

Vocabulary Learning Strategies Employed by English as Foreign Language Students at NBU University

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ABSTRACT

Learning vocabulary is a challenging task for female English as a foreign language (EFL) students. Thus, improving students' knowledge of vocabulary is critical if they are to make progress in learning a new language. The current study aimed at exploring the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at Northern Border University (NBU). It also aimed to identify the mechanisms applied by EFL students at NBU University to learn vocabulary. It also aimed at evaluating the approaches adopted by EFL female students at Northern Border University (NBU) to learn a language. The study adopted the descriptive-analytical method. Two research instruments were developed to collect data namely, a survey questionnaire on vocabulary learning strategies was used to collect data from the students on the strategies that they used to learn vocabulary. Also, the researcher used a semi-structured interview to assess and collect qualitative data about the effectiveness of the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at NBU University. Results of this study revealed that the students preferred the cognitively demanding techniques over the techniques currently in use, along with the memory strategies. The study also showed that social strategies are rarely implemented in teaching vocabulary these days.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Strategies, EFL Female Students, Vocabulary Learning.

استراتيجيات نعل المفردات النلي يسندمها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في جامعة الحدود الشمالية

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المستخلص

يعد تعلم المفردات أحد المهام المعقدة لطالبات اللغة الإنجليزية، وبالتالي، فإن تحسين معرفة الطلاب بالمفردات اللغوية أمر بالغ الأهمية من أجل تحقيق تقدم في تعلم اللغة؛ ومن ثم هدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات المستخدمة من قبل طالبات اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة الحدود الشمالية، بالإضافة إلى التعرف على الآليات التي يطبقها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في جامعة الحدود الشمالية لتعلم المفردات، أيضاً عمدت الدراسة الحالية إلى تقييم الأساليب التي يتبناها طالبات اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة في تعلم المفردات، ولقد تبنت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي للإجابة عن أسئلة البحث، كما استخدمت مجموعة من الأدوات لجمع البيانات وهي: استبيان حول استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات لجمع بيانات من الطلاب حول الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة لتعلم المفردات والمقابلات شبة المقيدة مع الطلاب لتقييم وجمع البيانات الكيفية حول فاعلية استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات المستخدمة من قبل الطلاب بجامعة الحدود الشمالية، أوضحت نتائج هذه الدراسة تفضيل الطلاب للأساليب المعرفية المعتمدة على الدماغ عن التقنيات المستخدمة حالياً جنباً إلى جنب مع استراتيجيات الذاكرة، كما أظهرت الدراسة أن الاستراتيجيات الاجتماعية نادراً ما يتم استخدامها في تدريس المفردات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات، طالبات اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية، تعلم المفردات.

1. Introduction

The world has effectively shrunk to the size of a small village which is marked by a remarkable advance in global communication, and, for this reason, a language is a critical tool for fostering discourse and comprehension between cultures and civilizations. The ability to speak the language of other nations is considered a strong and influential tool and is of immense value to individuals. Languages are essential components of the world, especially English, which is regarded as a bridge that connects nations and facilitates transactions around the world (Al Ouq & Marwa, 2017).

The ability to communicate effectively in a second language is considered a significant competence today. The desire to learn a new language and develop a range of talents such as educational skills has led to the inclusion in many countries of second language teaching in high schools and university curricula. The development of interpersonal communication skills while learning another language enhances self-confidence which leads to increased employment and higher education opportunities. It also enhances how students learn to read and write resulting in improved academic performance (Hayrettin, 2015). In the same vein, being proficient in English is a basic knowledge required as an integral part of the information revolution and advances in scientific research. It is the language of sciences, discoveries, computers, technology, and the internet. Moreover, it provides access to global opportunities to those who speak it fluently, which means that one in every five people speaks English or at least understands it (Alhaysony, 2017).

Thus, to obtain English language proficiency, learners must acquire basic skills, such as listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking, and writing. Each skill can be taught in diverse ways using various innovative strategies. In the past two decades, English language

education has witnessed changes and innovations that have changed how English is taught. Current views of English teaching are influenced by the regression model, emphasis on the importance of the holistic skills and new knowledge of English, as well as the value of teaching multiple language skills in an integrated context

(König et al., 2016).

