

**Answers to the Queries Raised by
Teachers on the
Vocablearning Project**

- **Q1. Students don't need to know so many words.**
- **Q2. Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context**
- **Q3. Students can guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words that they encountered.**
- **Q4. The scheme may have adverse effect on English learning, in particular, the students will misuse the words that they learn through the scheme.**
- **Q5. Learning vocabulary is not as important as other aspects in learning a language.**
- **Q6. The school is using English Builder and Vocablearning is a duplicated effort.**
- **Q7. Even though the students have marked improvement, it cannot prove that there is no other more significant factor affecting the performance of a student.**
- **Q8. The promised improvement seems to be miraculous and questionable.**
- **Q9. About a quarter of the students got an "H" in the assessment, so the exercise should be discontinued.**
- **Q10. The exercise can be carried out as a voluntary activity.**
- **Q11. The scheme by-passed the formal decision making channel**
- **Q12. The scheme costs the school \$4500 a month.**
- **Q13. Paul may have financial interest in the project.**

Q1 : Students don't need to know so many words.

- Numerous researches highlight the importance of vocabulary size in
 - Reading (Haynes & Baker, 1993; Huckin & Bloch, 1993)
 - Speaking (Hincks, 2003; Joe, 1998)
 - Listening (Elley, 1989; Ellis, 1994)
 - Writing (Hinkel, 2001; Laufer & Nation, 1995; Lee, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1994; Walters & Wolf, 1996)
 - Academic success (Hazenberg & Hulstun 1996)
- There are over 10,000 different head words in the HK secondary curriculum (Evans, Hoare, O'Halloran & Walker 2001)
 - About 800 general words form English Lessons
 - About 2000 context words from each academic subject

Q1 : Students don't need to know so many words.

- Low academic achievers in WY come across 60-100 encounters of unknown word every school day (10,000-17,000 unknown encounters a school year).
- Some F7 students in WY know as few as 3600 head words only.

Q2 : Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context.

- For an article with less than 90% of the words known to a student, most students have difficulties in applying the guessing strategy. This can easily be proved by crossing out all the words which are not on the Oxford 3000 word list in any newspaper article and presenting the article to an educated adult in Hong Kong. Most people will have difficulties in comprehending the article.

Q2 : Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context.

- An excerpt From SCMP
- The Building Department said it would start xxxxxxxxxx owners of units in the Ma Tau Wai xxxxxxxx block that was swept by a xxxxxx fire in June, saying they had failed to remove illegal structures as ordered.

The xxxxx in 111 and 113 Ma Tau Wai Road, which claimed the lives of a pregnant woman, her two young sons and an 18-year-old girl, highlighted the dangers of xxxxxxxxxx flats and prompted the department to xxxxxx to xxxxxxxx 150 buildings suspected of xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxx each year.

The department issued 12 removal orders to various owners on June 30, two weeks after the fire, requiring them to remove illegal structures within 60 days. But only two had xxxxxxxx by yesterday due date.

Words checked = [113]

Words in Oxford 3000 = [91%]

Q2 : Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context.

- An excerpt From SCMP
- The Building Department said it would start **prosecuting** owners of units in the Ma Tau Wai **tenement** block that was swept by a **deadly** fire in June, saying they had failed to remove illegal structures as ordered.

The **blaze** in 111 and 113 Ma Tau Wai Road, which claimed the lives of a pregnant woman, her two young sons and an 18-year-old girl, highlighted the dangers of **subdivided** flats and prompted the department to **pledge** to **inspect** 150 buildings suspected of **improper partitioning** each year.

The department issued 12 removal orders to various owners on June 30, two weeks after the fire, requiring them to remove illegal structures within 60 days. But only two had **complied** by yesterday due date.

Words checked = [113]

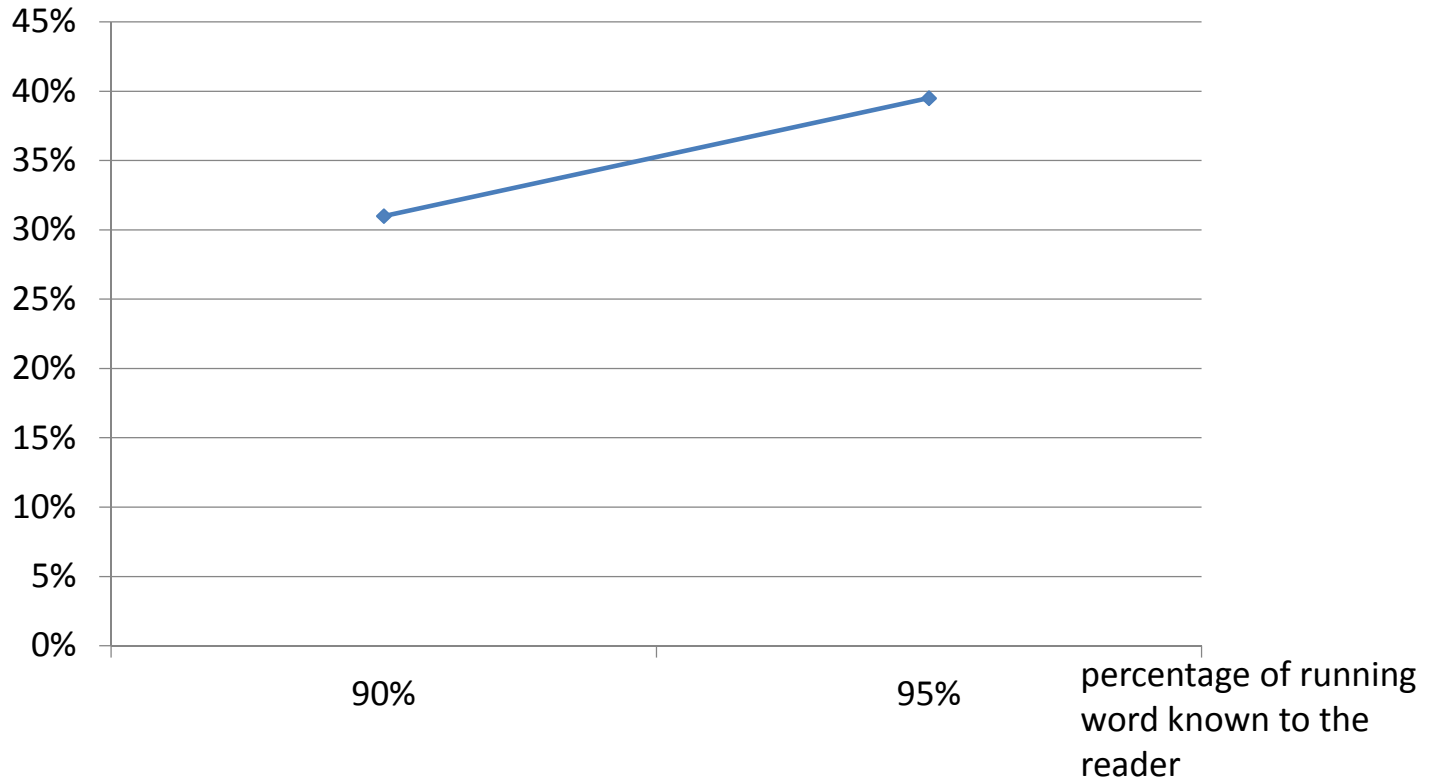
Words in Oxford 3000 = [91%]

Q2 : Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context.

