

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES USE OF SUDANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Learning second language vocabulary needs the use of vocabulary learning strategies that have been receiving much attention in the field of second language learning (Schmitt, 2000). The use of vocabulary learning strategies has accompanied the shift from the teacher-oriented to the learner-centered curriculum. In the Sudan context, Ahmad(1988) conducted a study on vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) of good achievers and poor achievers. He concluded that successful learners use wider variety of strategies than the weak learners also added students with high performance use tend to use deeper strategies while learners with low performance prefer shallow strategies. Since then only few research has been done in areas relating to learning and teaching vocabulary concerning Sudanese EFL Learners classrooms. In the present study, the researcher examined 60 university students to a 15-item questionnaire (adapted from Schmitt's Taxonomy, 1997) on the frequency of their use of vocabulary learning strategies. The Data were analyzed by using frequency, percentages and means. In respect to the overall use of the five categories of (VLS), the results show that, Sudanese EFL learners most frequently use Social strategies (Mean score = 10.9). Meanwhile the least used strategies are Memory strategies recording the lowest mean score (5.6). However, students use of strategies in individual items of each category show that they prefer strategies such as "I ask classmates for the meaning of new words" (SOC), "I use monolingual dictionary to find the meaning of new words" (DET), "I say a new word aloud when studying" (MEM), "I make a word list of new vocabulary" (COG), "I skip or pass the new words" (MET).

Keywords: vocabulary learning strategies, Sudanese EFL Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) is one of the basic columns in second or foreign language acquisition. Horwitz (1988) found that vocabulary acquisition was considered by learners to be the most crucial part of language learning. The priority of (VLS) and the related areas of language in second language acquisition has resulted in a progressing number of studies concerning FL vocabulary learning strategies (Chostelidou, Griva, Ioannidis, & Panitsidou, 2012; Nation, 1990; Schmitt, 2000).

In spite of this finding, little attention has been given to VLS generally or specifically in Sudan context. According to my experience, in the case of university students who major in English Language and Literature, vocabulary should come in the first place and then other integrated branches like grammar, pronunciation or communicative competence that will enhance a deeper knowledge of the language. Vocabulary is central to their language development, regardless of what they intend to use English for in the future.

Since there is a lack of research in this area in Sudan, the aim of this study was to shed more light on vocabulary learning strategies used by Sudanese students at various stages in their education. Which is why, the initial hypothesis of the present study is that students in university levels do not use a wide range of strategies that help them learn, store and use new vocabulary effectively. Moreover, Sudanese learners at tertiary level are acknowledged to encounter many difficulties when they learn English as foreign language and one of the main problems is that lack of vocabulary knowledge (Ahmed, 1988). In addition, Ahmed (1988) noted that Sudanese EFL learners have a lack of knowledge in using vocabulary learning strategies and they.

This paper is a report of findings from a study on the preferences of a group of Sudanese EFL learners, at Sudan University of Science and Technology, College of Languages, in respect to their personal use of VLS. Such study could be of great value as it is claimed that students level of English was affected negatively after arabicization (Using Arabic as a medium of teaching) Alfaki (2015)

1.1 Literature review

1.1.1 Defining vocabulary learning strategies

VLS such as memorizing, repeating and taking notes on lexical words are commonly used (Schmitt, 2000). Schmitt observes that beginners use 'shallow' strategies for vocabulary learning such as memorization and repetition, and advanced learners use 'deeper' strategies such as consolidation and determination strategies (p. 132).

The question whether learners will use VLS depends on a number of factors such as motivation, proficiency and culture (Schmitt, 2000). For example, culture can affect their preference for particular learning strategies (Schmitt, 2000). Most learners are used to rote learning and would not be able to get used to a new strategy (Schmitt, 2000). Another crucial factor is to convince the students of the need for strategy training, as a previous study has shown that learners who had not undergone strategy training had performed worse than learners who used their own rote-learning techniques (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, as cited in Schmitt, 2000). Proficiency is also important because novice learners might be restricted to the use of word lists, while advanced learners might guess the meaning of words from the text (Cohen & Aphek,

1981, cited in Schmitt, 2000).

