

## VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY VOCATIONAL STUDENTS AT AL-SHOMOKH HIGH INSTITUTE FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by second year students at Higher Institute for Science and Technology. To achieve this, a questionnaire consisting of 17 questions was distributed to 28 students from Computer Department. The items were divided into three sections. The first section includes attitude towards English vocabulary, section two is around EFL vocabulary learning, and the third one is dedicated to vocabulary learning strategies. Vocabulary learning strategies are very significant because it can assist students to learn vocabulary and master it. This study illustrated the vocabulary learning strategies that the students used when they learned new words. The results indicated different vocabulary learning strategies used by second semester students to learn English vocabulary. In addition, the majority of students faced more difficulties in words' meaning, so meaning is being the first problem in learning vocabulary, because many words have different meaning and they are difficult to understand as well as they have limited vocabulary which can never help them communicate efficiently. The findings of this study maybe beneficial for both teachers and vocational students of providing them guidelines for their English vocabulary.

**Keywords:** vocabulary, learning strategies, students, Higher Institute.

## استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات التي يستخدمها طلاب التعليم المهني

### دراسة ميدانية بمعهد الشموخ العالي للعلوم والتكنولوجيا

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#### ملخص:

التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية يتطلب الكثير من الكلمات والمفردات، وكلما كانت الحصيلة اللغوية من الكلمات والمفردات كبيرة كلما زادت القدرة والكفاءة على التحدث. الهدف الرئيسي من البحث دراسة أساليب واستراتيجيات تعلم المفردات التي يستخدمها طلاب التعليم المهني في المعهد العالي في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، وأيضاً لمعرفة حجم المفردات المكتسبة خلال سنوات دراستهم والكشف من أهم الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها الطلاب، ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة تكونت عينة الدراسة من 28 طالباً من طلاب الفصل الثاني في قسم الحاسب الآلي وتم توزيع استبيان يتألف من 17 سؤال . أظهرت نتائج الدراسة إن هنالك تنوع في الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة في تعلم المفردات ومن ضمن هذه الاستراتيجيات استخدام المعجم، تدوين الملاحظات، تخمين معنى الكلمة من السياق، الذاكرة والاستدعاء ومعالجة الكلمات الجديدة. بينت النتائج إن الطلاب يوظفون استراتيجيات مختلفة ومتنوعة في تعلم المفردات وكان أكثرها توظيفاً المعجم يليها تخمين المعنى من السياق، كما بينت النتائج إنه لدى الطلاب إدراك بأهمية تعلم المفردات وضرورة استخدام الأساليب المختلفة في التعلم ومن ضمن هذه الأساليب التكرار والحفظ واستخدام الكلمة، وتشير نتائج دراسات سابقة التي أجريت في استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات أن استخدام المعجم ثنائية اللغة هي أكثرها استخداماً في تعلم مفردات اللغة الثانية، وتعد إستراتيجية تخمين معنى الكلمة من السياق من أهم الاستراتيجيات في تعلم مفردات اللغة. اقترحت الدراسة بعض التوصيات لتحسين عملية التعلم للغة الإنجليزية وذلك من خلال دعم برامج تعلم مفردات اللغة وتعزيزها وتوجيه معلمي اللغة نحو التقنيات الحديثة لتدريب المتعلمين على استخدام هذه الاستراتيجيات بفاعلية، وكذلك تضمين استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات في المناهج وتدريب المتعلمين على كيفية استخدامها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المفردات، التعلم، الاستراتيجيات، الطلاب، المعهد العالي.