- Independent reading requires knowledge of at least 95% of running words in a text (Laufer 1989; Liu & Nation 1985).
- Guessing strategy barely works only if the reader already has a vocabulary proficiency that can cover 95-98% of the words in an article, though the higher the better. (Prince 1995)

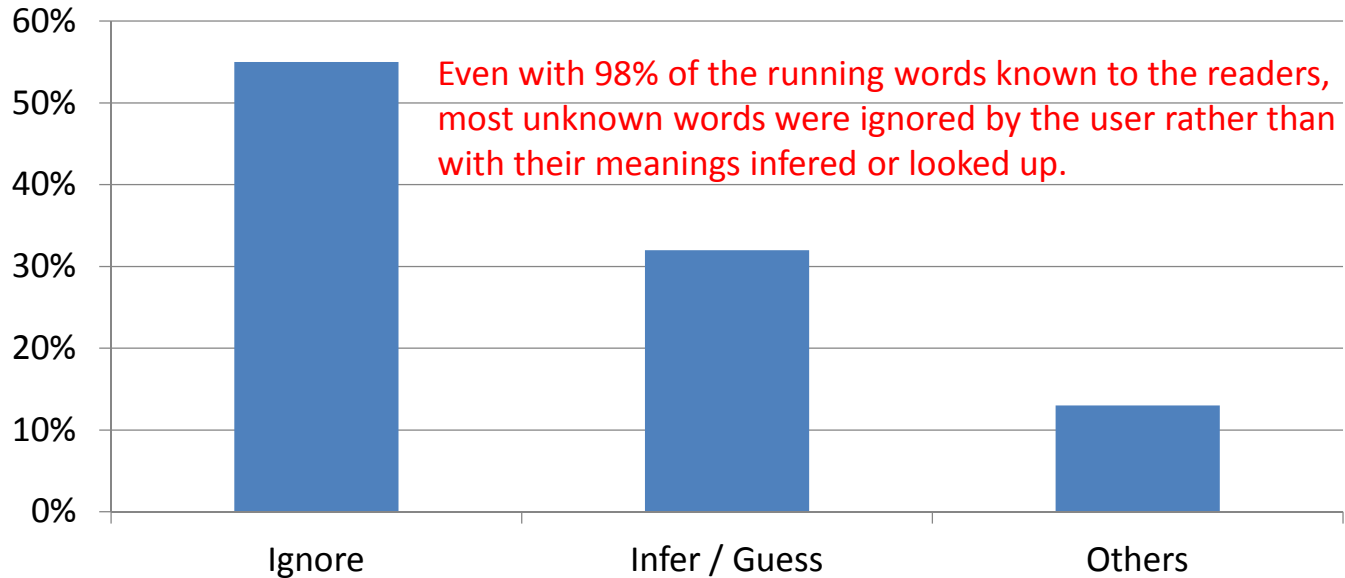
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Chance of Successful Guess (Liu & Nation 1995)

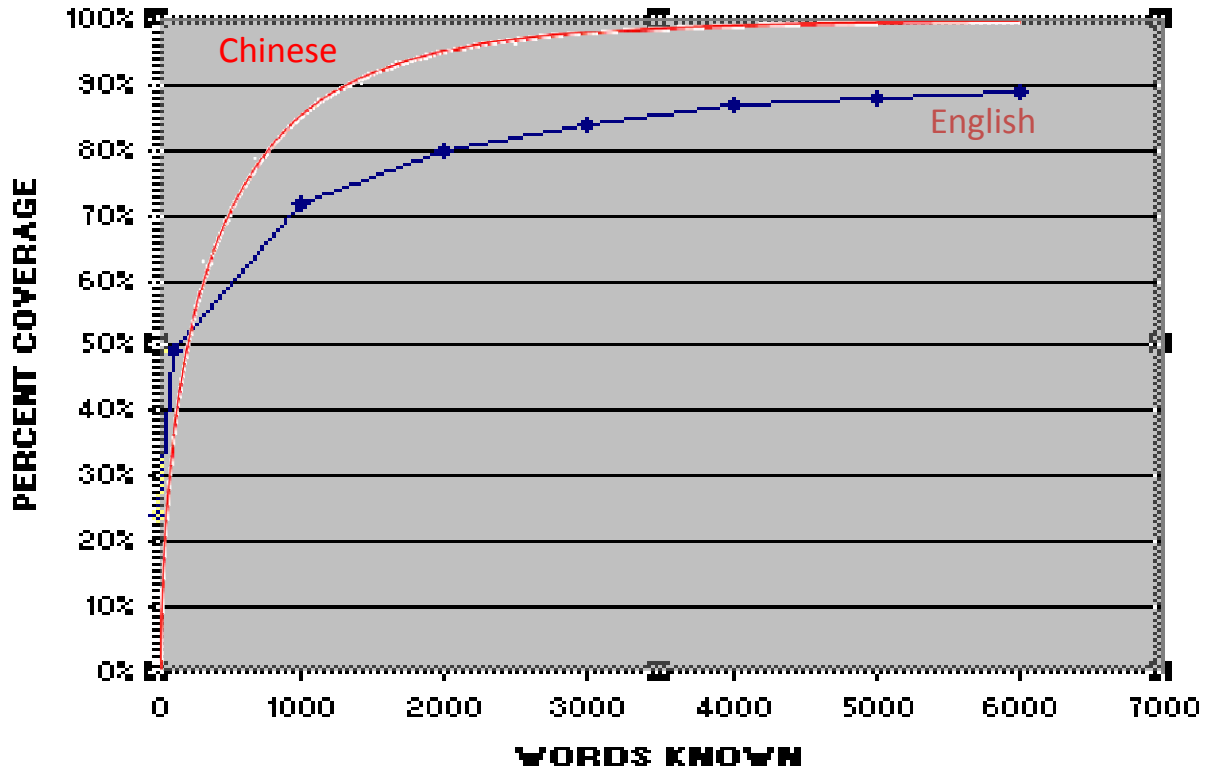


Q2 : Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context.

Strategies used by the readers to handle unfamiliar words in a text with 98% of the running words known (Parbakht & Wesche 1999)



