



Research Article

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING AT AN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning at an upper secondary school in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Participants of this research were 83 students from two different classes, namely 11A3 and 11C4. All participants were selected using a convenience sampling method. The research followed a quantitative approach. Quantitative data were collected through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from prior research. Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire data was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22). The results indicated that most students have positive attitudes towards vocabulary learning in terms of form, meaning, and use. Based on the results, some recommendations for teachers and students were suggested to improve vocabulary learning.

Keywords: an upper secondary school; students' attitudes; the Central Highlands of Vietnam; vocabulary learning

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, English is considered the major foreign language (Do & Nguyen, 2014). Much effort has been made to increase the English proficiency of students (Hoang & Tran, 2022). One of the efforts is the proposal of the new curriculum 2018, which emphasizes forming and developing students' communicative competence through learning language areas including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (MOET, 2018). Among these three components, vocabulary is central to language learning because it includes thousands of items, whereas grammar is more restricted and finite in scope (Hadi & Guo, 2020). There might be an emphasis on vocabulary in English learning in Vietnamese educational settings; however, it is mainly introduced to enhance reading and grammar (Vu & Peters, 2021). Many studies have emphasized the vital role of vocabulary in language learning, yet vocabulary learning often remains overlooked (Rahmani, 2023).

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Within the context of a high school, where this study is undertaken, students have difficulties in learning vocabulary. Also, attitudes greatly influence their language learning; therefore, educators should identify and nurture positive attitudes in their students (Pham & Nguyen, 2020). Appreciating the value in learning a second or foreign language, combined with matching behavior, suggests the student harbors a positive attitude (Getie, 2020).

This research is centered around the exploration of students’ attitudes towards vocabulary learning among high school students. This study focuses on answering a research question: **What are students’ attitudes towards English vocabulary learning at an upper secondary school in the Highland of Vietnam?** From the findings, the study offers some recommendations to facilitate vocabulary learning.

1.1. Concepts of vocabulary

Vocabulary encompasses more than just simple words; it also includes complex and compound words and other units that carry meaning in a language. Vocabulary refers to the complete set of words in a language, especially those that appear within specific contexts (Alias et al., 2018). According to Nation (2001), understanding a word requires learners to grasp the form, meaning, and use. These three aspects are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Components in Understanding a Word (Nation, 2001, pp. 40-41)

Form	Spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	Written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?
	Word parts	R	What parts are recognizable in this word?
		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	Form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concept and referents	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could be used instead of this one?
Use	Grammatical functions	R	In what pattern does the word occur?
		P	In what pattern must we use this word?
	Collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use (register, frequency...)	R	Where, when and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when and how often can we use this word?

Note. R: Receptive knowledge P: Productive knowledge

Table 1 provides insight into vocabulary knowledge, including form, meaning, and use, which helps to find out students’ attitudes towards each aspect of vocabulary.

1.2. Classification of vocabulary

Vocabulary can be distinguished in terms of active and passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary includes words that are understood and used in productive skills. Active

vocabulary development was impacted by attitudes, as evidenced by Mozaffari (2023), who found a correlation between learners' positive attitudes and an increased resolution of lexical problems in writing. Passive vocabulary consists of lexical items that are comprehended but are not necessarily used. Vocabulary knowledge is a scale that includes different stages, from simply knowing the word to being able to produce it appropriately in speaking or writing (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004). The classification helps to examine whether learners regard word knowledge as limited to word recognition or as inclusive of accurate use in contexts.

1.3. Challenges of learning vocabulary

Chung et al. (2024) explored 172 students' beliefs about academic vocabulary learning at a university in Hong Kong. Students found spelling, pronunciation, and multiple meanings of academic vocabulary difficult. They also expressed uncertainty about the pragmatic use of academic words and forgot learnt words when they applied them in productive skills.

Kaphle (2024) examined difficulties in vocabulary learning of students in Nepal. Students perceived vocabulary learning as challenging. Students reported difficulties in pronunciation, spelling, grammar, retention, and use of words. They also struggled with grasping word meanings and identifying accurate collocations and confusing words.

