

## The Effect of Cognitive Linguistic Approach in Teaching English Vocabulary



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**ABSTRACT:** Vocabulary is very crucial to language because without words, language has no meaning at all. There has been a history of thousands of years of research on vocabulary acquisition and teaching, however, language teachers are still facing a huge challenge now, that is how to help students acquire the words quickly and effectively. This paper puts forward cognitive teaching strategy which has a new approach into vocabulary teaching. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of cognitive linguistic approach in teaching English vocabulary at a public university in Vietnam. A total of 35 students participated in this study. The instruments of the study were pre-test, post-test. The study showed that CLA can give an effect on teaching Vocabulary because the score of students' vocabulary after being taught CLA was higher than before applying CLA in the class. It is hoped that this study would offer educators and researchers a practical teaching strategy for increasing students' vocabulary in language classes.

**KEYWORDS:** cognitive linguistics, cognitive linguistic approach, teaching vocabulary, English language teaching

### I. INTRODUCTION

English is now widely used in entertainment, business, science, and education, among other areas of daily life. Due to the widespread use of English language, the educational system places a great value on teaching and mastering the language at all grade levels, from elementary to higher education. In Vietnam, many initiatives and techniques have been launched with the goal of enhancing learners' English vocabulary. Vocabulary is undeniably an essential component of learning any second language. This is because every language skill, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking, depends on vocabulary (Hung, 2019). Famous linguist-David Wilkins stated in 1972 that vocabulary is crucial: "Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed; without grammar, little can be conveyed; very little can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972, pp. 111–112). Thus, for English language learners, learning vocabulary is always one of their top concerns.

On the contrary, some of the students who have studied English for more than five years struggle to master it and are unable to speak it smoothly while speaking to people from other countries. The main cause is the students' vocabulary limitation, which makes them feel timid or fearful of making mistakes when speaking in front of an audience. Additionally, students frequently focus more on the teacher's vocabulary explanations than on their own attempts to figure out the meaning of the terms and use them in sentences. (Hung, 2019). Another factors like teaching and learning methodologies, students' laziness, using mother tongues in language classes, grammar-based also affects students' vocabulary achievement. Hence, students' vocabulary deteriorates as a result, and they are unable to successfully integrate the four English skills.

Based on these mentioned problems, it is observed that there is a need to innovate teaching and learning methods in order to improve students' knowledge of vocabulary. In addition, the traditional methods of teaching vocabulary still have a significant role to play in education, but if we actively employ this new perspective on vocabulary teaching, our efforts will undoubtedly be fruitful (Littlemore, 2009). However, there is a big concern among language teachers that is how to help students learn English effectively and expand their vocabulary quickly, so students can speak fluently like native speakers. This study proposes a cognitive teaching style that takes a novel approach to teaching vocabulary. This method is very helpful for English teachers and vocabulary teaching, in accordance with cognitive vocabulary learning strategy and teaching practice. According to Boers (2011), the cognitive linguistics approach places special emphasis on the role that meaning, conceptual, and experiencing processes play when examining the relationship between language and the mind. Furthermore, with the aid of cognitive linguistics, students can learn linguistic terms without remembering sentence structures and idioms with more accurate meanings (Aydin, 2019; Ngoc, 2017).

In the light of the discussion above, the researcher has inspired and motivated to do the research on teaching vocabulary utilizing cognitive linguistic approach at a public university in Vietnam with the title "*The effect of cognitive linguistic approach in teaching English vocabulary.*" It is intended that this study would offer educators and researchers a practical teaching strategy for increasing students' vocabulary in language classes.

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## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Definitions of cognitive linguistics

The cognitive linguistic approach (CLA) is a contemporary school of linguistic thought that was founded in the 1970s by the early pioneers who were unsatisfied with the ways in which language was being studied at the time. A group of American academics dominated their research in the 1970s. Additionally, CLA had a strong presence throughout Europe in the 1980s.

According to Evans and Green (2006), cognitive linguistics focuses a significant emphasis on the role of meaning, conceptual processes, and embodied experience. Today, CLA is regarded as one of the theoretical linguistics fields that is growing the fastest (Evans 2007). The social and physical worlds, language, human cognitive processes, and their interactions are the main topics of the CLA (Lin, 2011).