## 1. Introduction:

In learning English students be ready to practice the basic skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking adding to that those basic skills there are component of language like grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation; one of English component which is important to be mastered well is vocabulary, so Vocabulary is one of English elements that should be learned by students in order to achieve a high degree of efficiency in English. Additionally, learners should master and practice the four skills beside that there are also elements of language which assist learners to master English as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

According to Nation (2001), Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) comprise a subclass of language learning strategies, and they are also in a group of general learning strategies. Vocabulary refers to the collection of words particular person, group of people, socioeconomic group, profession, and so on, know and uses the technical term for vocabulary is lexis. Vocabulary can make the student transmit the iride a both in oral and written form efficiently. In this institute, students especially, not all of them are good in vocabulary competence, a few students still having less of vocabulary competence. There are several techniques and devices for teaching vocabulary in methodology textbooks.

### 1.2 The objectives of this study:

The aim of this study is

- To investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by the third semester students at Higher Institute

### 1.3 Questions of this study:

This study seeks to address the following question:

- What are vocabulary learning strategies that the vocational students employ?

## 2. Literature Review:

## 2.1. The Definitions of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs)

According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning strategies are defined by the following important features: "they involve choice; they are complex i.e., consisting of several steps; they require knowledge and benefit from training, and they increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and use"(p.217).

Therefore, many strategies have their own features, it is necessity for students not only to realize but also to use the strategies. The role of VLS in language learning process should be prominence in the acquisition of English vocabulary if the learners can command and control their vocabulary learning.

Richardsetal.(1992;2016)statedthatthedefinitionofvocabularyshouldinclude three considerations. Firstly, vocabulary is the collection of vocabulary and idioms of any language. Secondly, vocabulary includes words, compounds, and idioms. Finally, vocabulary is the collection of a language and its corresponding grammar or syntax. While Schmitt (1997) states VLS is the process for students to find the meaning of foreign language words, to memorize the foreign language words, and to use the foreign language words in context. Vocabulary learning strategies used by students as techniques on the ongoing process to master English vocabulary (Mehring, 2005). In addition, According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning strategies are one part of language learning strategies which in turn are part of general learning strategies. Schmitt (2000) also said that learning vocabulary in the second language requires the use of vocabulary learning strategies which have not been receiving much attention in the field of second language learning.

## 2.2. The importance of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs)

Vocabulary is considered to be useful component in the use of language and Vocabulary learning strategies are very significant because it can assist students to learn vocabulary and master it. As will as it plays important role in language learning as an essential skill for learning to read, speak, write, and listen. Many researchers discussed the importance of vocabulary

learning in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. One of the importance aspects in foreign language learning is vocabulary mastery (Astika, 2016)

Rubin and Thompson (1994) state that “one cannot speak, understand, read or write a foreign language without knowing a lot of words so, vocabulary learning is at the heart of mastering a foreign language” (p. 79).

Words are considered to be the base of language and vocabulary knowledge is considered to be an important part of all language skills. Vocabulary is a list or set of words for a particular language with their meaning that individual knows. Vocabulary also can be defined as a list of words for a particular language or a list or set of words that individual speakers of language might use in their daily activities. Also, Nation (2001: 222) believes that “a large amount of vocabulary can be acquired with the help of vocabulary learning strategies and that the strategies prove useful for students of different language levels ” that means vocabulary learning strategies are beneficial techniques for learners to have a lot of vocabulary, therefore learners need vocabulary learning strategies to help them in improving their knowledge of vocabulary. Vocabulary learning strategies are fundamental for students because they help them to learn new words and develop their vocabulary as well as support them to increase their vocabulary to be effective learners.

### **2.3. Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs):**

The term “vocabulary learning strategies” refer to “any set of techniques or learning behaviours, which language learners reported using to discover the meaning of a new word, to retain the knowledge of newly-learned words, and to expand one’s knowledge of vocabulary” (Cameron, 2001; Intaraprasert 2004, p. 53). As Vocabulary is a considerable part of all English language skills, vocabulary learning strategies have played a significant role in the English language. Vocabulary is a list or set of words for a particular language with their meanings .

Oxford (1990) defined language learning strategies are particular approaches that learners select in order to make language learning easier. He further defined that language learning strategies are beneficial for learners to discover suitable approaches to their language learning.