1.4. Situations of teaching vocabulary

Melani (2018) stated that incidental learning happened when reading. Chung and Fung (2023) found learners concentrated on meaning, pronunciation, spelling, and grammatical category of words, while largely overlooking collocations and associations. In Vietnam, Le (2013) indicated that the objective of learning vocabulary was to cultivate mechanical practice to meet the requirements of tests. Learners have a restricted vocabulary knowledge concerning the meaning and form (Vu & Peters, 2021). The study of Nguyen and Webb (2016) showed that learners lacked sufficient knowledge of collocation. Vu and Peters (2021) highlighted important notes. Firstly, students had limited opportunities to apply words in class. Secondly, the emphasis was on form-meaning connections, which neglected other areas of vocabulary knowledge. Thirdly, students lacked vocabulary learning strategies.

1.5. Attitudes

Ajzen (2001) viewed attitude as a judgment of a referent regarding aspects categorized into favorable versus unfavorable properties. Attitudes were theorized within the ABC model (affection, behavior, cognition) (Ta & Tran, 2022).

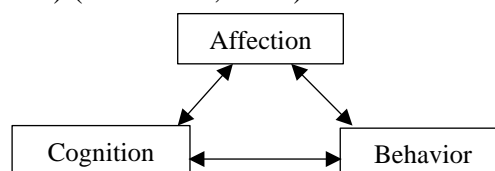


Figure 1. Ta and Tran's model of attitude

Affection is considered how people feel towards a referent (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998). Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) considered cognition as information and understanding

expressed through experiences. It shows the evaluation of things for each individual. Behavior denotes the manner in which individuals act in alignment with their worldview, particularly in response to outside influences (Nguyen & Duong, 2022).

1.6. Attitudes towards vocabulary learning

Tanaka (2017) analyzed Tseng and Schmitt (2008)'s model of motivated vocabulary learning and concluded that motivation included attitude on learning vocabulary, self-efficacy, and anxiety. Based on this model, attitude toward learning vocabulary was viewed through motivation. Students acknowledged that vocabulary learning was a complex process that extended beyond the mere acquisition of word meanings (Tseng and Schmitt, 2008).

Tran (2020) found that students possessed cognitive awareness of learner autonomy in vocabulary learning, but their affective and behavioral responses were notably disengaged. Vu and Peters (2020) focused on Vietnamese learners at the tertiary level. The participants of the first experiment were at a beginner level while they were at an intermediate level in the second one. In the first experiment, the students in the reading-only group struggled to retain new vocabulary after reading. In the reading-while-listening group, the majority preferred this condition. Reading with textual input enhancement was beneficial. Regarding the second experiment, the reading-only condition facilitated vocabulary retention. Students in the reading-while-listening group also liked this method. All students in the reading with textual input enhancement group liked this way of learning. Chung and Fung (2023)'s study found that the majority viewed understanding form, meaning, and use of vocabulary as important. Rahmani (2023)'s study revealed that learners expressed favorable attitudes, particularly endorsing reading and repetition as primary strategies for retaining lexical items.

As the literature review points out, form, meaning, and use of vocabulary do not receive adequate attention, and some issues call for in-depth consideration. Firstly, there were several studies investigating students' attitudes towards English learning in general without focusing on vocabulary (Getie, 2020; Le & Le, 2022; Pham & Nguyen, 2020). Secondly, studies often focused on beliefs about vocabulary learning (Chung et al., 2025; Hadi & Guo, 2020; Rahmani, 2023) instead of attitudes. Thirdly, some studies addressed problems pertaining to students' perspectives of vocabulary learning rather than attitudes (Chung et al., 2024; Vu & Peters, 2020). Fourthly, the few studies on attitudes focused on university students (Tran, 2020) and lower secondary school students (Chung & Fung, 2023). To fill the gap in existing research, this study explored students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning in an upper secondary school in the Highland.

2. Methodology

This study was carried out at a public upper secondary school in a province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The participants were 83 eleventh graders. They were between 16 and 17 years old. They had learnt English for 11 years. The researcher utilized convenience sampling. Thanks to the support of a colleague at this school, the researcher could have access to the

participants from two classes she was teaching, namely 11A3 and 11C4. They exhibited a shared characteristic: they followed the old curriculum in primary and lower secondary schools, but they were introduced to the new curriculum (MOET, 2018) in high school.