Similarly, as a language, English is popular at the international level and is the official language in 30 countries. It is an international language that combines world cultures, facilitates cultural exchanges, and recognises race and religions throughout the world. There are many benefits to being proficient in English

(König, et al., 2016).

2. Literature Review

The Benefits of Learning English Cultural Promotion

Language learning permits learners to share experiences and knowledge with others, which, in turn, promotes cultural understanding and, through culture, people construct relationships with others in different countries. Being able to communicate in English also facilitates the understanding of other cultures, heritages, and popular traditions around the world (Al-Khanaifisaw, 2016).

Enhanced Communication

Visiting a foreign country is much easier when an individual has the ability to communicate well in more than one language fluently. People who master more than one language can easily read newspapers and news and are good at interacting with others (Al-Dilaimy, 2012). Enhanced communication is related to using the available methods of communication to ensure understanding and meaning in a meaningful way.

Enhanced Intelligence and Analytical Ability

In this respect, studies have indicated that learning a foreign language improves brain function, resulting in enhanced intelligence through increased awareness of the different meanings of words, as a result of that accelerating more effective communication via several different linguistic systems. This helps people to counter difficulties and develop effective solutions (Mirzaei et al., 2015). In addition, proficiency in English leads to an improvement in analytical abilities, work skills, creativity, and the problem-solving abilities of learners (Yang et al., 2016).

Multitasking

Multilingual individuals transition quickly between different tasks and are skillful at multitasking. In one study, multilingual participants were asked to drive using a simulation device. The results showed that they were shown to successfully perform other tasks at the same time, and their performance was superior to that of the other participants (Horner, & Weber, 2017).

Education and Business

English is frequently used on websites; therefore, knowledge of English allows for an enhanced understanding of the content and nature that provides opportunities for participation in business, medicine, law, technology, industry, and marketing. In addition, in the field of education, the knowledge of the English language affords individuals a greater opportunity to pass standard examinations. Namely, English proficiency enhances listening skills through which it is possible to recognise the interrelationships between language and human nature (Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016). This is considered a broad and complicated process of interaction.

Language Acquisition Through Vocabulary Learning Strategies

An optimal way of obtaining new knowledge of a foreign language is to rely on the use of effective vocabulary learning strategies. Vocabulary learning strategies are defined as 'learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner'. The two main vocabulary learning strategies are incidental learning, which involves the acquisition of new vocabulary in a certain context, and direct intentional learning which give specific focused training on vocabulary learning skills and could have equipped the children to be more independent readers and word learners

(Svensson, 2018). Seven key vocabulary learning strategies have been identified: (1) metacognitive regulation, (2) guessing strategies, (3) dictionary strategies, (4) note-taking strategies, (5) rehearsal strategies, (6) encoding strategies, and (7) activation strategies (Mokhtar et al., 2017). Previous studies indicated that students prefer guessing and dictionary strategies (Mokhtar et al., 2017).

Regarding learning English, students need to think carefully about vocabulary learning strategies and identify the most effective approaches to be used to strengthen their English. Learning a new language is of great value to students and helps to improve their perspectives. English is considered one of the most common and important languages in use around the world since it is spoken in at least 50 countries (König et al., 2016). EFL students must focus on the acquisition of new vocabulary if they are to fulfill the demands of the digital era.

The process of new vocabulary acquisition by EFL students is primarily based on students' abilities and perceptions regarding learning. However, vocabulary learning strategies also play a significant role in helping students to acquire the maximum number of new lexical items (Vibulphol, 2016).

In the same vein, Svensson (2018) argued that a key challenge encountered by learners in the process of learning a new language was obtaining new vocabulary. Learning new vocabulary is affected by several factors, including the capacity of the learner, the environment, and the context. That is, different strategies can be used to enhance students' ability to learn new vocabularies, the most important of which are incidental learning and direct intentional learning (Svensson, 2018). The study found that students tended not to use vocabulary learning strategies to a wide extent. Moreover, it showed that teachers believed that it was the responsibility of the students to acquire new vocabulary (Svensson, 2018). Elsewhere, English language learners applied different vocabulary learning strategies to make sense of new words (Vakilifard et al., 2015), and the use of repetition was given preference over resource and recording strategies.

