

## *Original Paper*

# A Study on the Input and Output of Vocabulary Teaching Based on Noticing Theory

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### ***Abstract***

*As an important concept in cognitive psychology, noticing is pertinent to the daily life, working, and study. What is more, it is one of essential factors to have a bearing on language learning. When teachers input or output knowledge or material, not all the things can gain learners' attention, that is, the value of these things is not equal. Based on the analysis of vocabulary from the textbook published by the People's Education Publishing House from the perspective of Noticing Theory, this paper tries to explore some teaching cases of how to facilitate the input and output of vocabulary teaching, aiming to enhance learners' efficiency, and provide some reference to teachers on how to attract learners' attention. The result shows that it is better to design the tasks on the basis of those elements of Noticing Theory, that is, expectation or readiness, frequency, perceptual salience instruction, task demands, and skill level, which facilitates the vocabulary acquisition, and boosts learner's interest and initiative to learn English vocabulary.*

### ***Keywords***

*Noticing, English vocabulary, language input, language output, noticing hypothesis*

## **1. Introduction**

Vocabulary is one of components of all language, and it plays an indispensable role in human communication and language learning, the importance which echoes with the statement that "Without grammar, little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972). In other words, although students may know little grammar, they can still figure out what others talk about, or make themselves understood. Therefore, vocabulary learning is a top priority and lasting challenge for both native and foreign learners. The significance of vocabulary learning can be successfully

demonstrated by much theoretical work and empirical work. Read (1988) emphasized that second language learners are typically conscious of the extent to which imitations in their vocabulary knowledge hamper their ability to communicate effectively in target language. During the past decades, foreign language vocabulary learning receives more attention in the field of cognitive linguistics. Many scholars found that noticing plays an essential part in foreign language learning. Learning is greatly a conscious process. Therefore, noticing put in classroom manipulation could improve the learning effects for language learners.

The present study is to explore how the input and output of vocabulary learning and teaching based on attention theory may aid vocabulary acquisition. Further, some teaching cases may provide some reference to vocabulary process and vocabulary retention through varied methods.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Noticing Theory*

#### 2.1.1 The Definition of Noticing

Noticing, an essential concept in the field of psychology, has yet no standard definition. In Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary, noticing means "The action of applying one's mind to something or somebody or to become aware of something". That is to say, "the cognitive process of selectively concentrating on one thing while deliberately ignoring other things" (Proeter, 2004). Schmidt (1990) regarded that noticing was a necessary condition for transforming input to be took in. What is more, he also claimed that it is noticing that promoted learning rather than directly presenting knowledge to students, which means learning can not take place without noticing. Robinson (1995) proposed that noticing is detection plus rehearsal in short-term memory, which is prior to encode in long-term memory. According to those various explanations about noticing, we can dig out some common points. That is, noticing has the potential to facilitate the process of learning. Not only can noticing better input for learners to take in the input knowledge, but also promote the retention of knowledge over the long haul, which paves a solid foundation for learners to output the established resource. Therefore, learning without noticing is hardly possible.

#### 2.1.2 Factors to Affect Noticing

Generally speaking, two sorts of factors contribute to affecting noticing. The first one is pertinent to the characteristics of the stimulus. The other is associated with the condition of a person.

##### (1) the characteristics of the stimulus

From longitudinal perspective, if the stimulus is strong, novel, and emotional, people are prone to pay their attention to those things. Strong stimulus, such as loud sound, dazzling and colourful light will arouse people's attention, and the novel stimulus will attract people's curiosity. In addition, some stimulus, like vivid and lifelike images, or some moving and personal stories will bring strong emotional effect, which makes people associate many other things to activates their mind.

From cross perspective, if the stimulus contrasts other sort of stimulus in strength, color and size, these

alteration will also easily gain attention. Because variation is the spice of life to add the rhythm to the present, while the same style readily makes people feel weary.

(2) the condition of a person

The same stimulus may attract some people's attention, but in the meantime it may fail to arouse others' due to various personal orientation, like physical and mental condition, people's interest, experience and knowledge. A vigorous and brisk person is inclined to may pay more attention to a multitude of things. On the contrary, if one person feels uncomfortable, he or she may fail to catch attention and be reluctant to do others things due to lack of no energy and the willingness. On top of that, if the stimulus caters for people's interest, experience and their acquired knowledge, people will easily focus on those things to establish the relation with inherent knowledge, enlarging knowledge network or enriching experience. In the final analysis, we can make good use of these subjective and objective factors to make full play of the function of attention.

