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ASSOCIATIVE LEARNING METHOD AS AN ENGLISH LEARNING METHOD
AT EFL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Bachelor's thesis

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PREFACE

Learning is a very important part of human life. Student's language acquisition is one of the most important processes where school education plays a significant role, giving opportunities for international communication and individual development. The search for new language-teaching methods is gaining relevancy in the modern education system as the requirements of modern life, with its quick technological development and the increasing globalization, make the acquisition of languages even more important. One of the most important preconditions for efficient language learning is the choice of the most suitable and effective teaching methods.

The present Bachelor's thesis titled "Associative learning method as an English learning method at EFL primary school" aims at finding out the benefits and disadvantages of associative learning method in comparison with other known vocabulary-acquisition methods currently used in EFL classes in Estonia. The thesis also aims at discovering the approaches of associative method practices. The present paper consists of the Introduction, where the topicality of the issue is discussed; Chapter 1 which provides the theoretical background of the topic of associative learning method and other methods; Chapter 2, the practical part of the paper, which describes and analyses the results of the survey conducted among the students of Narva Language Lyceum; the Conclusion, which sums up the results of the research and comments on the hypothesis. The Summary in Estonian is also included in the thesis.

PREFACE	3
<i>Contents.....</i>	<i>4</i>
INTRODUCTION	5
1. VOCABULARY LEARNING METHODS.....	8
1.1 Visual techniques	8
1.2 Verbal techniques.....	8
1.3 The use of dictionary	9
1.4 Vocabulary retaining strategies.....	9
1.5 Theoretical background of associative learning method	12
1.5.1 Associative learning method as an academic learning method.....	12
1.5.2 Main principles of associative learning method in education.....	13
1.5.3 Experience of use	16
1.5.4 Advantages of associative learning methods	17
1.6 Associative learning VS Rote learning.....	17
1.7 Possible disadvantages and necessary preconditions	18
2. PRACTICE OF ASSOCIATIVE LEARNING IN ESTONIA	21
2.1 Description of the survey.....	21
2.2 Analysis of the Results of the Survey	22
CONCLUSION	26
SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN	27
REFERENCES	28
APPENDICES.....	30
Appendix 1	30
Appendix 2	31
Appendix 3	33

INTRODUCTION

Compulsory education in Estonian public schools offers up to 10 years of English studies. Though state examination results are relatively high, whereas the highest score – 89,4p – was in Tallinn English College in 2018 (Innove statistics), standard curriculum is not accomplished perfectly by every student. One of the reasons might hide in currently used teaching methods and, more specifically, their inefficiency. Modern Estonian schools offer English studies from the first school level (National curriculum for basic schools, chapter 4, §7). The attention to the foreign language studies confirms the significance of language for the development of students' personal skills and abilities. As the national curriculum states, the purpose of studying a foreign language is

to design students' foreign language competence appropriate to their age, i.e. ability to understand and interpret what is presented in a foreign language, to communicate purposefully orally and in writing, following relevant cultural practices; to understand and appreciate the different cultures, their own culture and the similarities and differences of other cultures; to understand that it is necessary to know multiple foreign languages in life (National curriculum for basic schools, Annex 2).

It means that the immediate objective of language studies is to develop a communicative competence and promote respect for different cultures and readiness to cooperate internationally.

Speaking of communicative competence, vocabulary is considered one of the ~~most~~ essential components of language that effective communication relies on (Oxford & Scarella 1994). If we compare the roles of vocabulary and grammar in learning languages, much more improvement is attained by learning words and expressions. McCarthy (1990:8) said, "No matter how well the students learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way". Wallace (1982: 9) argues for the fact that "there is a sense in which learning a foreign language is basically a matter of learning vocabulary in a target language".

Recently, more attention has been paid to vocabulary learning strategies and techniques. What is more, research in vocabulary learning is viewed as a "promising area of inquiry" (Ellis 1990: 214). The reason is, for many years, teaching of vocabulary was neglected in the teaching process. Meara (1980: 1) argues that "vocabulary is considered as a neglected aspect of language learning that has not significantly changed today".

Taking into account the lack of attention towards vocabulary-learning strategies in the past, there is a need for expanding the body of experimental research concerning the effectiveness of the strategies and methods of teaching and learning English vocabulary.

Previous studies show, that the sooner the process of learning a foreign language is started, the more opportunities there are to achieve high results:

The combined advantages of extended time and opportunities furnished by early instruction probably make it more conducive to attaining the higher levels of second language proficiency, provided that full advantage is taken of them through effective pedagogy (Genesee 1978).

When the language studies are started and attaining necessary vocabulary skills becomes important, associative connections should be used to a greater extent. Learner-generated word meanings should be the basis for vocabulary instruction. Understanding of the word meaning and memory increase when learners are involved in the process. Consequently, students learn better if they use their own experience and background knowledge to give definitions to words. "The words serve as labels for concepts and students associate words to a larger vocabulary and experiences. Vocabulary should focus on usable words" (Pohl 2003: 22). One of the goals of studying a foreign language is to attain a skill of verbal communication in this language. It is vital to find methods that can be successfully applied at the beginner-level and that would not require any previous linguistic experience in a particular language.

Associative learning meets these requirements as it is known to be one of the most natural techniques for connecting new words with their meaning as it does not require any prior knowledge of the new language. "Associative learning is a learning process in which discrete ideas and percepts become linked to one another" (Merriam-Webster 2019). Associative learning is an essential tool to boost the following more advanced language development and, in particular, vocabulary development, which usually starts at primary school and is a basic part of any language learning.

Associative learning, which is mostly based on mnemonics, offers various methods of organizing, defining and retrieving foreign vocabulary. "Mnemonic devices are structured ways to help people remember and recall information" (Brigham and M Brigham 2001: 1). The methods represent different associations which are based on assonance, characters, rhymes, sounds and situations. Though mnemonical devices can be modified to fit a variety of learning content despite the learner's age, they can be conditionally divided by age-appropriateness. For instance, aforementioned rhyme- and sound-based associations are more effective when applied in primary EFL classes,

whereas situational and assonant associations (keyword method) seem appropriate in secondary EFL classes.

