

A case study on vocabulary teaching at Quang Oai Upper-secondary school, Hanoi / Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Hạnh

PART A: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale of the study:

As one of the fundamental building blocks of language, vocabulary knowledge plays a prominent role in foreign language learning. In other words, vocabulary is the basis for communication, reading, and writing. Therefore, an effective approach to vocabulary is always one of the great concerns of every language teacher. The reason is that learning vocabulary is really challenging requiring many cognitive processes, and teachers have to make sure that the students understand the word and its meaning as well as how to use the word accurately and appropriately.

At upper-secondary schools in Vietnam, with a short duration of 3 periods (135 minutes) per week for all language skills and language focus, vocabulary instruction has been paid less attention than it should have been. Students have to learn so many new words every week, and by the time they learn the new words in the new lesson they have forgotten most of the words they have learned in previous lessons. Consequently, word retention has always been a difficult problem for the students.

As an English teacher, I found out that one of the major reasons for which the students were not successful users of English is their vocabulary deficiency. This motivates the researcher to conduct this study in an attempt to find out how vocabulary is taught and learned in one particular upper secondary school in Hanoi.

2. Aims and Objectives of the study:

The aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of vocabulary teaching held by the upper-secondary school teachers working in Quang Oai upper-secondary school (QOUS) in Hanoi and the connection between their beliefs and practices.

The objectives of the study are:

- a) to understand teachers' opinions of the role of vocabulary in foreign language teaching as well as their perceived opportunities for and constraints on vocabulary teaching

b) to investigate their teaching approach to vocabulary in the classroom and the extent to which their self-reported teaching approach diverges their actual classroom teaching 2

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aims and objectives, I decided to carry out a qualitative case study, which is aimed at seeking answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What are teachers' opinions of the role of vocabulary in foreign language teaching?
- 2) What do they think of the opportunities for and constraints on vocabulary teaching in their school?
- 3) To what extent do their self-reports of vocabulary teaching diverge from their actual classroom teaching?
- 4) What are the common vocabulary activities they use in the classroom?

3. Scope of the study:

The study is confined to the investigation of the teachers' perceptions related to vocabulary teaching as well as the way they taught vocabulary in the classroom within the context of one particular upper secondary school. I therefore had no intention of generalizing the findings. Rather, I wanted to identify the space where improvements in vocabulary teaching can be improved so as to make a small contribution to the effort to make English language teaching in the researched upper secondary school more effective.

4. Method of the study:

This study is designed as a single qualitative case study and uses a combination of various methods to achieve its objectives such as pre-observation interviews, observations, and post-observation interviews.

The case here is an upper secondary school on the outskirts of Hanoi. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

First, pre-observation interviews were conducted. The obtained data help to investigate teachers' attitudes towards English vocabulary teaching in Quang Oai Upper-Secondary Schools in Hanoi, the opportunities as well as constraints.

After that, classroom observations were conducted to find out how effectively the teachers taught English vocabulary.

Finally, I carried out post-observation interviews to gain understanding of teachers' reasoning for their classroom practices.

5. Design of the study:

There are three main parts in my thesis:

Part A is the Introduction presenting the rationale, aims, objectives, scope, research questions, methods and design of the study.

Part B, the Development, includes three chapters:

Chapter I is the Literature Review, which reviews theoretical issues related to the definitions, roles of vocabulary in English language acquisitions, techniques in vocabulary teaching as well as previous studies on vocabulary teaching in the classroom.

Chapter II is the study which is composed of some smaller parts: rationale for choosing the case study, the settings (the case), the participants, the instruments and research procedures of the study.

Chapter III is the analysis and discussion of the findings through an analysis of the data collected by means of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

Part C is the Conclusion. In this Chapter, major findings of the study will be briefly summarized to answer the research questions. Also, the limitations of the study and suggestions for the future researches will be presented in this chapter.

PART B: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on vocabulary teaching. It begins with definitions and relevant knowledge around vocabulary teaching, followed by the significance of vocabulary in language acquisition as well as the challenges of vocabulary teaching and a review of related studies in the same field.

1.1.What is Vocabulary?

In some literature, vocabulary is defined differently by different scholars. Below is the presentation of some definitions that are relevant to the present study. According to Websters Collegiate Dictionary (9th ed., 1978:1320), vocabulary is defined as: a) a list or collection of words and phrase usually alphabetically arranged and explained or defined. b) a sum or stock of words employed by a language group individual or work or in a field of knowledge. c) a list or collection of terms or codes available for use.