In the same vein, Boers (2011) asserts that "Cognitive linguistics treats language and its acquisition as usage-based and as reflecting the general cognitive abilities that operate in our interaction with the world" (p. 211). The core of cognitive linguistics is the connection between cognitive competence and linguistic forms (Hung, 2019).

In short, cognitive linguistics is the study of language in its relationship to cognition, where cognition refers to the central place that intermediary informational structures play in our interactions with the outside world. That is, cognition is considered to be a part of the human cognitive system and is influenced by how people interact with their physical and social environments.

### 2.2. Cognitive linguistic approaches in English language teaching

Over the past few decades, second language acquisition academics have begun to recognize usage-based language pedagogy and cognitive linguistic theory of language as a useful tool in teaching and learning language (De Knop, Boers & De Rycker, 2010; Tyler 2012) because cognitive language enables students to combine individual words into complete thoughts. Additionally, learners can quickly learn the grammar structure due to logical reasoning and the flexibility to arrange numerous grammatical structure system (Véliz, 2016)

According to Evans and Green (2006), CL should not be thought of as a theory but rather as an approach which looks for systematicity in language and thinking patterns, therefore researching language using the CL approach entails investigating conceptualization patterns and aspects of the human mind. He also adds that activities employed in cognitive language teaching should concentrate on how they affect students' capacity for thought and problem-solving. Without any preparation or stages in teaching will lead to an answer, the objective is to get students thinking and utilizing problem-solving techniques. Some examples of cognitive tasks that teachers should prepare for teaching vocabulary in the classroom are mind maps, visualizing, associating, employing mnemonics, using reading comprehension cues, underlining words, scanning, self-testing, and monitoring (Littlemore, 2009)

Tyler (2012) states that, CLA assists students in memorizing a portion of their vocabulary and provides a strategy that enables lexical elements and numerous meanings to be perceived as motivated, which implies reflecting a pattern that can work as a schema for learning new vocabulary. Tyler also emphasizes the value of systematic, motivated explanation in CLA since it will help language learners interpret and recall the lexical items they encounter. It also assists students in feeling that learning vocabulary is desirable and pleasurable by convincing them that studying a language is a source of enjoyment, addiction, curiosity, fluency, and simple comprehension. Additionally, it helps students create and solve problems, and helps them to control challenging and complex parts of language acquisition.

More importantly, cognitive linguistics aids students in comprehending and remembering textual structure and semantics in various cultural situations (Aydın, 2019). Due to the fact that linguistics and cognition may mediate potential causality effects on textual and semantic comprehension. Similar to this, cognitive approaches help students process ambiguous idioms, construct meaning through an integrated process that incorporates idiom components, improve results in learning foreign languages, and comprehend the idioms' original meanings (Al-Otaibi, 2019; Wang, 2020)

In brief, cognitive linguistics is an approach which is based on how we experience the world and how we understand and conceptualize it. Language teachers may find the tools offered by CLA useful in helping students understand the semantic potential of words, convey lexical chunk meanings more precisely, and use collocations with better explanatory force. CL can increase lexical awareness and help teachers become more conscious of language.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Participants

The participants were 35 university who students studied at a public university, in Ho Chi Minh city. They were in the same pre-intermediate level of English proficiency. Most were between the ages of 18 and 28. Among them, 25 are females and the rest are males. Besides, ten English language lecturers also will take part in the research, one of them plays the role of researcher implementing the proposed strategy .These lecturers have at least 10 years of teaching English at university.

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### 3.2. Instruments

The study applied pre-test and post-test as instruments to collect effectiveness of the cognitive linguistic approach (CLA) in teaching English vocabulary. According to Burns (2010), pre-tests and post-tests can be administered to gather data about the subjects before and after the intervention of a teaching method and can collect sizable amounts of data at a comparatively low cost. The initial test was conducted by the researcher to identify students' vocabulary status before taking the intervention to get the pre-test results. The second was used after the treatment to get the post-test results. To ensure consistency of results, the pre-test and post-test were constructed and covered the same topic and same construct.