The following paper investigates how associative learning approaches a teaching-learning process of English vocabulary in EFL classes. For this purpose, associative techniques and methods are compared with other vocabulary-learning techniques in order to identify the advantages of each and establish the best way to apply associative learning methods in EFL classes. The other objective of the following research is to reveal associative learning method practices in modern schools and, as a scientific contribution, to suggest possible strategies of associative learning besides the ones that are already in use.

The research is aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the benefits of associative learning in contrast to other language learning methods currently used at basic schools in Estonia?
- How can associative learning method be applied in learning English at EFL classes?

The hypothesis of the current thesis is the following: associative learning methods outweigh rote learning methods by preference among the students due to the efficiency of associative methods. The hypothesis is based on a previous study. Voytyulevich (2018: para 1) states that in education, associative method helps to effectively master new words and expressions through the search for links between words in phrases and collocations. The use of the associative method in education makes it possible to achieve the goal set at the beginning of the lesson and aimed at memorizing material. For the purpose of answering the aforementioned questions and achieving the aims of the research, 11 students of the second stage of basic school studying English as a foreign language were chosen to participate in this study. The research involves a case-study based on a focus group interview as well as individual interviews with the English teachers who work with the same group of students.

1. VOCABULARY LEARNING METHODS

As vocabulary is connected to reading comprehension and one of the vocabulary learner's goals is to be able to read and comprehend information in a foreign language, there are three views concerning reading comprehension and vocabulary, according to Nagy, Herman and Anderson (1985: 233):

The first view suggests that direct instruction make little differences in terms of vocabulary development, whereas the second view suggests that direct instruction in specific words is extremely beneficial. The third view suggest that vocabulary development will be enhanced if students learn to relate to new concepts to their existing concepts and background knowledge.

Thus, a teaching-learning process should consider the development of the students' vocabulary. What is more, new unfamiliar vocabulary is efficiently taught when direct instructions are focused on relating it to the learners' background knowledge.

In general, vocabulary teaching methods can be divided into visual, verbal and the use of dictionary.

1.1 Visual techniques

Visual techniques represent realia, pictures, and mime or gestures. "Realia: which refer to real objects, are according to Allen sometimes more meaningful than pictures" (Allen, 1983: 24).

Realia means using different real-objects brought by the students in the classroom or created during the classes. Realia can be applied to help remember written material as well. With the help of different real-objects students can act out material and associate physical sensations caused by these objects with specific vocabulary.

Klippel (1994: 115) states that "mime or gesture is useful if it emphasizes the importance of gestures and facial expression on communication".

This way, mimes and gestures can not only help indicate the meaning of a word in a written form, but also in speaking activities because such activities are related to communication.

1.2 Verbal techniques

Verbal techniques are meant to for illustrative situations, synonyms and antonyms, scales, definition and categories. Marla, *et al* (1990: 3) divide verbal techniques into four parts:

1. *Definition and illustrative situations*. In order to apply this technique, English teachers are expected to introduce a new word in English through the use of other word in the same language.
2. *Synonyms and antonyms*. Synonyms and antonyms are essential in learning vocabulary as they involve previously learned and known words. Synonyms are words that have the same meaning as the new word in a given context, whereas antonyms have the opposite meaning. Sentences can indicate the presence of antonyms or synonyms, for example, with *or* or commas and dashes for synonyms and *but* for antonyms.
3. *Scales*. In this technique, related words are presented in scales that combine both verbal and visual techniques. For instance, in the noun phrase ‘64° Celsius’, the degree sign is the visual.
4. *Explanation*. This technique suggests that English teachers explain the use and the definition of a word using English. Students are expected to comprehend the explanation and guess the meaning.

1.3 The use of dictionary

Another vocabulary teaching method is the use of dictionary. Similarly to the previous two techniques, it is used to find out the meaning of new expressions and words. A variety of dictionaries can be used, from bilingual to pictorial and definition dictionaries. Allen (1993: 83) suggests that dictionaries are “passport to independence and use them is one the students-centered learning activities.” What is more, Readence (1995: 35) points out that “the dictionary definition is shared with a discussion when the words are presented both in isolated form and in the context”. Dictionaries are an efficient way for finding out definitions and meanings of words and the words are memorized through this activity.

1.4 Vocabulary retaining strategies

The aim of learning vocabulary is not only to comprehend, but also retain new words. In order to retain the meaning of words a variety of vocabulary retaining strategies should be applied:

1. *Possible Sentence*. The goal of a possible sentence is to help learners determine the meaning of new words by combining them with known words in the context that is thought to be possible to be found in a text. Robert, *et al* (1995: 89), cites Nagy and Anderson (1991) to clarify that "possible sentence could be used by the students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary during reading assignment in subject

matter discussed.” Therefore, possible sentence can be used if the learners’ group has the ability to imply the meaning of words. The last study conducted by Moore and Moore (1988) proves that possible sentence was designed to help the learners to:

- a) learn new vocabulary to be encountered in reading assignment;
- b) make predictions about sentences to be found in their reading;
- c) provide purpose for reading;
- d) arouse their curiosity concerning the text to be read.

There are two ways to use possible sentence as a technique. In the first one, possible sentence is used to help determine the meaning or relationship between the notions independently. The second way is to use possible sentence to refine the prediction about the meaning. Although these two means of application are different, both of them put a great emphasis on identifying the meaning in the context.

2. *List Group*. Oxford (1990: 41) states that list groups can also be called semantic mapping. He defines them as

making an arrangement of words into a picture which has a key concept at the center or at the top, and related words and concepts linked with the key concept by means of lines of arrow. This strategy involves meaningful imagery, grouping, and associating, it is virtually shown how certain group words relate to each other.