Vocabulary learning strategies have a role in language learning by helping learners extend their vocabulary. For Schmitt (1997), VLSs are grouped into two main categories consisting of discovery and consolidation categories. Discovery strategies are the strategies used by learners to discover the words, and consolidation strategies are the strategies where a word is consolidated once it has been encountered. In discovery strategies, there are two subcategories: determination strategies (DETs) and social strategies (SOCs). In consolidation strategies, there are four subcategories: social strategies (SOCs), memory strategies (MEMs), cognitive strategies (COGs), and met cognitive strategies (METs). DETs are individual learning strategies where learners learn new vocabulary individually without assistance. SOCs are learning by interaction, so learners acquire vocabulary by learning from other people such as teachers or classmates. MEMs involve relating words to background knowledge. COGs are similar to MEMs, but they do not involve mental processing and are more mechanical. METs are strategies with which learners can evaluate themselves and find an appropriate way to learn new vocabulary. Vocabulary is considered to be one of the most important elements in comprehending lesson materials, especially when learning a foreign language. Heidari et al. (2012) state that vocabulary is the core of language and the cornerstone of language learning. For successful communication in a second/foreign language, vocabulary knowledge is more essential than any other language skill (McCarthy, 1990). Schmitt (1997) defined vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) as tactics or actions that can help language learners acquire and retain vocabulary knowledge. Research on L2 vocabulary indicates that VLS plays a pivotal role in language learning (Nation, 2001).

#### 2.4. Types of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs)

Numerous studies have attempted to explain the classification of vocabulary learning strategies.

Schmitt (1997) divides VLS into five categories, namely determination strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and met cognitive strategies. First, determination strategies are used to discover the meaning of new words through direct translation into L1. In determination strategies learners discover the meaning by guessing from their structural knowledge of the language or context, guessing from their mother tongue (L1), using reference materials including monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, asking someone else, and also using a word list that is including the use of flash cards. Indeed, Schmitt (1997) proposed that determination strategies "facilitate gaining knowledge of a new word" p.10

Second, social strategies are strategies utilized by learners that involve interaction with other people to improve vocabulary acquisition (Schmitt, 1997).

For instance, the use of social strategies is asking teachers and classmates to attain the meaning of new words. Also, students may discover the new words' meaning through discussion in a group work activity.

Third, memory strategies traditionally known as mnemonics strategies, involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge using some form of imagery, or grouping".

Fourth, cognitive strategies are parallel with memory strategies but do not focus on the manipulative mental process. It means that the strategies involve the learners manipulating and transforming the words of the target language and do not involve mental manipulation. Cognitive strategies facilitate the learners to find the word's meaning. In implementing this strategy, the learners are required to do a rehearsal, interference, summarizing, paraphrasing, imagery, and amplification of the words. Thus, the cognitive strategies involve verbal repetition, writing down vocabulary in a notebook, employing vocabulary units in a textbook, using word lists and flashcards (Schmitt, 1997).

Fifth, metacognitive strategies are “used by students to control and evaluate their learning, by having an overview of the learning process in general” (Schmitt 1997). The aim of using metacognitive strategies is to make the learning new words successful and efficient. For instance, learners can use English language media songs, movies, magazines, radio, newspapers, and new scastson TV), involved in) vocabulary tests, skip unfamiliar and difficult words, review vocabulary lists in their notepad, and keep on studying new words over time. (Schmitt, 1997).

### 3. Methodology:

#### 3.1. Participants of the study

The participants of this study were limited to second-semester students from the Computer Department at Higher Technical Institute. They were asked to participate by answering questions about the vocabulary learning strategies. The total number of students was (28). They were selected randomly and their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old. All of them are Libyan.

#### 3.2. Instrument of the study:

The present study is quantitative, using a questionnaire to collect data from the participants, and twenty-eight copies were distributed in October and November 2024, which was the first semester of the 2024 year, to the second-semester students from the Computer Department.

