

## Memorization and EFL Students' Strategies at University Level in Vietnam

Duong Thi Hoang Oanh  
Hue University, Vietnam  
<dthoangoahn@gmail.com>

Nguyen Thu Hien  
Hue University, Vietnam  
<hiennguyen282vn@gmail.com>

### Abstract

Experience and observation as a learners and teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) convince us that memorization seems to be one of the learning methods that helps EFL students learn and use the English language, provided that memorization is used appropriately to help learners to internalise what they have learned to apply in actual communication. On the other hand, some teachers argue that memorization and communication cannot coexist in an academic environment. This controversy inspired this investigation into whether memorization is accepted as a strategy in the process of learning EFL in EFL students' and teachers' perspectives, and if so, what role memorization plays. The research aims to identify learners' and teachers' beliefs about learning EFL in relation to memorization as well as to provide an insight into the possible effectiveness of memorization. Gleaned from questionnaires and interviews, the data were analysed by using ethnographic methods. Memorization is a mental process, so the choice of qualitative method as the main data collection and analysis tool is appropriate, but to carry out qualitative research in Vietnam is undeniably challenging. Apart from common difficulties such as time constraints, members of powerful research committees at Vietnamese universities--such as the one where the data were gathered--generate many doubts. Nonetheless, it was found that both teachers and learners differentiated between "good" and "bad" memorization in terms of a specific, commonly used task in Vietnamese universities, giving speeches in English.

### Introduction

Experience and observation as learners and teacher of English as a foreign language

(EFL) as non-native speakers (NNS) convince us that memorization seems to be a valid learning strategy, provided that memorization is used appropriately to help students internalize what they have learned to apply in actual communication. For example, some teachers argue that as NNS, we learn English in a conscious and repetitive manner, that is, we have to remember rules, sentence structures, and vocabulary systematically in order to apply these in communication. On the other hand, some native English speakers (NS) in Vietnam argue that memorization and communication cannot coexist in an academic environment. For example, an American teacher argues that due to memorization, her students can only fluently utter memorized chunks at the beginning of a conversation, but lack the capacity and creativity for spontaneous and appropriate responses. These arguments mark a contrast between NNS and NS English speaker teachers' conceptions of memorization and its utility in EFL learning in a Vietnamese context. This controversy inspired us to see if memorization is accepted as a strategy in the process of learning EFL in students' and teachers' perspectives, and if yes, what role memorization plays and how effective it might be. This research encompassed an examination, analysis, and identification of patterns in data provided by the triangulation of said data collected using questionnaires and interviews of EFL teaching and learning processes at a university in Hue, Vietnam.

## Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated:

1. Is memorization considered a learner strategy?
2. What are students' beliefs and attitudes towards memorization in learning EFL?

## Literature Review

**Definition of terms.** Many definitions of memorization can be found in various studies and dictionaries. For example, according to Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992, p. 226), "Memorizing is the process of establishing information in memory. The term 'memorizing' usually refers to the conscious processes." This means the learners use memorization consciously and they think about the process of memorization when they are applying it. Another explanation can be found in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2005), that "Memorizing is to learn something carefully so that you can remember it exactly." This technique is similar to a description of a cognitive learning strategy called rehearsal (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

**EFL learner strategies.** Different definitions of strategies are emerged. Cotterall and Reiders (2004) emphasize the benefit of learners' strategies, as specific actions undertaken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. Cohen and Oxford (2003) focus on what happens when students use the strategy of memorization as behavior done to improve the development of their language skills. Memorization has the power to:

- increase attention essential for learning a language;
- enhance rehearsal that allows linkages to be stronger;

- improve the encoding and integration of language material; and
- increase retrieval of information when needed for use.

Learner strategies are very important, because they "play a crucial role in language learning," and "affect the type and amount of language practice" students do (Cotterall & Reiders, 2004, p. ii). O'Malley & Chamot (1990) offer a useful model for describing three important learning strategies: cognitive (identifying, remembering, storing and retrieving words and sounds), metacognitive (managing and monitoring learning), and social- affective (managing feelings or interaction among learners, questioning for clarification and self- talking). Among these, the first strategy, cognitive, is of most relevance to memorization, because it works directly with the target language and involves identifying, remembering, storing, and retrieving words, sounds, or other aspects of the target language.