Regarding the quotation above, it must be mentioned that semantic mapping regards meaningful imagery, group and association as the main concept. Thus, the third concept should help the students in memorizing, grouping and associating the words to be related to each other. When list groups are employed as a meaning vocabulary strategy, students should be made to associate the vocabulary with the topic taught. The associated words can consist of listing, grouping etc. Oxford (1990: 41) suggests semantic mapping as one of the names of this strategy. He states that list groups are

making an arrangement of words into a picture which has a key concept at the center or at the top, and related words and concepts linked with the key concept by means of lines of arrow. This strategy involves meaningful imagery, grouping, and associating, it is virtually shown how certain group words relate to each other.

The above-mentioned semantic mapping involves meaningful imagery, grouping and associations as the key concept. Richardson (1980) states that “by using imagery the students can establish an acoustic link by changing the foreign word to similar sounding

English word”. After that, the learners visualize an image of the word and form an imagery link interacting with the English definition.

3. *Contextual Redefinition*. Similarly, to possible sentences, contextual redefinition enables the learners to make a guess about the meaning. Contextual redefinition also helps provide the learners with a strategy for using context. Hence and Readance (1995: 37) define contextual redefinition as a strategy where the stress is on the importance of predicting and verifying the meaning of words. “In this case, context enables the students to make more informed guess about the meaning of words in print and to monitor those predictions by checking them for syntactic or semantic appropriateness as reading progress.” (Hence and Readance 1995: 37). This strategy provides an opportunity for the learners to predict the meaning. It is important to apply this strategy accurately, so the teacher’s responsibility is to select new words, make a sentence with them, present them as isolated words, present them in a context and, as the last step, to use a dictionary to verify the correctness.
4. *Feature Analysis*. Feature analysis is designed to improve learners’ vocabulary and categorization skills and to identify similarities and differences in related words and expand and retain vocabulary.

Feature analysis provides a procedure for learning vocabulary through the categorization. Therefore, the key concept of feature analysis is categorization, which is related to another strategy – list group. Hence and Readance (1995: 38) suggest that the simple categorization exercises and strategies can use list group as means of introducing the concept of categorization.

5. *Word Mapping*. Word mapping is based on a hierarchical structure of words and their attributes. What is more, word mapping is useful not only to show a hierarchical relationship between the concepts but also to develop knowledge on a topic of the lesson. Applying word mapping is relevant to the students’ learning process. Robert, *et al* (1995), as cited by Sanusi (2009: 6) explains that “the key to success of the word map is the student involvement and discovery that the strategy used will be more effective.”
6. *Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy*. Vocabulary self-collection is aimed at promoting the growth in learners’ general and content vocabulary knowledge. This strategy is based on students’ prior knowledge and experience. The teacher’s responsibility here is to ask the learners to choose several new words they feel are

important to comprehend the text and identify them. After that, the words are defined and recorded so the learners have an opportunity to learn about the words before they read the whole text.

7. *Levin's Keyword Method*. The Keyword technique is a mnemonic strategy in which the learners make a keyword, which looks or sounds like the original, in order to connect new data with a psychological image to help recall the target word. Dealing with keyword method, Wenden and Rubin (1987: 43) state that mnemonic strategy may be meant as “aiding memory” in which the students can memorize and retrieve the vocabulary met, learned and discussed in the classroom. It can also refer to “memory trick” where the students may use a retrieval plan to be developed during the encoding process and using mental imagery, which can be both visual and verbal. In general, mnemonic strategy helps the learners store verbal data and retrieve it for communication means. Concerning the use of keyword method in mnemonic strategies, Oxford (1990: 62) explains that the combination of sounds and images in this strategy offers an easier way to memorize the material in the new language.

The strategy involves two steps. Firstly, learners (with the help of their teacher, if necessary) distinguish a familiar word in one's own language or another language that sounds or looks like the new word. Secondly, students generate visual picture of the new word and the familiar one interacting somehow. Keyword method is known as a means of helping the students memorize new vocabulary in harmony with the sound or the image conducted.

1.5 Theoretical background of associative learning method

1.5.1 Associative learning method as an academic learning method

Association has been one of the main themes in theories of learning. The concept of association was initially accepted by Aristotle, though it found place in developing psychology of learning through the works of British philosophers, such as Locke and Hume, in 17th-19th centuries. Laws of association – the concept founded by Aristotle – are synthesized principles by which the ideas are combined in conscious experience. In the 19th century the concept of association became widely accepted among such psychologists, such as Wilhelm Wundt and Hermann Ebbinghaus, who observed the association of one word to every succeeding word in lists as the main mechanism in learning.

In order to define “associative learning”, the term has to be observed from several perspectives. Merriam-Webster gives associative learning the following definition: “Associative learning is a learning process in which discrete ideas and percepts become linked to one another” (Merriam-Webster 2019).

Associative learning involves the encoding of relationships between events, for example, between two stimuli or between a stimulus and a response. Associative learning is distinguished from non-associative learning, which involves only a single stimulus (Weidemann and McNally 2011).

Associative learning is used in its broader meaning in order to encompass memory for the connection between events and it consists of other forms of short-term and long-term memory.

The definition of associative learning from the article Neuroscience of Associative Learning causes the need of defining the term “conditioning”. Conditioning is a simple form of learning involving the formation, strengthening, or weakening of an association between a stimulus and a response (Merriam-Webster 2019). That means that behavior can be modified using a stimulus and a response, depending of the response it produces.

As an academic learning method, associative method is seen as one of the components of innovative learning technologies. Voytyulevich (2018: para 2) defines associations as connections that arise under certain conditions between two or more mental formations (sensations, motor acts, perceptions, ideas). In education, associative method helps to effectively master new words and expressions through the search for links between words in phrases and collocations. The use of associative method in education makes it possible to achieve the goal set at the beginning of the lesson and aimed at memorizing material. Associative method allows to structure the process of memorization, develops the level of concentration and attentional set-shifting.

