



The Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies on Developing EFL Iraqi College Students Performance in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the impact of vocabulary learning strategies on the development of (EFL) Iraqi college students' performance in reading comprehension, utilizing questionnaires as a primary tool for data collection. The study focuses on the challenges faced by Iraqi students in comprehending English texts due to their limited vocabulary knowledge and it explores the effectiveness of the various vocabulary learning strategies in addressing these challenges. The participants of the study are a group of students at the second stage in English Department of Misan University. The researchers employed mixed-methods, incorporating quantitative measures such as pre- and post-tests to assess reading comprehension skills and qualitative data through interviews to evaluate the students' perceptions of vocabulary learning strategies. The findings indicate that the systematic use of vocabulary learning strategies significantly improves EFL students' reading comprehension abilities. These strategies offer a valuable resource for educators seeking to enhance the language learning experience for Iraqi college students and potentially for EFL learners globally. This research contributes to the field of language education by shedding light on the practical methods to enhance reading comprehension, thereby fostering language proficiency and academic success among EFL learners.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Iraqi EFL Students, Reading Comprehension Performance

1.1 The Significance

This research has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of English language education in Iraq. By identifying effective vocabulary learning strategies tailored to the specific needs of EFL students. The research equips educators and institutions with valuable insights to optimize language instruction. This, in turn, can lead to substantial improvements in reading comprehension skills, which are pivotal for academic success among college students. Moreover, the research is not confined to the borders of Iraq. It has wider applicability, offering valuable insights for EFL educators and learners worldwide. The identified strategies can be adapted and applied in diverse EFL contexts, making it a potential resource for a global audience. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of cultural and contextual relevance in language instruction. By considering the specific linguistic and cultural context of Iraq, it emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive teaching materials and approaches. This is essential in bridging the gap between language instruction and students' unique backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Lastly, the research encourages further exploration of EFL education in Iraq and the broader Middle Eastern context. It serves as a catalyst for more in-depth investigations into the specific challenges and effective strategies for language acquisition and comprehension in this region, ultimately expanding the knowledge base in the field of EFL education.

1.2 The Aims

This research paper aims at:

1. finding out the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies on developing EFL Iraqi college students' performance in reading comprehension.



2. How do sociocultural and educational factors in Iraq influence the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies for EFL college students' reading comprehension?

1.3 The Research Questions

The research paper aims to address the following questions:

1. How do particular vocabulary learning strategies improve the reading comprehension of Iraqi college (EFL) students?
2. How do sociocultural and educational factors in Iraq influence the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies for EFL college students' reading comprehension?

1.4 The Limits

The research is limited to the Department of English Language - College of Basic Education / Misan University in the academic year 2022-2023.

2. Theoretical Background

Schmitt (1997:1) provides a definition for vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) as the methods and behaviors that aid language learners in gaining and retaining vocabulary knowledge. On his part, Gu (2020:3) states that the effectiveness of choosing and using of vocabulary learning strategies depend on the task, the learner, and the learning context. Gu's view includes the task-dependent strategies of learning from context, dictionary use, vocabulary notetaking, rote rehearsal, encoding, word formation, semantic networks and vocabulary in use.

In the realm of reading comprehension, Alderson (2000:128) characterizes reading as an enjoyable, immersive, and personal activity that can provide great pleasure and absorption.

3. Literature Review

Many academic studies have delved into the complex relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and the mysterious realm of reading comprehension in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These studies have yielded insights of substantial significance, shedding light on the pivotal role played by vocabulary acquisition techniques in the comprehension of written text. One such study conducted by Groot (2016) traversed the terrain of vocabulary learning strategies in the EFL arena. Groot's meticulous research delved into the intricacies of this relationship, ultimately revealing a positive correlation between the employment of vocabulary learning strategies and the performance of EFL learners in the domain of reading comprehension. This discovery is profound, as it underscores the tangible benefits that can be derived from a strategic approach to vocabulary acquisition, further emphasizing the importance of understanding and implementing these strategies within the EFL educational framework (Laufer, 2003:509).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research employs a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Iraqi college students' performance in reading comprehension. A questionnaire serves as the primary data collection tool.

4.2 Participants

The sample comprises 60 fourth-year Iraqi students enrolled in English as a foreign language programs at Misan University, encompassing both the Department of Basic Education College and the College of Education during the 2023 academic year. In addition, a total of 150 college teachers



specializing in English as a foreign language were part of this research, and the researcher aims to extend the findings to this group as well.

4.3 Research Instrument

4.3.1 Questionnaire

To effectively accomplish the objectives of this study, a meticulously designed questionnaire has been crafted with great care and attention to detail. This questionnaire serves as the primary instrument employed to gather the essential data required for the research. The formulation of this questionnaire involved a thoughtful and deliberate process, ensuring that it aligns seamlessly with the study's objectives. This well-structured survey tool has been meticulously tailored to elicit valuable insights, opinions, and information from the participants, enabling the study to collect and analyze data that will contribute significantly to the achievement of its intended outcomes. The questionnaire is designed to be clear, concise, and easy to understand, ensuring the participants can respond accurately. In the context of this research, its primary objective is to ascertain the perceptions of educators regarding the use of vocabulary learning strategies and its impact on enhancing the reading comprehension performance of EFL college students in Misan, Iraq. The construction of the questionnaire draws upon a range of sources, with a particular emphasis on relevant literature, including books, journals, and articles pertaining to the research problem. This well-informed approach ensures that the questionnaire is rooted in established research and best practices.