Cognitive strategies are thought to contain two subgroups. The first subgroup covers strategies for learning the target language, such as rehearsal and elaboration. The rehearsal strategy involves saying or writing something over and over again. Learners often rehearse when they are trying to learn new vocabulary, or when they are preparing or give a talk in the target language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Elaboration involves making links between new information and what one already knows, or between different parts of new information. The second subgroup relates to using the target language for approximation and paraphrasing. Students use approximations when they choose a more general word than the target word to express their meaning. By applying learning strategies appropriately, students can make progress in their use of language.

### **Memorization as a Learning Strategy**

It is well documented that English learners use memorization in different ways, ranging from learning to coping with assignments or exercises (Adamson, 1990, p. 76). In Adamson (1990), Almad, an Arabic student, used memorization as a way of learning new vocabulary. He looked up all the unfamiliar words, wrote the new word and its translation in Arabic in a notebook and memorized the content of the notebook. The result is that he learned many new words but then also became a slower reader. Meanwhile, Cook believes:

Repetition and learning by heart are two of the most valuable, pleasurable and efficient uses of language leaning activities, and that they can bring with them sensations of those indefinable, overused yet still valuable goals for the language learner: being involved in the authentic and communicative use of language. (1994, p. 133)

Kovecses and Szabo (1995) found positive learning effects for students memorizing phrasal verbs. For these authors, memorization is considered a strategy, and not necessarily a negative one.

### **Giving a Speech with Good and Poor Memorization**

In terms of giving a formal speech, a speaking activity commonly used in Vietnamese university classrooms, memorization seems to have an impact. In Vietnamese

classrooms, speeches are defined as a prepared talk where students present a substantial topic then answer questions from an audience. Giving a speech requires the deliverer to combine many skills, such as monitoring voice and delivery, using content and rhetorical language, and handling questions. Murphy (1992), Ngo (2000), and Nguyen (2000) report that when giving a speech, students as speakers integrate their skills, such as researching, logical and critical thinking, organizing, arguing, forming questions, leading a discussion, managing time, using technology, and especially developing culturally expected non-verbal behavior. In giving a speech, remembering the talk seems crucial. However, the requirements for a good speech is likely in contrast with the reality in many Vietnamese classrooms where students typically sound stilted, and exhibit little eye contact or audience awareness.

This contrast raises the issue of "good" and "bad" memorization. Duong (2003, p. 179) investigated this topic, observing that some English learners believe that memorization is a normal practice and that they seek ways to achieve "good memorization" to help them in learning English. The Chinese and Korean students in her study noted, "Learning by heart has become a habit" and "Few students can speak naturally without learning by heart, only about 15/50 can do that" and "We are not professional; we need strategies to help us remember." Good memorization seems to play a significant role for students in learning English. Duong (2003) opines that it is ideal for students to memorize as they may be able to internalize what they have learned, and end up by saying the learned expressions naturally. A participant in research done by Adamson (1990) noted she memorized phrases and sentences which she understood very well for her oral report in art history, and this allowed her report from her notes rather than reading it verbatim. Cook underscores this observation (1994, p. 139): "As the know-by-heart is repeated many times, it may begin to make sense. Its native-like structures and vocabulary, analyzed and separated out, become available for creative and original use."

On the other hand, native English speaker teachers in New Zealand highlighted in Duong's study (2003) spoke of "poor memorization" causing problems in learners' speaking performances. Duong noted these teachers believed that they have to explicitly advise students to avoid memorization as learners then do not interact with the audience and lose naturalness in communicating.