### *2.2 Noticing Hypothesis*

In terms of noticing, noticing hypothesis proposed by Schmidt gains popularity. Schmidt (1990) pointed out that not all of the input information is equal in value, and only the information which is paid attention to is taken in and processed effectively. That is to say, noticing is indispensable for learning. Only when the input information is noticed or obtains attention can it be processed and transferred to permanent memory. Therefore, the more attention a person pays to learning, the more he will attain.

Schmidt mentioned that some factors could exert great influence on noticing, like, expectation or readiness, frequency, perceptual salience instruction, task demands, and skill level, which agrees with that of in psychology.

Expectation or readiness: learners are more likely to increase more notice to learning if they are equipped with expectation toward learning material or learning goals. In other words, if students are greatly motivated by the material itself or by teachers, they are stimulated more interest and attention to learn something.

Frequency: all else being equal, the more one word is endowed with the frequency, the more it will be likely to be noticed. In other words, if a word is exposed to students more times in a lesson, their impression toward this word will be deepened. Whereas, the chance to acquire this word will be substantially maximized.

Perceptual salience: a word could win more attention given that the form of this word is extremely salient. If the form of one word is readily sensed, the instant memory toward the word will come into people's consciousness.

Skill levels: the strategies to process learning material facilitate the learning process due to the fact that it could make learners to analyze learning items rapidly. During this analysis course, learners must pay more attention to these items.

Task demands: when learners notice the learning contents in a task, the incidental learning grows will be awash with possibility and efficiency. That is to say, learners put in a task could learn something

incidentally.

Those factors are conducive to instructing the students as well as teachers during the learning and teaching process. The efforts should be made to diversify the learning material in a bid to catch learners' attention, which paves a foundation for learners further to interpret or take in the learning material and knowledge.

In a word, attention and learning are inseparable. Attention is the necessary and sufficient condition to transform input knowledge to intake in the learning process, and the achievement gained through learning in turn boosts the attention of learning.

### *2.3 Noticing and Language Learning*

From all the school activities, classroom teaching, the major channel to acquire knowledge, occupies the most of students' time to learn something, and has a prominent bearing on students' development. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to attract students' attention. If students don't pay attention to the input information, they will readily forget what they learn, saying nothing of excelling in language.

#### *2.3.1 Noticing and Input*

Input plays an essential and indispensable role in learning a language that is addressed to the second learner either by a native speaker or by another second language learner (Ellis, 1985). Krashen (1985) stated that only the input is comprehensible and enough can be the learners acquire language automatically. Enough and sufficient comprehensible input facilitates learners' understanding of the target language. The more comprehensible input students are possession of, the easier they get hang of the language. Besides, students can acquire knowledge when they feel comfortable rather than anxious, so more interesting knowledge input can motivate students.

The Input Hypothesis stands a point, but this kind of unconscious learning was not sufficient to learn a foreign language. Although students are instilled a body of knowledge and even the comprehensible knowledge, if they fail to pay attention to it, it also doesn't work. Schmidt conducted one research, showing that the way for input becoming intake could be done by externally driven enhancement or by externally focused attention. Externally driven enhancement is achieved through tasks that teachers set to attract students' attention.

Therefore, input knowledge should focus on its comprehension and sufficiency as well as students' attention directed on it.

#### *2.3.2 Noticing and Output*

As for Krashen's input hypothesis, Swain was unsatisfied with it, because it didn't recognize the importance of output. Swain (1985) regarded that comprehensible input is not sufficient for learners to cultivate their language competence. Thus, based on the comprehensible input, students need comprehensible output to fully develop their language competence. Comprehensible output can provide appropriate opportunities for using language, can test hypotheses about the target language, and help learners successfully change from semantic analysis to a syntactic analysis of the language.

Swain (1985) proposed the three ways in which output gears up the process of learning foreign language:

the noticing function, the hypothesis-testing function, and the reflective function. The noticing function was put at the priority. Output conduces noticing (Swain, 1995). The noticing function of output refers to foreign language learners begin to realize the difficulty existing between what they want to say and what they can say when they produce the target language. In other words, it can motivate foreign language learners to notice what they have to learn from input to improve their performance.

Output hypothesis contains the noticing function of language output, which exerts great influence on language learning.

#### *2.4 Input and Output & Second Language Acquisition*

##### *2.4.1 Input and Second Language Acquisition*

Krashen (1981) held that the input which learners were accessible to has to be the comprehensible input. In fact, learners still could understand its general idea in spite of the fact that they don't know every word of the material. Therefore, learners get the hang of language through the comprehensible input instead of the conscious learning. Conversely, if the input surpasses learners' current competence, it will reduce or impede their acquisition.