Vocabulary size and text coverage

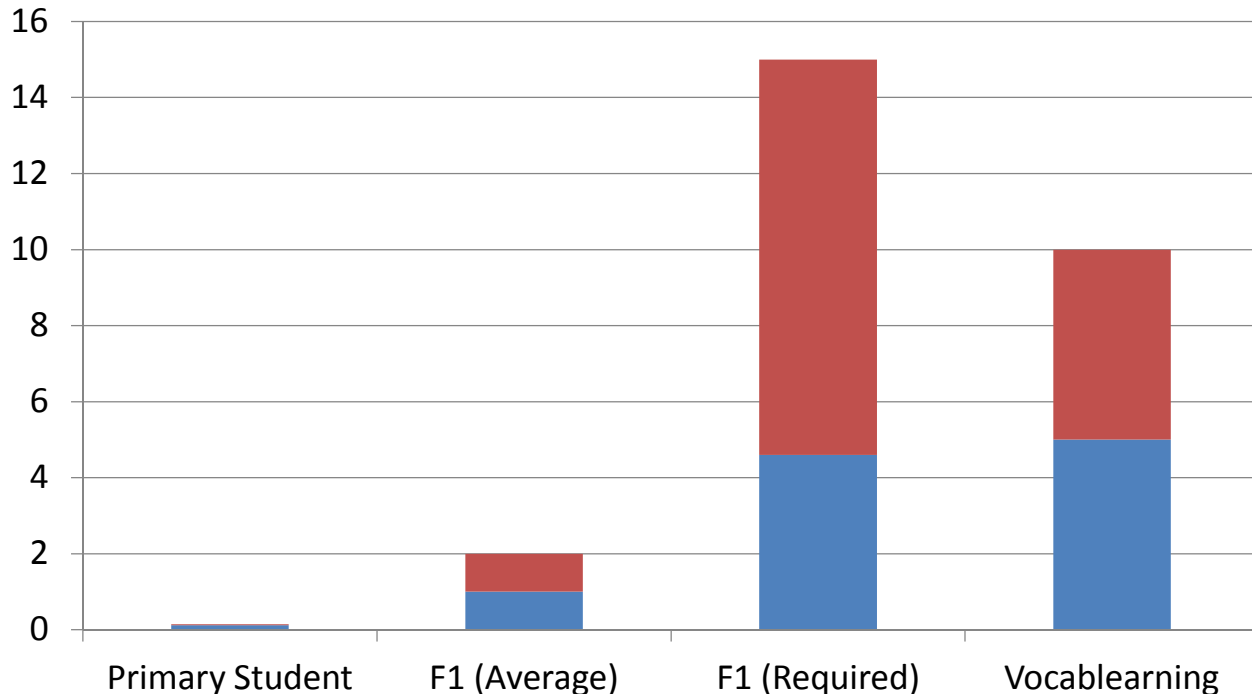


Q2 : Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context.

- Guessing was usually quoted as a feasible strategy to learn unfamiliar words because at the beginning of 20th century when corpus study first emerged, it was found that native speakers know far more words than the number that can be learnt within the time available time in formal education. Guessing is deemed as an explanation to the difference.
- This is a fallacy as the proponent of this school of saying doesn't account for the chance of learning the meaning of the extra words outside formal education.
- Guessing doesn't work in real world, especially for second language learners.

Q2 : Learning vocabulary through Vocablearning has no advantage over guessing from context.

Daily vocabulary acquisition Rate



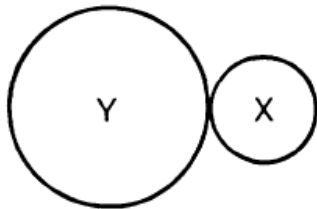
Q3 : Students can guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words that they encounter.

- Good readers do not need to guess; poor readers fail to guess.
- A pervasive fallacy stemmed from an error-prone work done by Huey in 1908.
- Contrived context :
 - He drank a _____ of coffee.
- Naturally occurring prose :
 - I like ham and _____ for breakfast.

Q3 : Students can guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words that they encounter.

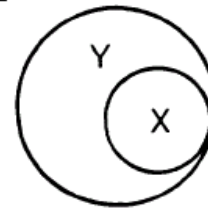
- Transfer Feature Theory (Finn 1977-78)
 - Readers can only guess the low-information words correct which are not vital to comprehension of the text.

SITUATION A



Rasputin's necromancy allowed him to rule the kingdom.

SITUATION B

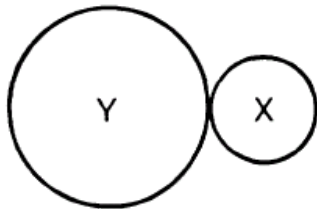


Necromancy, or sorcery, was once punishable by death.

Q3 : Students can guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words that they encounter.

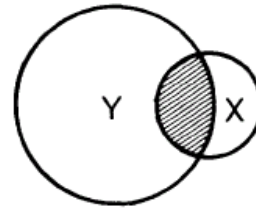
- Transfer Feature Theory (Finn 1977-78)
 - Readers can only guess the low-information words correct which are not vital to comprehension of the text.

SITUATION A



Rasputin's necromancy allowed him to rule the kingdom.

SITUATION C



Merlin's necromancy allowed him to rule the kingdom.

Result from checking against Oxford 3000™

An excerpt from Harry Potter

Harry stretched his arm and grabbed the **xxxxxx** just as a **xxxx** white and reached out and **xxxxxxx** it, too. He felt a burst of **xxx** cold energy **xxxxxxx** from the **xxxxxx**, traveling up his arm and **xxxxxxxxxxxxx** freezing it. He dropped the **xxxxxx** in surprise, watching as the Inferius did the same. The Inferius ' arm hung uselessly by his side, **xxxxxxxxx** as if it was no longer part of his body. Without another **xxxxxx** towards Harry, he turned and **xxxxxxx** back into the water like a wounded animal.

" Harry, get up," Ginny **xxxxxxxxxx**, her eyes wild. He turned to see her **xxxxxxxxxxxxx** her **xxxx** like some sort of Muggle machine gun. Bursts of flame shot out of it, as she aimed at anything near her that so much as moved.

Words checked = [131]

Words in Oxford 3000 = [89%]

Result from checking against Oxford 3000™

Harry stretched his arm and grabbed the **locket** just as a **bony** white and reached out and **grasped** it, too. He felt a burst of **icy** cold energy **emanate** from the **locket**, traveling up his arm and **momentarily** freezing it. He dropped the **locket** in surprise, watching as the Inferius did the same. The Inferius' arm hung uselessly by his side, **dangling** as if it was no longer part of his body. Without another **glance** towards Harry, he turned and **crawled** back into the water like a wounded animal.

" Harry, get up," Ginny **screeched**, her eyes wild. He turned to see her **brandishing** her **wand** like some sort of Muggle machine gun. Bursts of flame shot out of it, as she aimed at anything near her that so much as moved.

Words checked = [131]

Words in Oxford 3000 = [89%]

Q3 : Students can guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words that they encounter.

- Gough, Alford and Holley-Wilcox (1981) find that false guessing outnumber the true by at least 3 to 1.
- Incorrect guess of word meaning has direct detrimental effect on academic subject learning.

Q4 : The scheme may have adverse effect on English learning, in particular, the students will misuse the words that they learn through the scheme.

Speaking (Habitual Level)



3 years

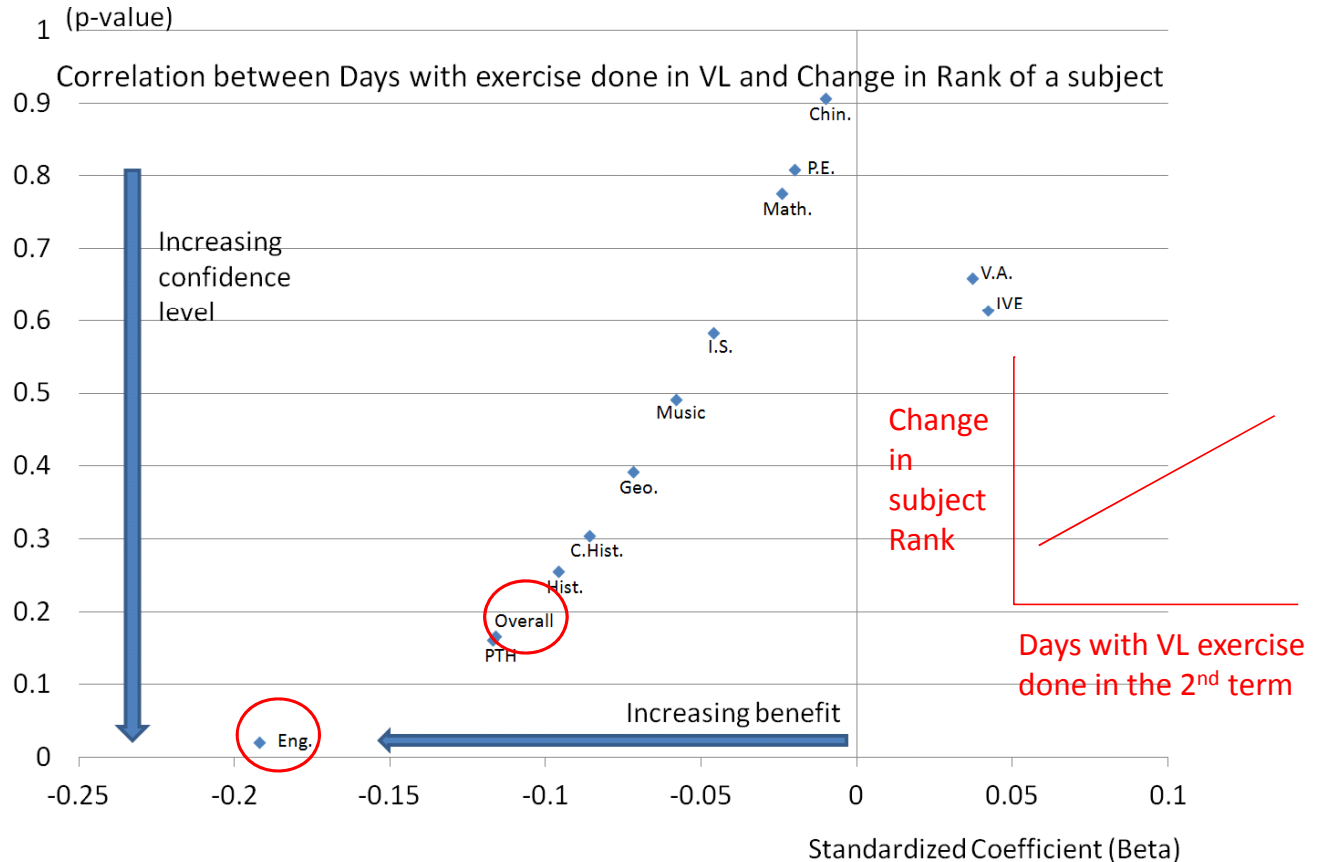
Writing (Application Level)