### **Contextual Challenges in the Research Process**

Since memorization is a mental process, qualitative methods of data collection and analysis are appropriate. However, to carry out qualitative research in a Vietnamese context is undeniably challenging. Apart from the expected difficulties such as time constraints, a lack of up-to-date reference material, substandard facilities, and the lack of a strong research community, it is also true that qualitative research methods are relatively new in Vietnam. Administrators in charge of research development in Vietnam often value quantitative methods of research, and they have a certain power over the choice and flow of research being implemented in higher education contexts. There are different levels of control over research in Vietnam, including the Government (ministry) level, the university or college level, and the departmental level. At each level, there are Research Committees (RS) charged with reviewing the quality, approaches, and outcomes of research being implemented. If a researcher does independent research (such as writing for a journal), s/he does not have to go

through such committee reviews, but receives no financial or official support. At the university highlighted in this study, the RC (consisting of one head of the unit, the head of the university research office, and five other prestigious researchers/teachers) usually has three meetings for each research project undertaken. The researcher presents his/her plan/research in about 15 minutes and each member of the research committee is free to ask questions. If the researcher fails to respond to these questions satisfactorily, s/he might have to modify the research, or in the worst case, will not be allowed to continue doing the research. Most of the comments and questions are relevant but sometimes, due to different ideas about and backgrounds in research methodology, some of these questions are actually challenging to answer. Below are some examples:

In one research using a case study approach with questionnaires to 40 students and in-depth interviews with two teachers and two students, one question from the RC was "Why do you have such a small number of sample and population for such an important study; even in a term paper conducted by my fourth year students, they conducted nearly 500 questionnaires!"

In some other cases, the value of participants' comments (either nameless, pseudonym, or so-called "normal" people) is questioned. Many RC members seem to believe only in what so-called recognized and famous figures claim. The researchers for this study were asked "Why should you quote teacher A, or student B? They are not well-known people, so their opinions are worthless and unreliable, thus not worth quoting!!!"

Questions have also been raised about the value of the claims and interpretations found based on participants' opinions or observations, reflecting the fact that many Vietnamese studies are a simply impressionistic meta-analyses of what have been done by previous well-known researchers.

All the challenges mentioned above seem associated with a biased attitude against Vietnamese researchers trained in foreign settings. In doing this research, we were faced with similar queries. However, because this was considered independent research, i.e., for publication outside the university, we neither received funds from the University nor underwent any required procedures, such as end-of-project reviews.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Different participants joined the research by completing a questionnaire, being observed in class, and participating in in-depth interviews. All names reported here are pseudonyms. *Ms.* or *Mr.* plus first names are used to address the teacher participants, which is normal usage in Vietnam. Participant details are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
**Study Participants**

Participants	Teachers			Students		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Questionnaire	13	7	20	58	12	70
Interview	3	1	4	3	1	4

There were two questionnaires, one for students and one for teachers. The student questionnaire was issued to three fourth year undergraduate classes at the university in Vietnam, totaling 70 students. Fifty-eight respondents were female, and 12 were male. The teacher questionnaire was distributed to 20 teachers. 13 were female, and 7 were male. Additionally, 19 were Vietnamese and one was American, who was female). For the classroom observation, one class of 38 fourth year undergraduate students (7 males and 31 females) and one teacher in charge of the speaking course were observed.

The interview teacher participants were four teachers (three females and one male), and four students (two females and two males). The teachers were Ms. Mary (an American teacher), Mr. Ly, Ms. Nhu, and Ms. Mai (all three Vietnamese teachers). The American teacher was enrolled in an MA in TESOL, and has three years' teaching experience. The Vietnamese instructors had over 10 years' English teaching experience and obtained their MA degrees in an English-speaking country. The interview student participants, Nga, Thu, Tran, and Ha were fourth-year students, and had sufficient English skills and the willingness to take part in the interview.

### Materials

The two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students (see Appendices A and B) were designed to provide a broad view of students' and teachers' perceptions and uses of memorization in English language learning classrooms. The questions were included based on the researchers' accumulated knowledge, experience, and observation.

Both questionnaires were composed in both English and Vietnamese as parallel forms.

After analysis of the questionnaire data semi-structured interviews were constructed (see Appendices C and D) in order to capture students' and teachers' perceptions and uses of memorization in learning English. Four teachers were interviewed from 20 to 30 minutes. Four students from three classes were also interviewed from 30 to 35 minutes.

### Analysis

The data were collected and categorized separately according to their types, i.e. questionnaires and interviews. After each type was categorized thematically, both data categories were compared to identify main themes common to all sources of data. Both sources of data were used to build up confirmatory evidence to support one another in every main pattern identified from the data. The transcriptions of the teacher and student interviews were sent back to the participants generating the data

for checking.