1.5.2 Main principles of associative learning method in education

Associative learning has found its application in education because associative learning can not only be a powerful behavior-management tool but also a vocabulary-teaching mechanism.

In English vocabulary acquisition, association is an attempt to connect two words that have a similar meaning, whereas the first one is in Russian and the second one – in English. That is to say, association is a virtual connection between two or more objects, which can be things, feelings, thoughts, ideas etc., where the recollection of one entails

the appearance of the other in our imagination. Here are some associative methods that contribute to learning English as a foreign or second language (EnglishDom 2014):

1. *Association based on assonance.* Association based on assonance takes place when one English word resembles the Russian one phonetically. For example, English “clever” can be compared with Russian “клевер”, “ship” – “шип”, “ditch” – “дичь” etc. In this case, a learner remembers the word using the association with the word he already knows. In order to acquire such word-pairs, it is recommended to associate them as collocations: “умный клевер”, “корабль с шипами” and “дичь в яме”. This particular associative method is especially efficient in primary language classes as children-learners are usually good at visually imagining such collocations.

The mnemonic technique, where association is based on assonance, is known as the keyword method. In his definition, Hulstijn (1997: 204) suggests:

The keyword method comprises three strategies: 1) an L1 or L2 word, preferably referring to a concrete entity, is chosen based on acoustic/orthographic similarity with the L2 target word; 2) a strong association between the target word and the keyword must be constructed, so that the learner, when seeing or hearing the word is immediately reminded of the keyword; 3) a visual image must be constructed combining the referents of the keyword and the target word, preferably in a salient, odd, or bizarre fashion in order to increase its memorability.

2. *Association based on a situation.* English words can be associated with situations. For example, the word “embarrassed” can be remembered if the learner recalls and associates it with the situation he/she felt embarrassed in. In this case, emotions and feelings play a significant role. Student’s brain remembers emotions and pins words onto them.
3. *Association based on a character.* This method presupposes linking vocabulary to appearance or/and personality. For instance, if we describe a famous Russian character Shapoklyak, it is easier to remember such vocabulary as “hat”, “nose”, “evil”, “bad”, “sly”. The reason is, when the learner visualizes the association, he adds a picture to the just-learned words. This method guarantees better results if the picture is presented to the learner with the words he needs to remember. It is also characterized by a minor probability of forgetting the words as they become saved in long-term memory.

4. *Association based on a sound.* Association operates on the basis of the sound that the word symbolizes. For example, English word “bang”, which stands for a sound of knocking, can be easily learned when imagining how a monk knocks on a huge copper gong. There are some words that sound the same as the objects that are represented by these words. For example, “knock”, “beep” etc. In addition, it is useful to present such words to learners accompanied with the sound so it would be even easier to make an association for auditory learners who attain more knowledge by hearing the information.
5. *Association based on rhymes.* Associations are combined into one image with memorized words. This makes it easier to remember and retain vocabulary. This technique is suitable for memorizing small chains of words. It is helpful to make little poems to teach irregular verbs in English. For example, “bring – brought – brought” – “несу бригаде бутерброд”. The key is to make a rhyme for a line of three verbal forms. It is easier for beginners to learn a rhymed line but this method is efficient for both beginners and advanced learners.

Another important term connected to associative learning, is “mnemonic devices”. Mnemonics is a learning technique that helps information retention. Mnemonics help encode any new information in a way that allows to store and retrieve it efficiently. In other words, mnemonics help associate new information by connecting it to something more accessible. That is to say, it presupposes the transformation of new information into something simpler for learner to perceive. Mnemonics is a basis of associative methods for memorizing new foreign words. It is present in all above-mentioned associative learning methods. It allows for better retention of the information. Mnemonic devices help use material from long-term memory to assist easier memorization (Carlson and Neil 2009: 245).

The point of associative methods of memorizing information is not to cram material but to create associative chains that help remember new words more efficiently. Mnemonics is commonly used in learning foreign languages. The principle is to exchange difficult foreign vocabulary with some words from a language that the learner already knows. It is helpful to find link words – words that are pronounced in a known language the same as the target word, then associate them by visual or audial context. A common example of mnemonics in learning English, is the word “puddle”. Its mnemonic model in

Russian is the following: “я всё падал и падал в лужу”. As we can see in this example, mnemonics is also built on assonance.

Mnemonics is not only used for learning new vocabulary but for memorizing grammatical rules as well. For instance, the rule based on an acronym OPSHACOM is used to memorize the canonical order of several adjectives standing before the noun phrase (Campbell 1991):

OP (OPinion) - general opinion of the object: nice, great, excellent etc;

SH (SHape) - geometric description of the object: big, triangular etc;

A (Age) - indication of age: young, old, ancient etc;

C (Color) - color of the object: green, orange, reddish etc;

O (Origin) - the origin of the object: British, Estonian, Russian etc;

M (Material) - the material which the item is made of: steel, wooden, plastic etc;

Example: Nice big old black Italian leather jacket.

Effective application of mnemonic devices requires development of creative devices, which is often resources- and time-consuming. The students should not be prevented from developing their own mnemonic devices besides those that are suggested by the teacher. Developing individual mnemonic devices will help the students memorize new language more easily. The most effective devices are usually the most simple and meaningful. In the classroom, teachers are advised to use mnemonic associations at the appropriate time with the appropriate instructions. This way, their highest effectiveness will be achieved (Seay, McAlum and Harry 2010: 33-47).

1.5.3 Experience of use

Ronald Gray, the language teacher from Taejon University, Korea, describes his experience of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in his work. He describes his experience using the example of teaching prepositions of place (on, at, under, near etc) by means of loci methods (Gray 2001: para 3).