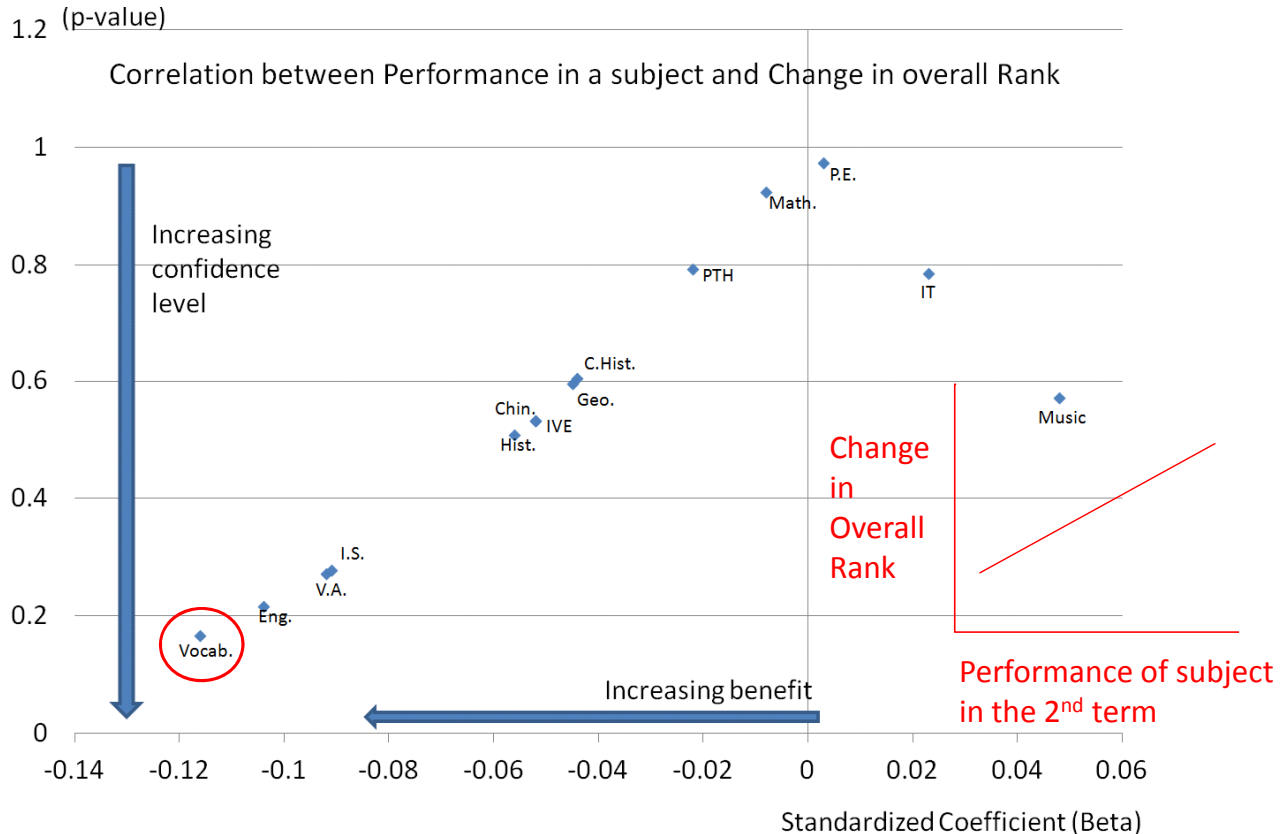
3 years

Reading (Recognition Level)

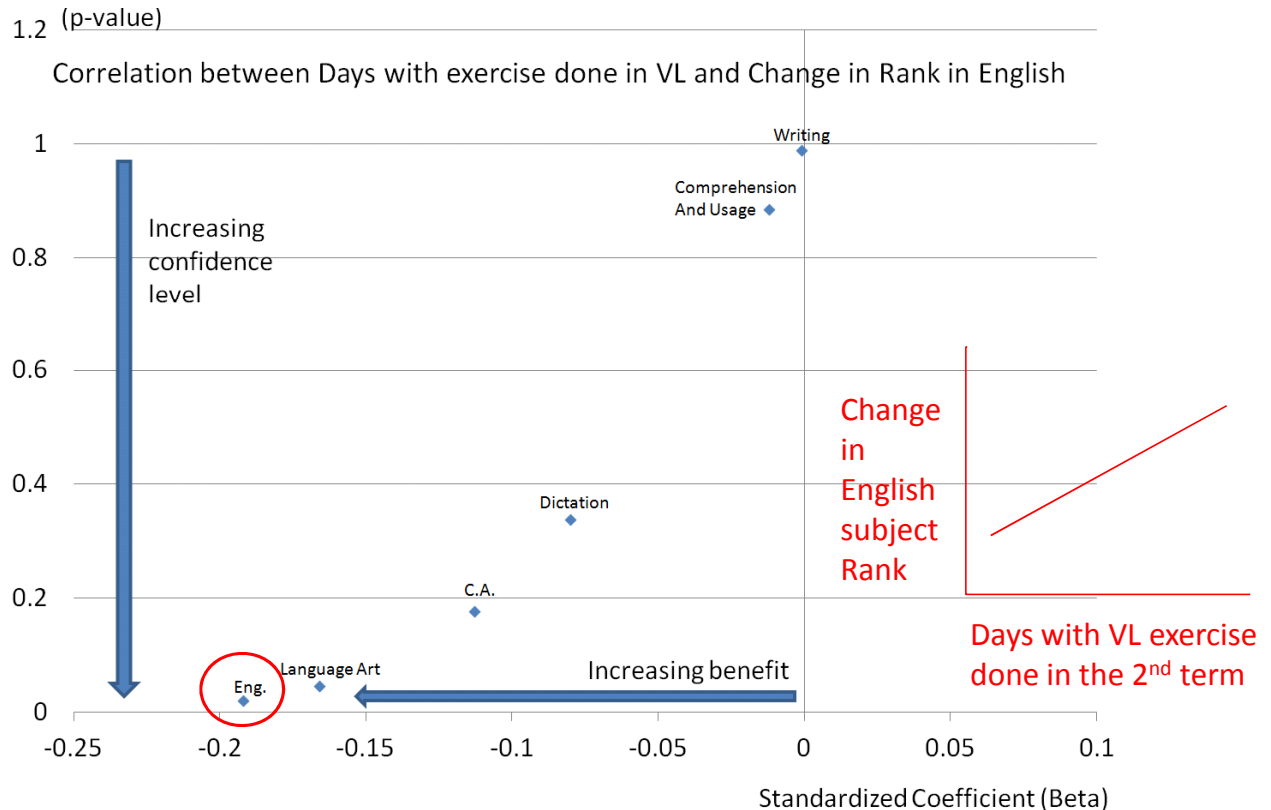
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Q5. Learning vocabulary is not as important as other aspects in learning a language.