## Results

In terms of the first research question, "Is memorization considered a learner strategy?" memorization was found to be considered a learner strategy. See Table 2 below for questionnaire data on what aspects of language teachers and students think should be memorized:

**Table 2**  
**Aspects of the Language Memorized in the Teachers' and Students' Perspectives**

Aspects of the language memorized	Teachers		Students	
	Total (20)	Percentage	Total (70)	Percentage
Vocabulary	17	85%	67	96%
Grammar structures	17	85%	53	76%
Idioms	14	70%	48	67%
Phrases	14	70%	45	64%
Whole sentences	7	35%	7	10%
Scripted dialogues	2	10%	10	14%
Whole paragraphs	0	0%	1	1%

A majority of students (96%) stated that they used memorization as a strategy to learn vocabulary. For grammar structure, idioms and phrases, students also acknowledged rather high use, with 76%, 67%, and 64%, respectively. Similar results were found with the teachers' responses, where 85% of the teachers claimed that memorization was needed for learning vocabulary and grammar structures, and 70% thought memorization was needed for learning idioms and phrases. However, while 35% of teachers accepted learning by heart the whole sentences, only 10% of students concurred. For learning scripted dialogues, the percentage of was low for both the teachers and students (10% of teachers and 14% of students). Memorizing whole paragraphs received the lowest percentage of approval, with only one student (1%) agreeing with the practice, and no teachers (0%) agreeing with the practice. The interview data reflected that both groups shared similar opinions in using memorization for various and appropriate purposes.

It can be seen that the teachers and students equally emphasize memorizing vocabulary, as is revealed in student and teacher comments on this topic. Nga, a student, commented in an interview, "Vocabulary is one of the most basic parts of languages and the most popular tool to remember it is to memorize." Tran, another student, noted "All foreign language students need to memorize vocabulary. It is possible that after studying they may forget but the basic things need to be remembered by memorization." Mr. Ly, a teacher, shared his experience "Before

people thought that vocabulary only included words, but nowadays, vocabulary includes phrases, phrasal verbs, expressions, and idioms. Usually, vocabulary has a short content so a lot of which is easily remembered. When I memorize, it is usually for vocabulary." This finding related to vocabulary is similar to the advice given by a vocabulary scholar who must remain unnamed because the original work is not available in Vietnam: "vocabulary is not just words. When we talk about our vocabulary, we mean the words we know and our ability to use them." Therefore, with good memorization, students can build up and increase their personal vocabularies stock.

Teachers and students alike had varying reasons for memorizing, in terms of skills needed to do well in the English learning classroom. See Table 3 below for questionnaire data:

**Table 3**  
**Skills-Based Reasons for Using Memorisation**

Reasons of memorization	Teachers		Students	
	Total (20)	Percentage	Total (70)	Percentage
To sound more confident	17	85%	58	83%
To speak more fluently	17	85%	54	77%
To remember what to say	14	70%	49	70%
To use less filler words	15	75%	17	24%
To sound more coherent (smoother transitions) and easier to understand your ideas	9	45%	18	25%
To sound more like a native speaker	6	30%	17	24%

Table 3 shows a high percentage (85%) of teachers who suggested using memorization as a strategy to help students to sound more confident and speak more fluently. In the students' perspective, similar findings were found. The majority of students (83%) thought that, with memorization, they would be more confident, and 77% of them thought they could achieve fluency in speaking. The same percentage of agreement (70%) was found with both teachers and students regarding using memorization "to remember what to say." However, whereas 75% of teachers suggested that memorizing enabled students "to use fewer filler words," only 24% of students agreed with the notion. In terms of using memorized stock phrases to sound "more coherent" or "like a native speaker," 45% and 30% of teachers agreed, but only 25% and 24% of students did so.

In their interview, the teachers and students provided comments which may explain the differences. Ha, a student, said they (students) did not recognize how strongly their speech was affected by using too many filler phrases and not being confident, or

sounding too foreign; whereas the teachers, as assessors and observers, were much more aware of this. Mr. Ly, a teacher, commented that the students, when performing a task, seemed to pay more attention to basic linguistic elements and attributes of "good" performances, such as sounding fluent or remembering what to say, while teachers were more likely to view the students' performances at a discourse level (sounding coherent and native like).

