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EFL Learners' Attitudes towards the Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Najah Mohammed Genaw & Sahar Ali Aljamal

Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that learning vocabulary is an essential part of mastering a language and texts. Comprehension or production heavily depends on the command of vocabulary knowledge and its effects on learners' attitudes. The knowledge of vocabulary is essential for ESL learners since they need effective knowledge of words before they can understand what they read or listen (Teng 2014 cited in Teng 2015). Thus, teaching vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) and consideration of learners' attitudes remain essential issues for EFL learners. This paper aims to investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards vocabulary learning strategies in order to acquire new vocabulary in the English department at Elmergib University. EFL learners' awareness, motivated factors and evaluation in terms of their favour and disfavour on the use of VLSs would be stated.

Key words:
Teaching English language, ESL or EFL Learners' Attitudes, Vocabulary Learning Strategy

1. Introduction:
1.1 Background:

In recent years, vocabulary learning has become the basis of language learning process in teaching English as second or foreign languages. The relationship between learners' attitudes and language learning strategies has become essential. Learner's attitude is considered as an important factor which influences language performance and has received considerable attention from both first and second language researchers. Therefore, students' learning attitudes basically depend on their beliefs regarding language learning. For example, a study by Ellis (1994), has confirmed that when individuals learn a language, it is shown that they have different interpretations regarding how they can obtain a language. Ellis' study has added that they may have thought of the concepts and ways which equip them to learn the language. Specifically, learning vocabulary is one of the most important challenges that learners will face during the process of foreign language learning. "This is because the more words that students know, the more they are able to understand what they hear and read, hence the better they are able to say what they want when they

speak or write" (Shoebottom, 2007, p.150). However, it should be understood that there are differences between using vocabulary and knowing vocabulary. "The main aim is not to memorize the words, but to use the words in different contexts where it is needed" (Baskin, Iscan, Karagoz, Birol, 2017, p. 126). Therefore, in order to teach new vocabulary to EFL learners, they need to be educated with vocabulary learning strategies. For example, learning vocabulary strategies are the greatest crucial component in language learning (Baskin, Iscan, Karagoz, Birol, 2017). Consequently, it is investigated that EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of vocabulary learning strategies in order to acquire new words in the English language department at Almergeb University. It attempts to identify their feelings of accomplishment and thoughts towards the use of the different strategies and methods of learning vocabulary. More specifically, it tries to record their awareness, motivated factors and evaluation in terms of their favour and disfavour on the use of VLSs. An implication for helping teachers to develop vocabulary learning strategies would be considered.

1.2 The Significance of the Research

   Although there are significant advantages in teaching vocabulary inside foreign language classrooms in the English Language department at Elmergib University, very little has been done to identify an effective approach for applying vocabulary learning strategies in teaching EFL learners. Importantly, there is a lack of an empirical study that critically evaluates the implementation of effective teaching approaches and strategies in order to gain new vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, this research attempts to find out the following:

 -Investigate the level of awareness of EFL learners regarding strategies of learning vocabulary.

 -Identify the main factors which motivate and influence EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of vocabulary learning strategies at Elmergib University.

1.3 The Statement of the Problem:

    It is widely recognized that teaching new vocabulary is an important part of the learning cycle, but both students and teachers frequently express disappointment and frustration in relation to vocabulary processes. Students may complain that new words have not been taught effectively in foreign language classrooms. Additionally, students sometimes report that they are not given guidance as to how to use and pronounce new words correctly in order

to improve their reading comprehension in a subsequent performance. However, teachers frequently comment that students are not interested in practicing new words and are only concerned with marks. Furthermore, teachers express frustration that students do not incorporate vocabulary advice into a subsequent task. Thus, this paper aims to review and investigate the learners' attitudes towards the use of vocabulary learning strategies in order to obtain unknown words.

1.4 The Research Questions:

This paper attempts to investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of vocabulary learning strategies in order to acquire new words. This study aims to achieve the following:

1. Does awareness of VLSs influence the attitudes of EFL learners in the classroom?
2. Are there any significant differences in EFL students' learning attitudes towards the use of vocabulary learning strategies in the classroom?
3. What are the principles which influence the use of vocabulary learning strategies by EFL learners in the classroom?
4. Which vocabulary learning strategy/ies is/ are the least or most frequently used by EFL learners?
5. What vocabulary learning strategy/ies is/are actively employed by EFL learners in learning the English language?