The ways transforming the input material into be comprehensible lie in simplifying the material or putting it into the context. Concretely, words should be split into the words or morpheme, which is accordance with or similar to words they have learned; in the same vein, the context is supposed to be familiar one or connected with students' daily life.

On top of that, sufficient comprehensible input facilitates the better understanding of the learning material. Whether the input is sufficient varies with different ages. Krashen (1985) claimed that TPR (Total Physical Response) students were able to output target language after 10 hours of TPR input. However, it takes about 720 hours for adult English speakers to learn a foreign language reaching the level between minimal professional proficiency and working professional proficiency. The sufficiency echoes with the frequency of Noticing Hypothesis.

In the final analysis, the input knowledge should be interesting. As the Affective Hypothesis shows, the affective filter or learner's anxiety is fairly low given that learners are equipped with positive emotion, strong motivation, interest and confidence. Moreover, interesting and useful input can greatly stimulate their curiosity and passion.

##### *2.4.2 Output and Second Language Acquisition*

The Output Hypothesis is the action of producing language (speaking or writing), under certain circumstances in the process of second language learning (Swain, 1985). Then Swain pointed out the three roles of output. Firstly, learners should be provided with opportunities to verify hypothesis. And output serves the trigger that drives learners to focus on the means of expression. Moreover, output encourages the learners to acquire language in the process of communication. Likewise, Long (1983) mentioned that the language competence can be acquired when it takes place in conversation interaction. Furthermore, language communication does not happen in isolation, but does in the interaction process, such as teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction, which is beneficial for learners to use

the linguistic elements through the unrehearsed interaction. Therefore, Long (1983) stated that the face-to-face interaction is the best way to promote the development of second language acquisition.

Then, output vocabulary through speaking or writing is injected into communication, which could win learners' attention to self-learning as well as others' learning.

In a word, input and output are interrelated. Learners can never learn a language without input, and without output, students could fail to judge whether they grasp the language. Output in turn affects students' willingness to continue to accept or increase their input. And then, the more input students get, the more potential they output what they learn. If a person has great passion and aspiration to express their ideas, they will end up doing that, due to the shortage of vocabulary. From the input to output and then from output to input, a round and a round form a virtuous circle for learners to increase their intelligence.

### **3. The Input and Output of Vocabulary Teaching Based Noticing Theory**

#### *3.1 The Input of Vocabulary Teaching Based on Noticing Theory*

##### **3.1.1 The Status of the Input of Vocabulary Teaching**

The way to present vocabulary exerts great influence on students' understanding and attitude toward vocabulary, and even toward English learning. Nowadays, the ways of teaching vocabulary are restricted to show the pictures or guide students to read vocabulary in morning reading. In that case, the confusion comes to students' mind why they can not remember words. Moreover, teaching words just one time with no concrete methods proves a costly mistake that students are bombarded with numerous words, the burden that leaves very little attention for meaningful learning. Consequently, this kind of mechanical drill gains slight learning effect and impairs students' passion and confidence of learning vocabulary.

On top of that, the time spent in teaching vocabulary is not sufficient and efficient. Most teachers simply exploit a small amount of time in teaching words of a new lesson, while students make it difficult or even impossible to absorb these words. To make matters worse, students are forced to or reluctant to recite words again and again, and the torture on learning is in the wake of it. Furthermore, the abominable score goes without saying that reciting words is also in futile. Therefore, the negative feedback gets students to a vicious circle.

The possible reasons account for what has been discussed above. It may lie in the pressure of course progress and a multitude of contents, so that teachers are lack of time and energy to teach vocabulary. In addition, teachers are convinced that students could be available of remembering words through reciting words constantly after class. That is, so long as students are inclined to spend time as well as energy in reciting words, they could conquer words naturally. However, teacher's little attention on teaching vocabulary sparks enormous burden on students' study and psychology.

##### **3.1.2 The Input of Vocabulary Teaching**

The input knowledge should be in accordance with transition devices to process knowledge rather than being exposed to students directly, due to the fact that the English vocabulary is but a symbol, the

stillness which hardly attracts people's attention. Therefore, the symbol is supposed to be turned to be comprehensible. That means the ways to demonstrate vocabulary should be interesting, connected with students' experience and original knowledge, and organized in a proper way, so that it could evoke learners' notice.

Moreover, the respects of words also merit mentioning. Those are chiefly featured by the form and meaning of words. The form of words contains spoken form, written form, word families, word class, word formation, and so on. The meaning of words includes polysemes, synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, collocations, and multi-word units. Those aspects demonstrate that one word could be abundant. Namely, when you learn or read a word, you should associate it with more things instead of regarding it as one word. Additionally, those sides of one word could serve the guide toward teaching and learning. To be specific, teaching one word maybe with one side, and then with another side in another activities, or in reviewing this word.