This definition is echoed by Hatch and Brown (1995). Ur (1996) elaborates further and she uses the term ‘vocabulary item’ to refer to ‘word’. This is because, she argues, a vocabulary item can be either a single word or a multi-word phrase. According to her, “Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. A useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary “items” rather than “word” which is made up of two or three words but express a single idea”. (p. 60)

Similarly, Lewis, an advocate of the lexical approach to second language teaching, views vocabulary either as individual words or as full sentences, which he terms as ‘institutionalized utterances, that “convey fixed social or pragmatic meaning within a given community” (Lewis, 1993: 89).

1.2. Roles of Vocabulary in Second Language Acquisition:

“Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.”

David Wilkins, linguist

This is how linguist David Wilkin sums up the importance of vocabulary learning. It's known to most L2 learners that acquisition of vocabulary is a fundamental and important component in the course of their learning. McCarthy (1990: viii) emphasizes that: "No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wider range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way" (McCarthy 1990: viii)

A good repertoire of vocabulary is essential for ESL/ EFL learner, especially for those who learn English for specific purposes or those who expect to become expert users of English. As a result, the teaching and learning vocabulary, although it is only one sub-goal of a range of goals that is important in ELL, plays a key role in the overall structure of language teaching program because of its basic function in language components. Huckin and Block (1993: 154) show that L2 readers may rely heavily on vocabulary knowledge and that a lack of vocabulary knowledge is the largest obstacles for L2 readers to overcome. If someone has adequate vocabulary, he/ she will feel more confident in communicating with others as well as expressing his/her opinions in both oral and written forms.

Learners can express themselves with poor grammar. However, it is always a challenge to get the message across in a foreign language (Wallace, 1982), and because of this communication in foreign language is constrained considerably to those with limited vocabulary.

1.3. What is Involved in Teaching Vocabulary?

Basic to the teaching of vocabulary is the question of what it is to know a word. It is widely believed that people learn words receptively first and later achieve productive knowledge (Schmitt, 2000). Schmitt (1995: 86) presents a list of the word knowledge types that native speakers typically possess: 1. a word's spoken form, 2. a word's written form, 3. a word's part of speech, derivative forms, and grammatical patterns, 4. a word's collocations, 5. how frequently a word is used in a language, 6. the many stylistic constraints which determine if a word is appropriate in a given context, 7. a word's conceptual meaning, 8. a word's semantic network of associations. Schmitt (1995: 87) pictures the development of the overall knowledge of a word in the following way: After the initial exposure, a learner may have an idea of one of

the word's possible meanings, along with an impression of its form. As the learner repeatedly comes into contact with and uses the word, understanding of the word's form and meaning are strengthened, while other word knowledge aspects are generally added. This may continue until the learner finally controls the collocational and stylistic aspects. These final two kinds of word knowledge may well be the last to be controlled, since they seem to require a great deal of exposure to a language, and arguably, only a minority of L2 learners ever achieves native-like competence of these two aspects.

1.4. Challenges in Vocabulary Teaching:

Since a good knowledge of vocabulary has a great effect on the learners' improvement of other aspects of language such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, and writing, due attention should be paid to choosing and implementing appropriate vocabulary teaching/learning techniques in language classes. However, in general, teaching vocabulary is not easy, clearly more than just presenting new words (Harmer, 1993: 159). It shows that the students' vocabulary mastery is poor. According to Aganes (2008), the causes of the problem might be that: 1) the material is not interesting; 2) the limited time and the equipment; 3) the technique of delivering materials is neither suitable nor interesting. Because of the problems, students got difficulties in learning vocabulary.

1.5. Approaches to Vocabulary Teaching:

There are many different methods, approaches, techniques as well as strategies to vocabulary teaching. In the early decades of the 20th century, vocabulary teaching and research were respectable. The Grammar Translation Method and the Reading Approach were the leading language teaching methodologies at that time. Both of these approaches involved a great deal of direct vocabulary teaching and learning (Murcia, 1991: 296).

1.5.1. The Grammar Translation Method:

1.5. 2. The Reading Approach:

1.5. 3. The Reform Movement:

1.5. 4. The Direct Method:

1.5.5. The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching:

1.5.6. The Audio-lingual Method:

1.5. 7. The Cognitive Approach: 11

1.5. 8. The Communicative Language Teaching

1.5. 9. The Lexical Approach

1.5. 10. Content-based Instruction:

1.6. Techniques in Presenting New Vocabulary:

After the teacher chooses what items to teach, he or she should follow certain guidelines. In my opinion, this includes teaching the vocabulary "in spoken form first" to prevent students from pronouncing the words in the form they are written, placing the new items in context, and revising them.