2.Classification of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs):

"The learning strategy is defined as thinking and behaviour that the learner applies to influence the coding process" (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986 cited in Baskin,Iscan, Karagoz, Birol 2017,p.127). According to Oxford's study (1990) cited in Asgari & Bin Mustapha (2011), it is stated that there are two main types of learning language strategies which are Direct and Indirect strategies.

A-Direct strategies: which include the following:

1-Memory strategy is to enable the learners' store of knowledge and assist in recalling new information. In fact, this strategy support the learners to link their learning of unknown words to mental processing by relating their existing or background information with new words using some image or grouping format.

2-Cognitive strategy such as summarizing which permits learners to understand and create new language by different means. It is stated that "cognitive strategies are similar to memory strategy but do not focus on

mental processing. They include repetition and mechanical methods such as word lists and flash cards"(Baskin, Iscan, Karagoz, Birol ,2017,p.128)

3- Compensation strategies such as "guessing intelligently while reading enable learners to use language despite their large gaps in linguistic knowledge"(Asgari & Bin Mustapha ,2011,p 86).

B-Indirect strategies: which include the following:

1-Metacognitive strategy: This strategy helps learners to control their own cognitive ability to coordinate their learning process by planning, monitoring and evaluating. It is indicated that "metacognitive strategies are to decide which words are worth learning, plan consciously and find the most effective methods"(Baskin, Iscan, Karagoz, Birol, 2017,p.128).

2- Affective strategy: "to allow learners to regulate their motivations, attitudes and emotions" (Asgari & Bin Mustapha ,2011,p 86).

3-Social strategy: "to facilitate students when learning new words through interaction with others" (Asgari & Bin Mustapha ,2011,p 86).

Therefore, according to the summary regarding classification of language learning strategies LLS in Oxford (1990) cited in Asgari & Bin Mustapha (2011). It could be mentioned in the following figure which explains classification of VLSs.
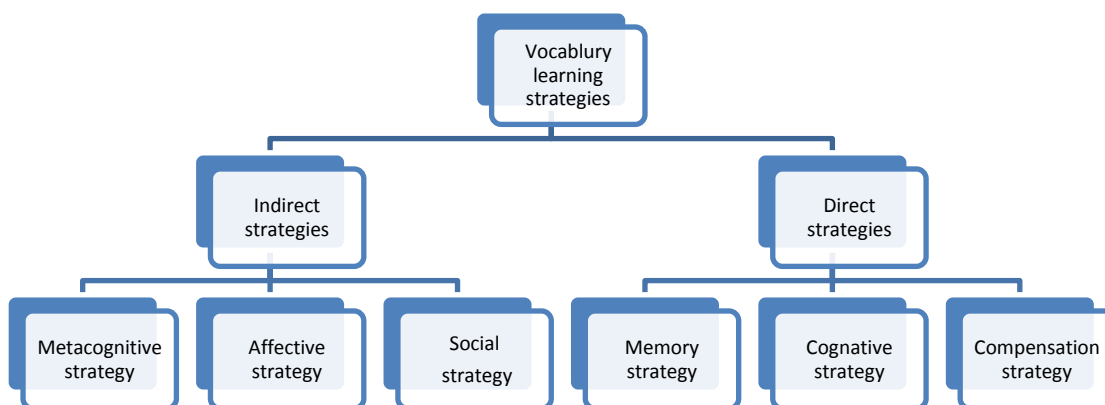
As well as there are subclasses of vocabulary learning strategies such as using monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in EFL English language classes. Further approaches are the use of the CALL programme and using a database, namely Word store. According to Jamal (2016), it is confirmed that teaching strategies of learning new vocabulary have become a main concern for researchers and learners to be developed progressively so they are needed to seek the right learning strategies.