The questionnaire consisted of (17) questions and it involved both closed-ended and open-ended questions; these questions were adapted from the dissertation titled Investigation Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies in the English Department. It is based on a taxonomy of Schmitt (1997) in order to collect data about the vocabulary learning strategies that are utilized by students to learn English vocabulary.

#### 3.3. There suits of the study:

The results of the study revealed that of the five categories, the determination strategies were the most frequently used by students

followed by social strategies, met cognitive strategies, memory strategies, and cognitive strategies.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

##### Q1-Learning vocabulary is very important in learning English

According to (Table 1) above the majority of students (22) replied agree that vocabulary is very important to learn the English language while (6) students replied Neutral.

Table .1

| Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|-------|---------|----------|
| 22    | 6       | 0        |

##### Q2-Do you enjoy learning English vocabulary?

Table (2) illustrates that most of the participants (25) stated that they enjoyed learning vocabulary, while (3) participants replied that they didn't enjoy English vocabulary because they didn't like it, and they think that it is very difficult.

Table .2

| Yes | No |
|-----|----|
| 25  | 3  |

##### Q3- Learning vocabulary is hard and takes great effort.

As indicated above (Table3) half of the students (15) hold a neutral view about the difficulty of learning vocabulary while (12) of the students informed that English didn't take great.

Table .3

| Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|-------|---------|----------|
| 12    | 15      | 1        |

##### Q4-If you know more words, do you think your English ability will be improved?

A scan be seen from the above (Table 4), it was revealed that most of the students(25) said that they agreed on knowing more word sand their English ability will be improved.

**Table.4**

| Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|-------|---------|----------|
| 25    | 1       | 0        |

### **Q5-Do you think you have enough vocabulary know ledge about the English language?**

As shown in Table 5, the majority of students (23) stated that they didn't have enough vocabulary about the English language, while (3) students claimed that they had enough vocabulary.

**Table.5**

| Yes | No |
|-----|----|
| 3   | 23 |

### **Section two: EFL vocabulary learning:**

### **Q6-Where do you find difficulties when meeting new words?**

As indicated in (Table 6) the most of students (15) said that they were facing more difficulties in the word ' meaning, whereas (10) students found pronunciation difficulties. Only (7) students claimed that they found difficulties in word spelling.

**Table.6**

| In pronunciation | In spelling | In meaning |
|------------------|-------------|------------|
| 10               | 7           | 15         |

Richards et al. (1992) define the term word as “the smallest of the linguistic units which can occur on its own in speech or writing” (p. 406)

Whereas vocabulary is “the total number of words which make up a language; and a range of words known to, or used by a person” (Horn by et al., 1984).

### Q7- How do you learn unknown vocabulary items?

Answering this question reveals that the majority of students replied that they learn unknown words by using dictionaries, asking their teacher, guessing from context, listening to music, watching movies, and asking a classmate for help, furthermore, a few students didn't answer this question.

### Q8- How do you learn vocabulary in the class room?

As ill unstated in (Table7), more than half of the students(20) said that they learn vocabulary in context while the others (8) claimed that they learn vocabulary as isolated words.

Table.7

| As isolated words | In context |
|-------------------|------------|
| 8                 | 20         |

### Q9-What is your major purpose when you relearning English vocabulary?

According to (Table 8) the majority of students (23) informed that the major purpose when they are learning English vocabulary is "to be able to communicate" while (21) of students claimed that their major purpose when they learn vocabulary is" to understand English movies, songs, conversations...etc. On the other hand, (13) of students stated that their major objective when they are learning vocabulary is " to understand a sentence" only, (10) students said that their English vocabulary is learned just "to be able to write better.