In teaching vocabulary, teachers of English mainly focus on explaining the meaning, presenting the form as well as the use of a new word. Nation, Paul (2005) suggested different techniques that teachers of English can implement in their teaching vocabulary.

Firstly, teachers quickly give the meaning of the word by

- (a) using an L1 translation, (b) using a known L2 synonym or a simple definition in the L2, (c) showing an object or picture, (d) giving quick demonstration, (e) drawing a simple picture or diagram, (f) breaking the word into parts and giving the meaning of the parts and the whole word (the word part strategy), (g) giving several example sentences with the word in context to show the meaning, (h) commenting on the underlying meaning of the word and other referents.

Secondly, teachers can draw attention to the form of the word by (a) showing how the spelling of the word is like the spelling of known words, (b) giving the stress pattern of the word and its pronunciation, (c) showing the prefix, stem and suffix that make up the word, (d) getting the learners to repeat the pronunciation of the word, (e) writing the word on the board, (f) pointing out any spelling irregularity in the word.

Finally, the use of the word can be explained by (a) quickly showing the grammatical pattern the word fits into (countable/uncountable, transitive/intransitive, etc), (b) giving a few similar collocates, (c) mentioning any restrictions on the use of the word (formal, colloquial, impolite, only used in the United States, only used with children, old fashioned, technical, infrequent), (d) giving a well known opposite, or a well known word describing the group or lexical set it fits into.

1.7. Vocabulary Learning Strategies:

1.7.1. Guessing Meaning from Context:

1.7.2. Vocabulary Notebooks and Word Cards:

1.7.3. Learners' First Language and Dictionary Use:

1.8. Previous Studies on Vocabulary Teaching in The Classroom:

CHAPTER II. THE STUDY

2.1. Rationale of Using A Case Study Approach:

A case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. A form of qualitative descriptive research, the case study looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context.

Case study is known as a triangulated research strategy. Snow and Anderson (cited in Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991) asserts that triangulation can occur with data, investigators, theories, and even methodologies.

In essence, Sandra Lee McKay (2006: 71) defines a case study as: “a single instance of some bounded systems, which can range from one individual to a class, a school, or an entire community”.

When carrying out the study, I chose case study as the method for some reasons. First, a case study approach allows me to collect data from multiple methods i.e. interviews, document review, and observation. Second, a case study provides much more detailed information than what is available through other methods, such as surveys (Neale, Thapa, and Boyce (2006:3)). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) maintain that a case study (1) is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case; (2) provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case and (3) the researcher is integrally involved in the case.

2.2. The Case:

The present study was conducted at a state upper-secondary school, which is located in an economically developing district, 50 km north of the centre of Hanoi city. Agriculture was the dominant local economy, and the majority of the population was farmers. However, the district was one of the popular tourist destinations in North Vietnam. The school was

established in 1961. At the time when the study was carried out, the school had a total student body of 1890, who were aged between 16 and 18. They were grouped in three grades of 10, 11, and 12 like in any upper-secondary school in Vietnam.

Admission was decided through an entrance examination administered by the Municipal Department of Education and Training. Prior to their upper-secondary education, these students had learnt English as a compulsory subject at lower-secondary school for four years. Some even started to learn English at the primary school. Despite this long period of learning English, an overwhelming majority of them was pre-intermediate students (some were just elementary students) in terms of English proficiency. Although they lived in an area with many tourist attractions, their exposure to English was quite limited for two reasons. First, tourists coming to this area were largely from within Vietnam, who naturally are not English speakers. Second, even when there were English-speaking visitors, the students did not have the opportunity to use English with them because they were either at the school or on the farm helping their parents with the farm work while the visitors stayed there quite briefly. Consequently, learning English to these students was just for passing the exams. The average class size is around 45. Each classroom is basically furnished with two rows of long desks, a blackboard. Every 4 students shared one desk. Between rows of desks was a narrow aisle for the teacher to move around.

Like in other schools in Vietnam, in this school the textbooks are prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Training, and were pre-determined for all grades and school type nationwide from grade 10 to 12, with weekly class time of 135 minutes, split into three lessons of 45 minutes each. Each lesson is theme-based and skill-based, with adaptation of the two currently popular teaching approaches, task-based learning and communicative approach. Among 120 staff and teachers of all subjects, there were 9 English-language teachers working for the school. The approach to English language teaching in the school can be described as teacher-fronted with teachers playing the key role in the classroom, and being the main speakers throughout the lesson.