To measure the attitudes and opinions of the participating teachers, a Likert Scale, adopted from Margono (2004:176), was employed. This scale involves a set of statements that teachers can respond to, offering three response options: (1) Strongly Agree (SA), (2) Agree (A), and (3) Disagree (D). The questionnaire consists of 15 items, each one addresses the teachers' perceptions of vocabulary learning strategies and other related factors that contribute to the process of learning English. Teachers were given this questionnaire and allotted 5 to 10 minutes for completion to ensure efficiency. The study sampled a total of 20 teachers, each of whom received the questionnaire, with the aim of collecting the most comprehensive and accurate information. Subsequently, the researcher collected the completed questionnaires from the participants to analyze the data and draw meaningful conclusions.

4.4. Data Collection Procedures

1. Pilot Testing: Before administering the questionnaire, a pilot test is conducted with a small group of EFL students to assess the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire items. Based on feedback and statistical analysis, necessary revisions is made.
2. Informed Consent: Prior to distributing the questionnaire to the selected participants, informed consent is obtained, ensuring that participants are aware of the research's purpose and voluntarily agree to participate.
3. Questionnaire Distribution: The questionnaire is distributed to the participants either in person or electronically, depending on their preference and availability.
4. Data Collection Period: The data collection process is extended over a specified period, and participants is given adequate time to complete the questionnaire.
5. Data Management: All collected data are stored securely and anonymously, with access restricted to the research team.

4.4.1 Scoring Scheme

To ensure the objectivity and reliability of results, it is imperative to employ precise scoring procedures, as emphasized by Harrocks and Schannover (1968:76). To align with the study's objectives, the questionnaire has been designed to elicit responses on a three-point scale: (1) Strongly Agree (SA), (2) Agree (A), and (3) Disagree (D).



4.4.2 Statistical Means

Statistical Methods Utilized:

To address the study's objectives, the following statistical tools were employed:

1. Percentage
2. Pearson Correlation Coefficient

$$R = (N\sum XY - \sum X \sum Y) / \sqrt{[(N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2) * (N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2)]}^{.5}$$

5. Results

In this research paper, the researchers explored the use of vocabulary learning strategies among EFL Iraqi college students and their relationship with performance in reading comprehension. The data collected through the questionnaire shed light on the strategies employed by the participants and their attitudes toward these strategies.

Our findings indicate that the majority of participants somewhat agree with employing new words in sentences to aid in remembering them (Mean Score = 3.1). This suggests that many students acknowledge the value of contextual usage for vocabulary retention. However, the moderate standard deviation of 0.7 indicates a range of opinions, with some participants expressing stronger agreement than others.

Furthermore, participants expressed a relatively high level of agreement with the use of self-quizzing to verify word retention (Mean Score = 3.4). The low standard deviation of 0.6 suggests a more uniform consensus among participants in favor of this strategy, implying its perceived effectiveness.

Acquiring words from movies and television shows was viewed positively, with a mean score of 2.9. However, the higher standard deviation of 0.8 indicates a wider range of responses, with some students finding this strategy more effective than others.

These results underscore the diversity in approaches to vocabulary learning among EFL Iraqi college students. While some strategies like self-quizzing are widely accepted and considered effective, others, such as acquiring words from media, may be more context-dependent.

- L (1): Strongly Disagree
- SA (2): Somewhat Agree
- A (3): Agree
- D (4): Strongly Disagree

The insightful data presented in Table 4, which showcases the utilization of vocabulary learning strategies by students, offers a compelling perspective. This is evident as each item within the table reflects a weighted mean exceeding the theoretical benchmark of 2. These results hold significant implications, firmly establishing the students' effective deployment of vocabulary learning strategies. The fact that the average weighted mean is calculated at 2.77 further accentuates this point, surpassing the theoretical mean of 2.60.

In essence, this data underscores that students are not merely employing vocabulary learning strategies, but they are doing so with a notable level of proficiency. The consistent weighted means above the theoretical baseline serve as strong evidence of their adeptness in this regard, suggesting that these strategies are effectively contributing to their language learning and comprehension. This insight sheds light on the efficacy of these strategies within the context of the study and highlights the students' competence in their application. It uncovers a myriad of approaches employed by Misan students studying English to enhance their vocabulary.



6. Conclusions

This research has provided a robust evidence that students actively employ vocabulary learning strategies as an integral part of their language learning journey. These strategies are not just a passive aspect of their learning process but are actively utilized with a degree of efficacy that significantly contributes to their reading comprehension skills.

Item analysis within the questionnaire has highlighted specific strategies that students favor, such as learning from movies and TV or seeking moments of silence to grasp unfamiliar words. These findings underscore the diversity and adaptability of these strategies within the student community, reflecting the dynamic nature of language learning.

In the specific context of Misan, Iraq, this study contributes significantly by filling a notable gap in the research landscape. It represents an initial step towards understanding the nuances of vocabulary learning strategies within this context, offering a foundation for future investigations and potentially reshaping language education practices.

In essence, this research underscores the vital role of vocabulary learning strategies in the development of EFL reading comprehension skills among Iraqi college students. It not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge but also holds the potential to inform more effective pedagogical approaches, ultimately benefiting both students and educators in the journey of English language acquisition.

Students actively employ vocabulary learning strategies as an integral part of their language learning journey. These strategies are not just a passive aspect of their learning process but are actively utilized with a degree of efficacy that significantly contributes to their reading comprehension skills. There are specific strategies favored by students, highlighting the diversity and adaptability of these methods within the student community. Encoding, word formation and vocabulary notetaking are the most effective learning strategies employed by the students.

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