This research followed a quantitative approach. Data were collected through the questionnaire adapted from Chung and Fung (2023), Hadi and Guo (2020), and Rahmani (2023). This instrument was utilized for its ability to obtain data from a large population (Getie, 2020). The questionnaires administered to participants were presented bilingually in English and Vietnamese to guarantee their accurate comprehension. It had a five-point Likert scale including Strongly disagree (SA), Disagree (D), No idea (N), Agree (A), and Strongly agree (SA). The scale “No idea” was included to avoid coercing participants into selecting an answer, which might threaten the reliability of results. Participants’ personal information was kept confidential. The questionnaires were delivered to 83 students, all of whom completed them. Table 2 below clarifies the objectives of all sections in the questionnaires.

Table 2. Objectives of the questionnaire items

Sections	Items	Objectives
I. Personal information	1	Age
	2	The number of years students have learnt English
	3	Class
II. Students’ attitudes towards English vocabulary learning in terms of form	1	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding word parts.
	2	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding word parts.
	3	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding the spoken form of a word.
	4	Recognizing the cognition of vocabulary learning regarding the spoken form of a word.
	5	Recognizing the cognition of vocabulary learning regarding the written form of a word.
III. Students’ attitudes towards English vocabulary learning in terms of meaning	1	Recognizing the cognition of vocabulary learning regarding incidental learning.
	2	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding guessing the word meaning.
	3	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding guessing the word meaning.
	4	Recognizing the cognition of vocabulary learning regarding the word meaning.
	5	Recognizing the cognition of vocabulary learning regarding associations.
IV. Students’ attitudes towards English vocabulary learning in terms of use	1	Recognizing the cognition of vocabulary learning regarding collocations.
	2	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding the use of vocabulary.
	3	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding the use of vocabulary.
	4	Recognizing the behavior of vocabulary learning regarding the use of vocabulary.
	5	Recognizing the cognition of vocabulary learning regarding constraints on use.

3. Results and discussions

With regard to the reliability of the questionnaire, SPSS 22 was utilized to generate the statistical results illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Reliability of the questionnaire

	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Cluster 1: Students' attitudes towards English vocabulary learning in terms of form (Questions II.1, II.2, II.3, II.4, II.5)	.747	5
Cluster 2: Students' attitudes towards English vocabulary learning in terms of meaning (Questions III.1, III.2, III.3, III.4, III.5)	.764	5
Cluster 3: Students' attitudes towards English vocabulary learning in terms of use (Questions IV.1, IV.2, IV.3, IV.4, IV.5)	.859	5
All items of the questionnaire	.905	15

As seen, the questionnaire yielded an overall Cronbach's Alpha of .905, while the values of Cronbach's Alpha for each cluster were .747, .764, and .859, respectively. This ensured the reliability of the instrument.

The results reflecting students' attitudes towards vocabulary in terms of form are illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning in terms of form

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1. I memorize the commonly used roots and prefixes.	1.2	5	15	42	20	3.90
2. When I learn new words, I pay attention to prefixes, roots, and suffixes (e.g., international).	2.4	6	12	38	25	3.94
3. When I try to remember a word, I repeat its pronunciation in my mind.	2.4	0	10	44	27	4.13
4. When I claim I know a word (e.g., underdeveloped), I must be able to pronounce it correctly.	4.8	4	6	37	32	4.07
5. When I claim I know a word (e.g., underdeveloped), I must be able to spell it correctly.	3.6	5	7	39	29	4.04
Average Mean						4.02

Overall, a high level of concordance was observed, with the majority choosing "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" for five statements. Item 3 yielded a notably high mean of 4.13, suggesting students acknowledged the role of pronunciation. Item 4 revealed the importance of spoken form perceived by the majority of students. Item 5 showed that students considered the written form as essential. While the means for word parts in item 1 and item 2 were slightly below the total mean, they were still widely regarded as popular behaviors.