2.3. Participants:

The 7 male and 1 female participants ranged from 23 to 54 years in age, with the majority in their 20s; the average age was 34. Their experience in teaching English varied from 1 to 30 years, with an average of 11.25 years. At the time of the study, eight

participants were teaching in rural upper-secondary school. All of the participants held a B.A degree from different universities in Vietnam (see Table 2. 1)

2.4. Instruments:

2.4.1. The Interview:

Pre-observation interview:

Before observing teachers, I conducted short informal interviews with the teachers. In fact these were more like informal conversations. The purpose of these informal interviews was to elicit the teachers' opinions of the role of vocabulary; the opportunities for and constraints on vocabulary teaching and the techniques that the teachers often apply in vocabulary teaching. While interviewing the participants, the researcher recorded all that could be recalled of the interviewees' responses.

Post-observation Interview:

The aim of the post-observation interview was to find out the consistency and inconsistency between teachers' self-reports and actual practice regarding vocabulary teaching as well as the rationale of teachers' actual behaviors in the classroom. For this aim all post-observation interviews were unstructured.

2.4.2. Classroom Observation:

This technique is useful for providing additional information about the topic being studied. The reliability is enhanced when more than one observer is involved in the task. Participant-observation makes the researcher into an active participant in the events being studied.

In this study, I observed and took detailed notes of the key events that occurred in the classroom. This included teacher questioning, student response, classroom discussion, and individual as well as whole-class participation. Observations depicted the description of the participants, the arrangement of the classroom setting, the re-enactment of dialogue that occurred between teacher and students, and activities that occurred during the class.

2.5. Data collection and data analysis procedures:

2.5.1. Data collection procedures:

The data collection procedures involved the following steps:

Before collecting data for the study, on February 10th I met all teachers of English of QOUS in order to ask for cooperation for my study. It was so lucky for me to be given warm welcome by all teachers there.

The interviews were conducted before and after the classroom observation if the teacher were having an interval waiting for their next periods. Otherwise, the researcher had to wait until they had free time later in the day or made phone calls after school. Each interview lasted around 15 to 30 minutes. The pre-observation interview consists of two parts. The first is about the participants' own background and the second deals with the respondents' attitudes toward vocabulary teaching. The language of the interview was Vietnamese to ensure mutual understanding between the teacher and myself as an interviewee. Therefore, the participants fully articulate their views without being constrained by the use of English or it helped them to avoid getting confused in understanding the English interviewing questions and giving answers to the asked questions. All the interviews were recorded so the researcher could transcribe them in detail then. They were then translated and analyzed by the researchers to uncover the emerging themes.

A semi-structured interview was conducted in Vietnamese with each of the eight teachers.

2.5.2. Data analysis procedures:

The procedures of collecting data took me nearly 3 months and about a month to analyze the data. Data collected from the above different sources were categorized into i) teachers' opinions of the role of vocabulary, ii) Teachers' perceptions of the opportunities for vocabulary teaching; iii) Teachers' perceptions of the constraints on vocabulary teaching; iv) Teachers' self-reports of their vocabulary techniques; v) Common classroom vocabulary exercises and vi) Consistency and inconsistency between teachers' self-reports and actual practice regarding vocabulary teaching.

CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This Chapter presents and discusses the findings that arise from the data which were collected to answer the intended research questions. First, the data collected from pre-observation will be presented and analyzed to answer the first two research questions: i) What are teachers' opinions of the role of vocabulary in foreign language teaching?; ii) What do they think of the opportunities for and constraints on vocabulary teaching in their school?. Second, classroom observations will give answers for the two next questions iii) to what extent do their self-reports of vocabulary teaching diverge from their actual classroom teaching? iv) What are the common vocabulary exercises they use in the classroom?

Finally, the reasons for teachers' actual teaching behaviors in their classes will be answered through post-observation interviews.

3.1. Findings:

3.1.1. Teachers' opinions of the role of vocabulary:

Vocabulary is instrumental to language acquisition:

All the participants confirmed that vocabulary knowledge is a prerequisite for a learner's success in mastering a second language in general, and English in particular. Vocabulary shortage leads to many serious difficulties in English language learning.

Vocabulary as foundation of communication skills:

Language is made up of words (Zimmerman, 1997). Having sufficient L2 vocabulary is a prerequisite for communication in an L2 (Nation, 2001). In other words, vocabulary is an essential component for successful communication in the second language classroom. This is because vocabulary is integral to every language skills, including reading, writing, listening and speaking skill.