Loci methods are mnemonical methods that are based on visualization using spatial memory of familiar surroundings. He begins to write several basic words on the board (TV, bathroom, bed, desk etc), then the students are told to close their eyes and imagine their own house and place these objects there in their imagination. After that, students mentally move to another room and do the same. On the second day, the students are asked to write down what they remember about how their objects were placed. Then, when the teacher introduces new vocabulary (prepositions of place), he writes down a

simple sentence, for example, “A black cat is on the floor”, so that this sentence clearly illustrates the meaning of the term “on”. After introducing all the necessary prepositions and asking the students to recall the placement of objects in their memory palace, he allows them to memorize the phrases such as “The desk is in my room”, using surroundings that are familiar. Making a plan of a house and making students place the objects how they want is useful as well. The reason is: “The memory palace selected will serve as a template for storing images and as a framework for relating differing concepts in a meaningful way” (Gray 2001: para 3).

1.5.4 Advantages of associative learning methods

As mentioned above, mnemonics is a basis of associative methods for memorizing new foreign words. It is a set of techniques and methods that facilitate the memorization of the necessary information and increase the amount of memory through the formation of associations. The most beneficial aspect of mnemonics is its flexibility. The alternations are easy to make. Through the example of R. Grey’s experience, to learn any additional prepositions of location, teacher and the students can construct more streets, rooms, buildings, both mentally (imaginary places) and visually.

Another advantage is its good retrievability. Building associations helps organize, define and retrieve information. Because most of the uses of this technique rely on imagery, the processing of the information happens on a deeper level, which increases important connections and, as a result, the retrievability.

As an associative method, mnemonics has a certain naturalness. F. S. Bellezza and B. G. Reddy (1978) state that mnemonics organize data similarly to the way we organize it daily. During our regular day we unconsciously distinguish familiar and easily memorizable information. Later, new knowledge can be easily recalled if we use the more easily remembered background setting. For example, it is easier to memorize a new acquaintance’s name Ivan, if one’s brother’s name is also Ivan and this fact comes to mind during the introduction.

According to Gray (2001: para 4), this method also provides a psychological boost. Mnemonics shows students that there are various and interesting alternatives to simple cramming. This method makes students active participants in the process of learning a language, makes them think and teaches organizing data efficiently.

1.6 Associative learning VS Rote learning

Associative learning is often compared and opposed to rote learning. Though it is difficult to identify which one of them is more effective, there are some advantages and disadvantages in both. To begin with, rote learning is memorization of data based on repetition. Some of the examples of rote learning include learning the alphabet, numbers and formulas. Rote learning is considered a necessary step in learning certain subjects, such as Math or Physics. The benefits of rote learning include the ability to quickly recall basic information and the development of fundamental knowledge. However, there are also some disadvantages. Rote learning does not contribute to maintaining focus and interest. It does not allow for a deeper understanding of a topic, nor does it encourage the use of communicational skills. There is no connection between new and previous knowledge and it may result in a wrong understanding of a concept as it does not explain it.

As mentioned before, one of the associative strategies is keyword method. The disadvantages and advantages of associative learning can be seen through the example of keyword method. Campos and Gonzalez (2003) attribute ineffectiveness of keyword method to participants “lack of training”. They investigated in four experiments the effectiveness of the mnemonic keyword method using two groups of adults and adolescents. In all the experiments, the rote method was more effective than the keyword method for both adolescents and adults.

Regarding the aforementioned study, one of the reasons of ineffectiveness of keyword method as an associative method, is the lack of training. As a learning method, associative learning has its disadvantages and necessary preconditions that should be applied before and during the teaching-learning process.

1.7 Possible disadvantages and necessary preconditions

Hence, Nagy and Anderson (1991) as cited by Robert *et al* (1995: 325), reveal some existing disadvantages of applying the keyword strategy, and they are:

The first it could be time consuming for the teacher to generate keywords and their accompanying image. Second, the visual images initially used are teacher-provided, not students-provided. This way, they are less involved in their own learning. Thirdly, the extent to which students can transfer the keywords techniques to other areas of study is relatively unknown at this time.

Continuing to analyze possible disadvantages of associative methods through the example of keyword method, it is possible to state that the efficiency of associative methods depends on three aspects of the teaching-learning process: recoding, relating

and retrieving. It requires recoding skills from the learners so they could transform a new word into something more meaningful and simpler. What is more, the effectiveness of the strategies also depends on the student's involvement, intended time of the process and the length of a target word.

The application of associative learning and mnemonics involves a decent amount of work for a teacher and may appear time-consuming, complex and impractical. It requires a careful explanation, creativity, patience. Although, if all the requirements are met, the higher results are achieved. While the mnemonic method produces much greater retrievability than the traditional methods, it also has an advantage of maintaining students' interest, especially if the method is correlated with their culture. Although, it is necessary to consider that there are some limitations that can be met during the process of associative learning, which mostly depend on context, time limits, learners' involvement and mnemonic skills.

According to Bartosz (2016: para 7), the limitations include:

- a) Some people (especially adults) are reluctant to create vivid images and crazy stories.
- b) Some people (especially adults) are unable and/or unwilling to resign from using previously learned strategies.
- c) Using mnemonic devices for memorizing words is time-consuming (especially at the beginning).
- d) Using mnemonics requires more effort (especially at the beginning) than rote-learning.
- e) Mnemonics don't guarantee understanding.
- f) Learning with mnemonics lacks context.

Having learned about aforementioned limitations, it is necessary to identify some preconditions that provide efficient associative learning. The key concept of an effective associative teaching-learning process is explanation and preparation. Wang, Thomas and Ouellette (1992) describe the procedure of preparation through the example of English-French keyword method:

The logic of the keyword method was explained in detail. The students were told that first they would be taught to associate each French word with a sound-alike keyword. After they learned these well, they would be provided with the English equivalents of the French words. At that time, they were to visualize an interactive image involving both the keyword and the English equivalent. The experimenter then presented a sample word and described how a keyword and the English equivalent word could be linked in a mental picture. The importance of generating an interactive image was explained and emphasized (Wang, Thomas and Ouellette 1992).

