

## **Effectiveness of Strategy Instruction for Vocabulary Learning: A Narrative Review**

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**Abstract** – Nowadays, it is strongly irrefutable that vocabulary skill founds the stepping stone to language learning and should be at the epicenter of language education, in re to the fact that much cannot be implied without grammar; nothing can be imparted without vocabulary. Understanding the key notions of how vocabulary is acquired can help language teachers be able to dispense more realistic and effective vocabulary teaching. With this thought in mind, it is crucial to acquaint students with vocabulary learning strategies (henceforth VLSs) so that they can do this more effectively. With the expansion of research on vocabulary learning strategy instruction, the question to be posed is whether training in VLSs will culminate in improvement in language learners or not. Thus, based on the significance ascribed to teaching VLSs in the process of language learning, the present paper seeks to cull evidence and scour the effectiveness of teaching VLSs.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary, vocabulary learning, strategy training for vocabulary learning

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

According to Rubin (1987), learning is the process by which information is elicited, stored, retrieved and utilized. Schmitt (1997) resonates and rebellows this definition likewise. Therefore, vocabulary learning strategy (henceforth VLSs) is any tactic which consolidates this generally accepted definition of learning process (ibid).

Language learning is built upon the cornerstone of vocabulary. Communication is concocted from individual words and phrases. In a trek into the distant past, vocabulary strategy instruction was a cinderella term in the study of EFL/ESL classroom (Meara, 1980). Predominantly conspicuous role of vocabulary ken in learning a language has been attested by many scholars and researchers. Celce-Murcia and Rosenweig (1979) verify that communication is much better handled with a good vocabulary size than with a near native grasp of grammar and a poor stock of vocabulary.

Words are outward facades of language by dint of labeling objects, actions and thoughts through which people impart their intended concepts. According to Hatch and Brown (1995), numerous tactics, assumptions, and drills are being inaugurated into the discipline to teach vocabulary. It is continually being recommended that vocabulary teaching should not only be constricted to specific words but also include strategies needed to widen knowledge of words (Hulstjin, 1993).

Strategy instruction should elevate learners' cognizance of learning strategies, make learners abreast of know-how of utilizing learning strategies and avail them of honing self-monitoring skills that facilitate agile involvement in learning process (Anderson, 1991). The strategy instruction is to enable learners to 1) self-monitor their vigor and weakness, 2) discover ways to acquire the target language constructively, 3) hone a broad array of problem-solving expertise, 4) bring to task a prearranged approach, 5) self-examine and overhaul their performance and 6) transmute and accommodate efficient strategies to new milieus (Singhal, 2001). Learners from all walks of life, unskilled or experienced, indulge into strategy schooling (Allen, 2003; Kinoshita, 2003). Most of the practitioners persist that learning strategies be proffered explicitly rather than in implicit form (Anderson, 1991; Cohen, 1987, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Leaver, 1996). The triads of approaches have been posed for implementing learning strategies instruction: through self-study in self-access sections, by coaches in language classes and intensive training programs. Learning strategy instruction is proclaimed as the most drastic method in language curricula (Wenden, 1998).

To compensate for the mass of vocabulary in language, teachers can train learners directly the ways to improve their own vocabulary by teaching them apposite in contrast to simply letting students learn vocabulary by themselves. Schmitt (1997) avows that higher use of strategy is indicative of the learners' cognizance of the importance of the vocabulary.

Language learning strategies is a super-ordinate term to VLSs, ipso facto, for which general learning strategies is an umbrella term (Nation, 2001). Any plan of action that eventuates in the learning of vocabulary is defined as VLS. This prevails on learners to adopt self-direction.

Language learners are in want of training in VLSs that fall into their first aids and order of priority for learning. Many researches acknowledge the number of occurrences of strategy usage and its users for vocabulary learning in much greater extent than those of learning other skills like listening and speaking. However, they are willful to use basic VLSs (Schmitt, 1997). This attests to the primacy of strategy instruction for foreign or second language learning ipso facto.

With the advancement in teaching methods and approaches in recent decades, the goal of training has been to assist the individual learner to become autonomous with vocabulary skill. As it can be seen, well-nigh all learners do use VLSs for learning. Within the purview of class time and with innumerable words in per language teachers are compelled to teach learners strategies for acquiring words by themselves than teach them squarely the words.

Abreast of "learn how to learn" trend, teachers need to elevate students' cognizance of discrepant kinds of strategies they are in need of by introducing the strategies in line with the curricula and the materials they are involved in.