It is evident that the teachers were fully aware of the importance of vocabulary in learning English as a foreign language.

3.1.2. Teachers' Perceptions of the Opportunities for Vocabulary Teaching:

Textbooks as resources:

Tieng Anh 10, Tieng Anh 11 and Tieng Anh 12, which were set by the Ministry of Education and Training, (MOET), has been used in teaching and learning English at QOUS. These textbooks are designed following theme-based and skill-based, with adaptation of the two currently popular teaching approaches, task-based learning and communicative approach.

Teaching facilities:

In English teaching, especially in vocabulary teaching, teaching equipments such as radios, cassette players, computers, projectors are really necessary and useful. Although located in an economically developing district, QOUS has been equipped with some modern equipment as above.

3.1.3. Teachers' Perceptions of the Constraints on Vocabulary Teaching:

In general, teaching vocabulary is not easy. Teaching vocabulary is clearly more than just presenting new words (Harmer. J, 1993: 159). Several difficulties in teaching vocabulary are determined not only by linguistic factors but also by psychological and methodological ones.

Time constraints:

Through the pre-observation in-depth interviews, it has been found that most of the participants did not spend much time teaching vocabulary. They just only spent about from 5 to 7 minutes in each lesson teaching vocabulary because there were too many tasks to be completed in a 45-minute lesson.

Students' vocabulary deficiency:

Five among eight participants shared that most of their students were born into farmer families with low income, so they have few chances to learn and practice English outside the class. The students only attended three 45-minutes English lessons per week for all skills and language knowledge. As a result, they usually have a small English vocabulary and limited English structures. The students' deficiency in vocabulary prevented the teachers from using some effective techniques in teaching vocabulary, such as using synonyms, antonyms, using English to define a new word.

Teachers' limited knowledge of vocabulary teaching

Due to the deficiency in vocabulary teaching methodology, some of the interviewed teachers confirmed that vocabulary teaching was a really challenging job. The techniques to present, practice and consolidate new words are simple, boring and seem ineffective for their students. These techniques do not give their students great motivation to learn. In other words, students are passive in learning vocabulary.

3.1.4. Teachers' self-reports of their vocabulary techniques:

A number of techniques can be adapted to present new vocabulary items. Some techniques are more popular and more often used than others.

Use of translation:

Use of visual aids and realia:

Use of synonyms or antonyms:

Integration of vocabulary into skills lessons

3.1.5. Consistency and inconsistency between teachers' self-reports and actual practice regarding vocabulary teaching:

The information obtained from 16 class-observations revealed some interesting findings. The researcher could find the consistency and inconsistency between the teachers' self-reports and their actual teaching behaviors in the classroom regarding vocabulary teaching. (The sample observation sheets are attached in Appendix E).

Consistency:

Some of the observed teachers tried to use as many techniques as possible to make their lessons more interesting and effective. From the observations, the researcher found that using translation; visual aids, realia; synonyms and antonyms; and integrating vocabulary into skill lessons were applied most by the participants.

Inconsistency:

Findings from the interviews showed that teachers' beliefs about the vocabulary teaching were positive, however, all the teachers demonstrated inconsistency between their self-report and actual practice. The teachers' techniques to teach vocabulary were poor. The teachers were only keen on one or two techniques for a long time. And the material most teachers used in vocabulary teaching was only the textbook with so few exercises. As a result, the teachers' lectures might not be so interesting.

3.1.6. Common Classroom Vocabulary Activities:

With regards to vocabulary consolidation, 8 teachers agreed on the necessity of designing exciting and practical activities to help students strengthen their word memory. Hoi proposed that “vocabulary consolidation can be supported by tests” or “there should be regular check of the taught words” said Chang. Thuy proposes that students should be given a variety of these exercises to help them remember the words taught. The more exercises they can do, the more improvement they can make.

However, the researcher observed that after teaching vocabulary or at the end of the lessons, the teachers didn’t spend much time checking and consolidating students’ vocabulary understanding. Only two among 8 teachers asked the students to do some simple exercises, such as matching the words with their meanings, doing gap-filling exercises, and finding synonyms for the given words as follows:

3.2. Discussion:

The teachers pointed out some factors affecting vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning in their school. These are limited instructional time, students’ limited English proficiency and limited vocabulary. Especially, they themselves acknowledged that they had problems finding more effective ways of presenting vocabulary and getting the students to practice vocabulary.