Referring to the idea that mnemonics are not transferrable between people, the author describes an example from his experience:

But many of the associations might be a stretch to understand, or might not make any sense at all. If you take a room full of people and you say, “Create a mnemonic to help you remember the Italian word dove means where” you will get a range of answers. Even if you say, “Let’s use a dove as the mnemonic since it’s spelled the same,” there will be people who reject that association. There will be others who, instead of thinking of a bird flying to a particular location, will think of Dove soap or Dove chocolate. Any attempts I have made in the past – even for the purpose of demonstration – to pass on pre-constructed mnemonics have at best only been marginally successful (Wang, Thomas and Ouellette 1992).

Overall, it is advised to use mnemonics only for high-value content instead of overusing it. Mnemonics for vocabulary tend to be more efficient and natural once the structural system is in place. It means that the content should be based on structural patterns and include thoroughly selected vocabulary. Another recommendation is to consider carefully what material needs and can possibly be stored in learners’ memory before creating mnemonics for the class.

2. PRACTICE OF ASSOCIATIVE LEARNING IN ESTONIA

2.1 Description of the survey

The aims of the practical part of the Bachelor's thesis is to establish students' perception of different learning methods and efficiency of those methods in vocabulary acquisition as well as to identify preferences for associative learning methods or other vocabulary learning methods among the students, as well as the reasons for these preferences. First, it is necessary to find out how students of Narva Language Lyceum explain associative learning and the way associations are created in English classes. Do they have an understanding about how to memorize English vocabulary using associations? Secondly, there is a need to find out which vocabulary acquisition methods are used in English classes and if associative methods are among them.

In order to achieve the aforementioned aims, the survey involves a focus group interview with students studying English as a foreign language and two individual interviews with the English language teachers of Narva Language Lyceum. In both cases, the interviews were held in the Russian language as it is the native language of the students, the teachers and the interviewer and allows to receive more information about the uses of different methods. Thus, the interview provides comfortable and habitual language environment in order to achieve more objective results.

The focus group interview was based on the open-ended questions which were developed by the author. The focus group interview allows for collecting both narrative and observational data from the participants in the interactive environment. As a result, it helps collect natural and authentic responses.

The target group of the survey are students of the second stage of basic school who study English as a foreign language and English language teachers who work with the same group of students. One group interview and two individual interviews were combined in order to build a case study. In total, 11 students and 2 teachers were interviewed. Interviewed students were 12-14 years old and studied in the sixth grade. All of the students had been familiar with the interviewer as their Estonian language teacher by the time of the interview, which served as the basis for the selection of the group. The previous acquaintance with the teacher allowed to develop a habitual environment and avoid distraction which can be caused by an unfamiliar interviewer.

Appendix 1 consists of permissions for the interview from the students' parents/caretakers. The transcription of the individual interview with the teacher is presented in Appendix 2. Some of the replicas, such as greeting replica are deleted from

the transcription as they do not carry any relevant meaning. Appendix 3 consists of the replicas of the students which were recorded during the interview. The focus group interview was not recorded with any recording devices in order to avoid any possibly distractive or stressful influences. The students expressed their concern about the recording device so it was decided not to use it. It allowed for collecting more honest and minimizing the effect of distracting factors. Instead, the records were made in writing. The analysis of the interviews is presented in the Analysis of the Results of the Survey.

2.2 Analysis of the Results of the Survey

The first group of questions of the survey was aimed at finding out the perception of different vocabulary-learning methods among the students. The group was asked to discuss which learning methods they prefer when it comes to vocabulary acquisition. The first group of questions consisted of the following questions: “Which methods do you use to memorize new English vocabulary in class?”, “Which methods do you use to memorize new English vocabulary when you study at home?” “How do you use these methods? Can you describe the process?”. It turns out, rote learning methods outweigh associative learning methods by preference among the group. The correlation is 9 students to 2. The students named the methods they used for independent vocabulary-learning. The group uses the following methods for memorizing new vocabulary and preparing for spelling tests on a regular basis:

- a) word cards and dictionary (the idea of these methods is to hide the column/side of a card, where English translation is written, and try to recall the word in English seeing only Russian translation, then move your hand or rotate the card and check yourself) (8 students);
- b) association based on assonance (some students develop associations with similarly sounding words in Russian) (2 students);
- c) pictures and visualization (1 student from a group draws small pictures for each of the word and memorizes the words by visual memory).

The methods are presented in popularity descending order.

The second group of questions was aimed at finding out which vocabulary learning methods are found the most efficient among the group. Besides, the students were asked to explain why they prefer the methods. The students were also asked to compare the efficiency of rote learning methods and associative learning methods. Before that, the concepts of both associative and rote learning methods were explained to the

group. The second group of questions consisted of the following questions: “What methods do you find the most effective?”, “Do you prefer to cram new words? Is it efficient from your point of view?” “Why do you prefer rote learning?” Rote learning methods are found the most efficient among the group. The students give the following reason for the preference for rote learning methods: rote learning is more efficient when new vocabulary needs to be memorized within the shortest possible time. Thus, students cram new material before the tests.

The third group of questions was aimed at comparing associative learning method with other methods and consisted of the following questions: “How would you explain associative learning?” “How do association occur?”, “Have you ever learned a word by associating it with something else?” Before the group was asked to scale and compare rote learning methods with associative learning methods, there were several steps that needed to be done. First, the students were asked to discuss their own perception of associative learning. To answer the question how associations occur, the students agreed on the opinion that associations are formed by similarities and analogs. Then, some of the students shared their experience of memorizing English vocabulary using associative methods. Here are some of the examples with the student’s explanation:

- a) *Moonlight* – the word was met in the lyrics of the student’s favorite song and, along with this, the word stands in the end of a rhymed line (“spotlight, moonlight – get your mood right”). The student points out that she memorized the pronunciation through the rhyme and the translation out of curiosity.
- b) *Key* – the word was associated with a person who had this word inside her Instagram account nickname.