### 3.3. Results

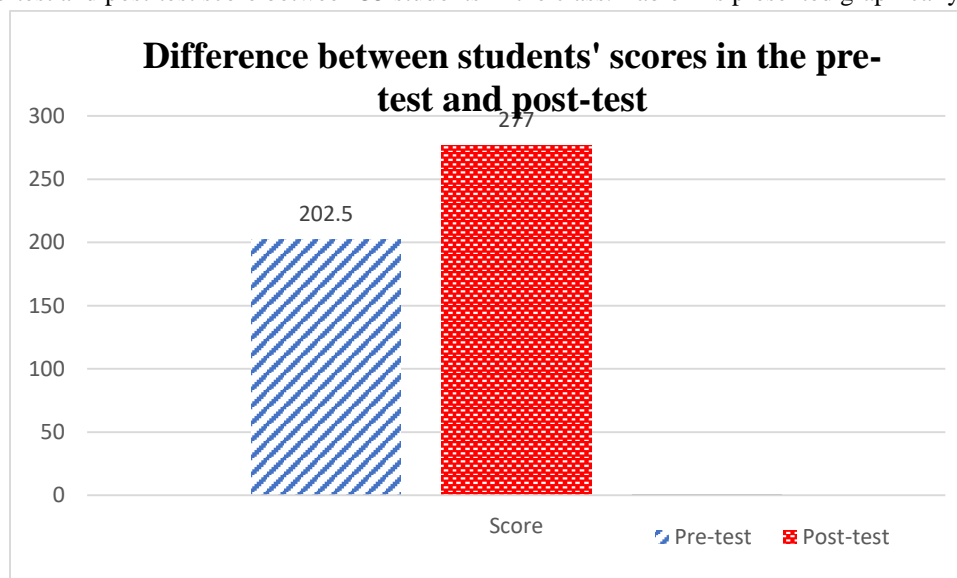
In order to answer the research question, the researcher used the independent t-test from SPSS version 24 to compare the means of the pre-test and post-test in order to check whether there was a significant difference in the result of the two tests after the treatment of cognitive linguistics approach was given. The class in this research consisted of 35 students taught by CLA. The researcher conducted the pre-test before the students got the treatment using CLA. The pre-test was used to measure students' vocabulary learning before the treatment given. Table 1 shows students' pre-test and post-test Scores of in the CLA class

**Table 1: Students' pre-test and post-test scores in the CLA class**

Name	Pre-test	Post-test	Gained score
Student 1	5.5	8.5	3.0
Student 2	5.0	8.5	3.5
Student 3	6.0	7.5	1.5
Student 4	6.5	8.5	2.0
Student 5	5.5	8.5	3.0
Student 6	6.0	7.5	1.5
Student 7	5.5	7.5	2.0
Student 8	3.5	6.5	3.0
Student 9	5.0	6.5	1.5
Student 10	5.0	7.5	2.5
Student 11	5.5	7.5	2.0
Student 12	5.5	6.5	1.0
Student 13	7.0	8.5	1.5
Student 14	7.5	9.5	2.0
Student 15	5.5	8.0	2.5
Student 16	6.5	9.0	2.5
Student 17	5.5	7.5	2.0
Student 18	4.5	7.5	3.0
Student 19	6.5	7.5	1.0
Student 20	6.5	8.5	2.0
Student 21	6.5	7.5	1.0
Student 22	4.5	9.5	5.0
Student 23	4.5	7.5	3.0
Student 24	7.5	8.5	1.0
Student 25	7.0	8.5	1.5
Student 26	5.5	8.5	3.0
Student 27	6.5	8.0	1.5
Student 28	6.5	9.5	3.0
Student 29	4.5	6.5	2.0
Student 30	4.0	7.5	3.5
Student 31	6.5	7.5	1.0
Student 32	6.5	8.5	2.0
Student 33	6.0	7.5	1.5
Student 34	5.5	6.5	1.0
Student 35	7.0	8.5	1.5
<b>Total score</b>	<b>202.5</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>75.4</b>
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>5.78</b>	<b>7.91</b>	<b>2.13</b>