In terms of the teachers’ approaches to vocabulary, the interview data showed that the teachers were heavily dependent on the textbook.

The observational data justified that the teachers’ knowledge of how to teach vocabulary was rather limited. They used translation to teach vocabulary more often than other techniques. In fact, translation was the most dominant classroom vocabulary technique. Of course, there is nothing wrong in using translation to teach vocabulary. Translation is really a useful technique, especially when the students’ proficiency is low. The question is that it should not be overused. Pictures, realia, mime, etc are all appropriate techniques that can be used in addition to translation.

Another point that is worth-noting is that teachers used very limited types of vocabulary exercises, which just focused on accuracy rather than on fluency. There was little evidence that the teachers employed more communication-oriented activities to teach vocabulary. This could be the main reason for the students’ poor retention of words.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

This study sets out to explore the reality of vocabulary teaching at a particular secondary school. In the previous part, Part B, I presented and discussed the findings of the study with reference to the research questions. In this chapter, some conclusions of the study will be drawn out to summarize all the main findings as well as the implications, limitations and suggestions for further studies.

1. Summary of Main Findings:

The teachers in this study viewed vocabulary as an important element of learning English as a foreign language because they were aware that vocabulary deficiency prevented the students from using English for communication and even in learning grammar effectively. However, the limited time of classroom instruction allocated to English was one of the constraints leading to students' limited vocabulary which, in turn, leads to the students' limited English proficiency.

The teachers' pedagogical repertoire of how to teach vocabulary appeared to be rather limited. The teachers had difficulties finding more effective ways of presenting vocabulary and getting the students to practice vocabulary. They used translation to teach vocabulary more often than other vocabulary techniques. The reality also showed that teachers were heavily dependent on the textbook, which presents limited types of vocabulary exercises with a great emphasis on accuracy rather than on fluency.

2. Implications:

The findings in this study have suggested some implications which should be put into consideration. The first implication is the vital requirement for teachers to seek new and innovative ways to teach vocabulary. When vocabulary instruction is limited to translation only, it results in students' off-task behavior because of boredom. Students' active involvement will also enhance the success of the lesson. Besides the traditional techniques like saying the words clearly one by one and writing them on the board, translating all the words into Vietnamese, more use of using synonyms and antonyms, using target language to define the new word is also necessary in vocabulary teaching. Nevertheless, the over-use of these two techniques may make it time-consuming because an endless explaining of new words may take place.

In addition, observational data did not show evidence of teachers' use of visual aids, gestures and facial expressions and especially TV sets, head- projectors, songs, word games to present vocabulary and to get the students to practice the taught vocabulary.

3. Suggestions for further studies:

3.1. Limitations:

The study has some limitations. The first limitation is limited the scope of the study. The case of this study involves only 8 teachers teaching English as a foreign language at a state school in Hanoi. Due to this limitation, the results could differ if conducted in another school. Therefore, no generalizations can be drawn from the study and the findings could not be representative for the whole student population of the school.

However, the study provides useful information about teachers' perceptions of the role of vocabulary, the challenges in teaching vocabulary as well as how they actually taught vocabulary in the classroom. Although no generalization is intended, the findings of the study could be transferable to other similar upper secondary schools in Vietnam. The contribution of this study is that it reveals that teachers seemed to be so dependent on the textbook in dealing with vocabulary and they seemed to be focused more on accuracy than fluency in vocabulary teaching. This could account for the students' poor retention of vocabulary, which leads to vocabulary deficiency, and poor grammatical knowledge because without adequate vocabulary, grammar learning is almost impossible, let alone using English for communicative purposes. All together partly explains why the students' proficiency in English was not as good as it was desired after years of learning English at the school.

3.2. Suggestions for further studies:

On the basis of the findings and limitations of the study, the following suggestions are made for further research.

Since this study was just carried out on a small number of teachers with a period of nearly 3 months, it would have been better if further researches had been done on a large number of participants for a longer time. Using multiple methods of data collection is needed.

In order to gain a better picture of Vietnamese secondary school teachers' beliefs and practice regarding vocabulary teaching, there is a need for a multiple-case study, which should be conducted in different schools located in various geographical areas.

In conclusion, these substantial findings would not have been possible without adopting a longitudinal, multi-method approach to data collection and grounded analysis within a qualitative paradigm. It has been emphasized that further such research into teacher cognition is necessary both in Vietnam and elsewhere, and it is hoped that the approach adopted in this study will be relatable to other contexts.