

A Study on Art-Contextual Vocabulary Learning Strategies in University English Courses for Art Students

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, English proficiency has become increasingly vital for the development of art students. However, they currently face numerous challenges in vocabulary acquisition during university English studies. This paper focuses on vocabulary learning in university English for art students, thoroughly analyzes its current status and problems, explores the intrinsic connection between artistic contexts and vocabulary learning, constructs a vocabulary learning strategy system based on artistic contexts, and verifies the effectiveness of the strategy through teaching experiments. The research indicates that vocabulary learning strategies based on artistic contexts can significantly enhance art students' English vocabulary learning outcomes and comprehensive language proficiency, providing new insights and methods for English teaching in art education.

Keywords: art students; university English; artistic context; vocabulary learning strategies

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1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, English, as a key language for international communication, has become increasingly important. For art students, strong English proficiency not only facilitates access to cutting-edge international art information but also broadens opportunities for their future artistic development. However, art students currently face numerous challenges in university English vocabulary learning, such as lack of interest, weak foundations, and ineffective methods. These issues lead to insufficient vocabulary acquisition, thereby hindering the improvement of their overall English proficiency.

Art-contextualized vocabulary learning strategies integrate artistic elements into English vocabulary instruction, creating a familiar and vivid learning environment for art students. This approach helps stimulate their interest, enhance vocabulary retention, and improve application skills. Therefore, researching art-contextualized vocabulary learning strategies in university English courses for art students holds significant practical value.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on the Current State of English Learning Among Art Students

Numerous studies indicate that art students commonly exhibit low interest and insufficient initiative in English learning. Due to long-term prioritization of specialized courses, they often neglect general education subjects, resulting in weak English foundations, non-standard pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and fragile grammatical skills. Simultaneously, lacking effective learning methods and clear study plans, they remain in a passive learning state, studying English merely to pass exams. This severely hampers the improvement of their English proficiency.

2.2 Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Foreign scholars have conducted extensive research on English vocabulary learning strategies. Theoretical frameworks such as Craik and Lockhart's Deep Processing Theory Model, Wittrock's Generative Processing Theory, Craik and Tulving's Elaboration Theory, and Herman and Anderson's Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition Theory provide foundational support for vocabulary learning strategy research. Domestic scholars, building upon international research while considering Chinese learners' characteristics and linguistic context, have extensively studied vocabulary learning strategy classification, influencing factors, and pedagogical applications. They have proposed targeted perspectives and recommendations.

2.3 Research on Applying Artistic Contexts in Language Instruction

The integration of art and language teaching has garnered increasing attention. Studies indicate that

incorporating artistic elements—such as music, painting, or drama—into language instruction can create engaging learning environments, enhance student motivation, and improve language application skills. However, research on vocabulary learning strategies based on artistic contexts within university English courses for art students remains limited and warrants further exploration.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Questionnaire Survey Method

A questionnaire targeting art students' English vocabulary learning was designed, covering aspects such as learning interest, challenges encountered, study methods, and perceptions and expectations regarding art-based vocabulary learning strategies. A selected number of art students served as survey participants. Questionnaires were distributed, collected, and statistically analyzed to comprehensively understand the current status and needs of art students' English vocabulary learning.

3.2 Interview Method

Conduct interviews with selected art students and English teachers. Student interviews aim to uncover genuine thoughts, encountered problems, and perceptions of different learning strategies during vocabulary acquisition. Teacher interviews focus on understanding their views on teaching vocabulary to art students, current teaching methods, and opinions/suggestions regarding art-based vocabulary learning strategies. These interviews provide detailed, in-depth information to strengthen the research.

3.3 Teaching Experiment Method

Two parallel classes were selected as experimental subjects: one served as the experimental class, implementing teaching based on the art-based vocabulary learning strategy; the other functioned as the control class, employing traditional teaching methods. The experimental period spanned one semester, during which students' learning progress and academic performance changes were documented. Following the experiment, vocabulary tests were administered to students in both classes. Test scores were compared and analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the art-based vocabulary learning strategy.

4. Research Content

4.1 Analysis of the Current State of Vocabulary Learning in University English Among Art Students

4.1.1 Lack of Learning Motivation

Art students often devote substantial time and energy to their specialized courses, showing little interest in cultural subjects like English. They perceive English learning as tedious and irrelevant to their majors, lacking intrinsic motivation to study proactively. During the learning process, they exhibit a passive, perfunctory attitude, unwilling to invest time and effort into memorizing and understanding English vocabulary.