- Without grammar, little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed.
- Lack of vocabulary knowledge is the largest obstacle for L2 readers to overcome (Huckin & Bloch 1993).
- Students ranked vocabulary development second only to opportunities to speak in class (Flaitz 1998; James 1996; Folse 2004).

Q6 : The school is using English Builder, and Vocablearning is a duplicate effort.

- English Builder targets to enhance the English proficiency of the students.
- Vocablearning targets to help the student to handle the 9000+ words outside English lessons.

Q7 : Even though the students have marked improvement, it cannot prove that there is no other more significant factor affecting the performance of a student.

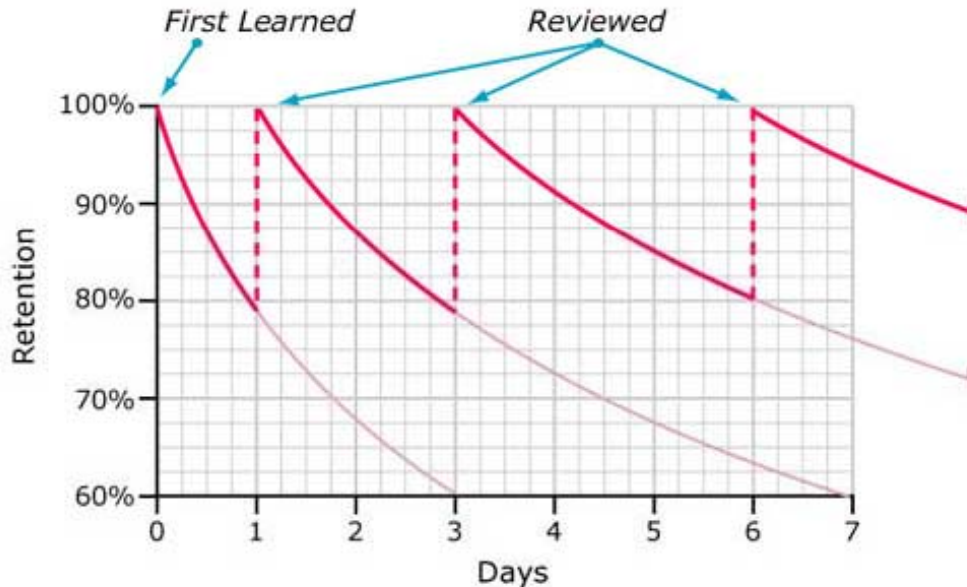
- Scientifically, there is no way to prove that there is no other more significant factor affecting the postulation of a given hypothesis.
- If the query is a valid statement to invalidate a hypothesis or a theory, no one single valid hypothesis or theory can exist in the world.

Q7 : Even though the students have marked improvement, it cannot prove that there is no other more significant factor affecting the performance of a student.

- The data of the project already disproved the hypothesis that vocabulary learning has no or has adverse effect on the learning of students.
- If we need to investigate the effect of any factors not considered in a given hypothesis, a separate investigation is required. By scientific convention, the given hypothesis is still valid as long as it is not disproved.

Q8 : The projected improvement seems to be miraculous and questionable.

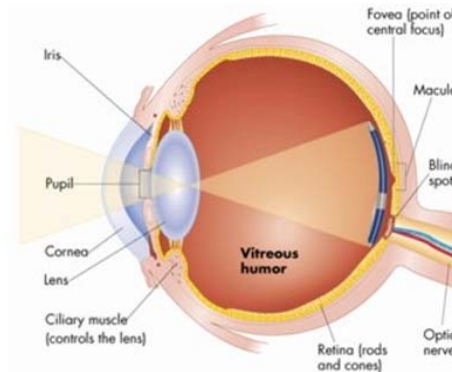
Typical Forgetting Curve for Newly Learned Information



The project works in the way
the brain works

Q8 : The projected improvement seems to be miraculous and questionable.

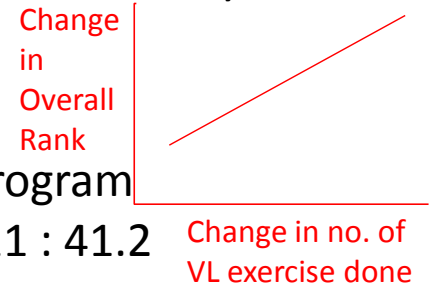
- The project works in the way the brain works
 - Our brain has amazing ability to fill up the missing gap.



- Memory reinforcement is done every night automatically while we are sleeping.

Q8 : The projected improvement seems to be miraculous and questionable.

- In the regression analysis with a p-value < 0.007 , on average, a student has his Overall rank advanced by 1 in the final examination for every extra 11.5 days with the vocablearning exercise done in the second term of 2010-11.
- If the extrapolation is linear, a student can get his form position advanced by 180 places at maximum in his 5.7 years time in Wah Yan.
- Note :
 - Average annual UGC subsidized degree program offer(including early admission) in 2006-11 : 41.2
 - Average F5 enrollment in 2006-11 : 146.8
 - % of students (F5 enrollment) with a UGC subsidized degree program offer in 2006-11 : 28.1%