Schmitt (2000) compiled a list of VLS categorized and divided them into two types based on two purposes: 1) strategies that discover a new word's meaning (Discovery); and 2) strategies that consolidate a word once it has been encountered (Consolidation).

The following is a list of VLS from Schmitt's (2002) taxonomy, which includes a variety of different strategies, all important skills in the learner's process.

Determination strategies: Individual learning strategies, which help learners to discover the meaning of words by themselves with no assistance from peers, such as guessing the words from the context (Schmitt, 2000).

Social strategies: Engage learners in interaction with their peers, and this helps them to learn from each other, such as observing their classmates and asking their teacher for the meaning of a word (Schmitt, 2000).

Memory strategies: Strategies that engage learners in learning the new word through mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new word (Schmitt, 2000). For example, if the learner comes across the word "cat", the learner can group the word "cat" under the category of a four-legged animal because the learner already knows the image of these four-legged animals from his/her background knowledge. Another example is that the learner sees a particular action from a kind of sports on TV and guesses the name of the sport because he/she already remembers the actions associated with that sport.

Cognitive strategies: Do not engage learners in mental processing but is more mechanical. An example is repeating the pronunciation of new words (Schmitt, 2000).

Metacognitive strategies: Strategies relating to processes involving monitoring, decision-making, and evaluation of one's progress. Metacognitive strategies help the learner in determining appropriate VLS for learning new words (Schmitt, 2000).

1.1.2 Purpose of study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of university Sudanese EFL students towards the VLS they frequently use.

The specific research questions explored in the present study are listed below.

1-Do Sudanese EFL students' use a wide range of VLS?

2-What are the most frequently and the least frequently used VLS by Sudanese EFL learners?

2. Methodology

This section introduces the participants, research instruments and data analysis methods used in the research study.

2.1 Participants

The present study involved (60) Sudanese university students, college of languages, at Sudan University of Science and Technology for whom English is a foreign language. The students had completed their 2nd year of four, taking different English courses as part of their bachelor degree programme.

2.2 Data collection and procedure

The tool which was used for the study was a 15-item questionnaire adopted by Al-Fuhaid (2004) based on Schmitt's (2004) taxonomy of VLS. It included the following: 3 statements on cognitive strategies (COG), 2 statements on memory strategies (MEM), 4 statements on determination strategies (DET) and 4 social strategies (SOC) in vocabulary learning. The frequency of use were measured by 5-point Likert scales (1=Never to 5=Always)

The researcher adapted this questionnaire, as it used Schmitt's list of VLS, and re-organized all the strategies according to Schmitt's taxonomy; this was helpful to the researcher in categorizing the VLS in the questionnaire for analysis.

The questionnaire was administered to the students during a regular English class where the researcher attended the lecture with the teacher to conduct the questionnaire in December 2018.

There were a top-ranked students, a middle-ranked students and a lower-ranked students.

2.3 Data analysis

The mean scores and standard deviations of the ratings given by the students on the frequency of use of the 15 VLS were calculated and compared. Frequency, mean, and standard deviations of results were calculated using SPSS.

3. Results

3.1 Overall strategies use of the five classifications of strategies

Table 1. Percentage of Overall Strategy Use

VLS	Frequency (Total no. of the respondents =60)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
SOC	10.93	2.93
DET	10.55	2.47
MEM	5.61	2.09
COG	8.21	2.78
MET	6.30	1.48

The findings of the questionnaire display that in five categories, the respondents most frequently use Social strategies as the highest mean score indicates that (**10.9**). Meanwhile the least used strategies are Memory strategies recording the lowest mean score (**5.6**), as can be seen in table 1.

3.2 Use of the five categories

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of strategy use in separate item of Social strategies.