Al Majali, (2015) conducted a study to investigate the vocabulary teaching strategies used by English as a foreign language teachers at public secondary schools in Jordan. The sample of the study comprised 10 students. The researcher used random sampling process to select the participants of the study. This is an experimental research in which the researcher used textual analysis (test) to elicit data from the participants. The findings of the research indicated that female learners use

all types of strategies in learning new vocabulary on top of direct and indirect methods. This is because direct strategy is very important since it teaches the novice students the basics of how to learn vocabulary.

Baskin, et al., (2017) conducted a study with the aim of determining the vocabulary learning strategies of the students in TÖMER. The general screening model was used in the study. A 25-item Questionnaire of vocabulary learning strategies was administered to 22 students at level A1. The questionnaire was based on Schmitt's Taxonomy. The data was analyzed using frequency, percentage and averages. As a result of the research, it was shown that the students'

language levels were effective in determining the vocabulary strategies they used. Students used determination strategies the most while using cognitive strategies the least.

The aim of this study was to identify the types of learners based on their VLS preferences and to discuss the impact of their preferences on the acquisition of English vocabulary. Seven vocabulary learning strategies namely metacognitive regulation, guessing strategies, dictionary strategies, note-taking strategies, rehearsal strategies, encoding strategies, and activation strategies were tested. 360 first- and second-year students of Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perlis, from five diploma programmes were involved in the study. A vocabulary learning questionnaire developed by Gu and Johnson (1996) was used to gather the data. Results showed that the respondents preferred guessing and dictionary strategies the most; the other five namely metacognitive regulation, notetaking strategies, rehearsal strategies, encoding strategies, and activation strategies were less preferred (Mokhtar, et al., 2017).

Bakti, (2018) Conducted a study to investigate VLS used by junior high school students in learning English. The data were collected by using Schmitt's vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 31 statements administered to 50 junior high school students in the 8th grade at SMP N I Salatiga. Interviews were also conducted to obtain more information from the participants. The results show that the students choose practical, simple and fast strategies in learning vocabulary. Strategies such as checking if the word is also an Indonesian word, guessing the word's meaning from the context, asking the teacher to give the definition, studying the word with their classmates, remembering the word by studying and paying attention to the word's spelling, underlining the word, and using English media were frequently chosen in this study.

Afzal, (2019) conducted a study to investigate the problems faced by English majors in learning the vocabulary at Prince Stattam bin Abdulaziz University (PSAU) in Saudi Arabia. It also puts forward some vocabulary-learning strategies to minimize the potential problems. The data consist of the responses of 100 student-participants (undergraduates) randomly picked up from five different levels (four, five, six, seven, and eight) of 4-Year BA English Program at PSAU. This quantitative study uses an online questionnaire, as an instrument, to collect the data. The results reveal that the

English majors at PSAU face several problems in learning the vocabulary such as knowing the meanings of new words, pronouncing new words, using new words correctly, memorizing and spelling new vocabulary and so on.

The approach used in the current study was dissimilar to those of previous studies that explored the vocabulary learning strategies of English as a foreign language (EFL). Previous studies have relied on an exploration of English learning in general, and the findings across the studies were inconsistent and lacked consensus. By contrast, the current study focussed specifically on the identification of vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students in a particular setting—NBU University. Different sources of information and data collection methods, namely interviews and a questionnaire were used to determine the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at NBU University. The current study assessed different aspects of the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at NBU University, and the method used could be applied to achieve the objectives, which will be of great use to practitioners.

3. Context of the Problem

Working as an EFL lecturer for female students at Northern Border University (NBU), the researcher noticed that, in EFL English classes, female students use some vocabulary learning strategies to acquire new vocabulary. They also do not know whether such strategies are effective or not. In addition, the students have to use English as a means of instruction in the classroom while being learning a language, evaluated, and judged all the time.