3.Literature reviews:

Learners' preferences with regard to the methods or strategies of learning vocabulary may promote positive attitudes among learners. According to a study by Mei (2005), it has revealed that on average, 69 primary school students in her study preferred the use of picture clues and phonics instead of just guessing meaning from context and in order to learn vocabulary. This was so since the primary school pupils were frequently guided to look at the pictures first whenever they came across a new book. Also, Mei's study has added that teachers' approaches in conducting the classes affected the way in which students learn vocabulary. In guessing meaning from context, one of the teachers only elicited from students words related to the unknown words. The teacher did not assign students to look at the surrounding words to guess the meaning of the unknown words. Also, students have different attitudes in the course of learning vocabulary using dictionaries.

Moreover, Chow 2001 as cited in Ali & Mukundan & Baki & Ayup 2012 has reported that the pre-university students in her study were generally positive in using the English-English dictionary. However, they were unable to make full and proper use of the dictionaries as they only consulted the resources for definitions. Thus, it is found that the pre-university students benefited from the use of monolingual dictionaries to find definitions of a word, although they did not use it frequently.

Another study was carried out by Tan and Zarei (2011), it has confirmed that L2 dictionary users may tend to show negative attitudes towards using the tools when they are unable to conceptualise the meaning of a word. The survey of Tan and Zarei's study has reported that a majority of 40 students claimed that they were effective users of the resources. Yet, they did not see the significance of using helped devices such as cross-referencing and numbering of senses when they used the monolingual dictionaries. Moreover, Fernandez (2008), in her survey which employed 60 Pre-Basic English students, reported that they would rather use the bilingual dictionaries than the monolingual

dictionaries in English classes. They disliked the use of the monolingual dictionaries for three simple reasons : it took longer to look up words, it was boring to look up words and it was a nuisance to the eyes during look-up.

According to Kukulska-Hulme (1998), 1t has indicated that a simple database, namely WordStore, eased the problem of the storing of words learnt. Students were able to engage in a systematic and interactive learning of vocabulary. They were able to record the forms and meanings, share information and remember the words individually. Yet, its use was more suitable for advanced learners as they already possessed sizable vocabulary knowledge. Full autonomy in controlling the pace of learning and using computers to encourage positive learning attitudes among students. It is found that a majority of the subjects when using computers was more interesting than just working with paper so positive learning attitudes can be developed (Ali, Mukundan, Baki, Ayub (2012). In fact, it is claimed that the use of computers created enjoyment and fun in the quest to acquire a newly learnt vocabulary.

Furthermore, the interactive exercises in the learning programme allowed a deeper level of processing of the new words. The use of CALL in learning vocabulary has different effects on students, depending on the nature of the programmes. Iwanski (2000) has compared the CALL programme with the traditional method of learning vocabulary. Iwanski's study has revealed that a hypermedia-based programme produces positive learning attitudes among 82 undergraduates because of the features that were not present when blackboards and overhead projectors were used. The use of the CALL programme can also encourage an exploratory attitude towards learning vocabulary. Also, a study by Can and Cagiltay (2006), it is found that students' positive attitudes for learning vocabulary might be hampered if teachers were unable to master the skills to handle a CALL lesson. This was especially more observable among the senior teachers, who were not able to fully utilise the CALL programme due to their limited computer skills and technological knowledge. As a result, these teachers were not very comfortable integrating computers, in particular, games in their courses simply because they did not have strong technical support. This denotes that it is necessary for the teachers to literate and equip themselves with the appropriate technology and know the CALL programme that will be used in the language classrooms. Their ignorance may lead to ineffectiveness in using the resource to learn vocabulary.

As well as a study by Alghamdi (2019), it is concluded that students learn vocabulary mostly from reading classes and through group work. It has

concluded that teachers are encouraged to investigate their students' favorite learning method to optimize the vocabulary learning experience. A further study by Ali (2020) has given a questionnaire to Saudi undergraduate learners to find unknown word meanings and the most and least vocabulary discovery strategy they used. It has revealed that EFL Saudi learners seem to figure out the meaning of new words by guessing word-meaning through reading different sub-strategies but the least used strategy was the social interaction strategy. Ali's study has suggested that students' scores on the vocabulary test mainly correlated [positively and negatively] with the kind of strategy they used. So it is vital for teachers to design more activities to train learners on the use of effective vocabulary learning strategies.