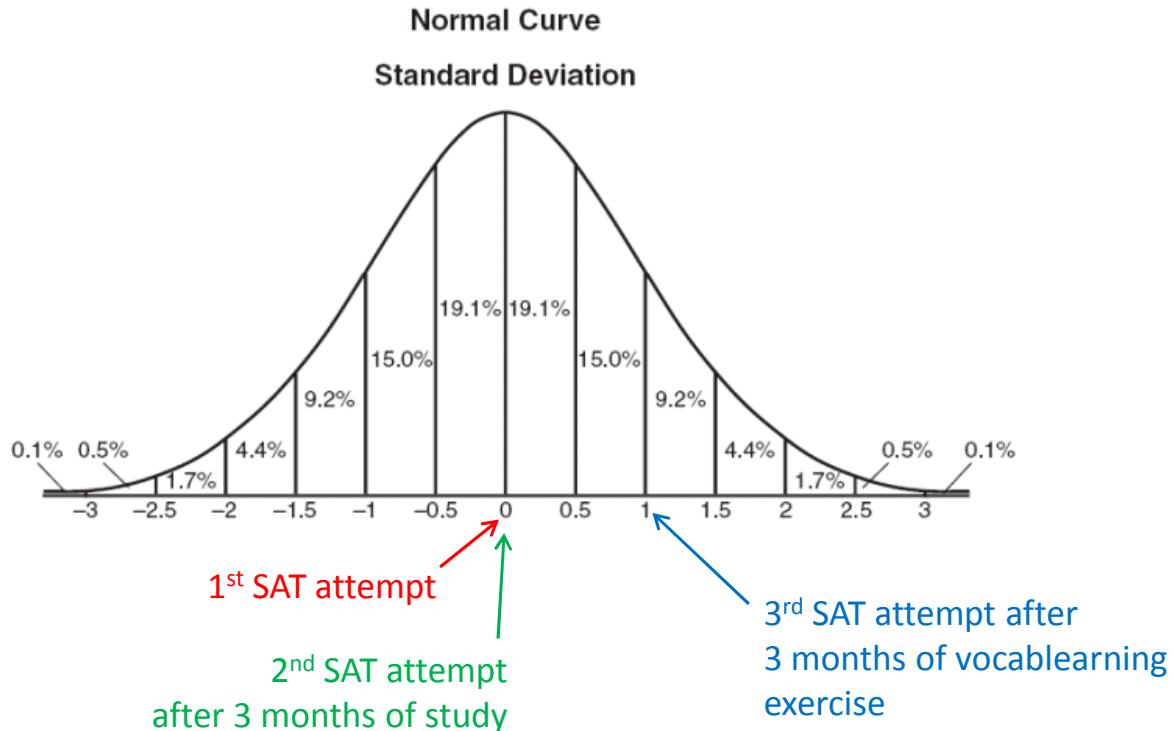
Financial Implication of the project

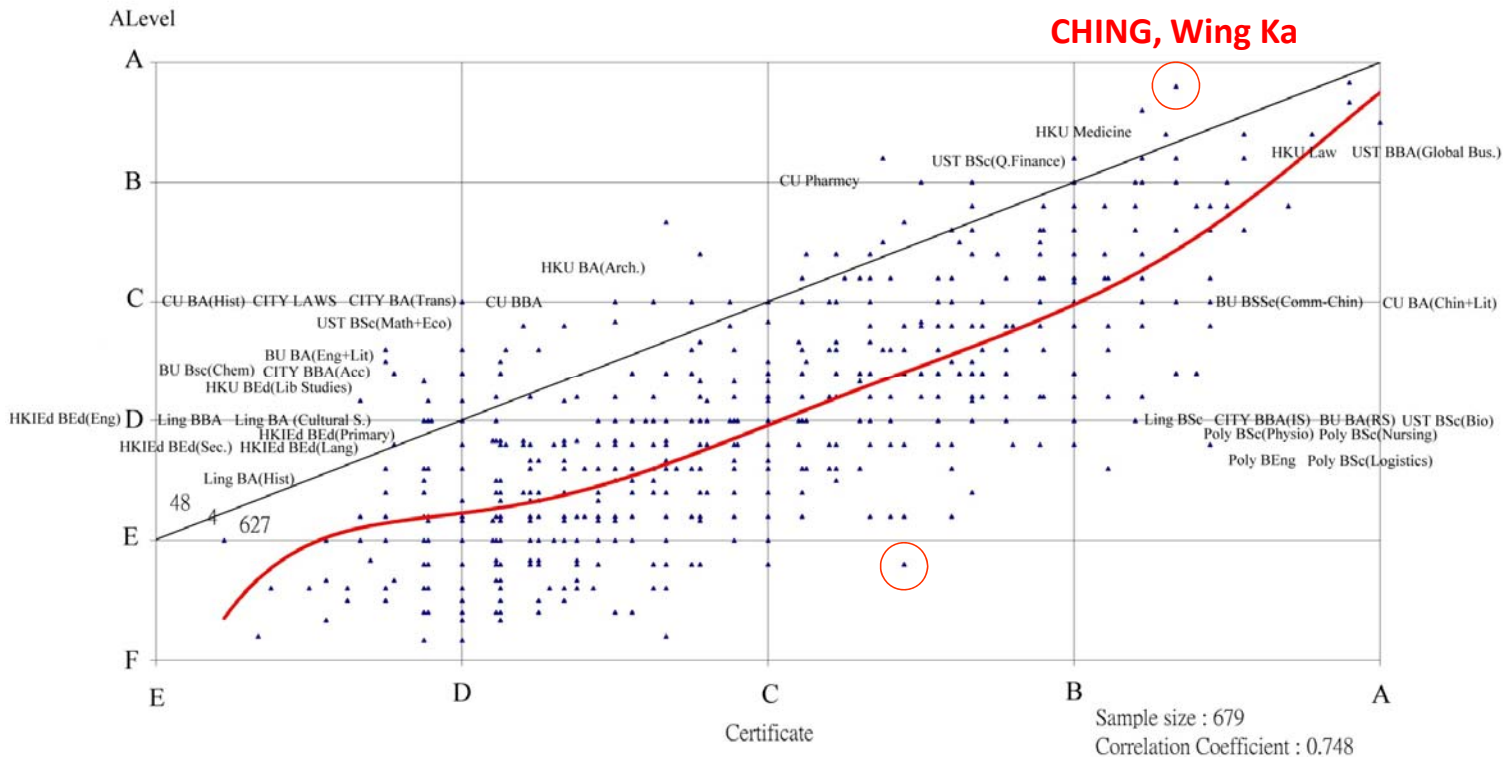
Safety factor / Efficiency	Position advanced	Extra UGC subsidized degree offer (a)	Financial benefit to the WY graduates / year (a) x \$180,000 x 4
x 1 / 100%	180	106	\$76,300,000
x 2 / 50%	90	90	\$64,800,000
x 3 / 33.3 %	60	60	\$43,200,000
x 4 / 25%	45	45	\$32,400,000
x 5 / 20 %	36	36	\$25,900,000
x 6 / 16.7 %	30	30	\$22,000,000
x 8 / 12.5 %	23	23	\$17,000,000
x 10 / 10 %	18	18	\$13,000,000
x 20 / 5 %	9	9	\$6,480,000
x ∞ / 0 %	0	0	\$0

Is the projection too far-fetched?

- Even for a projection with a meager 5% efficiency, the financial benefit is over 6 million dollars a year.
- The practice improves the vocabulary acquisition rate of an average secondary student from 1-2 words a day to 5-10 words a day.
- Try to imagine what will happen if each of the followings enjoys a 5-fold improvement :
 - Efficiency of utilization of energy
 - Effectiveness of waste recycling
 - Purchasing power of minimal wage

How effective is the knowledge delivery mechanism of the vocablearning platform ?





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Wah Yan Scholarship

in commemoration of Rev. C. J. Barré

CHING, Wing Ka	WYHK	2006-07
TAM, Yu Ping Jonathan	WYK	
TSANG, Pui Lim	WYHK	2008-09