4.1.2 Weak English Foundations

Due to long-term focus on specialized studies, art students generally have weak English foundations. Their limited vocabulary and shaky grasp of grammar result in significant shortcomings in comprehensive application skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. When reading English texts, they often struggle to comprehend content due to unfamiliar vocabulary. In writing, they find it difficult to express ideas accurately, resulting in lower-quality compositions.

4.1.2 Ineffective Learning Methods

Most art students lack scientific and effective vocabulary learning strategies, relying primarily on rote memorization. When memorizing words, they often focus solely on spelling and Chinese meanings, neglecting pronunciation, parts of speech, collocation, and contextual usage. This isolated approach results in superficial understanding, unstable retention, high forgetting rates, and an inability to flexibly apply vocabulary for

communication and expression.

4.2 The Close Connection Between Artistic Contexts and English Vocabulary Learning

4.2.1 Stimulating Learning Interest

Artistic contexts possess unique charm and appeal, swiftly capturing art students' attention and igniting their learning interest and motivation. Art students harbor a deep fascination with and keen sensitivity to art. Integrating artistic contexts into English vocabulary instruction—such as displaying artworks, screening art films, or simulating artistic activities—creates a familiar and vivid learning environment. This allows them to learn English vocabulary in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere, enhancing their initiative and engagement in the learning process.

4.2.2 Deepening Vocabulary Comprehension

Artistic contexts provide students with rich sensory materials, aiding in the development of visual thinking and deepening their understanding and retention of English vocabulary. For instance, when learning color-descriptive vocabulary, displaying paintings of various styles allows students to intuitively grasp the characteristics and distinctions of different colors—a more effective approach than merely memorizing the Chinese meanings of the words. When teaching art-related vocabulary, integrating explanations with specific artworks or artistic activities enables students to better grasp word meanings and usage, thereby enhancing learning outcomes.

4.2.3 Cultivating Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

Art serves as a vital vehicle for culture, with different art forms reflecting distinct cultural backgrounds and values. Combining artistic contexts with English vocabulary learning allows students to explore the cultures of English-speaking countries while acquiring words, thereby developing cross-cultural communication abilities. For instance, when learning vocabulary related to Western painting, introducing the development history, stylistic characteristics, and underlying cultural connotations of Western painting enables students to not only master vocabulary but also gain a deeper understanding of Western culture. This, in turn, facilitates more effective communication and interaction with people from English-speaking countries.

4.3 Building a Vocabulary Learning Strategy System Based on Artistic Contexts

4.3.1 Contextual Introduction Strategy

Utilizing Artworks to Create Contexts Teachers can collect various artworks relevant to the teaching content, such as paintings, sculptures, and photographs, and display them to students in class. When learning vocabulary describing character traits, present portraits of different styles and have students observe and describe the subjects' appearance, expressions, and temperament. Guide them to express these observations using the learned English vocabulary. This approach allows students to naturally learn and apply vocabulary while appreciating artworks.

Simulating Artistic Activities Organize simulated artistic events like English-language art exhibitions, drama performances, or concerts where students assume different roles. During an English art exhibition simulation, students can play curators, docents, or visitors, using English to describe artworks and share exhibition impressions. This authentic scenario practice enables students to apply vocabulary in real-world contexts, enhancing language proficiency.

4.3.2 Practical Application Strategies

Integrate artistic creation with English expression by encouraging students to create artworks and articulate their creative concepts and the essence of their work in English. For example, have students draw English-themed comics and add English dialogue and captions; or have them compose English poetry, prose, and other literary works. This artistic approach stimulates interest in learning English vocabulary while simultaneously improving their English writing skills and vocabulary application abilities.

Integrate artistic performance with vocabulary memorization by organizing English drama performances, song recitals, and other artistic activities. This allows students to memorize and apply vocabulary through performance.

Select classic English plays or songs for rehearsal and performance. During rehearsals, students must comprehend and memorize the script's vocabulary and lines. Through repeated practice and performance, they deepen vocabulary retention and understanding while improving oral expression and performance skills.

4.3.3 Cultural Integration Strategy

Conduct comparative studies of artistic cultures by contrasting English-speaking countries' artistic traditions with Chinese artistic traditions, enabling students to recognize differences and commonalities between cultures. When studying Western music culture, introduce its historical development, major genres, and influential figures while contrasting it with Chinese music culture. Analyze differences in musical styles, instrumentation, and expressive techniques. This comparative approach broadens students' cultural horizons and deepens their understanding of the cultural connotations behind English vocabulary.

