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| RGC Ref. No.: |
| UGC/FDS16/H19/21 |
| (please insert ref. above) |

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

- Submission Deadlines:**
1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within **six** months of the approved project completion date.
 2. Completion report: within **12** months of the approved project completion date.

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Towards a reflective approach to developing academic vocabulary: An intervention case study in the higher education context

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

| Research Team | Name / Post | Unit / Department / Institution |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Principal Investigator | Dr CHUNG Hiu-yui Edsoulla Assistant Professor | School of Education and Languages, Hong Kong Metropolitan University |
| Co-Investigator(s) | Dr FUNG King-tat Daniel Assistant Professor | Academic Unit of Language and Literacy Education, The University of Hong Kong |

3. Project Duration

| | Original | Revised | Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted) |
|--|------------|-----------|---|
| Project Start Date | 1/1/2022 | N/A | N/A |
| Project Completion Date | 31/12/2023 | 30/6/2024 | 14/9/2023 |
| Duration (in months) | 24 months | 30 months | 14/9/2023 |
| Deadline for Submission of Completion Report | 31/12/2024 | 30/6/2025 | 14/9/2023 |

- 4.4 Please attach photo(s) of acknowledgement of RGC-funded facilities/equipment.
N/A

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To investigate the salient features of university students' professed beliefs about vocabulary knowledge and learning;
2. To examine the impact of reflection on university students' vocabulary learning trajectories, focusing on the ways in which their beliefs about vocabulary knowledge and learning evolve, if at all, and how any such evolution influences vocabulary learning behaviour and knowledge;
3. To explore how such factors as proficiency levels, learner motivation and features of reflective practice shape the vocabulary learning trajectories of undergraduates in Hong Kong.

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change: N/A

5.3 Realisation of the objectives (*Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any*)

All three objectives were successfully and fully achieved through a series of carefully designed research activities, with data collected primarily at two key phases – before and after the pedagogical intervention.

1. To investigate the salient features of university students' professed beliefs about vocabulary knowledge and learning, an online questionnaire was developed and administered to 172 first-year undergraduate students at a Hong Kong university during the first round of data collection. The questionnaire consisted of three sections comprising items on students' demographic information, beliefs about academic vocabulary knowledge and learning, and their self-reported use of vocabulary learning strategies. Upon completing the questionnaires, the students also completed two vocabulary tests to evaluate the breadth and depth of their academic vocabulary knowledge. All instruments underwent thorough piloting and refinement to ensure their clarity and reliability. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires and test results were analysed using SPSS, while open-ended responses were examined through content analysis. These analyses offered a comprehensive baseline understanding of the students' existing beliefs, learning practices, and vocabulary knowledge prior to the intervention.
2. To examine the impact of reflection on university students' vocabulary learning trajectories, a specialised programme entitled "Building academic vocabulary for academic success" was developed and implemented on 57 students. Spanning three months, the programme consisted of six three-hour sessions, each exploring key topics and concepts important to academic vocabulary learning. Specifically, the sessions covered: (a) the conceptualisation and importance of academic vocabulary; (b) various aspects of academic word knowledge; (c) core principles, including noticing, repeated processing, practicing, and recycling; and (d) effective strategies for academic vocabulary learning, such as guessing, rehearsal, note-taking, dictionary use, encoding strategies, and vocabulary activation strategies. Each session of the programme followed a sequential approach, starting with structured reflection, progressing through interactive engagement and hands-on practice, and concluding with reflective tasks. To enhance vocabulary learning through reflection, participants were encouraged to write reflective entries and document the academic words they learned in a vocabulary learning logbook after each session. Following the intervention, all participants were invited to complete the same online questionnaire and vocabulary tests that were used in the initial round of data collection. In-depth, semi-structured follow-up interviews were also conducted with 20 students at the beginning, middle, and end of the programme. Quantitative data collected before and after the intervention were analysed using SPSS to evaluate changes in students' vocabulary knowledge, beliefs, and strategy use. Concurrently, interview responses, reflective entries, and learning logbooks were thematically analysed to corroborate the quantitative results and provide deeper insights into the observed learning trajectories.
3. To explore how various factors shape vocabulary learning trajectories, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. Statistical analyses were conducted using data from two rounds of questionnaires and vocabulary tests to assess how students' trajectories varied by proficiency level and academic discipline. Students' reflective entries and interview responses were also analysed to gain deeper insights into how motivational shifts and experiences with reflective learning contributed to their vocabulary development. These comprehensive analyses provided a multidimensional examination of the individual and contextual factors influencing students' academic vocabulary learning.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

| Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i> | Addressed <i>(please tick)</i> | Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i> |
|---|--|--|
| 1. To investigate the salient features of university students' professed beliefs about vocabulary knowledge and learning | ✓ | 100% |
| 2. To examine the impact of reflection on university students' vocabulary learning trajectories, focusing on the ways in which their beliefs about vocabulary knowledge and learning evolve, if at all, and how any such evolution influences vocabulary learning behaviour and knowledge | ✓ | 100% |
| 3. To explore how such factors as proficiency levels, learner motivation and features of reflective practice shape the vocabulary learning trajectories of undergraduates in Hong Kong | ✓ | 100% |