However, a study by M –akrami & Al-awaid (2020), has investigated vocabulary learning strategies which have been employed by EFL learners at Jazan university in order identify the worthy strategies to make useful pedagogical suggestions. Respondents of M –akrami & Al-awaid 's study have preferred and avoided certain strategies. For example , guessing the meaning of unknown vocabulary or from prior knowledge are the most favored strategies by respondents. Also, they adds that respondents relied majorly on contextual information and environment to understand new vocabulary. Thus, it is suggested that metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies may encourage learners to be aware of their roles in language learning. Also, it is concluded that " it is best to allow learners to learn as it comes naturally to them with strategy they prefer individually"(Makrami & Al-awaid 2020,p.57).

In addition, Asqari and Bin Mustapha's study (2011) has concluded that strategies which require cognitive and deep processing such as putting English labels on physical objects and writing down new vocabulary and the meaning on cards are not mentioned by learners of this study. Whereas applying new English words in their daily speech which are related to memory determination and metacognitive are popular strategies which learners are keen in using them. Also, they has explained that based on the interviews that were conducted, most learners are not aware of the existence of numerous strategies which have been used to learn new words. Also, Alharbi (2015) has stated that the study's analysis measured five sets of vocabulary knowledge such as building synonyms, network and remembering strategy for writing so the group with high language proficiency agreed more on the items selected than those with low language proficiency.

A further point, it provides an empirical evidence for the relationship between VLSs and vocabulary knowledge through investigating a sample of 145 students in a Chinese college (Teng,2015). Teng's study tends to know the correlation between direct and indirect vocabulary learning strategies. His study has found that learners with higher levels of vocabulary knowledge tended to conduct effective indirect and direct strategies. Also the results has confirmed that direct strategies such as cognitive and memory strategies were frequently used by EFL learners whereas indirect strategies such as social, metacognitive and effective strategies were less frequently used strategies. Thus, Teng's study highlights the importance of indirect strategies such as metacognitive strategies of self-planning, self-monitoring and self-evaluating.

4. Research issue:

As it is illustrated above, the attitudes, evaluation and awareness of the English language learners towards the vocabulary learning strategies are important considerations in future studies. The literature reviewed in the earlier discussions have given the researcher some basic ideas about students' vocabulary learning attitudes towards the use of different strategies and methods such as contextual clues, dictionary , metacognitive, cognitive and other strategies. However, the previous studies were conducted to the secondary school students as their sample (e.g. Chi, 1998; Mei, 2005). Another limitation is the fact that there is no study which has empirically investigated students' relative learning attitudes using such strategies in a single study for EFL Libyan learners. Previous researchers have only concentrated on the use of one of the strategies individually in their studies. Therefore, these limitations motivate the researcher to point up her research issue to be focused on EFL learners in the English department at Elmergib University. This is to know their attitudes towards the use of different strategies of learning vocabulary in order to obtain newly learnt vocabulary.

5.Methods & Materials & Research Instruments:

The purpose of the present research is to investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). A qualitative research design has been adopted in this paper to better understand the students' attitudes towards the use of VLSs. The researcher is the main instrument of analyzing the data personally, the researcher is interested in this topic because she has been taught in an EFL (English as Foreign Language) context where it was difficult to gain access to teaching and learning materials of English Language. Participants in this research were 20 from second, third and fourth year students (10 males and 10 females) ranging in age from 20-23

from the English language department at Elmergib University in Libya. They were native speakers of Arabic language background and although they had have studied English before, their proficiencies in English language were intermediate. Interviews were conducted individually with twenty students who were randomly selected from the English department to know learners' attitudes towards VLSs. None of the participants have ever studied in a country where English is the official language. How do you learn vocabulary? this was the title of the interview questions which was offered to the students at the end of each class and consisted of four questions that were multiple choice except the fifth one was a question and answer.(see Appendix)

6.Results & Discussions:

Through learners' interviews, it have shown that EFL learners at the University of Elmergib aren't aware of most of the other VLSs mentioned in the present study. On the other hand, they usually use vocabulary learning strategies in either a medium or low frequency. The common and specific strategies have been used by participants will be discussed in the following sections:

For second and third year students, it is shown that most of those participants preferred to learn new words through reading classes such as reading text books and stories. They have confirmed that reading a lot is a very useful approach to obtain new vocabulary. Also, the participants mostly liked to learn new words outside the classroom where they could use English media such as listening to a song, watching movies, playing computer games and chatting on-line with native English speakers. Thus, the most frequently and enjoyable used strategy among participants was using English media. Participants has confirmed that practicing English language with native speakers from foreign country is a beneficial way since it can help them to learn new words and fix their mistakes. As well as, the majority of the participants liked to use the bilingual dictionary to translate new vocabulary into their first language whereas others disliked the use of bilingual dictionary to do so. Writing the new words in sentences so they can remember them is another way which most participants preferred to use in order to increase vocabulary knowledge. Also, some of the participants liked to work alone when learning new words but most of them liked to work in groups with their classmates so they can communicate and benefit from each other.