To answer the second research question ("What are students' beliefs and attitudes towards memorization in learning EFL?") the data provided insights from interviews into what the teachers and students believed to be good and poor memorization, together with positive and negative influences of memorization on students' performances when giving speeches.

*Good memorization.* In interviews, three out of the four teachers emphasized that good memorization was to learn by heart with a deep understanding and proper application in use for communication. Ms. Mary said, "It is very good if students rely on memorization, for key points, key words and so on, and have an understanding of what they are learning." Mr. Ly shared a similar opinion, stating that good memorization meant the effort to keep the information in one's mind systematically and used it effectively in appropriate contexts. For example, when reading an article, translating or listening to a text, a student with good memorization would select and take note of new words or structures and then memorize them for later use and application. All of the students in interviews confirmed that good memorization was to understand well what was learned by heart and not to depend completely on what was memorized. Nga commented that memorization should be a selective process, covering only main or general ideas or key words. From the interview data, both teachers and students seem to feel that good memorization means memorizing in a selective and flexible manner, as well as the capacity to apply what has been learned in real use for communicative purposes. This is one important aspect of memorization, related to associative learning, which happens when a connection or association is made between new information and what one already knows (Richards and Platt, 1992; and O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

*Poor memorization.* In interviews, both teachers and students provided interesting responses on what poor memorization was, such as the notion that poor memorization was rote learning in which some students would get stuck and forget their entire speech if s/he forgot only one key word. As one teacher said, with poor memorization, learners depended so much on what memorized and "students just learn by heart but do not understand what they memorize and do not know how to apply memorized information in suitable circumstances." Mr. Ly also distinguished further the concept of memorization, remembering, and application. He reflected, "Poor memorization does not mean you are bad at remembering. Many people remember a lot but cannot use the knowledge in the right context." The problem of poor memorization is likely common among many students of Vietnam and a lot of attention and concerns will be needed to solve this problem.

On this research question, the questionnaire data reflected that both teachers and students actually realized the usefulness of good memorization in certain situations. In the questionnaire, 50% of students said that proper memorization helped them achieve an effective application of new words, phrases, idioms and so on in certain

speaking and writing contexts. 63% of students considered memorizing as a useful strategy for natural communication and daily conversation using correct pronunciation. See Table 4:

**Table 4**  
**Usefulness of Good Memorization (Questionnaire Data)**

<b>Usefulness of good memorization</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Teachers	To achieve effective application of new words, phrases, idioms in speaking and writing contexts	10/20	50%
Students	a useful strategy for natural communication and daily conversation using correct pronunciation	44/70	63%

Both teachers and students also commented on the positive impact of memorization on learning English in their interviews, as indicated in Table 5. These comments related to integrative skills improvement, native- like accent and accuracy, fluency and natural communication, confidence and motivation, and better learning.

**Table 5**  
**Usefulness of Good Memorization (Interview Data)**

<b>Benefits gained from good memorization</b>	<b>Teachers' perspectives</b>	<b>Students' perspectives</b>
Improvement of integrative skills	To apply what memorized to speaking and writing tasks To gain intensive and quick learning	To apply specific language skills To apply new words, phrases, idioms in speaking and writing contexts
Obtaining a native- like accent and accuracy	To sound more native-like To remember and imitate native speakers' talks	To use English correctly and effectively To have correct pronunciation in daily conversations
Improvement of fluency and natural communication	To feel confident in starting a talk politely For natural communication	To be able to react quickly for formatted situations To express ideas clearly, fluently
Stronger self-confidence and motivation	To feel less nervous To be willing to get involved in class activities To feel equipped with good resources for communication	To be more confident, motivated, less shy To be motivated in speaking in English To trust oneself as a communicator
Enhancement of cultural awareness and sensitivity	To sound more culturally appropriate To remember and imitate	To be able to react quickly and appropriately for some culture-bound contexts

	native speakers' verbal and non-verbal communication To avoid culturally inappropriate or embarrassing or confronting conversations	To use fixed expressions To learn what is appropriate and natural in English to use instead of just translating from Vietnamese
A better learning process	To keep learning process going smoothly To have a more effective learning process and result	To have a good basic understanding and remember what learned before learning new things

In their interviews, when asked to describe positive effects of memorization in giving speeches, the teachers and students emphasized the important role of memorization as a strategy in helping students to obtain better accuracy and fluency, use of stock of language knowledge, and have more self-confidence. Extracts from the interviews with teachers are displayed in Table 6, and students' interview extracts are displayed in Table 7.