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome (*Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary*)

Below are the key findings and outcomes from the mixed-methods, classroom-based intervention study on a reflective approach to academic vocabulary development among first-year ESL university students in Hong Kong:

The initial phase of the study revealed that students often found academic vocabulary learning inherently difficult and overwhelming, even though they understood its importance. They experienced personal struggles, emotional challenges, and self-doubt, often exacerbated by their unfamiliarity with academic vocabulary, insufficient exposure to such vocabulary, and a lack of effective strategies for learning it. When learning academic vocabulary, students typically focused on receptive knowledge, such as word meaning, spelling, and pronunciation, while neglecting important aspects like word associations and collocations. Additionally, they primarily relied on basic strategies such as dictionary use, note-taking, and oral repetition, while rarely employing more complex affective or deep processing strategies. These baseline findings have led to three publications in high-impact journals and presentations at seven international conferences, where we underscored the need to enhance academic vocabulary learning in higher education.

Building on these insights, a reflective vocabulary learning programme was implemented to explore the impact of reflective practices on students' academic vocabulary development. Post-intervention analysis indicated significant shifts in students' beliefs, learning practices, and vocabulary knowledge, suggesting the positive influence of reflection. Students showed increased awareness of the comprehensive nature of word knowledge, placing greater importance on productive knowledge and previously overlooked dimensions. They placed a higher value on reading and contextual learning, diversified their strategy use, and transitioned from basic methods to more metacognitive, affective, and encoding strategies. Notably, improvements in vocabulary test performance reflected gains in both the breadth and depth of their vocabulary knowledge.

The findings also revealed that students' proficiency levels influenced their learning trajectories, with lower-proficiency students exhibiting more noteworthy improvements than their higher-proficiency peers. However, their fields of study did not significantly impact these outcomes. Qualitative data from interviews, reflective entries, and vocabulary logbooks highlighted the pivotal role of reflection for enhancing academic vocabulary development. Students unanimously appreciated the reflective approach, recognising it as a valuable tool for engaging more deeply with their learning. This approach enabled them to critically assess their beliefs and practices, identify and address biases and misconceptions, and recognise areas for improvement. It also fostered a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, boosting their motivation and confidence in learning academic vocabulary.

Overall, the findings underscored the value of guided reflection for supporting academic vocabulary development, enhancing our understanding of student learning processes, and informing the design of effective vocabulary instruction and reflective practices in higher education. To enhance the project's impact, the research team will continue disseminating findings on the impact of a reflective approach to academic vocabulary development at conferences and through publications.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

This study opens several avenues for further development. First, because the project focused exclusively on first-year ESL undergraduates at a single institution in Hong Kong, future studies could broaden the scope to include students from other educational levels and different universities in Hong Kong or similar contexts. This expansion would not only enhance the generalisability of the findings but also provide insights into how reflective vocabulary learning can be adapted to meet the needs of students at various stages of their academic journey. Second, with the increasing prevalence of generative AI tools in higher education, future research could explore their integration into academic vocabulary learning, examining student perceptions and effective uses. Finally, future work could examine teachers' beliefs and practices regarding incorporating reflection into academic vocabulary instruction. Teachers play a key role in shaping the conditions under which reflection is introduced, modelled, and sustained in the classroom. Examining teachers' perspectives would provide valuable insights into how reflective practices are interpreted and implemented in instructional settings, and how these align—or misalign—with students' expectations. Such research could also explore how reflection can be co-constructed between teachers and students to enhance awareness, engagement, and vocabulary learning outcomes. Ultimately, this would offer a more balanced perspective and contribute to developing more informed, pedagogically grounded approaches to academic vocabulary instruction.

7. Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

Knowledge of academic vocabulary is essential for success at university; however, it often poses challenges for learners of English as a second or foreign language, especially those moving from secondary to tertiary education. Therefore, this research project aimed to enhance second language vocabulary building by investigating how a reflective approach to vocabulary learning promotes first-year undergraduates' academic vocabulary development. It represents one of the first studies investigating reflection's role in this context. The findings have significant implications for those involved in teaching and learning English for Academic Purposes (EAP), including EAP teachers, researchers, and university students. Theoretically, the project has deepened our understanding of how students' beliefs and practices regarding academic vocabulary learning can be improved through reflection. In terms of methods, it addresses the need for more mixed-methods, classroom-based intervention studies and lays the foundation for future research on students' vocabulary learning. As for teaching, it provides practical insights regarding the academic vocabulary needs of first-year ESL students in Hong Kong and shows how reflection can be an effective tool for guiding learners toward more effective and independent vocabulary learning.