Organize vocabulary around art and culture themes. Systematically compile and categorize relevant English vocabulary centered on art and cultural subjects. For example, under the theme of “music,” vocabulary is organized into categories such as music genres (e.g., classical music, pop music, jazz), instrument names (e.g., piano, violin, guitar), and musical terms (e.g., tempo, melody, harmony). This approach allows students to explore various aspects of musical culture while enhancing the systematic and effective acquisition of vocabulary.

4.4 Teaching Experiment and Results Analysis

4.4.1 Experimental Process

Two parallel classes were selected as experimental subjects. The experimental class employed an arts-based vocabulary learning strategy, while the control class used traditional teaching methods. During the experiment, the experimental class teacher flexibly applied strategies such as contextual introduction, practical application, and cultural integration based on teaching content and student circumstances. The control class teacher followed traditional teaching methods, primarily focusing on explaining vocabulary spelling, Chinese meanings, and grammatical usage. The experiment spanned one semester, during which students' learning progress and performance changes were documented.

4.4.2 Results Analysis

Following the experiment, vocabulary tests were administered to both classes, assessing spelling, definition comprehension, and application skills. Comparative analysis revealed that the experimental class achieved significantly higher average scores and a higher percentage of students scoring at the advanced level compared to the control class. Further analysis revealed that experimental class students demonstrated markedly improved comprehension and application of vocabulary, enabling more accurate expression and communication using learned words. Concurrently, their interest and initiative in English vocabulary learning significantly increased, with higher classroom engagement. This indicates that the art-based vocabulary learning strategy effectively enhances art students' English vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Research Findings

This study demonstrates that vocabulary learning strategies grounded in artistic contexts align with the learning characteristics and needs of art students. Such approaches effectively stimulate their interest in learning, enhance vocabulary retention and application skills, and positively contribute to improving their overall English language proficiency. Through strategies such as contextual introduction, practical application, and cultural integration, a vivid, engaging, and culturally rich learning environment is created. This transforms vocabulary learning from a tedious task into an enjoyable and challenging experience. Within this environment, students actively participate in learning, think critically, and apply acquired vocabulary, thereby enhancing learning outcomes.

5.2 Teaching Recommendations

5.2.1 Enhancing Teachers' Artistic Literacy

English teachers should deepen their study and understanding of art knowledge to elevate their artistic literacy. Only when teachers possess rich artistic knowledge and strong appreciation skills can they effectively integrate artistic contexts into vocabulary instruction and design more engaging and impactful teaching activities. Schools can organize teachers to participate in art training courses, exhibitions, and performances to broaden their artistic horizons and enhance their artistic proficiency.

5.2.2 Diversifying Teaching Resource Utilization

Schools and teachers should fully leverage diverse art education resources—such as art museums, galleries, concert halls, and theaters—by organizing student visits and practical art activities. Simultaneously, modern information technology should be employed to collect and organize online art resources (e.g., images, videos, audio) to enrich vocabulary teaching content. Furthermore, schools may invite artists to deliver lectures and workshops, enabling students to engage in face-to-face exchanges with artists, experience the allure of art, and stimulate interest in learning English vocabulary.

5.2.3 Implementation of Personalized Strategies

Address the individual differences among art students by developing personalized vocabulary learning strategies grounded in artistic contexts, tailored to their specialized fields, learning styles, and English proficiency levels. Students from different art disciplines may have varying needs and interests regarding artistic contexts. For instance, fine arts students might be more engaged by contexts related to paintings, while music students may show greater enthusiasm for contexts tied to musical activities. Teachers can select appropriate artistic contexts and teaching methods based on students' disciplinary characteristics to meet diverse learning needs and enhance learning outcomes.

5.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions

While this study achieved certain results, it also has limitations. For instance, the experimental sample size was small, involving only two classes, which may introduce some randomness; the experiment duration was brief, spanning just one semester, necessitating further observation and research on the strategy's long-term effects. Future studies could expand the sample size by selecting more schools and classes for experimentation, extend the experimental period, and delve deeper into the long-term efficacy of art-based vocabulary learning strategies. Additionally, integrating modern educational technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence could facilitate the development of richer and more diverse art-based vocabulary learning resources. This would provide stronger support for art students' English vocabulary acquisition and advance the reform and development of English instruction for this population.

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