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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Vocabulary Acquisition and Learning Strategies in Second Language Learning: A Review Paper

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| ABSTRACT

This scoping review research attempts to examine vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary learning strategies of second language learners. It found that different students used a variety of vocabulary learning strategies. Effective learning strategies would best be learned through the help of the teachers. Moreover, the study indicates a beneficial effect of integrating technology in acquiring vocabulary in a second language.

| KEYWORDS

Vocabulary Acquisition, Vocabulary Learning Strategy. Second Language Learning

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

**ACCEPTED:** 04 July 2022

**PUBLISHED:** 14 July 2022

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijels.2022.4.3.9

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### 1. Introduction

One of the constant challenges to every second language teacher is to incorporate vocabulary in their teaching. Acquiring the vocabulary of the mother tongue was not given emphasis since it happens naturally; however, the necessity to learn a second language is another thing, the profound role of vocabulary in a second language and how the learner understands the receptive message and responds effectively.

*"Words, so innocent and powerless as they are, standing in a dictionary; how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to choose and combine them."*

#### 1.1— Nathaniel Hawthorne

Vocabulary is an essential component of any language; therefore, it plays a major role in the second language (L2) acquisition (e.g., Nation, 2013; Willis & Ohashi, 2012). L2 learners often recognize that inadequate or poor vocabulary knowledge is the primary reason for their difficulties in acquiring, comprehending, and using an L2 (Nation, 2013). It only manifests that vocabulary is an indispensable skill that is needed to communicate in any language as all other skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening are established on vocabulary.

In Vietnam, Phung (2021) conducted a survey at Thai Nguyen University of Technology; it revealed that students' knowledge of grammar is acceptable; however, their vocabulary is extremely insufficient. He discovered that the reason behind it is the non-changing learning habits of the students, which is writing only the new words on paper and learning submissively through the explanation of the teacher. Thus, these students tend to forget vocabulary quickly and have difficulty conveying their ideas through speaking and writing.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, the English Proficiency test results of Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students in Sorsogon State College revealed that they have poor vocabulary knowledge (Carranza et al., 2015). This result is evident in daily communication and comprehension of the lessons, which are hampered by their difficulty

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in fathoming unfamiliar words. This affirms the report of the Rand Reading Study Group (2002), as cited by Pikulski et al. (2004), which concluded that "Research has shown that many children who read at the third-grade level in grade 3 will not automatically become proficient comprehenders in later grades."

This enormous research evidence depicts an effective decoding strategy that not only allows students to identify printed words accurately but to do so quickly and spontaneously (Pikulski and Chard, 2003). Therefore, in order to comprehend the meaning of various English sentences and passages, it is essential to have excellent and immense vocabulary storage (Rupley et al., 1999).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Words or Vocabulary**

In simple terms, vocabulary is defined as "the sum of words used by, understood by, or at the command of a particular person or group" (American Heritage Dictionary). While Hornby (1995), as cited by Asyiah (2017), defined vocabulary in three aspects which entailed a) the total number of the words which make up a language; b) all the words known to a person or used in a particular book, subject, etc.; and c) a list of words with their meaning.

### **2.2 Vocabulary Acquisition**

When learning a new language, vocabulary acquisition refers to how people increase the number of words they know. This applies to both first and second language learning. The term vocabulary refers to a collection of words that are separated into two categories: functional words that fulfill grammatical functions and lexical words that give information. The expansion of one's mental lexicon is connected to, but not the same as, learning grammar and syntax (Wollacot, 2020). Vocabulary is an important component of learning a new language. The definitions of new words are regularly highlighted in books and in spoken interactions. Vocabulary is considered the most important aspect of language learning and is extremely important to a language learner, as Susanto (2017) stated. When learning a foreign language, vocabulary is essential. There are several factors that affect or contribute to the vocabulary acquisition of one's learner. The analysis is essential because as time goes by, it is also getting magnanimous the need to attend to the emerging constraint when it comes to vocabulary acquisition. One factor that could greatly contribute to learning the language is technology.