VLS	Frequency (Total no. of the respondents =60)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I ask the teacher to translate the words into Arabic	2.55	0.90
2.I ask the teacher for paraphrase or synonym of a new word.	2.83	1.37
3.I ask the teacher for a sentence including the new word	2.63	1.16
4.I ask classmate for meaning of new words	2.91	1.04

According to social strategies, the results show that the respondents most frequently use the strategy item4; “I ask classmates for the meaning of new words” (mean = 2.9). Meanwhile, the least used strategy is item1; “I ask the teacher to translate the words into Arabic” (mean = 2.9).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of strategy use in separate item of Determination strategies.

VLS	Frequency (Total no. of the respondents =60)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
5.I analyze any available picture or gesture to guess the meaning	2.28	1.2024167
6.I use bilingual dictionary to find the meaning of new words	2.41	1.384167
7.I use monolingual dictionary to find the meaning of new words	3.55	1.335500
8.I guess the meaning of new words from the textual context	2.30	1.2124167

With reference to table3. above, the results show that the respondents most frequently use the strategy item7; “I use monolingual dictionary to find the meaning of new words” (mean = 3.6). Meanwhile, the least used strategy is item8; “I guess the meaning of new words from the textual context” (mean = 2.3)

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of strategy use in separate item of Memory strategies

VLS	Frequency (Total no. of the respondents =60)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
9.I say a new word aloud when studying	2.81	1.504167
10.I connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms	2.80	0.94167

In respect to table4. above, it is significantly that the respondents most frequently use the strategy item 9 of the Memory strategies; “I say a new word aloud when studying” (mean = 2.81). Meanwhile, the respondents slightly less use strategy item10; “I connect the word to its synonym and antonym” (mean = 2.8)

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of strategy use in separate item of Cognitive strategies

VLS	Frequency (Total no. of the respondents =60)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
11 .I study new words through verbal repetition	2.81	1.324167
12.I study new words through written repetition	2.55	1.224167
13. I make a word list of new vocabulary	2.90	1.315500

To promote vocabulary acquisition, the respondents use the Cognitive strategies most frequently by the item 13; “I make a word list of new vocabulary” which has the highest mean score among other items of social strategy category (mean = 2.9). Whereas, the respondents less frequently use strategy item12; “I study new words through written repetition” (mean = 2.6)

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of strategy use in separate item of Meta- Cognitive strategies

VLS	Frequency (Total no. of the respondents =60)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
14.I continue to study new words over time	2.96	1.234167
15.Iskip or pass the new words	3.33	1.224167

The data from table 6 above show that the respondents most frequently use the strategy item 15 of the Meta-Cognitive strategies; “Iskip or pass the new words” (mean = 3.3). In contrast, the respondents less frequently use strategy item14; “I continue to study new words over time” (mean = 2.9)

4. Discussion

Results of the study show that Sudanese EFL learners at college of languages, SudanUniversity, use theSocial strategies in their learning of new words meaning most frequently. As can be seen from table1. Which displays the overall use of the strategies. To make it more clear, students mostly prefer utilizing some social strategies such as ask classmate for the meaning of new word, while the least used strategy is asking the teacher to translate the words into Arabic, (table2). However, Memory strategies as saying a new word

aloud when studying and analyzing the word into its synonym and antonym, were the least frequently used by the students as can be seen from table1.of the overall strategy use.

In respect to the responses of the respondents of VLS of the five categories for each individual item, it is clear that the students mostly use list of strategies like asking classmate for the meaning of a new word, saying new words aloud when studying, using monolingual dictionary to learn the meaning of new words in addition to making a word list of new vocabulary. Incontrast, students less frequently use strategies such as connecting the new word to its synonym and antonym, analyzing any available picture or gesture to guess the meaning and study a new word through verbal repetition. Although such strategies can help to reinforce and enhance recalling and mastering new words, there is a reluctant in using them by the students.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, it is obvious that, Social strategies are the most frequently used by Sudanese EFL learners. Such results indicate that students tend to learn or to acquire second language through interaction with peer students or other similar social strategies in an open and less formal situation rather than using strategies which involve complicated mental activities in a formal classroom situation. In addition, the least frequently used strategies are Memory strategies such as saying a word aloud when studying, connecting the word to its synonym and antonym. This indicates that students have no interests to strategies containing difficult mental process.

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