Part C: Research Output

8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

| The Latest Status of Publications | | | | Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*) | Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified) | Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report) | Attached to this Report (Yes or No) | Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No) | Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| Year of Publication | Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published) | Under Review | Under Preparation (optional) | | | | | | |
| 2024 | | | | Edsoulla Chung*, Aaron Wan and Daniel Fung* | Understanding academic vocabulary learning in higher education: Perspectives from first-year undergraduates in Hong Kong. <i>International Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34(4), 1368–1384. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12576 [SSCI] | No | Yes [Attachment1] | Yes | Yes |
| 2025 | | | | Edsoulla Chung*, Daniel Fung and Aaron Wan | A mixed-methods study of strategy use in academic vocabulary learning among first-year undergraduates in Hong Kong. <i>Journal of English for Academic Purposes</i> , 74, Article 101482. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2025.101482 [SSCI] | No | Yes [Attachment2] | Yes | Yes |
| 2025 | | | | Edsoulla Chung* and Jonathan Newton | Metaphors as windows into academic vocabulary learning. <i>TESOL Quarterly</i> , 59(2), 1036–1049. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3375 [SSCI] | No | Yes [Attachment3] | Yes | Yes |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-----|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|
| | | Yes | Edsoulla Chung*, Aaron Wan and Daniel Fung* | Enhancing academic vocabulary learning through reflection: A mixed-methods study in Hong Kong | No | No | Yes | Yes |
|--|--|-----|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered (Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

| Month / Year / Place | Title | Conference Name | Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report) | Attached to this Report (Yes or No) | Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No) | Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No) |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|---|
| March 2023, Singapore | Understanding academic vocabulary learning from the learner's perspective | <i>The 57th RELC International Conference</i> | No | Yes [Attachment4] | Yes | Yes |
| June 2023, Cambridge, UK | A metaphor analysis of student beliefs about academic vocabulary learning | <i>The 6th International Conference on Advanced Research in Education</i> | No | Yes [Attachment5] | Yes | Yes |
| November 2023, Tokyo, Japan | Hong Kong undergraduates' strategy use in academic vocabulary learning: A mixed-methods study | <i>The 15th Asian Conference on Education</i> | No | Yes [Attachment6] | Yes | Yes |
| November 2023, Tsukuba, Japan | Promoting academic vocabulary learning through reflection | <i>Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) 49th Annual International Conference on Language Teaching</i> | No | Yes [Attachment7] | Yes | Yes |
| December 2023, Wellington, New Zealand | Student perceptions of academic vocabulary learning: Insights from metaphor analysis | <i>Vocab@VIC 2023</i> | No | Yes [Attachment8] | Yes | Yes |
| October 2024, Hong Kong | Addressing lexical challenges for diverse curricula: An inquiry into undergraduates' academic vocabulary learning strategies | <i>The 4th International Conference on English across the Curriculum</i> | No | Yes [Attachment9] | Yes | Yes |
| May 2025, Macao | “Can I climb this high mountain?”: An analysis of academic vocabulary learning challenges in higher education through metaphor | <i>The 11th International Conference on Learning and Teaching</i> | No | Yes [Attachment 10] | Yes | Yes |

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning
(Please elaborate)

The materials developed for the academic vocabulary learning programme have been adapted to enhance the learning experience of students enrolled in Effective Use of English II, an EAP course at Hong Kong Metropolitan University.

11. Student(s) Trained
(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

| Name | Degree Registered for | Date of Registration | Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------|--|
| N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| | | | |
| | | | |

12. Other Impact
(e.g., award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

In addition to the journal publications and conference presentations mentioned above, the research team delivered an invited talk entitled “Academic Vocabulary Learning in Higher Education: Implications from a Multifaceted Study of English Language Learners” as part of the “Key Issues in English for Academic Purposes Seminar” Series at the Research Institute for Bilingual Learning and Teaching (RIBiLT) [Attachment11].

Statistics on Research Outputs

| | Peer-reviewed Journal Publications | Conference Papers | Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters | Patents Awarded | Other Research Outputs (please specify) | |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------|---|----------|
| No. of outputs arising directly from this research project | 3 | 7 | 0 | 0 | Type Invited talk | No. 1 |

13. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

| Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access | Reasons |
|---|---------|
| N/A | N/A |