The next point of analysis pertains to attitudes towards vocabulary learning regarding meaning, which are detailed in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning in terms of meaning

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1. The meanings of a large number of words can be picked up through reading.	2 2.4	3 3.6	9 10.8	38 45.8	31 37.3	4.12
2. I make use of the grammatical structure of a sentence when guessing the meaning of a new word.	3 3.6	4 4.8	14 16.9	43 51.8	19 22.9	3.86
3. I make use of the logical development in the context (e.g., cause and effect) when guessing the meaning of a word.	3 3.6	5 6.0	11 13.3	40 48.2	24 28.9	3.93
4. When I claim I know a word (e.g., underdeveloped), I must be able to understand its meaning(s).	3 3.6	4 4.8	7 8.4	39 47.0	30 36.1	4.07
5. When I claim I know a word (e.g., underdeveloped), I must be able to know its related words, like overdeveloped, backward, and challenged.	4 4.8	5 6.0	9 10.8	45 54.2	20 24.1	3.87
Average Mean						3.97

On the whole, the total mean was the lowest within the three clusters. Improving vocabulary knowledge through reading emerged as the most valued aspect, while the focus on syntactic cues to understand unfamiliar words was comparatively minimal. Item 1 demonstrated a markedly greater mean compared to the average level ($M = 4.12$). In item 2, the lowest average score was recorded ($M = 3.86$). Items 3 and 4 showed an equivalent percentage of participants expressing strong disagreement. Item 4 received 36.1% of "Strongly Agree" responses, ranking second after item 1. In item 5, it is pertinent to note that the percentage of disagreement was the highest, measured at 10.8%.

Table 6 encapsulates students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning in terms of use.

Table 6. Students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning in terms of use

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1. Learners should pay attention to expressions (e.g., pick up) and collocations (e.g., heavy rain, strong wind) that go with a word.	3 3.6	4 4.8	8 9.6	44 53.0	24 28.9	3.99
2. I encourage myself to speak English using the newly learned words even when I am afraid of making a mistake (usage mistakes).	2 2.4	4 4.8	7 8.4	43 51.8	27 32.5	4.07
3. I try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind.	2 2.4	3 3.6	7 8.4	34 41.0	37 44.6	4.22
4. I try to use newly learned words in real situations (e.g., shopping).	2 2.4	3 3.6	11 13.3	40 48.2	27 32.5	4.05
5. When I claim I know a word (e.g., underdeveloped), I must be able to judge whether the word has been used correctly in the sentence in which it occurs.	2 2.4	6 7.2	13 15.7	38 45.8	24 28.9	3.92
Average Mean						4.05

Generally, among the three clusters, this category attained the greatest total mean. Item 1 yielded the greatest proportion of “Agree” responses. Item 2 received the second-highest mean score ($M = 4.07$), suggesting a proactive stance towards vocabulary use in communicative activities. Item 3 recorded the highest average score ($M = 4.22$). Item 4 recorded a lower rate of disagreement (6%) compared to items 1, 2, and 5. Despite obtaining the lowest mean score ($M = 3.92$), item 5, which involved evaluating whether a word was used appropriately in context, was still positively endorsed by 74.7% of respondents.

The research question of this study is to explore students’ attitudes towards vocabulary learning. The results from questionnaires are discussed below.

Regarding form, the data indicated that learners regard accurate spoken form as a foundational component of lexical mastery. This finding is consistent with Nation’s (2001) framework. Amiryousefi’s (2015) findings further supported this result, highlighting that learners placed considerable emphasis on form. Also, learners reflect a strong awareness of the essence of both spoken and written form, which is consistent with Chung and Fung (2023). In addition, students’ behaviors about word parts were observed to be of moderate intensity. The present findings contribute additional perspectives on learners’ attitudes towards word parts, an area not explored in Chung and Fung’s (2023) investigation.

Concerning meaning, students place considerable importance on acquiring word meaning through reading, which aligns with Nation’s (2001) framework and Rahmani’s (2023) findings. This highlights the importance of integrating form-meaning associations in learning, enabling students to decode the meaning of word forms. Besides, regarding concepts and referents, in cases where a word carries multiple senses, its meaning is determined by the context (Harmer, 2007). Students viewed mastery of a word as inherently linked to knowledge of associations. This result diverges from the conclusion of Chung and Fung (2023), who reported that learners assigned minimal significance to word association.