Concrete teaching cases will be demonstrated. Those following words come from Unit 1 of Grade eight of Go For It:

duck hungry wait umbrella wet because of enough hill dislike top
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Step 1:

The teacher says, "Good morning. Everyone knows who this duck in this picture is, right?"

"Yes, Donald Duck, and also everyone knows the stories or TV series about it, right?"

"But today, Donald is having a terrible time. Do you know why Donald is sad?"

Step 2:

Firstly, let's play a game.

The teacher groups students and then explains the rules of the game: there are two participants in each group; one describes the words on the screen, can also use body language to explain those words, but cannot say the word directly; another student needs to guess the words. Other students in the group can also go to the stage to help their member to describe the word that fails to be guessed; the group which guesses the most words will be the winner.

Step 3:

The teacher says, "Let's look at this picture about Donald, and another picture about a hill".

"What is this duck going to do?"

"That is right. It is going to climb this mountain? Or climb this hill?"

"Yep. Hill is smaller than mountain. OK. Now, let's look at this picture about the duck on the top of hill".

"The duck finally reaches at... yes, the top of the hill".

"After walking a long distance, not eating enough food, how does the duck feel?"

"Absolutely, the duck feels hungry and tired. OK, now, look at next picture with the view that it is raining".

"It suddenly rains, but the duck is still there and approaches to a tree. Why does the duck go back home

directly”.

Students give their own idea. And then, the teacher says, “Because the duck dislikes the feeling of being wet, and it fears its feather will be wet”.

“So what is the duck going to do?”

“The duck waits somebody to bring an umbrella for him”.

(The words are put under each picture)

Step 4:

Pair work. The teacher says, “retell the story about Donald Duck with your partner, and also you can use your imagination to complete the story”.

Step 5:

Each group uses the other words in this unit to practice according to the above methods. After 10 minutes, each group performs it. At last, the teacher reveals which group is the winner today.

The design purpose:

Firstly, using students’ familiar things is to stimulate their curiosity of what will those things happen, and those familiar things gravitate to already established pathways, strengthening existing channels. So students’ expectation will be activated, and their attention will be put the things they will learn.

And then, using various games can motivate students, because diversity makes students feel less bored and stressed, and it will greatly activate students’ attention. In this process, it needs every student's cooperation to make the overall performance best, and this kind sense of cooperation is not only beneficial to learning, but also a very important element in life and work. In addition, students create a context by using the words they learned during playing games. Although it may be not particularly logical, it can be very humorous, and in this process, students serialize the pieces words into a context with their imagination, which remains longer retention, because what people mostly remember are stories with a sense of coherence. What is more, it gives students the chance to apply the methods they learned to the same situation, that is, students can learn something by analogy, and judge the whole from the part.

Followed those ways, the frequency of being exposed to those words also capture students’ noticing. Therefore, various ways to consolidate vocabulary are necessary and indispensable. What is more, the change of voice and volume echoes the same effect. Because variety is the spice of life. People are curious about novel and unique things. Transition devices make input knowledge or material salient and noticeable.

On top of that, students use these strategies to learn other words independently, which facilitates the process to get the hang of learning strategies, so that they can use their own way to process the input knowledge. That is to say, their notice will be strengthened by using the methods consciously.

### *3.2 The Output of Vocabulary Teaching Based on Noticing Theory*

The input of knowledge is not enough and sufficient to master vocabulary, because the quality and depth of mastering vocabulary rest on the output of vocabulary. As for vocabulary, the productive vocabulary is



worth mentioning. Nation (2001) regards productive vocabulary knowledge as expressing meaning by speaking or writing, and outputting the suitable spoken or written form of a word. So you will be able to retrieve the word meaning and produce a word form to express the meaning in speaking or writing.

### 3.2.1 The Status of the Output of Vocabulary Teaching

The output of vocabulary is seldom highlighted. It means that students are not blessed with a wealth of opportunities to output those kinds of words. Moreover, speaking and writing receive less attention than reading and listening. Most teachers spend less time in practicing writing, saying noting of speaking. Furthermore, students fail to learn concrete and efficient methods in terms of speaking and writing. More specifically, teachers just ask students to write a passage once a week, and to practice oral English after class through following the audio and imitating the voice. Therefore, this kind of way to drill writing and speaking is short of feedback and interpersonal relationship, hard to make students concentrating on the things they are outputting.

