Wang, 2004) if a word is repeated verbally by syllables. Teachers should instruct students how to pronounce a word by means of phonetic symbols and phonics, and help them build the concept that English words, unlike Chinese characters, are composed of syllables rather than individual letters. If beginners or low-proficiency learners want to consolidate new words, they should be encouraged to say the words aloud and repeat them by syllables. Most of the senior high school participants in this study and the college students in Huang et al.'s study (2004) expected more training in phonological analysis, including phonetic symbols and phonics. Therefore, the teachers in senior high schools should help the students with low proficiency develop a command of phonological analysis first, and help the students with higher proficiency pronounce longer words correctly. Once learners with low or intermediate proficiency learn how to pronounce a word, they may feel more confident in learning vocabulary. Instruction of phonological analysis is recommended for teachers as the first step in development of high school students' vocabulary learning strategy use.

Phonological analysis is the first step, but not the only and final step. Based on the participants' feedback toward vocabulary learning, forgetting is the most frustrating part during their English learning process. According to Pimsleur's "forgetting curve" theory (1967), without constant practice, it is normal for learners who has just learned 10 new words to forget some of the words in a few days and to lose almost all of the words longer. Therefore, English teachers can introduce to

students more memory strategies involving deeper mental processing and transformation of difficult-to-be-remembered words into something more memorable. For example, the effectiveness of memory-enhancing strategies such as forming associations (Cohen & Aphek, 1981), word-part analysis (Thompson, 1958), using the keyword method (Hulstijn, 1997), and imagery (Hsu, 2004) have been proven to help learners commit the words to memory more efficiently and retain words longer. Teachers may make students aware that though “forgetting” is a natural part of how our memory works, memory can be refreshed with repetitive reviews and reinforced with mnemonic techniques. Teachers should further encourage students to be perseverant and patient with their vocabulary learning.

It is worth noticing that retrieving the spelling of a word is much more difficult than recalling its meaning. Development of productive vocabulary knowledge requires more efforts and practices. Cunningham (1998) suggests that morphological analysis can be used to help students practice spelling regularities across derivatives if students learn derivational suffixes and prefixes. Take the word *unpredictable* for example. If learners divide this word into a prefix *un*, a root *predict* and a derivational suffix “*able*,” they can write out the spelling of this word with ease and with accuracy. In addition to instructing mnemonics to help learners memorize the meaning and the form of words, English teachers may further encourage learners to learn words in context—extensive reading, and to use words in authentic contexts such as speaking or writing. After learners build up the threshold vocabulary to read, teachers can start to encourage them to spend more time on reading to deepen the knowledge of the ‘start up’ vocabulary (Waring, 2004). Extensive reading can provide multiple exposures of the new words and help learners to acquire other features of a word, such as its register, collocations, frequency, and so on. Extensive reading offers a source for students to know how a word is used authentically so that learners can further

imitate the patterns in outside reading to produce their own sentences with newly-learned words. If learners want to communicate with others, they have to know how to put words in context and say it appropriately and correctly without causing misunderstanding. After familiarizing themselves with the meanings of new words in reading, learners can then move forward to use these words productively. To develop learners' productive use of vocabulary, collocation chunks (Nation, 2001; Nattinger, 1988) can be introduced.

In light of the finding of decreased learning motivation in the experimental group right after the instruction but increased learning motivation four weeks later, teachers have to pay attention to learners' motivation during the implementation of strategy training. Teachers may investigate students needs, instruct vocabulary learning strategies students value, and provide a variety of tasks carting to different learning needs. To help students increase their motivation and master vocabulary learning strategies, teachers can instruct one strategy at one time and provide a variety of interesting exercises and tasks to check learners' improvement over time. In this way, learners may feel more confident and comfortable while applying strategies. Besides, teachers may design some strategy training materials appealing to learners' interests or adapt authentic texts from newspaper and the Internet so that learners' motivation can be increased.