For this reason, a concise account and glimpse of various taxonomies of strategies for vocabulary learning, a guiding plan for training students in VLSs, some words on the urgency and primacy of learning and teaching vocabulary strategy are initially raised. Studies into effectiveness of teaching vocabulary strategy learning will be raised and afterwards some

required consideration to be set for instruction before instigating any strategy training in VLSs is presented.

## **II. TAXONOMIC INAUGURATION OF VLSS**

Language learning strategies are deemed as mediators for crunching information which will enlarge as a result its reception, recognition and storage (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Teachers are bound to make students thrive into proficient independent word learners, notwithstanding a great many counts of words in language. Use of strategies spurs learners to self-direct to a much greater extent their learning, catering to word learning likewise. Strategy instruction can be a part of make-up of any foreign or second language teaching. Many things exist for teachers to galvanize students' skills at learning words by themselves. Nagy and Anderson (1984) go further to add that it will make students twice as many as increment the number of words they would learn.

One of the diverse means to swiftly broaden vocabulary size is to teach learners apposite VLSs vis-à-vis to ignorantly let them learn by themselves (Brown & Perry, 1991). Ellis (1995) insists that vocabulary learning appeals for each and every one of individual learning technique into the bargain. He has expressed his zeal in categorizing techniques and strategies of vocabulary learning aiming to widen knowledge of what brain go through during activity, adding that VLSs is a mediating device for learners to avail them more in their lexical learning (*ibid*).

Various strategies are used by learners to retrieve the word knowledge of a language. Assiduous and rigorous attempts have been made by researchers to group VLSs used by foreign and second language learners. These classifications are put forth by Gu and Johnson (1996), Schmitt (1997) and Nation (2001), which will be shortly canvassed as follows.

By large, albeit the adduced enumerations differ a mite in their categorization of strategies, they all seek to enumerate in a roster widely implementable VLSs. Teachers, willfully or not, happen to fall short of investing time to introduce these due to umpteen numbers of lexicons in language and the class time limits. However, equipped with some strategies proposed in the taxonomies, learners can deal with learning words by themselves and consequently get the hold of a large vocabulary size.

## **III. RATIONALE FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGY TRAINING**

Research has delineated that there exists a close nexus between strategy use and successful language learning. Instruction is deemed as an indispensable ingredient for strategy learning. Cohen and Apeh (1981) reports learners of Hebrew by learning how to retain vocabulary items through paired mnemonic associations recalled vocabulary constructively than those who did not.

In another study, Sanaoui (1995) endorsed the liaison between use of vocabulary strategies and achievement in retaining and absorbing vocabulary items. As regards the initial observation, second language learners of vocabulary were liable to be set into two groups:

one with structured approach for their learning and another without. Group one put to good account their vocabulary learning. They did not place a sole reliance on what the language course purveyed them. They self-initiate into orderly pattern of learning vocabulary by reading, using self-study, harkening to the radio, and watching movies. Persisting on recording and rehashing vocabulary, they learned systematically by using vocabulary notebooks and lists. Group one performed much better than the other.

#### **IV. IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES**

There is no conflict between researchers that vocabulary is sine qua non of language learning. According to Meara (1980), it was a cinderella area in linguistic research for a long time. From 1980s on, however, the field of vocabulary studies has been witnessing much progress.

Myriad of the research indicates that attaining a large vocabulary size is one of the aspirations of many language learners. However, there are different means to achieve this goal. VLSs are burgeoning and flourishing: mechanical/rote learning strategies (interchangeably used terms), use of bilingual dictionary, keyword and grouping strategies, etc. Learners discrepantly assume diverse strategies that give back to them. Some learners canalize their effort into learning words from a list or doing various vocabulary dry runs. However it may appear cliché and passé to some other learners. Notwithstanding manifold of studies spur students to utilize all possible ways to learn vocabulary.

Learning strategies push learners into more self-direction. Self-directed learner is deemed competent to take the charge of their own learning and of gradually accruing sturdiness, engagement and advancement (Oxford, 1990). Chastain (1988) propounds that even if students have the needed learning skills, they may not achieve up to their utmost potential because they may have made recourse to unfruitful and impractical strategies. As Brown (1994) states, 'teaching learners how to learn' is important as teaching is moving toward learner-centeredness and learners' autonomy.