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Based on the data in Table 1, the sum score of pre-test that achieved by 35 students was 202.1 and the mean score of pre-test is 5.77. The lowest score of pre-test is 3.5 and the highest is 7.5. It means that there are still many students who have a low understanding on the vocabulary. Meanwhile, the sum score of post-test is 277 and the mean score is 7.91. The lowest score of post-test is 6.5 and the highest is 9.5. Moreover, the minimum gained score between the two test was 1.0 and the maximum gained score was 5.0. The sum of gained score is 75.4 and the mean of the gained score is 2.13. It can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test score between 35 students in the class. Table 1 is presented graphically in Figure 1 below



**Figure 1: Difference between students' scores in the pre-test and post-test**

Figure 1 shows that the score of post-test which was implemented CLA in teaching vocabulary was higher than the score of pre-test. In other words, the students had more progress of learning vocabulary after implementing CLA in the class.

In this study, the researcher conducted the test of normality through SPSS version 24. The test of normality is need to be done in order to know whether the distribution of data were normal or not. Kolmogorov Swirnov and Shapiro Wilk table was used in this test of normality. If the result of normality test was above 0.05, then it could be said that the distribution of data was normal. On the other hand, if the result showed less than 0.05, then it could be said the distribution of data were not normal (Pallant, 2000). Table 2 shows the test of normality

**Table 2: Test of Normality**

Test of Normality						
	Kolmogorow -Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
Score	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre	.116	35	.205*	.923	35	.301
Post	.133	35	.506	.937	35	.185

As can be seen from Table 2, the result of the normality test showed that the significance level of the pretest was 0.205 and 0.301 and the post-test was 0.506 and 0.185. This means that the probability value ( $p_{value}$ ) of both pre-test and post-test scores in the class was higher than the degree of significance 5% ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that the data of both pre-test and post-test were normally distributed.

After doing the normality of the test, the independent t-test was calculated to compare the means of the pre-test and post-test in order to check whether there was a significant difference in the result of the students' progress after treatments were given. Table 3 shows the T-test results of the two tests

**Table 3: Results of T-test**

Independent Samples Test								
F	Sig.	tvalue	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
.193	.648	2.8966	66	.003	5.662	1.913	1.889	9.620

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The result of T-test in Table 3 shows that  $t_{\text{value}}$  was 2.896 and the  $p_{\text{value}}$  was 0.003 which was significant at two-tailed level. It can be seen that  $t_{\text{value}}$  (2.896) was higher than  $t_{\text{table}}$  (1.995) which has been standard in analyzing the data and the  $p_{\text{value}}$  was lower than 0.05. It means that there was a significant effect of CLA towards students' vocabulary teaching and learning.

Based on the analysis of the results which was taken from 35 students, Table 1 showed the pre-test mean score which was 58,7 before the implementation of CLA. Moreover, after the students were given the implementation of CLA, the mean score of post-test was 76,4. In other words, from the mean score of the two tests it can be seen that students got very minimum scores for their vocabulary test in the pre-test and got the higher scores in the post-test. It means that the post-test had more significantly increasing points rather than the pre-test. Furthermore, based on the t-test results, it can be proved that the two tests were significant ( $p=0.004$ ) at 2-tailed level with  $t_{\text{value}}$  of 2.968, showing a significant effect of CLA towards students' vocabulary teaching and learning.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The cognitive linguistic approach presents a promising alternative to the more traditional ways of teaching vocabulary to foreign language learners. Several studies worldwide have focused on experimenting with the cognitive linguistic approach to teach different types of vocabulary such as idioms, metaphors, prepositions, phrasal verbs and so on. All linguists showed that young foreign language learners were benefitted from the pedagogical application of the CL approach and were capable of comprehending figurative language. In the line of these previous studies, this present study also assumed that CLA can give an effect on teaching Vocabulary because the score of students' vocabulary after being taught CLA is higher than before applying CLA in the class. Therefore, it is suggested that the English language lecturers can use CLA to teach and support students' vocabulary learning, and the students are expected to learn vocabulary actively by applying CLA by themselves. Further studies on the same topic can be conducted with using a larger sample of students and making it a larger scale study with school, college and university students. Then it is hoped that the result of this study can be used as reference about implementing CLA in teaching for other skills.

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