

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES: A CASE OF JORDAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The present article represents the various vocabulary learning strategies employed by Jordanian students at Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST). The main purpose of this study was to investigate and find out the frequency of employing vocabulary learning strategies of learners of English as a foreign language in Jordan. For this purpose, a questionnaire containing fifty-nine items was administered to the students of Jordan University of Science and Technology. The results of this study were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results indicated that determination strategies were the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies among JUST students. On the other hand, metacognitive strategies were found to be the least frequently used vocabulary learning strategies among the students.

Keywords: Vocabulary, learning strategies, learning autonomy

1. Introduction

“Without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (Wilkins, 1972, p. 111). The previous statement can be as an indicator on the importance of vocabulary in conveying meanings and expressing ideas. The knowledge of vocabulary is essential part when using second or foreign language due to the fact that one is unable to communicate with others without a sufficient amount of words. A number of leading scholars in the field of vocabulary believe that the amount of words known is one of the crucial factors in

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second or foreign language learning (L2), especially in the initial stages of L2 learning where learners possibly have only a small amount of vocabulary (Laufer, 1989, 1998; Nation, 1990; Read, 2000; Meara, 2002).

Over the past few decades, a number of researchers have shifted their concentration within the field of vocabulary learning and teaching with a greater emphasis on learning and learners rather than on teaching and teachers (Sadighi and Zarafshan, 2006). It seems a sensible goal for language teachers to help students to reach a level of autonomy and make them less dependent on teachers (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). Learners' autonomy can be enhanced by introducing the learner to different vocabulary learning strategies which can be used in developing the learning process. In addition, vocabulary learning strategies help students to be more active and take more responsibility on their own learning (Martinen, 2008).

Therefore, a number of studies on vocabulary learning strategies have been conducted since 1980s as a response to the above mentioned shift (e.g., Richards, 1985; Abraham and Vann, 1987; Nation, 1990; 2001; Arnaud and Bejoint, 1992; Long and Richards, 1997; Schmitt, 2000; Thornbury, 2002; Nassaji, 2006; Yali, 2010). The aforementioned studies have concluded that it is common to find difficulties among students in the receptive and productive language due to the limited amount of words. These difficulties lead to gradually loss of motivation and confidence in learning the second language (Cook, 2001).

1.1 Research Objectives

In the context of this study, the main objectives are to determine the types of vocabulary learning strategies employed by JUST students. In addition, it aims to find the most frequently

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used strategies by JUST students. In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, the questions of this study are as follows:

- a) What types of vocabulary learning strategies do JUST students commonly use?
- b) Which strategies are used most frequently among foreign language learners at Jordan University of Science and Technology?

1.2 Significance of the Study

In light of the results of this study, it is presumed to shed light on the use of vocabulary learning strategies, shed light on the fallacies of vocabulary learning, and reflect upon the beliefs or thinking regarding strategies for learning and acquiring vocabulary items. Respecting to the learners' perspectives, this research helps learners to become aware of their own learning strategies and guide them to self-direct learning by adopting, modifying, and applying vocabulary learning strategies to learning tasks, in contrast to learning vocabulary knowledge from teachers.

Concerning the teachers' perspectives, considerable data about vocabulary learning strategies employed by Jordanian EFL learners will be available to English teachers and curriculum designers. This gives a better understanding to English teachers and curriculum designers about the overall vocabulary learning strategies used by Jordanian EFL learners. Teachers will be able to reflect on whether or not their current teaching method is consistent with the learners' overall strategies. Moreover, teachers will become aware of the Jordanian EFL learners' anticipations of their English learning environments, which strategies should be included to their English curriculum, and what tasks and learning materials must be provided to learners, taking into consideration the learners' contexts.

2. Methodology

The instrument used in this study included a written questionnaire based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. This questionnaire contained two sections. The first part consisted of "Background Information" and the second section included fifty-nine statements containing the various types of vocabulary learning strategies. The questionnaire was used to determine the types of vocabulary learning strategies employed by JUST students, and to determine the frequency of vocabulary learning strategies employed by JUST students.

2.1 Participants

Thirty undergraduate students from Jordan University of Science and Technology participated in this study. There were fifteen male students and fifteen female students. All of the participants were learning English as a foreign language. The subjects were selected randomly on the basis of availability and convenience.

2.2 Data Collection

Before the administration of the questionnaire, a brief instruction in Arabic on how to answer the questionnaire items were provided. Next, the researcher administered thirty questionnaire papers to thirty undergraduate students who were studying at JUST. The questionnaire was administered during one class session with the assistance of the students' professor.