As Nibset and Shucksmith (1986) put it, to succeed in a language, learners need to develop a spectrum of strategies to select of which appositely and mutably to cater for the needs of a specific situation. Oxford (1990) certifies the purpose-specific nature of language learning strategies. For Tarone (1983), deployment of strategy of any kind is believed to be goal-oriented. This trend is developed through realization of pragmatic and sociopragmatic competence in the target language.

#### **V. IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING VOABULARY LEARNING STRATEGY**

With tens of thousands of words to learn, anything teachers can do is to help students become more proficient independent word learners. Compared to ESL contexts, in EFL settings where learners suffer from inadequate exposure to input, teachers can be considered a readily accessible source of input for helping learners surpass their challenging and grueling task of learning vocabulary and also for steering them into the easiest and most apposite ways

of attaining a large vocabulary size which provide them with longer retention and paving their ways to proceed swifter toward proficiency.

Teaching strategy is incumbent upon teachers. It is pivotal and determining that teachers give students the tools for acquiring their own rich vocabulary. Learners should be au courant with the existing strategies if they are to put step in the process of learning.

In point of fact that vocabulary is a welcoming set and not a closed one with a limited number of regulations, learning all the words in a language may seem an unreachable task. Moreover, not all words may deserve much learning investment, as the need arises. Likewise it is the teacher's role to give students direction as to learn independently.

Time limits of class, garnering and fetching resources, references and materials and, the most important of all, the vast ranges of words in each language are the biggest barriers to teaching the most needed and useful words. To make learners cognizant of the different strategies that can assist them in the process of learning, they should be au courant with the strategies that exist. Teachers should then reflect a vivid picture of themselves as active users of word learning strategy.

## **VI. RESEARCH INTO EFFECTIVENESS OF STRAEGY INSTRUCTION FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING**

Results of study done by Morin and Goebel (2001) showcase the notion of how teaching semantic mapping as a strategy assists novice learners of Spanish to recall and order L2 vocabulary. Passing through the entire course of their semesters, the learners did not appear to show any sign of head start over one another in light of number of L2 vocabulary learned, irrespective of the fact that they were exploiting semantic mapping or entering communicative activities or not. However, semantic mapping group overtook vocabulary activity group in terms of familiarity with L2 vocabulary and became adept at grouping more L2 vocabulary by the thematic heading.

In a case study of Britain teachers, led by Grenfell and Harris (1999), in which researchers conjointly worked with five secondary school teachers of modern languages, teachers did experiment on learning strategy instruction in a variety of activities. Three of them zeroed in on teaching strategies for remembering words. The explicit instruction was dispensed on the whole and metacognition awareness of students was honed through a widespread number of consciousness-raising activities. Students profusely and wholly evinced their alacrities and propensities to assume the new strategies, albeit barely using a combination of them. Performance assessment conveyed that the memorization strategies had helped many learn new vocabulary.

Training in VLSs conducted by Cohen and Apehek (1980) and Brown and Perry (1991) had an eye-catching and punchy effect on language improvements. This suggests that a blend of meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies come into effect, while suffering a vacuum of meta-cognition about cognitive strategies lead learners astray or disable them to rehash and overhaul their learning.

One way to make better the performance of language learners is to teach them how to use designated learning strategies. Weinstein (1978) trained nine graders on a wide range of elaboration strategies to find their application to reading comprehension and memory drills. It was evidenced significantly positive that students receiving training significantly outperform those who did not. Cohen and Apeh (1980), in an identical try-out trained learners of Hebrew to use paired associations strategies for recalling new words. They found that learners making associations performed better in recall tasks than when they did not act on it.

In a case study carried out by Oxford, Ehrman, and Lavine(1991), with six subjects, it was unclouded that strategy training enlarge not only language learning process (the use of strategies or tactics and the affective issues involved) but also language learning product (alternation in performance of students). Training had some positive impacts on the trainers. Cottrell (1999) points out through drills, dry runs and tutoring, learners' use of strategies can be self-initiated. The fact of the matter is that there is a paucity of studies on instructional language learning strategy, vis-a-vis studies in other disciplines, which may hark back, somehow, to the ingrained travails in administering classroom research.

Use of a mix of apposite strategies has delineated ripple effect on invigorating and irrigating learning of language, but number of research into strategy amalgamation specifically for word dexterity improvement is sparse. Usage of deep vocabulary learning strategy, such as forming associations and using the keyword method has verified retention better than rote memorization. Sheer ingemination can come off even constructive if students get accustomed to using it. Management of strategy use is of paramount importance. In other words, rather than being used individually, often multiple VLS are concurrently used. As a matter of fact students do dispose to use more than one strategy in learning tasks.