**Table 6**  
**Positive Impacts of Memorization on Giving a Speech (Teacher Interview Data)**

Positive impacts	Extracts
Better accuracy	Students sound confident, natural and native like Students remember the content of the topic-specific voc., look at the notes less
Stronger fluency	Students to speak fluently, logically with less fillers and less hesitant Students sound confident, natural and native like
A better stock of language knowledge	Students to remember what to say Students employ what learned
Better structure	Seem well-organized, well-planned and sensible
Improvement at discourse level	Students seem coherent and cohesive, having good sign posting and appropriate format
Stronger self-confidence	Students sound confident, natural and native like
Better performance	Students seem well-prepared, knowledgeable and give listeners good impression

Ms. Mai, a teacher, noted, "In remembering the content of the topic, specific vocabulary, and the outline will help students look at the notes less. This results in many other good points for the speaker such as eyes contact, gestures or gaining the attention from the audience."

**Table 7**  
**Positive Impacts of Memorization on Giving a Speech (Student Interview Data)**

**Data)**

<b>Positive impacts</b>	<b>Extracts</b>
Better accuracy	Students have good pronunciation, structures, phrases
Stronger fluency	Speech sounds coherent, logical Students speak more fluently, less hesitant, more confidence
A better memory	Student avoid omitting ideas
At discourse level	Speech sounds coherent, logical Well-organized and well-prepared speech
Better results	Better marks, better performance
Stronger self- confidence and motivation	Students speak more fluently, less hesitant, more confidence Well-organized and well-prepared speech Students appear cheerful and interactive

The students shared similar reflections, as

Ha stated, "Memorization in the preparation helps students have a certain amount of knowledge for the presented topic. Therefore I am confident, able to speak smoothly and look at the notes less."

*Negative influences of memorization on students' performance.* In the questionnaire, the students responded that poor memorization could have negative impact on language learning and the speaking performances of students. See Table 8:

**Table 8**  
**Negative Impacts of Memorization on Giving a Speech (Student Questionnaire Data)**

<b>Negative impacts</b>	<b>Total/70</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cannot manage or continue when forgetting some words, parts, ideas (dangerous), becoming passive and less creative	35	50%
Being confused, embarrassed and nervous with short pauses, hesitant when forgetting some points	35	50%
Not absolutely naturally	16	23%
Reading rather than speaking	25	36%
Too passive or depend on what is learnt by heart	15	21%
Make speech boring	12	17%
Speaking without intonation, stress and rhythm	12	17%

Lack of eye contact (looking at window, ceiling etc)	11	16%
Looking unconfident, confused, uncomfortable	10	14%
Appearing unnatural	9	13%

It can be seen that 50% of the students considered memorization a "dangerous" strategy, making students more passive and less creative. One student wrote on his questionnaire that memorization could lead students to a frozen path or a frame, being passive in solving unexpected problems when speaking, and thus they dare not use expressions or sentences in which some words may be forgotten. Another 50% of the students seemed aware that poor memorization would make them hesitant, confused, embarrassed, and nervous. Poor memorization would make students read from a text rather than speaking (36%), not speaking naturally (23%), and being passive and dependent (21%). Other suggested indicators of poor memorization and its impacts included boring speech patterns without intonation, stress, and rhythm (17%); lack of eye contact (16%); looking unconfident, confused, and uncomfortable (14%); and unnatural (13%).

In addition, in their interviews, Nga, Thu, and Ha (students) commented that memorization was as seen harmful in the context of giving speeches because it made students:

- Less flexible and productive, and more passive, creating difficulties when communicating with people from different cultures;
- Feel confused when confronting something unfamiliar;
- React slowly in finding a replacement for forgotten words.

The teachers revealed similar opinions related to the negative impacts of memorization on student performance in their questionnaire, as illustrated in Table 9.