Concerning use, the findings suggested students engage in the active application of newly learned vocabulary, which reflects a positive attitude towards the role of lexical knowledge in supporting grammatical functions. These results are supported by Rahmani’s (2023) study. Besides, students exhibited favorable attitudes towards collocations. They conceptualize vocabulary not merely as isolated lexical items but as including the lexical combinations commonly found in natural discourse. Regarding constraints on use, learners indicated an awareness of the contextual appropriateness of vocabulary. Despite acknowledging the importance of contextual accuracy, learners may experience uncertainty when determining whether vocabulary is used appropriately in specific discourse situations.

4. Conclusion and suggestions

4.1. Conclusion

This study aims to investigate students’ attitudes towards vocabulary learning at an upper secondary school in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Most students had positive attitudes towards vocabulary learning. Concerning form, students showed greater engagement with spoken and written form than with word parts. In terms of meaning, students exhibited favorable attitudes towards acquiring word meanings incidentally through

reading. Also, students perceived meaning as a fundamental component of word knowledge. Concerning use, students underscored the importance of collocations. Participants also emphasized the application of lexical items in imaginary and real-world contexts. However, learners may have limited experience with word parts, rendering this aspect unfamiliar to them. Besides, some students appeared to give limited attention to logical relations within the discourse when inferring the meaning of words. In addition, they may experience uncertainty regarding their ability to evaluate the contextual appropriateness of a word within a given sentence.

4.2. *Suggestions*

The findings of this study yield important implications for both teachers and students. For students, vocabulary learning necessitates an understanding of form, meaning, and use. Knowing a word entails knowledge of spoken and written forms. Students should rely on contextual cues to determine word meaning. Reading exposes learners to repeated encounters with lexical items. Students should be able to identify word patterns for comprehension and apply appropriate structures for effective language production. Teachers can incorporate word parts into lessons. As some learners show resistance to associating words with related terms, teachers' instruction should aim to foster awareness of semantic networks. Given that words rarely occur in isolation in authentic language use, pedagogical attention should be directed towards collocations. Emphasis should be placed on enabling students to use vocabulary appropriately in meaningful contexts.

The study has several limitations. Firstly, due to the use of convenience sampling, the extent to which the findings can be generalized to a broader population is limited. Secondly, the study adopted a survey design. Future investigations should utilize qualitative or mixed-method approaches. Thirdly, the questionnaire was used to examine students' attitudes. Further research should ensure methodological triangulation. Fourthly, the research was conducted at an upper secondary school. Further studies should be undertaken in diverse educational settings. Fifthly, future research could explore learners at various levels.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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THÁI ĐỘ CỦA HỌC SINH ĐỐI VỚI VIỆC HỌC TỪ VỰNG TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG Ở KHU VỰC TÂY NGUYÊN, VIỆT NAM

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TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích khảo sát thái độ của học sinh về việc học từ vựng tại một trường trung học phổ thông ở khu vực Tây Nguyên, Việt Nam. Người tham gia là 83 học sinh từ hai lớp 11A3 và 11C4. Tất cả học sinh tham gia được chọn bằng phương pháp lấy mẫu thuận tiện. Nghiên cứu được tiến hành theo hướng tiếp cận định lượng. Dữ liệu định lượng được thu thập thông qua phiếu khảo sát gồm 5 mức độ phản hồi, được điều chỉnh từ các nghiên cứu trước. Phân tích mô tả dữ liệu từ phiếu khảo sát được thực hiện bằng phần mềm *Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22)*. Kết quả cho thấy phần lớn học sinh có thái độ tích cực đối với khía cạnh hình thức, nghĩa và cách sử dụng của từ vựng. Dựa trên kết quả, nghiên cứu đưa ra những đề xuất cho giáo viên và học sinh để cải thiện việc học từ vựng.

Từ khóa: trường trung học phổ thông; thái độ của học sinh; Tây Nguyên; việc học từ vựng