Research on vocabulary learning denotes that direct vocabulary instruction works for most adult learners and seems compulsory, on the ground that students are not capable of acquiring the large numbers of vocabulary just running through four skills (Brown & Perry, 1991).

Nunan (1991) propounds that instruction and conscious selection of strategy by learners are closely intertwined. To put it other way, for sharpness in strategy choice, students ought to be abreast of this sieving task (ibid). The research into over enumeration of the strategies have eventuated into classroom by aiding teachers as to proffer learners ways to select strategies alertly to expedite their learning. Learners ought to be kept abreast of existent strategies for facilitating their process of learning.

To Bialystok (1985), constructive teaching hinges more upon development of the skills, drills and dry run than upon dissemination of knowledge and thoughts. Being conscious of metacognitive strategy assists learners in selecting strategies alertly. Students stand to gain from being taught vocabulary by getting capable of teaching themselves (Sternberg, 1987). No matter how many words are taught in bee, these will constitute sparsely only a small fraction of the words they have to learn or that they in future will need to. These words constitute apparently a drop in the word bucket. It does not matter a whole lot how many of those few words students learn, or how well they learn them. The fact is that however well they will go on learning long after they have exited from use, as we have

discarded them (ibid).

It is agreeable that VLSs are “teachable” and training language learners in selecting VLSs can have long-lasting and constructive impacts on the frequency of use, vocabulary expansion, and mastery in language learning.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

Effectiveness of strategy instruction for vocabulary learning is stressed in re to the fact that there will be an escalation and improvement of learners’ consistencies of strategy usage as long as they are taught.

Studies have showed that explicit strategy instruction is the most constructive one in its kind. Learners are limpidly notified of gain of using a specific strategy and get trained how to put into use and transmute it to other settings. ‘Blind training’, in which students are bound to use strategies without any grasp of it, seems less productive. Research also has shown that strategy coaching is more optimal provided that it is woven into regular class activities.

The effect of ascending metacognitive strategy awareness for vocabulary learning is sealed by pinpointing that if students are devoid of any knowledge of metacognitive approaches they will also be quintessentially learners empty of any roadmap to rehash their advancement, accomplishment, and next pathways.

Teachers need to be cognizant of the fact that learners may repel at the learning of some VLSs because they come from quite culturally different origins. It was found that some elaboration strategies appeal for a justified L2 vocabulary base for making association with new vocabulary, or since some strategies demand greater deal of cognitive effort than others commonly used. While the usage of strategy has scantily been considered invariant, it can be thrown into question due to the dominance of quantitative studies in language learning strategy. So, educators also must endeavor to alter learners’ approach to those strategies which are of benefit to them; however, they should not quench their styles.

Teachers who deploy strategy training often indulge their roles of learning facilitators. Strategy training turns them into more learning-predisposed, demanding and need-sensitive toward students. Teachers, likewise, commence to monitor how their teaching techniques associate well with their students’ learning strategies (or fail to realize this) and ever and anon they would choose to alter their methodic exploiting such scrutiny (Oxford et al., 1990). Apprised by strategies implemented by ‘good language learners’, language strategy coaching is irrigated and seeks to improve performances of EFL learners’. The results are overlapped, albeit altogether pinpointing that blending training with the regular classroom program comes productive, specifically accompanied by four macro-skills. Some pedagogues have considered this, albeit in an improvised manner.

Teachers need to bear in mind that learners should also be notified of the goal of each strategy and of the situations under which it gives back to them enormously. Teachers should not also neglect the fact that some typical VLSs such as using notebook and dictionary and

expansion drills such as semantic mapping are highly beneficial and should be brought in from the outset of teaching posthaste.

In a nutshell, researchers have overemphasized that explicit strategy instruction helps learners get familiarized with the cognitive and metacognitive ken conducive to language learning. Since students categorically grow into using diverse strategies intermittently during their lives, it is reasonable to acquaint them with all strategies and let them pick out one they feel is apt for them. Finally, this related literature implies that instruction and use of learning strategies is strongly recommended to be incorporated into the running curriculum. The teacher should dispense explicit strategy training to students and consecutively supply them with plenty of opportunities to empower them into the use of strategies.

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