Despite having several vocabulary learning strategies applied in the field of EFL reading in several studies, there are no studies "if any" that explore the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at Northern Border University (NBU). It also aimed to identify the mechanisms applied by EFL students at NBU University to learn vocabulary. Moreover, this study attempted to assess the effectiveness of the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at NBU University. Consequently, the present study attempted to identify the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at NBU University. The study problem was framed by the research question:

- Which vocabulary learning strategies are used by EFL students at NBU University?

4. Method

The present study followed the descriptive-analytical method. The quantitative part focused on the statistical analysis of the participants' responses to the vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire. The qualitative part is concerned with the interview results. Data collection methods included a review of the literature and previous studies on the topic

4.2. Participants

One hundred and twenty Saudi EFL undergraduate students in the English Language Department at NBU University, Saudi Arabia, were recruited to collect

data for this study. The participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire. Then, a small sample was assigned for the interview.

4.3. Instruments of the Study

The vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire was developed to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at Northern Border University (NBU). It also aimed to identify the mechanisms applied by EFL students at NBU University to learn new vocabulary. The questionnaire was classified under five strategies including the determination strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. The data of the questionnaire has been filled out by the EFL undergraduate students and sent to the researcher's email, then based on that data of the questionnaire, the researcher describes the findings. Specifically, the data were collected during the second term of the 2020–2021 academic university year and confined to NBU University. explore the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at Northern Border University (NBU). The following lines depict the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 1: The Distribution of 44 Items of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

No	Categories	Items	Total
1	Determination Strategies	1-9	9
2	Social Strategies	10-16	7
3	Memory Strategies	17-30	14
4	Cognitive Strategies	31-35	5
5	Metacognitive Strategies	36-44	9
	Total		44

Table 2: Correlation coefficients between the degree of each individual and the total number of grades of Vocabulary Learning Strategies.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies									
Determination Strategies		Metacognitive Strategies		Cognitive Strategies		Memory Strategies		Social Strategies	
No	(R)	No	(R)	No	(R)	No	(R)	No	(R)
1	0.89**	1	0.68**	1	0.91**	1	0.62**	1	0.91**
2	0.72**	2	0.65*	2	0.82**	2	0.49*	2	0.77**
3	0.84**	3	0.83**	3	0.59*	3	0.78**	3	0.91**
4	0.91**	4	0.61**	4	0.86**	4	0.51*	4	0.82**
5	0.77**	5	0.88**	5	0.79**	5	0.68**	5	0.93**
6	0.91**	6	0.68**	6	0.92**			6	0.45*
7	0.82**	7	0.65*	7	0.87**			7	0.77**

8	0.93**			8	0.92**			8	0.69**
9	0.65*			9	0.61**			9	0.72**
				10	0.96**				
				11	0.82**				
				12	0.91**				
				13	0.63**				
				14	0.93**				

Note: No= 30 . Correlation= (R) . Pearson's Correlation (R) *p < .05, **p < .1

From the above table, it was found that the correlation coefficients between the scores of the five strategies (the determination strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, memory strategies, and metacognitive strategies) and the total scores of the questionnaire are estimated respectively as shown above at the (0.05) level of the significance level. Thus, there is a high validity of the constructs of the questionnaire items for each strategy.

5.2. Reliability

In this study, the researcher achieved content validity by piloting the questionnaire after modifying it in light of the jury members' suggestions. The test showed that the instrument was reliable and the consistency of the questionnaire was calculated through (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$; the Spearman-Brown formula = 0.91).

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha & Spearman Brown Reliability of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Reliability Statistics				
No	Categories	No.of Items	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	Spearman Brown coefficient
1	Determination Strategies	9	0.83	0.89
2	Social Strategies	7	0.88	0.90
3	Memory Strategies	14	0.79	0.86
4	Cognitive Strategies	5	0.96	0.97
5	Metacognitive Strategies	9	0.84	0.90
Total		44	0.87	0.91

The test showed that the instrument was reliable with (Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = 0.87$) & (Spearman Brown = 0.91).