After discussing the examples, the group started expressing their thoughts on associative methods. The students were asked the following questions: “What are your reasons for not using associative methods for memorizing English words?” “Do your English language teachers give examples of associations?” “Do they explain how to associate new vocabulary?” “How does your teacher help you memorize new difficult words?”. After discussing the examples, the group started expressing their thoughts on associative methods. The group points out that the process of associating can sometimes be unfortunate and inefficient. The reason is, the association in Russian can be easily memorized but the link with the English word tends to become lost. Another reason for associative methods’ inefficiency, which was pointed out by the group, is connected to the teachers’ choice of methods. The group claims that their English teachers don’t

usually give ideas for association. In case of particularly advanced vocabulary, which is difficult to memorize through the regular methods used in the class, teachers provide the class with two methods of memorization. The first one is oral repetition of the difficult word. The students repeat the word together with the teacher several times. The second method is more visual – the students are asked to write the word on the desk and in case any spelling errors are made, other students are welcomed to correct.

Then, the students were asked a question “What helps you learn new vocabulary aside from the teacher’s methods?” and a question “Would you like to change anything about the current process of studying new vocabulary?” As for the teaching-learning process and its aspects that the group finds the most efficient and comfortable (as they do not require much effort and are not time-consuming) and that the group wishes to change about their current learning process, the group states two aspects:

- a) When the dialogues are used in order to memorize the new vocabulary, it is more efficient if the dialogues are not crammed but improvised. The students find that in this case, they feel more motivated to learn new vocabulary.
- b) New vocabulary should be divided by topic. The students think it is more difficult for them to memorize new words when they come from various fields and present a “mixed” list.

The interview with the teacher was aimed at observing different vocabulary-teaching methods from the teacher’s point of views, including the choice of methods used in classes, reasons for that choice and the influence of the methods on students’ learning process and results.

The teacher was asked “What vocabulary-teaching methods do you use in your classes?”, “Do you use associative learning methods?”, “How do students react to associative methods and other methods?” “Which methods are preferred in your classes? Why?” The teacher pointed out the following vocabulary-teaching methods that she uses in her classes:

- a) Use of dictionaries;
- b) Oral repetition;
- c) Exercises “Fill the links”, “Make a sentence”, “Match a picture with a word” (use of new vocabulary);
- d) Interactive activities: dialogues, Kahoot games.

As for associative learning methods, the teacher points out she does not use associations with the Russian language for the following reason: she avoids using Russian in classes in order to create a fully English environment in the class. On the whole, the teacher claims she does not see that the students develop associations independently.

The need for associative learning methods is denied by the teacher. From her perspective, new vocabulary is easily learned after a few lessons if it is trained through repetition, exercises and interactive activities (dialogues, Kahoot games). What is more, the teacher points out the use of dictionaries. She believes that the students should write a word with its translation at least once in order to memorize it. Each student has a dictionary which is combined from the words that are learned during a school year.

Then, the teacher was asked about the results of her methods: “Which methods occur most effective when it comes to learning results?” As for the results of currently used vocabulary-teaching methods, the teacher uses the phrase “the words just stick to memory”. From the teacher’s point of view, the exercises, use of dictionaries and other aforementioned activities, which are used by the teacher on a regular basis, perform the task of teaching new vocabulary sufficiently.

There are several similarities between the answers of the focus group and the teacher:

- a) Associative methods are not used by the teacher in the teaching process and neither are they commonly used by the focus group in the learning process;
- b) Use of dictionary proved to be the most preferred method in the group. The teacher also puts an emphasis on the use of dictionaries as she believes in its efficiency.

There are some key points that can be suggested in order to improve the efficiency of currently used methods. Firstly, in order to learn new vocabulary through oral activities (dialogues), the dialogues are recommended to be improvised, not learned by heart. Secondly, it is pointed out by the students that new vocabulary should be divided by topic. Taking this idea into consideration, it can be recommended to use List Groups in classes.

Although the theoretical part of the current research suggests the attractiveness, good retrievability and naturalness of associative learning method, the empirical survey clearly shows the superiority of its disadvantages for this particular group of students and teachers. The main disadvantage is the lack of context and the loss of links as a result. Another limitation is the teacher’s effort to create a fully English environment in the class.

CONCLUSION

The final part of the current thesis is meant to sum up the results obtained during the practical research and the thesis as a whole. A general conclusion has to be made considering the methodology used during the work, the aims that were set and the hypothesis that were put forward at the beginning of the work.

The thesis has looked through various online and printed resources and has collected information about different vocabulary-learning methods and their functions for students in the learning process. The total amount of 15 vocabulary memorizing-retaining techniques was collected, 5 of which were associative techniques. The theoretical part provides a brief description of these methods for learning vocabulary.

The practical part of the thesis is based on an empirical research which consists of a survey and the analysis of the obtained results. The purpose of the research was to achieve the goals set at the beginning of the work which were:

- a) to find out the benefits and disadvantages of associative learning methods in comparison with other known vocabulary-acquisition methods currently used in EFL classes in Estonia;
- b) reveal associative learning method practices in modern schools and suggest possible recommendations about the application of associative learning. Both aims were achieved during the research.

It has been disproved that associative learning methods outweigh rote learning methods by preference among the students due to the efficiency of associative methods. Despite its retrievability and naturalness, associative learning method proved to be less preferred in the case study than other vocabulary-learning methods.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö põhineb sõnavara õppimise meetodite uurimisel põhikooli tasemel. Uurimisobjektiks on erinevad sõnavara õppimise-õpetamise meetodid ja nende efektiivsus. Töö eesmärk on 1) selgitada välja assotsiatiivsete õppemeetodite eelised ja puudused võrreldes teiste teadaolevate sõnavara omandamise meetoditega, mida praegu kasutatakse EFL klassides; 2) uurida assotsiatiivse õppemeetodi tavasid kaasaegsetes koolides ja teha mõned soovituselised assotsiatiivse õppe rakendamiseks.

Bakalaureusetöö koosneb sissejuhatusel, kahest peatükist ja kokkuvõtetel.