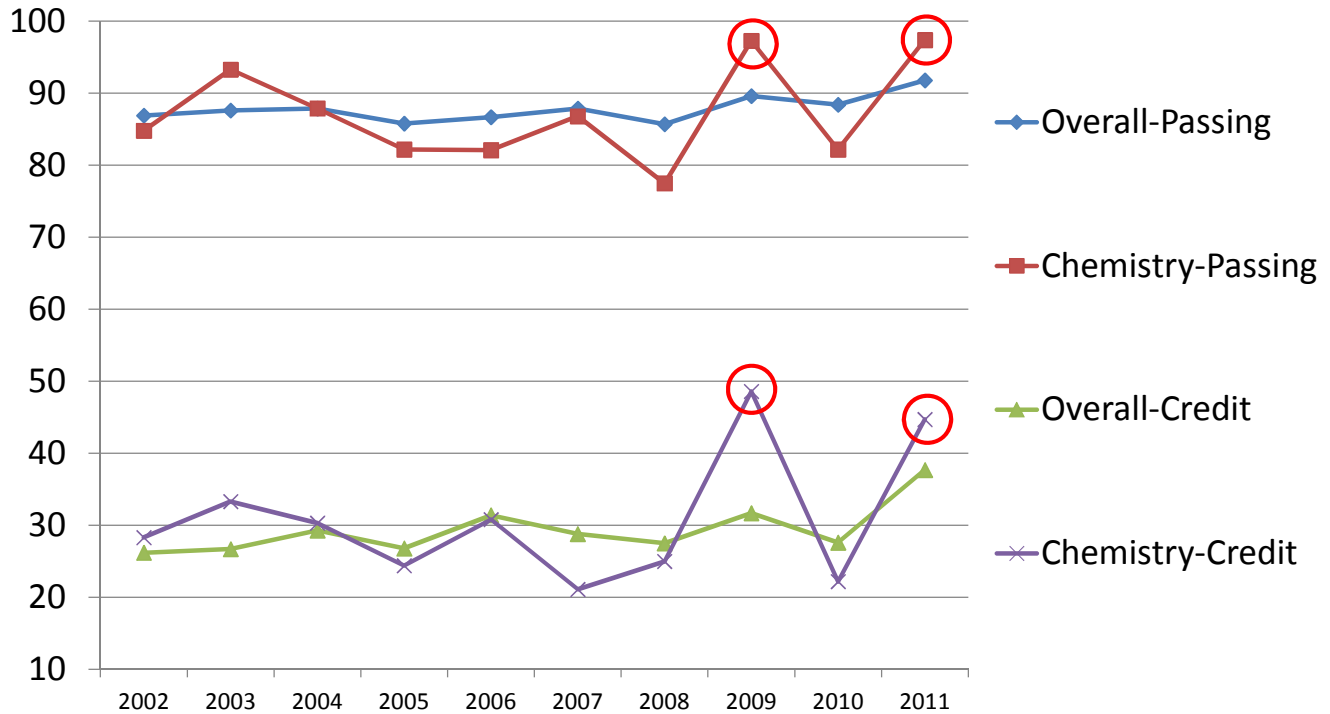
Q9 : About a quarter of the students got an “H” in the assessment, so the exercise should be discontinued.

- “H” students are those with less than 104 exercises done in a year.
- “G” students did more exercise with vocablearning than the no. of exercise required to get a perfect participation in English Builder.

Q9 : About a quarter of the students got an “H” in the assessment, so the exercise should be discontinued.

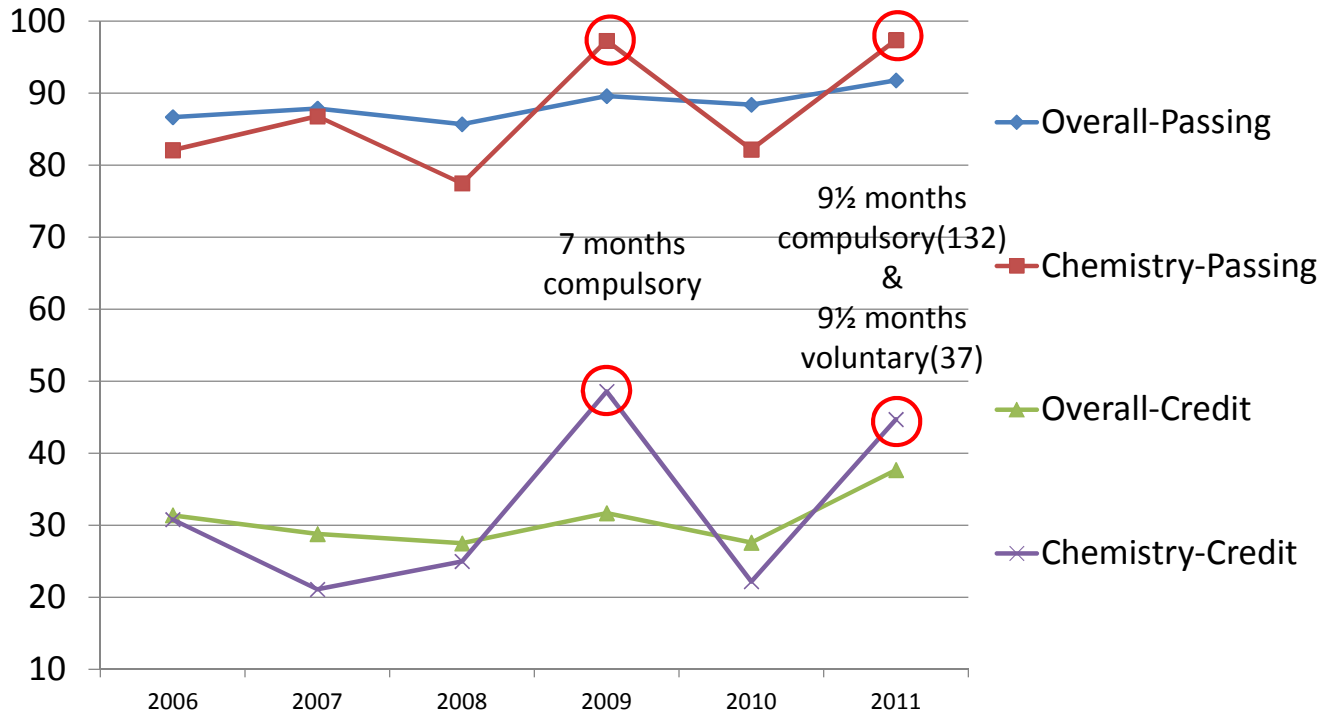
- On average, each F1 student did 164.3 exercise and at least 9858 word retrievals with the system last year.
- The no. of exercise to be done by each student is projected to be 217.4 this year with a word retrieval frequency of at least 13,0000.
- With email and telephone reminders, the percentage of “H” student is expected to be lower than 5 % this year.

Q10 : The exercise can be carried out as a voluntary activity.