A *vocabulary acquisition interview* is one of the instruments that was developed to answer the question of the study. Namely, it aimed at identifying the mechanisms applied by EFL students at NBU University to learn vocabulary. Moreover, this study attempted to assess the effectiveness of the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL students at NBU University. The interview was conducted with a sample of

twenty Saudi EFL undergraduate students in the English Language Department at NBU University, Saudi Arabia in order to collect rich and valid data about the phenomena under investigation.

5. Data Analysis and Results

The study adopted a descriptive-analytical method. The questionnaire comprised the quantitative part of the study. The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version (22) employing a number of techniques, namely frequencies, percentages, ranks as shown in the following tables.

<i>Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Vocabulary Learning Strategies No</i>	Strategies
Determination Strategies	
1	I identify the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective) to help me know its meaning.
2	I break the new word up into the main parts (un-safe-ly = unsafely).
3	I check for Arabic words that are similar in form and meaning to the new word.
4	I analyze any available pictures to help me understand new words.
5	I analyze any available gestures to help me understand new words.
6	I use a bilingual dictionary (English / Arabic).
7	I use a bilingual dictionary (Arabic / English).
8	I use a monolingual Dictionary (English / English).
9	I guess the meaning of the new word from the context in which it occurs.
Social Strategies	
10	I ask a teacher for translation of the new word into Arabic.
11	I ask a teacher for a paraphrase of the new word.
12	I ask a teacher for a sentence including the new word.
13	If you use word lists, do you ask a teacher whether they are accurate?
14	I ask classmates for the meaning of the new word.
15	I discover new meanings through group work activity.
16	I study and practice meaning of the new words in a group of students.

Memory Strategies	
17	I make a picture in my mind of the new word's meaning.
18	I study the spelling of the new word.
19	I study the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective) to remember it.
20	I connect the new word to a personal experience (e.g. connecting the word research with the final project).
21	I paraphrase the meaning of the word I am learning in another way.
22	I study the sound of the new word.
23	I associate the new word with its coordinates (apples with oranges, peaches and etc.).
24	I say the new word aloud when studying.
25	I connect the new word to its synonyms and antonyms.
26	I learn the words of an idiom together.
27	I make an image in my mind of the form of the new word.
28	I use 'scales' for gradable adjectives (e.g. huge, big, small).
29	I use the Keyword Method.
30	I use the new word in sentences.
Cognitive Strategies	
31	I repeat the new word over and over.
32	I write the new word many times.
33	I make my own lists of new words.
34	I keep a vocabulary notebook for expanding rehearsal.
35	I take notes of the newly learned words in class.
Metacognitive Strategies	
36	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by watching English TV channels (e.g. movies, songs, documentary).
37	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by using computer programs (e.g. internet).
38	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English radio programs (songs, news).
39	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by reading English newspapers and magazines.
40	I revise the newly learned words soon after the initial meeting.
41	I continue to study the word over time.
42	I revise the newly learned words using spaced repetition.
43	I skip the new word.
44	I try to assess my vocabulary knowledge (e.g. with word tests)

Note: Mean = M , Std. Deviation= SD , percentage=%

Table 5: The Distribution of 44 Items of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