**Table 9**  
**Negative Impacts of Memorization on Giving a Speech (Teacher Questionnaire Data)**

Negative impacts	Total/20	Percentage
Sound like reading, reciting rather than speaking	14	70%
Have difficulty in keeping calm when forgetting words, phrases or sentences	12	60%
Be slow in reaction when unexpected problems happen	13	65%
Seem unnatural and un lively because the speed of speaking is too fast	11	55%
Too passive or depend on what is learnt by heart	10	50%
Make audience inattentive	12	60%
Have their intonation more monotonous: students would not they will not pause long enough for effect	10	57%

or to aid comprehension if they only memorize speech		
Lack of eye contact or rolling the eyes	6	30%

It can be seen from the table that the teachers expressed some consensus on problems students face when employing poor memorization when giving speeches in class. A majority of the teachers observed that students who had used poor memorization to prepare would read, rather than speak extemporaneously (70%), would be slow in responding to unexpected problems (65%), would lose their calm when forgetting things (60%), and would "lose" the audience (60%). Teacher attributed other traits to poor memorization, such as students using monotonous intonation (57%), speaking too fast which make the talk unnatural and "unlively" (55%), and being passive and dependent on what learned by heart (50%). Though only 30% of the teachers chose to comment on the limited use of body language in the questionnaire (lack of eye contact, etc.), in her interview, Ms. Mai commented further that students needed to improve their body language in their performance, and that maybe due to poor memorization and under-preparation, most of her students looked stiff and unconvincing in their talk without eye contact and body movements.

Further interview data from teachers also confirmed that most of the teachers did not feel comfortable with students' apparent use of poor memorization. For example, Ms. Mary said, "Memorization may lead to students' lack in skills such as mapping, guessing and organizing ideas. This can be seen more clearly in tests and examinations. Although I appreciate their effort in learning by heart my lectures, copying all words in the lessons for an answer are not what I had expected. Maybe my question needs only some ideas from the relevant lesson, but some students do not filter or select the necessary information for their answers. Their answers make me feel that they only write what was memorized." Mr. Hiep agreed, "Memorization makes the students become lazy in thinking critically. In some context, students do not guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word even this is within their ability."

As discussed above, from teachers' and students' perspectives, memorization can be classified into good and poor types, and these are both seen to have negative and positive influences on student performance, particularly in giving speeches, a commonly used speaking activity in Vietnamese university EFL classrooms.

## Implications and Conclusion

The findings of the research suggest that no matter how good or poor memorization is, it can still satisfy certain needs of language learners. This finding confirms Duong's (2003) conclusions for EFL learners in New Zealand. It seems obvious from the findings here that because memorization is considered part and parcel of students' learning habits, teachers and students have to face the fact that memorization will not be eliminated and should not be denied either. Teachers and students should look for the best ways to use memorization as a strategy to help improve the effectiveness of students learning EFL.

These findings provide evidence teachers' and students' deep insights into and concerns about the distinctions between good and poor memorization, and their influence on the students' learning behavior and effectiveness. The concepts of good

and poor memorization seem related directly to the application of good memorization, and avoidance of poor memorization. We believe it is possible to limit negative effects of memorization, if students are aware of the distinction between good and poor memorization, and avoid learning by heart without understanding the content and context of the task. In the Vietnamese context, it is difficult for students to escape the influence of memorization, because memorization is employed in many disciplines at university, with the result students only learn by heart for the short-term, repeat what has been memorized for a test and forget it very quickly after the test. This suggests that awareness about good and poor memorization should be raised and highlighted, and that teachers should consider explaining and constantly reminding students of the potential roles of memorization in students' learning. EFL students must be made aware that memorization is a double-edged sword which can be used as an effective tool to get a better and quicker results in learning English but can also be a danger in hindering the students in their efforts to become competent and natural communicators. The question is that it is very difficult to recognize the line between good and poor memorization; hence, it requires learners' constant awareness and strong alertness in effectively choosing and using good memorization, as well as to avoid poor memorization.