The fact that the twelve-week VLSI did not significant increase the participants' mastery over the instructed strategies sheds light on strategy training. If vocabulary learning strategies are hoped to be mastered well, longer period of instruction time, constant monitor from teachers, and a variety of learner-centered activities may be needed. Each learner has a different learning style. They may like learning something in their preferred way regardless of its effectiveness. Therefore, it requires teachers' great effort and longer time to train learners to stretch beyond their comfort zone to

apply various strategies in different learning context. Oxford (2003) suggested that teachers should systematically provide a variety of learner-centered activities, which require learners to complete tasks with different strategies by themselves. The purpose of these activities is to enable the learner to gain more and more independence from the teachers, not increasing more and more dependence on the teachers. Thus, learners will gradually get accustomed to employing a variety of strategies and become independent word learners. Moreover, cooperative learning can be also integrated into the classroom activities. Learners with different learning styles and language proficiency levels can work together to solve problems. In completing a vocabulary-learning task, they can benefit from sharing ideas of vocabulary learning techniques with one another. Poor learners can be scaffolded by good learners and gradually cultivate the independent learning habit.

To sum up, successful word building can not simply rely on the students themselves alone, and EFL teachers play an important role, too. EFL teachers should go beyond being a teacher—who is just doing the teaching. EFL teachers have to be facilitators, strategy trainers, counselors, problem solvers, and motivation raiser. EFL teachers should concern about their students' needs, difficulties in learning, and emotional states. Then teachers can provide the assistance carting to students' needs and instruct students how and when to use strategies. With EFL teachers' guidance, vocabulary, which is not innate, can be built successfully with learners' wills and efforts. For high school students, explicit instruction of vocabulary learning strategies is needed instead of traditional spoon-feeding instruction of vocabulary.

Suggestions for Further Research

The major findings of the study revealed that though VLSI did not have a significant effect either on increasing more mastery over the instructed strategies or

on improving more motivation in vocabulary learning, VLSI did help the learners make significant more progress in vocabulary recognition immediately after VLSI. Four weeks after VLSI, the experimental group suffered less loss in vocabulary recognition and even made progress in production though not significant. Besides, the participants' responses in the interview and in the VLSIQ revealed that VLSI raised students' awareness of the importance of vocabulary learning strategies and their responsibility for vocabulary building. Based on the findings in the present study and the limitations specified in Chapter One, some suggestions for further research are given as follows.

First, a larger number of the subjects and female participants are recommended in further relevant studies. The sample size in this study (35 participants in the experimental group and 37 in the control group) was small, and nearly 80 % of the participants were male. Besides, they were from a section of comprehensive school at a vocational senior high school. Thus, the results in this study may not be applicable to other contexts. According to Oxford (2003), L2 strategy use is significantly related to age, L2 learning motivation, and gender. Further studies may investigate the effects of vocabulary learning strategy instruction on a larger sample with more female students at other educational levels, including junior high schools, vocational senior high schools, and colleges.

Second, due to the tight learning schedule in the comprehensive senior high school, time given to strategy training was not sufficient. Only ten percent of class periods was dedicated to instruction of vocabulary learning strategies. Though this study lasted for twelve weeks, the time for practice and activities was not enough for the participants to master the instructed strategies well and to stretch beyond their comfort zone to apply strategies. Therefore, longer time is suggested and more vocabulary learning activities involving a variety of strategies can be included in the

further study.

Third, the participants' vocabulary learning was examined by translating and spelling the target words in the vocabulary test. The vocabulary was tested out of context. However, knowing a word is more than learning the meaning and spelling of the word. Therefore, testing words in context such as writing a sentence and matching a word with its synonym or its English definition (reading) is recommended in further research. Moreover, it is also worth investigating the participants' vocabulary learning in listening and speaking in a further study.

Fourth, the participants' strategy mastery was measured by a self-rating questionnaire in the present study. In order to have a detailed analysis of the participant's strategy use, it is recommended to ask the participants to think aloud when using strategies to complete a vocabulary task and to keep a learning journal every week. In this way, the participants' strategy use can be analyzed in depth.