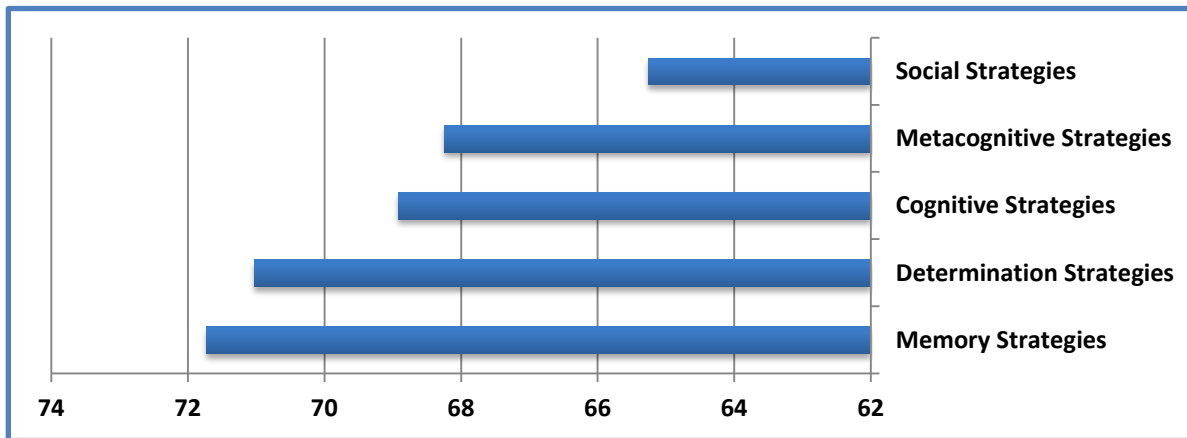
No	Categories	Sum	M	SD	%	Ranking
1	Determination Strategies	4602	38.35	7.60	71.02	2
2	Social Strategies	3289	27.41	8.67	65.26	5
3	Memory Strategies	7229	60.24	11.83	71.72	1
4	Cognitive Strategies	2481	20.68	5.76	68.92	3
5	Metacognitive Strategies	4422	36.85	8.11	68.24	4

Note: Mean = M , Std. Deviation= SD , percentage=%

Figure 1. Ranking of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

6. Discussion

The results of the current study indicated that the most frequently used strategies used by the participants were the use of memory and determination. Strategies with the highest frequency of use among the participants were identified as shown in the items presented in (Table 4): 'I use a monolingual dictionary (English/English)', 'I form a picture in my mind of the meaning of the new word', 'I study the spelling of the new word', 'I use "measures" for gradable adjectives



(e.g. huge, big, and small)', and 'I use the keyword method'. Apart from the aforementioned techniques, listening and reading strategies were associated with a high frequency of use by the participants.

With this in mind, dictionary use has long been recognized as one of vocabulary learning strategies. Fortunately, recent years have witnessed steady development of dictionary use research which includes investigations of the use and usefulness of dictionaries for various language activities. The words of a language come up with several meanings according to the context they are being used. Language learners can probably be familiar with what the word means in a sentence, but it is not necessary

that the meaning they know fits in according to the context of the sentence. Furthermore, learners can also not be very accurate when they try to make a guess about the meaning of a word in a sentence, they may be right or wrong. The use of dictionaries makes learners more autonomous and independent in language classrooms as they can find for the meanings of difficult words without help from the language teachers.

At the risk of using generalization to determine the attitudes of the female EFL students at NBU University who were majoring in English as indicated in (Figure 1), cognitively demanding tasks, such as listening and reading, were more commonly used by the participants in this study, compared to social strategies, such as interactive and collaborative methods. This might have been related to the educational design applied at the secondary school, which may have encouraged the students to memorise and repeat new vocabulary items as the primary goal. More importantly, using the Social strategies include asking questions, cooperating and empathizing with others. For example, learning can be enhanced when people interact with each other to clarify a confusing point or when they participate in a group discussion or cooperative learning group to solve a problem, which might not be available for the participants in the classroom.

The findings of this study showed that teachers need to train learners in the use of vocabulary learning strategies. It is vital that teachers inform students about the benefits of vocabulary learning and the adaptation of vocabulary learning strategies, how they support language learning, and the associated benefits.

7. Conclusion

Accordingly, by identifying and understanding the benefits of using different learning strategies, the students would be more motivated to incorporate vocabulary learning strategies

into language acquisition and, in the digital era of globalization, this is more important now than ever before. As English is a foreign language, and the teaching approaches concentrate on

competence in speaking and communication, the development of a vocabulary learning strategy that enhances effective EFL learning is recommended. Vocabulary enrichment is important and

needs to be developed consciously. Vocabulary learning strategies can be developed with practice during classroom activities. Motivating and changing students' attitudes towards English

and allowing them to speak about interesting topics is an important criterion of EFL learning. Teachers should also encourage and support the use of various teaching strategies by students and remain informed of the latest available teaching methods and materials in a teaching environment.

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