Sissejuhatus annab põhilist informatsiooni assotsiatiivsetel õppemeetoditel kui ka teistel sõnavara õppimise meetoditel ja nende efektiivsusest põhikooli tasemel. Töö hüpotees on järgmine: assotsiatiivsed õppemeetodid on rohkem eelistatud intervjueritud õpilaste seas kui teised sõnavara õppimise meetodid oma tõhususe tõttu.

Esimeses peatükis, mis on samas ka teoreetiline, on kirjeldatud erinevad sõnavara õppimise meetodid ja assotsiatiivne õppemeetod ka. Teoreetiline osa annab korralikku ülevaadet assotsiatiivse tüüpi meetodite tõhususe, puuduste, kogemuse ja põhimõtete kohta.

Teises peatükis on esindatud uurimine, mis koosneb intervjuudest ja saadud tulemuste analüüsist. Intervjuude abil saadud tulemuste analüüs näitab, et assotsiatiivsed õppemeetodid ei ole tegelikult eelistatud õpilaste seas ning prioriteedis on teised sõnavara õppimise meetodid. Vaatamata sellele, et assotsiatiivne õppemeetod on kättesaadavuse ja loomulikkuse poolest tundub efektiivsemaks, juhtumiuuring näitas, et teised sõnavaraõppemeetodid on rohkem eelistatud tõhususe seisukohalt. Võttes arvesse tulemuste analüüsi saab väita, et töö hüpotees oli ümber lükatud.

Kokkuvõttes antakse ülevaade terve töö tulemustest, kommentaaridest ja ülesannetesse ja hüpoteesist.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Уважаемые родители учащегося,

Прошу Вашего разрешения на проведение интервью фокусной группы в 6.AD классе. Тема интервью – ассоциативное обучение словарному запасу на уроках английского во второй школьной ступени.

Интервью будет проходить на неделе 15-19.04.2019. В ходе интервью учащимся будет задано несколько вопросов для создания дискуссии как между учителем и учащимися, так и между ними. В процессе также будет использоваться диктофон для сохранения информации.

Для подтверждения согласия необходима подпись одного из родителей:

Подпись:

Дата:

С уважением,

учитель эстонского языка в группе 6.AD,

Елена Добровольская

Appendix 2

А: для начала расскажите пожалуйста какие методы используете на своих уроках при обучении словарному запасу (.) какие методики используете

(5)

У: часто используем онлайн ресурсы как quizzlet (-) устно повторяя слова на протяжении нескольких уроков слова сами запоминаются (.) слова ведутся (.) я считаю что чтобы правильно писать слова ученики сами должны их прописать с переводом как минимум один раз (-) в начальной школе требую прописи по две строчки

(6)

А: используете ли на уроках ассоциативные методы (-) как дети реагируют на них (.) стараются придумывать сами или не умеют этого делать

(2)

У: за детьми не замечала чтобы они сами видели ассоциации (-) и с русскими словами тоже (-) Ассоциации с русским не использую наверное и потому что русский стараюсь использовать по минимуму во время уроков

(1)

А: почему

(-)

У: да просто чтобы среда на уроке была английской (.) как можно более полностью

(3)

А: а что касается результатов обучения (-) какие методы оказываются наиболее действенными

(7)

У: мне кажется что слова достаточно хорошо заучиваются когда используются в разных заданиях на уроках и дома (4) те же вставь пропуски (.) соедини картинки и слова там (-) составь предложение

(-)

А: то есть правильно понимаю (.) ни ассоциировать (.) ни зубрить слова не приходится

У: зубрежку как таковую мы не используем (-) поработав со словами несколько уроков (.) в упражнениях (-) диалогах (-) к диктанту им остается лишь запомнить, как пишется правильно (.) уже знакомое слово (-) этого достаточно

Appendix 3

«Чаще всего в словаре столбиками учу, русский перевод смотрю, а рукой английский прикрываю. Пытаюсь вспомнить, как на английском это слово, потом руку поднимаю, проверяю себя»

«А мне не нравится так делать. Карточки лучше. И не надо руку держать, удобнее. Один день пять карточек выучу, потом по одной прибавляю.»

«Я люблю рисуночки рисовать, ну это почти как карточки, только не слово, а рисунок на обратной стороне»

«На уроке учим просто когда хором проговариваем. Или с мячиком по одному отвечаем, учительница бросает, и ты ей обратно»

«Если слово ну очень сложное, то перед диктантом на уроке пишем на доску. Один идет на доску его пишет, остальные, если неправильно написал, могут подойти потом ошибки исправить»

«Диалоги тоже учим с новыми словами. Но это не очень, через день всё равно всё забываю»

«Да, диалоги мы выучиваем просто назубок и рассказываем потом на оценку. Лучше бы если бы сами их придумывали, так хоть осталось бы что-то из слов»

«Ну это интересно, но редко помогает»

«Я так пытался однажды, но запутался потом. Вроде бы помню, что звучит как-то похоже на другое это слово, а как оно на английском не могу вспомнить»

«Да, проще вызубрить слова. Перед диктантом нет времени придумывать ничего»

«Я, например, выучила слово *moonlight* из названия песни. Есть песня такая. Просто интересно было, как переводится, загуглила текст песни и перевод. Там еще он рифмуется, *moonlight* и *get your mood right*»

«Я запомнила раз и навсегда слово *key*, у меня есть просто знакомая у нее в Инстаграме имя Настя-*key*, я всё не понимала, что это за *кей*, тоже загуглила, и как-то так и запомнилось»

«А вообще мне кажется, нет просто общения на английском. Учительница с нами тоже не разговаривает особо, только задание прочитает на английском или вопрос какой-нибудь и всё»

«Помогает, когда слова связаны. Бесит, что нас заставляют выучивать из текста фразочки и слова самые разные, там одно слово, может быть, про отели, допустим, а другое вообще про животных. Вот когда по теме всё, гораздо лучше»

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