Table.8

| To understand a sentence | To be able to write better | To be able to communicate | To understand English language movies, songs, conversation, ...etc. |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 13                       | 10                         | 23                        | 21  |

### Q10-In which language skill the lack of vocabulary may cause difficulties?

Table (9) above demonstrates that the majority of students (24) said that the lack of vocabulary may cause difficulties in speaking while (6) students informed that the lack of vocabulary causes difficulties in reading, (5) of students claimed that difficulties in vocabulary cause difficulties in writing. Only (4) students discussed that the lack of vocabulary causes difficulties in listening.

Table.9

| In writing | In speaking | In reading | In listening |
|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| 5          | 24          | 4          | 6            |

### Q11-How will your vocabulary be improved?

Table (10) indicates that the majority of students (32) informed that their vocabulary will be improved through reading and listening, while (8) students said that their vocabulary will be improved by writing. Only (7) students said that their vocabulary would be improved by speaking.

Table.10

| Through reading | Through writing | Through listening | Through speaking |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 16              | 8               | 16                | 7                |

### Section Three: Vocabulary Learning Strategies

### Q12-When meeting a new word, how do you guess its meaning?

As shown in (Table 11) using a bilingual dictionary is considered the most important strategy that the students (14) employ when they are learning new words. Guessing from context is the second strategy that the students (12) used when they discovered the new words while (8) students claimed that they used both monolingual dictionaries and analyzed the form.

The nation claims that learning by guessing word meanings from context is an important strategy in learning vocabulary (Nation 2001: 232).

**Table.11**

| Analyze the form | Guess from context | Use a bilingual dictionary | Use a monolingual dictionary |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 4                | 12                 | 14                         | 4                            |

### Q13-From whom do you get help when you face un known words?

As indicated in (Table 12) the most of students said that they ask their classmates to translate the meaning of new words, so students depend on discovering the meaning of unknown words.

**Table.12**

| Ask the teacher for anL1 translation | Ask class mates or someone else |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 15                                   | 16                              |

### Q14-How do you memorize the meaning of a new word?

As shown in (Table 13) students confirm that they are memorizing the form of the word help them to memorize new words (11) Saying the word aloud is considered as the second strategy for students to use while (10) students present studying the spelling form of the word, whereas (5) students informed that memorize the meaning of the words by studying the pronunciation of the word. Few students claimed that using physical actions like gestures can help them memorize the new words. Only one student asserts that connecting the word with its synonym or hyponym helps them to memorize new words.

**Table.13**

| By memorizing the form of the word | By using physical actions like gestures, or images, facial expressions ...etc | By connecting the word with its synonym or hyponym | By studying the spelling form of the word | By studying the pronunciation of the word | By saying the word aloud |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|--------------------------|
| 13                                 | 3   | 1  | 10  | 5   | 11                       |

### **Q15-What are the strategies do you use when consolidating new vocabulary?**

Based on (Table 14) an equal number of students (13) stated that the most common vocabulary learning strategies were using written repetition and note-taking, which may help them consolidate new words. While (12) students choose to use English language media as a strategy and (9) students confirm that verbal repetition.

**Table.14**

| Note-taking class | Verbal repetition(i.e. using the new word when speaking) | Use English language media(e.g. Songs, movies, newspapers...etc) | Written repetition |
|-------------------|--|--|--------------------|
| 13                | 9  | 12   | 13                 |

### **Q16- Could you mention other strategies that you use to learn English vocabulary?**

Using Google Translate was identified as a source of learning English vocabulary. using social media, reading short stories, newspapers, and books, and also the strategy of asking other people, such as one of my family, native speakers of English, to discover the meaning of new vocabulary.

### **Q17-In your opinion, what are the strategies mentioned above that you consider helpful in learning new vocabulary? Would you explain your answer?**

Some students said that they preferred the bilingual dictionary was very useful for them because they could understand the meaning of the word. Also, students maintain that many strategies are very helpful for them, such as listening to music, watching movies, and cartoons, and reading a lot to help them learn and improve their English vocabulary.