Further, students are lack of the initiative and awareness to output what they learned. Furthermore, most students have no brow of writing and speaking. Consequently, students may make mistakes in the written form of vocabulary and even some simple words, and fail to express their ideas resulting from a fact that those words are incapable of coming to their tongue. On other hand, learners have no idea of how to improve themselves.

### 3.2.2 The Output of Vocabulary Teaching

Teachers should address great importance to the output of vocabulary. Izumi (2002) figured out learners could notice and acquire the target language through different output (text-reconstruction task and guided-essay writing) to demonstrate the effects of output on promoting learners' noticing. The output tasks especially writing task is an effective way of drawing students' noticing to the target language. Hence, teachers can make students write something with vocabulary. It can be making up story or writing a card which is related to their experience or their interest. It also can be the role play, drama and chant, which students are immersed in. During this process, students could consolidate knowledge and generate new linguistic knowledge.

Here comes a concrete teaching case. Those following words which come from Unit 1 of Grade eight of Go For It, have been learned in a reading passage whose topic is related to travel.

arrive in	with my family	try paragliding	take plane/train/a bus
I felt like I was a bird. / It was so exciting.			

Step 1:

The teacher says, "Use these vocabulary to retell the story in the textbook with your partner. When your partner retells the story, you have to check whether your partner's pronunciation, or word class is right or proper. And after both retelling the story, you should summarize the common mistakes you have made, and write them down for reviewing and practicing them later".

When students are doing the retelling, the teacher listens to them around the classroom, and helps them in need or gives them feedback.

After the retelling, teacher chooses three students to perform, and others listen to them and give them feedback.

**Step 2:**

The teacher says, “OK. Now, talk about one of your past vacations with your partner. Both also should listen to your partner’s telling and observe his or her spoken performance”.

The teacher’s role is the same as that above.

**Step 3:**

The teachers says, “Each group is to design a vacation plan, and then performs it”.

And then, the teacher walks to each group, giving them assistance.

At last, the teacher matches group 1 with group 2, group 3 with group 4... and then one group is performing, another writes it down, and speaks out the process.

**Step 4:**

The teacher says, “Each group is divided into two sides; one holds that I will choose to travel in the holidays which is full of people, while another is convinced that I will go for a trip in the off-season. So your group is going to hold a debate”.

Then, the teacher chooses one group to perform it, and the rest are to add views to support their side.

The design purpose:

The whole process is from the easier to the more advanced, and full of cooperation among peers. Moreover, students can obtain the intrinsic and external responses. Specifically, when students try to express their own ideas, they may find the gap between what they want to express and what they really can do; when they do one thing with others, they will receive the feedback from others. Therefore, this could spark students’ notice not only to the learning material, but also to their merits and demerits, which greatly facilitates the growth of a person. In addition, the cooperation could be strengthened through constantly socializing with others.

#### **4. Pedagogical Implications**

The process of language acquisition is from input to awareness, from awareness to memory, and finally from memory to output. Learners’ notice plays a role in each step of the process, especially in the input and output which are the pivotal to affect the width and depth of learning.

A word embraces the form and meaning, both also containing a bag of respects. Thus, teachers should not and have no need to just teach the meaning of a word which seems to be equivalent to its Chinese. Conversely, in respect of the form of words, teachers could use the exaggerate way to teach the phonetic symbol with gestures to turn this abstract rule to be more interesting, and to teach some common suffixes which students can guess the unknown words, so that their confidence will be boosted. With regard to the meaning of a one word, it could be a favorable intermediary to establish the network of this word, the structure that facilitates learners’ comprehending and memory.

Additionally, in point of the output of words, writing and speaking are always put aside, failing to fix

learners' eyes on them. The communication-based speaking and writing teaching through setting various tasks make it possible for learners to notice the gap between what they want to convey and what their status quo is, which motivates them to seek for possible options.

Likewise, bombarded by numerous information, students give special notice to those valuable things, allocating their energy and attention to different things. In addition, students could create some association with the new material to stimulate their sense and attention, making the tiresome learning more vivid.

## 5. Conclusion

Noticing serves as the significant power to instruct vocabulary teaching. On the one hand, transition devices is directed to students' interest, experience and cognition to prey their attention when teachers input and present vocabulary. Moreover, the various aspects of one word merit being noticed, a kind of good resource that could give a hint for designing activities. On the other hand, students get notice on language use to promote and better the breadth and depth of vocabulary, and by participating in different tasks, which sparks the cooperation that is benefit of English learning as well as personal growth.

For learners, they should manipulate their notice by adding cognitive depth, imaging, and so on to process the learning material. The deep learning will advance their cognition, and facilitate the establishment of knowledge.

Therefore, learners and teachers try to give more prominence to noticing to facilitate English learning and teaching.

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