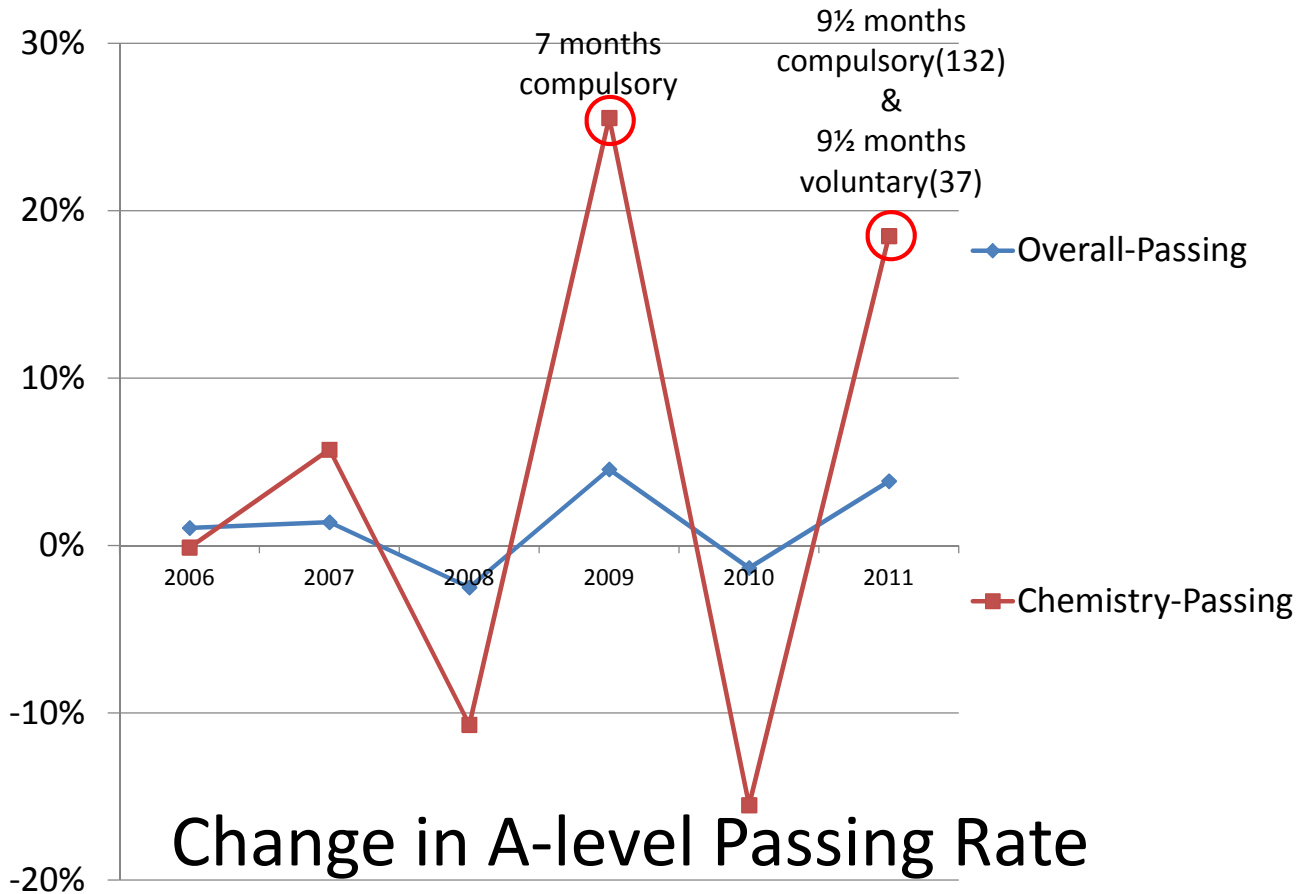
A-Level Examination Results

Q10 : The exercise can be carried out as a voluntary activity.

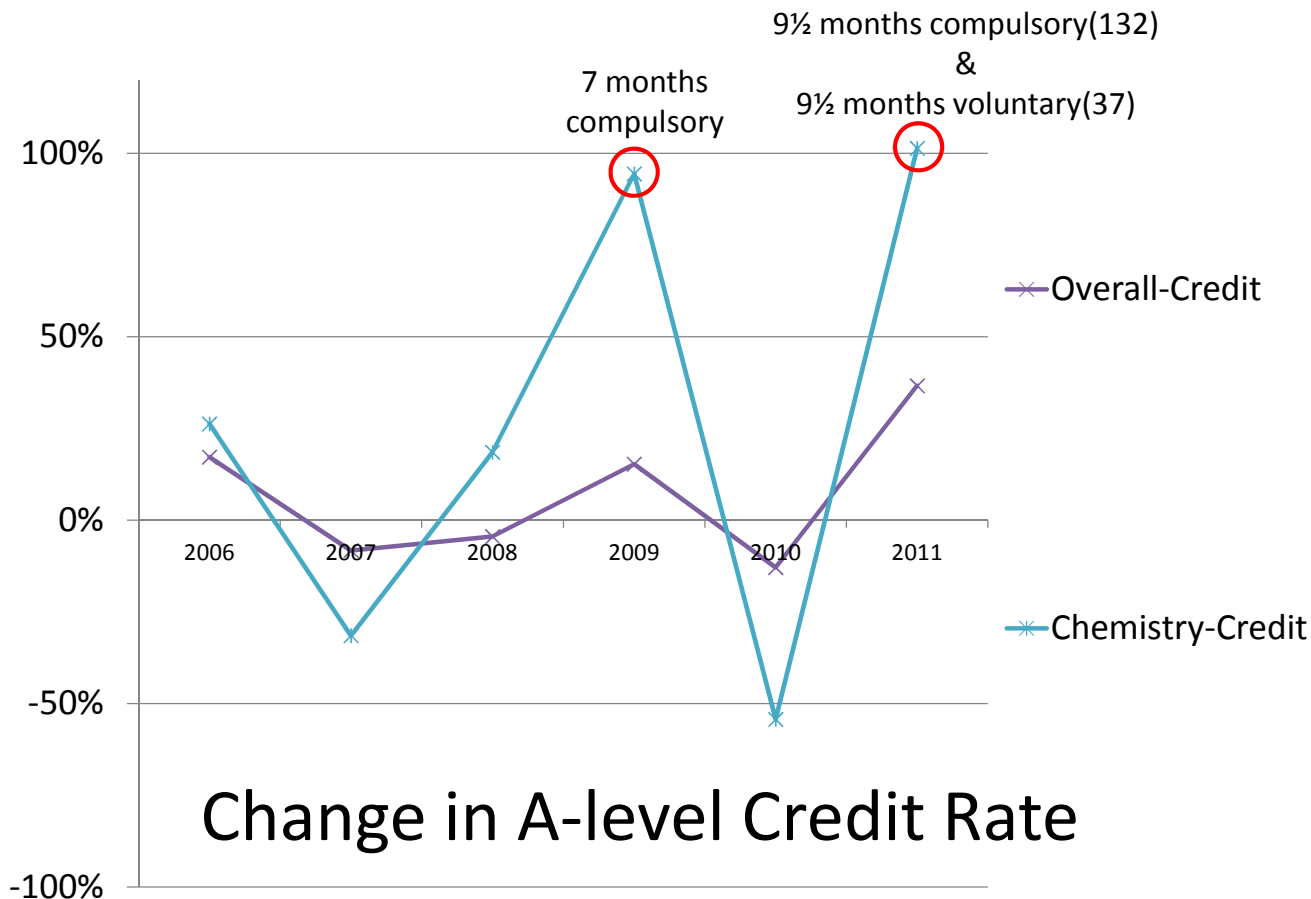


A-Level Examination Results

Q10 : The exercise can be carried out as a voluntary activity.



Q10 : The exercise can be carried out as a voluntary activity.



Q11: The scheme by-passed the formal decision making channel

- Mr. Tam requested me to get the approval of Academic Committee (AC). He said if AC approved the scheme, he would approve it.
- I approached some members of the AC to garner their support. Though I garnered enough members to support the scheme, they had the reservation that Mr. Tam would not honor the decision despite the promise. They asked me to get a written confirmation from Mr. Tam that he would honor the decision before casting their votes.
- When I approached Mr. Tam for the written confirmation, he didn't give me the confirmation and rather approved the scheme straightaway verbally.

Q12 : The scheme costs the school \$4500 a month.

- When the scheme was first conducted, it was Mr. Tam who offered me \$4500 a month for the scheme and I had never requested any.
- I informed Mr. Tam that if money is a concern of the decision making, I have no doubt in forfeiting the right to claim the money. Nevertheless, I received a pay check sent in by a registered mail on end of Aug. The check is still kept in a mint condition and I am always ready to return it to the school.

Q13 : Paul may have financial interest in the project.

- All university researches encourage the researchers to make the product of the research commercially available if the product is welcome by the market. Only by making the product commercially available, a positive cash flow can be generated to enhance the research result and let more people benefit from the research.
- If this is a concern of the decision, I agree to forfeit the copyright of the program to SMC of the school. Without the formal approval of SMC, I will not be allowed to make any single penny from the scheme.