2.3 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the results obtained in this study, The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 for windows was used. Some of the statistical procedures were carried out such as Cronbach alpha, means and standard deviations in order to summarize the students' responses to the questionnaire.

2.4 The Reliability Check for the Questionnaire

According to Devellis (1991), good reliability of the questionnaire will be found if the alpha (α) is at least equal 0.70 ($\alpha \geq 0.70$). After collecting data from the questionnaires, the data were calculated using SPSS 17.0 for Windows. The reliability value was found to be 0.924 ($\alpha = 0.924$), which is much higher than 0.70. Thus, the present questionnaire was reliable and could be used in the main study.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.924	59

3. Results and Findings

The findings obtained at the end of this study revealed that determination strategies were the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies among Jordanian students at JUST. On the other hand, it was seen that metacognitive strategies were the least commonly applied vocabulary learning strategies among the students. The following tables demonstrate and summarize the findings of this study.

Table 1: The Frequency of the five Categories of VLS

Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Determination	30	3.22	1.174	1
Social	30	3.03	1.248	2

Memory	30	2.76	1.281	3
Cognitive	30	2.68	1.325	4
Metacognitive	30	2.31	1.094	5

The above table shows the descriptive statistics of the vocabulary learning strategies employed by JUST students. It indicates that determination strategies ($M=3.22$, $S.D= 1.174$) and social strategies ($M=3.03$, $S.D= 1.248$) were found to be the most frequent strategies that JUST students tend to employ in their vocabulary learning. Memory strategies ($M=2.56$, $S.D= 1.281$) were found in the third place, cognitive strategies ($M= 2.68$, $S.D= 1.325$) and metacognitive strategies ($M=2.31$, $S.D= 1.094$) were found to be the less frequent strategies to be employed by JUST students compared to other strategies.

3.1 Students' Use of Determination Strategies

This section shows the determination strategies which were reported being employed by the students under the present research in order to learn vocabulary. Determination strategies included nine individual vocabulary learning strategies. The following is the frequency of each strategy use under the determination category.

Table 2: Students' Use of Determination Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency Category
I analyze part of speech	30	1	5	3.20	1.375	High use
Analyze affixes and roots	30	1	5	3.03	1.351	High use
Check for L1 cognate	30	1	5	3.67	1.155	High use

Analyze through available pictures or gestures	30	2	5	3.73	.828	High use
Guess meaning from textual context	30	1	5	4.07	1.081	High use
Use bilingual dictionary	30	1	5	3.03	1.299	High use
Use monolingual dictionary	30	1	5	3.80	1.215	High use
Word lists	30	1	5	2.67	1.213	Medium use
Flash cards	30	1	5	1.83	1.053	Low use
Valid N (listwise)	30					

As shown in the above table, there are nine items under determination category for learning vocabulary. Seven out of nine were reported being employed at the high frequency level, one at the medium level, and one strategy at the low frequency level.

3.2 Students' Use of Social Strategies

This section reveals the social strategies which have been employed by the students. Social strategies contained eight individual vocabulary learning strategies. What follows is the frequency of the individual social strategies for vocabulary learning among JUST students.

Table 3: Students' Use of Social Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency Category
Ask teacher for L1 translation	30	2	5	3.70	1.022	High use
Ask teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new word	30	1	5	3.00	1.339	High use

Ask teacher for a sentence including the new word	30	1	5	2.83	1.262	Medium use
Ask classmates for meaning	30	1	5	3.70	1.022	High use
Discover new meaning through group work activity	30	1	5	3.23	1.357	High use
Study and practice meaning in group	30	1	5	2.87	1.279	Medium use
Teacher checks students flash cards or word lists for accuracy	30	1	5	2.20	1.324	Medium use
Interact with native speakers	30	1	5	2.77	1.382	Medium use
Valid N (listwise)	30					

The above table demonstrated that four out of eight strategies reported being employed at the high frequency level. Four out of eight strategies reported being employed at the medium frequency level.

3.3 Students' Use of Memory Strategies

This section shows the memory strategies which were reported being employed by the students under the present research in order to learn vocabulary. Memory strategies consisted of twenty-eight individual vocabulary learning strategies. The following is the frequency of each strategy use under the memory category.