## 5. Discussion:

The investigation of the result has revealed the following findings:

There results of this study revealed that students employed all five categories and they stated that vocabulary is an extremely important part of the English language, so most of the second-semester students have positive attitudes towards English vocabulary and they are aware of the importance of English vocabulary.

The vocabulary learning strategy used by students was using a bilingual dictionary, so the bilingual dictionary is considered the most important strategy that the students employ when they are meeting new words, which means students use determination strategies and different types of strategies.

Students used the strategies of written repetition and taking notes in class as the most frequently used strategies (26) while the strategy of verbal repetition was the least used strategy by students.

Students used the strategy of studying the word with classmates for meaning in learning English vocabulary as the most frequently used strategy.

Furthermore, students use social strategies when they are asking class mates for help.

Students prefer working with each other than requiring their teachers' help, which means students prefer to use some strategies before asking their teachers. Students said that reading a lot and listening helps them to increase their vocabulary.

The majority of students faced more difficulties in words' meaning, so meaning is the first problem in learning vocabulary because many words have different meanings and they are difficult to understand, so this is the main problem in learning vocabulary and the majority of

students stated that they don't have enough vocabulary about English language, so the lack of vocabulary may cause difficulties in speaking more than the other skills as students said.

The majority of students replied that they learn unknown words by using dictionaries, asking their teacher, guessing from context, listening to music, watching movies, and asking a classmate for help, also a great number of students indicated that they prefer to ask their classmates to get the meaning of unknown words.

There are different vocabulary learning strategies used by second-semester students to learn English vocabulary, like using a bilingual dictionary, which is considered as the first strategy that students use to determine the meaning of the word, and guessing from context, which is considered as being the second strategy that students employ.

## 6. Conclusion:

This study aimed to answer the research question what are the English vocabulary learning strategies employed by students? This study was applied by employing a quantitative method to study the use of English vocabulary learning strategies by the vocational students at the Higher Institute for Science and Technology.

The results showed that most of the second-semester students have positive attitudes toward English vocabulary and they employed all five categories such as social strategies when they are asking class mates for help and determination strategies when they are using a bilingual dictionary, so the bilingual dictionary is considered the most important strategy that the students employ when they are meeting new words.

In addition, students use both determination and consolidation strategies when they learn the new word's meaning, using the

bilingual dictionary is considered as being the first strategy to determine the meaning of the word as well as guessing from context is considered as being the second strategy.

The result of the data showed that many students employed more than one strategy in learning vocabulary, such as memory strategies, written repetition, and note-taking in class, so students should expand their own vocabulary storage, and they should be taught how to discover the effective techniques to learn language vocabulary.

### **6.1. Pedagogical Implications:**

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) play a crucial role in enhancing students' ability to acquire and retain new vocabulary, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study highlights that vocational students employ various strategies, with determination strategies, such as using bilingual dictionaries and contextual guessing, being the most frequently utilized. The findings indicate that students recognize the importance of vocabulary acquisition, yet many struggle with word meanings due to the complexity and multiple interpretations of words. Furthermore, vocabulary deficiencies significantly hinder communication skills, especially speaking. The research underscores the necessity for a structured approach to vocabulary learning, where students are encouraged to integrate social and cognitive strategies alongside traditional dictionary use to reinforce retention and application.

Additionally, the research indicates that to facilitate the students' vocabulary development, teachers ought to employ various vocabulary teaching techniques. Met cognitive strategies, including self-monitoring and evaluation, allow learners to assume control over their learning and as a result, achieve better outcomes in acquiring a language. This research suggests the integration of vocabulary learning into the curriculum through active and creative methods of

teaching. Students should be motivated to use a combination of different VLSs, including peer interaction, listening to authentic English, and repetition, to achieve better vocabulary retention and communication skills enablement. As a result, vocational learners can achieve better mastery of the English language which in turn improves their educational and career opportunities.

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