

**PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSING SKILLS IN YOUNG LEARNERS’
EFL VOCABULARY ACQUISITION**

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ABSTRACT

Four factors were examined to investigate English vocabulary learning among 9-year-old elementary school children in Taiwan. The four factors were use of their native language, length of English instruction, and two phonological processing capabilities—phonological memory and phonological sensitivity. Apart from a series of paper-and-pencil and computerized vocabulary assessments, two nonword repetition tasks along with five detection and production tasks of rimes and phonemes were used to measure phonological memory and phonological sensitivity. The young learners’ scores on all vocabulary tests were positively correlated with phonological memory and phonological sensitivity, as was also evidenced in studies by Gathercole et al. (1997) and Bowey (1996). A similar pattern of association was found between the learners’ vocabulary performance and their length of English instruction. However, neither of the two phonological processing capabilities was associated with English instruction length.

The reaction times of the two online vocabulary tests suggest that an extra input of L1 gloss in explicit vocabulary teaching might have resulted in faster aural recognition of single English words. This supports Kroll and Stewart's (1994) revised hierarchical model of bilingual representation, which postulates that beginning L2 learners have their two languages interconnected at the lexical level.

Results of stepwise and hierarchical regression analyses confirmed that English phonological sensitivity was the best predictor of young learners' English vocabulary performance and contributed uniquely to their vocabulary scores after age, English instruction length, vocabulary knowledge from school textbooks, Chinese phonological sensitivity, and phonological memory were statistically controlled.

References

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