### **About the Authors**

**Duong Thi Hoang Oanh**, Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics (Victoria University), M.A. (Canberra University) is lecturer and Dean of the International Studies Department at Hue University, Vietnam. She is teaching and supervising at MA and tertiary levels (Discourse Analysis, Phonetics and Phonology, Research Methods, Curriculum Design and Evaluation, Testing and Assessment). She has lectured and worked at universities in America, Canada, New Zealand and Thailand. Her academic interests include classroom practices, curriculum design and evaluation, and cross-cultural studies.

**Nguyen Thu Hien** is a fourth year student for Bachelor of Arts in English (BAE) who cooperated with Oanh in collecting and analyzing the data for this article.

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## Appendices

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## Appendix A

## Student Questionnaire

Please complete the following questions by indicating your answers with a (✓) in the appropriate box or by writing your response in the space provided.

*How old are you?*

<input type="checkbox"/>					
<i>under 20</i>	<i>20-24</i>	<i>25-29</i>	<i>30-34</i>	<i>35-39</i>	<i>over 40 years</i>

Are you:  male or  female?

What is your name? (optional)

.....

1. What strategies do you use to learn English?

.....  
 .....

2. Is memorization one of your ways to learn English?

Yes  No  Not sure

If yes, what aspects of the language do you memorize?

- Vocabulary
- Phrases
- Idioms
- Grammar structures
- Whole sentences
- Whole paragraphs
- Scripted dialogues
- Others

3. Do you memorize parts of the oral presentation you give?

Yes  No  Not sure

If yes, what parts do you learn by heart?

- The introduction
- The conclusion
- The main ideas
- The beginning sentence
- Key words
- Whole paragraphs
- The whole presentation
- Difficult/new words

4. Why do you memorize?

- To remember what to say
- To speak more fluently
- To speak more naturally
- To sound more like a native speaker
- To sound more coherent (smoother transitions) and easier to understand your ideas

## **Appendix B**

## Teacher Questionnaire

Please complete the following questions by indicating your answers with a (✓) in the appropriate box or by writing your response in the space provided.

*How old are you?*

<input type="checkbox"/>					
<i>under 20</i>	<i>20-24</i>	<i>25-29</i>	<i>30-34</i>	<i>35-39</i>	<i>over 40 years</i>

Are you:  male or  female?

What is your name? (optional)

.....

1. What strategies do you emphasize in your class to help students learn English?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

2. Is memorizing one of the ways you advise your students in learning English?

Yes                                       No                                       Not sure

If yes, what aspects of the language do you suggest students to memorize?

- Vocabulary
- Phrases
- Idioms
- Grammar structures
- Whole sentences
- Whole paragraphs
- Scripted dialogues
- Others

3. Do you advise your students memorize parts of the oral presentation they give?

Yes                                       No                                       Not sure

If yes, what parts should they learn by heart?

- The introduction
- The conclusion
- The main ideas
- The beginning sentence
- Key words
- Whole paragraphs
- The whole presentation
- Difficult/new words

4. Why do you advise them to memorize?

- To remember what to say
- To speak more fluently
- To speak more naturally

## **Appendix C**

### Plan for Teacher Interviews

(Semi- structured, one 20 to 30 minute interview each)

1. Is memorization one of the strategies you emphasize in your class to help students learn English? Why/why not?
2. What aspects of the language do you think most appropriate to memorize?
3. What is the role of memorization in speaking activities?
4. How can memorization help students?
5. How can memorization be harmful?
6. Is it possible to memorize and ensure the quality of the task at the same time?
7. What do you think about good memorization and poor memorization techniques?
8. What can you do to advise your students to strengthen good memorization?
9. What can you do to advise your students to limit poor memorization?
10. Is there anything else you would like to say about memorization?

## **Appendix D**

### Plan for Student Interviews

(Semi- structured, one 20 to 30 minute interview each)

1. Is memorization one of the strategies you use in learning English? Why/why not?
2. What aspects of the language do you think most suitable to memorize?
3. What is the role of memorization in speaking activities?
4. How can memorization be helpful to you?
5. How can memorization be harmful to you?
6. Is it possible to memorize and ensure the quality of the task at the same time?
7. What do you think about good memorization and poor memorization techniques?
8. What can you do to strengthen good memorization?
9. What can you do to limit poor memorization?
10. Is there anything else you would like to say about memorization?