Table 4: Students' Use of Memory Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency Category
Connect word to previous personal experience	30	1	5	2.87	1.252	Medium use
Use semantic maps	30	1	5	2.93	1.388	Medium use

Associate the word with its coordinates	30	1	5	2.90	1.269	Medium use
Connect the word in its synonyms and antonyms	30	1	5	3.57	1.104	High use
Image word form	30	1	5	3.37	1.217	High use
Image word's meaning	30	1	5	2.87	1.279	Medium use
Use keyword method	30	1	5	2.97	1.377	Medium use
Group words together to study them	30	1	5	2.87	1.279	Medium use
Study the spelling of a word	30	1	5	3.27	1.363	High use
Say new word aloud when studying	30	1	5	3.07	1.337	High use
Use physical action when learning a word	30	1	5	2.53	1.383	Medium use
Study word with a pictorial representation of its meaning	30	1	5	3.10	1.213	High use
Associate the word with its coordinates	30	1	5	3.07	1.081	High use
Use scales for gradable adjectives	30	1	5	2.27	1.363	Medium use
Peg method	30	1	5	2.33	1.348	Medium use
Loci method	30	1	5	2.17	1.416	Medium use
Group words spatially on a page	30	1	5	2.47	1.279	Medium use
Study the sound of a word	30	1	5	2.73	1.337	Medium use
Group words together within a storyline	30	1	4	2.03	.999	Medium use
Use new words in sentences	30	1	5	2.50	1.106	Medium use
Underline initial letter of the word	30	1	5	2.50	1.383	Medium use
Configuration	30	1	5	2.50	1.480	Medium use
Affixes and roots (remembering)	30	1	5	2.40	1.329	Medium use
Part of speech (remembering)	30	1	5	2.53	1.279	Medium use
Paraphrase the word's meaning	30	1	5	2.93	1.258	Medium use
Use cognates in study	30	1	5	3.10	1.242	High use
Learn the word of an idiom together	30	1	5	2.70	1.236	Medium use
Use semantic features grids	30	1	5	2.97	1.273	Medium use
Valid N (listwise)	30					

The above table demonstrated that only seven out of twenty eight four strategies reported being employed at the high frequency level. Twenty-one out of twenty-eight strategies reported being

employed at the medium frequency level. No strategies have been found to be employed at the low frequency level.

3.4 Students' Use of Cognitive Strategies

The following table demonstrates the frequency of using cognitive strategies which were reported being employed by the students under the present research in order to learn vocabulary.

Cognitive strategies contained nine individual vocabulary learning strategies as follows:

Table 5: Students' Use of Cognitive Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency Category
Verbal repetition	30	1	5	3.50	1.333	High use
Written repetition	30	1	5	3.20	1.400	High use
Word lists	30	1	5	2.63	1.377	Medium use
Put English labels on physical objects	30	1	5	2.20	1.157	Medium use
Keep a vocabulary notebook	30	1	5	2.43	1.251	Medium use
Flash cards	30	1	5	2.27	1.311	Medium use
Take notes in class	30	1	5	2.70	1.512	Medium use
Use the vocabulary section in your textbook	30	1	5	2.83	1.341	Medium use
Listen to tape of word lists	30	1	5	2.40	1.248	Medium use
Valid N (listwise)	30					

As we can see from the above table, most of the individual strategies under the cognitive category reported being employed by the students were at the medium frequency level (seven out of nine strategies). Only two strategies have been reported to be used at the high frequency level.

3.5 Students' Use of Metacognitive Strategies

This section shows the frequency of using metacognitive strategies among students under the current investigation. Metacognitive strategies contained five individual vocabulary learning strategies as shown in the following table:

Table 6: Students' Use of Metacognitive Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency Category
Testing oneself with word lists	30	1	4	2.07	.868	Medium use
Use English language media (song, movies)	30	1	5	2.07	1.112	Medium use
Skip or pass new word	30	1	5	2.33	1.184	Medium use
Use spaced word practiced	30	1	5	2.40	1.070	Medium use
Continue to study word overtime	30	1	5	2.70	1.236	Medium use
Valid N (listwise)	30					

As revealed in the above table, all the strategies under metacognitive category reported being employed by the students at the medium frequency level (Continue to study word overtime, Use spaced word practiced, Skip or pass new word, Use English language media, and testing oneself with word lists) respectively.

4. Conclusion

It could be concluded that the knowledge of vocabulary learning strategies, that this study presents, could be beneficial for both learners and students. When learners are aware of these strategies, they become more motivated to learn and take part in the learning process more actively. Moreover, learners using these strategies feel secure and take their own responsibility for learning. In addition to these, this study gives opportunity to foreign language teachers to realize their learners' feelings, needs, and interests when learning vocabulary. Eventually, by means of these findings, various vocabulary learning activities could be organized to teach

vocabulary effectively. As for pedagogical implication, with the help of these strategies, learners acquire and memorize new vocabulary items in an easier and more effective way.

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