On the other hand, the majority of fourth year students preferred a self – study approach so they preferred to plan, monitor themselves in order to learn

new words. Similar to second and third years students, most of them enjoyed learning new vocabulary outside the classroom such as chatting with native English speakers from foreign country, listening to news and reading a lot. It is indicated that most of the participants liked to use bilingual dictionary to translate new vocabulary into their first language whereas others disliked it. A majority of participants liked to interact with their teacher and classmates during group work but others disliked it. Also, most of the participants preferred to put new words in sentences so they can remember them which was a great way for memorizing new words as they confirmed. A further point is that most advanced learners used a combination of the above mentioned strategies to learn new words.

Based on the above, it is found that learning unknown words through working in groups during classroom time, using various English media , attending reading classes and self- study outside the classroom are very useful and most frequently used strategies which are related to social, memory, compensation and metacognitive strategies. Also, it is found that most learners used bilingual dictionaries in order to learn new words, especially for difficult texts in reading classes. Consequently, this finding is similar to the finding which has been done by Asqari and Bin Mustapha's study (2011). Thus, there are popular strategies which learners are keen in using them but there are others which learners aren't mentioned such as Cognitive strategy. Therefore, this research has revealed the most favourite and disfavoured vocabulary learning strategies regarding EFL learners in the English department at Elmergib University.

Favoured VLSs	Disfavoured VLSs
Social strategy	Affective strategy
Memory strategy	Cognitive strategy
Compensation strategy	CALL Programme strategy
Metacognitive strategy	a Word Store database strategy

Therefore, as it has shown above, the researcher of present study highlights the importance of learners' awareness, learners' motivated factors and evaluation in terms of their favour and disfavour on the use of VLSs in order to obtain new knowledge of vocabulary.

7.Conclusion & Recommendation:

In conclusion, it is examined that EFL learners' attitudes in order to use VLSs in the English language department at Elmergib University. In fact, the relationship between EFL learners' attitudes and VLSs has been investigated.

Interviews have been conducted individually on second, third and fourth years students to collect data. Research's findings have confirmed that Social, Memory, Compensation and Metacognitive strategies are the most enjoyable strategies by EFL learners. on the other hand, other strategies are not mentioned by EFL learners such as cognitive strategy. Also, implications have been discussed to suggest how EFL learners could be aware of VLSs in order to gain unknown vocabulary knowledge. In other words, it can be suggested that frequency of using effective strategies which EFL learners enjoy to use, such as communicating with native English language speakers is an effective way to gain a wide range of vocabulary. Practicing different VLSs with EFL learners should raise the awareness of the importance of using VLSs during the processes of learning . Also, teachers should work collaboratively with each other and choose the best teaching resources in order to apply the majority of VLSs in EFL classrooms. Also, studying the effects of culture, home environment and classroom atmosphere could be beneficial ways to better understand the suitable strategy for EFL learners. As well as, clear feedback and suggestions that suit learners' needs along with systematic instructions for teaching vocabulary can be powerful to help learners to reach their goals.

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Appendix I

. Learners Interviews Questions:

A-How do you learn vocabulary?

-Please choose the correct answer: (more than one answer is allowed)

1-I learn vocabulary from:
.Reading classes.
.Writing classes.
.Listening Speaking classes.
.Outside the classroom(friends ,books, movies…,etc)
2-I use the dictionary to help me translate words into my first language.
.Always
.sometimes
.Never
3-I write new words in a sentence so i can remember it.
Always
.sometimes
.Never
4- I learn new words when working in groups.
.Yes
.No
.Sometimes
B-What is your favourite way or strategy to learn vocabulary inside the classroom?

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