In the present day, technology shows a great significant role in various fields, including education. Numerous studies indicate that employing technology help learners in acquiring a second language. A study by Nguyen (2021) entitled 'A Review of The Effects of Media on Foreign Language Vocabulary Acquisition' manifests the effect of social media on the vocabulary acquisition of a second language plays an important role. It catered aid to simplifying the learning of L2 among students. Social media is not solely functional to the learners; it is also a supporting tool for the teachers for the great reason that it makes their teaching easy. Aside from the initial presented study, there is an existing study conducted by Alfadil (2021) which explored the effectiveness of virtual reality games in vocabulary acquisition. It stated that students who used VR had better vocabulary acquisition results than those who used the traditional method. In comparison to their pre-test results, students in the control group obtained higher post-test scores.

A computer game can be used as a tool for autonomous learning to learn a new language with adequate practice and constant playing, as well as the correct goal of using it. In line with the virtual games, there is an application tool called MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) that have used in the study of Fagee (2013) entitled Effects of MALL Applications on Vocabulary Acquisition and Motivation. This type of learning tool is evidently effective, especially for the older learners, when it comes to vocabulary acquisition and stimulating their motivation to learn the language. The empirical reason is that it is convenient, and most learners can easily manipulate it because, commonly, the respondent is under the "digital age". Data analysis indicates that using mobile phones for vocabulary education and learning is a realistic option at the college level. This is sustained by the study of Dizon (2016), which found the effectiveness of using Quizlet, a popular online study tool, to develop L2 English vocabulary. The study included a total of 9 Japanese university EFL students. Over the course of ten weeks, the students used Quizlet to study Coxhead's (2001) academic vocabulary list (AWL). The learners were able to achieve statistically significant advances according to the results of the pre-tests and post-tests. Furthermore, a survey performed by the researcher revealed that the students' perception of Quizlet was a good tool for learning L2 vocabulary. The mean ratings on a 5-point Likert scale for all three dimensions investigated – perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and behavioral intention to use Quizlet – were all greater than 4, indicating a high level of agreement.

Factors that contributed from technology explicitly presented that it is really functional in learning vocabulary. Different applications and tools that stretch benefits to the learning process of language. Technology perceptibly caters to huge involvement in someone's learning of lexis. It delivers convenience to any user of it. Specifically speaking, on vocabulary acquisition. The literature display that technology is appropriate to support learning languages (L2). Cautiously, it must be used properly, planned, and accompanied by supervision. The study presented to show the feasibility and rationality of the topic; however, there are still gaps that need to focus on since there might be changes in some aspects.

### **2.3 Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Learning and teaching vocabulary has been disregarded in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) throughout several stages and up to the present age (Zimmerman, 1997a). Despite the research evidence that it plays a vital role in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading. McCarthy (1990) stressed that "no matter how well the students learn grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wider range of meanings, communication in L2 cannot just happen in any meaningful way."

Ghazal (2007) argued that it is critical to establish the learners to become independent during the process of vocabulary learning in a second language because independent learners are self-reliant and capable of taking responsibility for their own learning and building up their confidence, involvement, and competence (Oxford, 1990, as cited in Ghazal, 2007). Hence, teachers should expand students' awareness of the importance of vocabulary learning strategies.

Vocabulary learning strategies origins from language learning strategies, and many researchers present diverse definitions of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) based on their different perspectives such as (Catalan, 2003; Cameron, 2001) states that vocabulary learning strategies are actions that learners do to help themselves understand and grasp vocabulary items.

In the study conducted by Boonkongsan (2012) in Thailand, he discovered that belief, attitude, motivation, language learning experience, the field of study, course type, class level, language learning environment, language achievement, language proficiency, and vocabulary knowledge are the different factors that affect the vocabulary learning strategies of the students.

Recently, Ibrahim et al. (2022) studied the vocabulary learning strategies of Sudanese learners that help them enhance their vocabulary knowledge. It found out that there are three most frequently vocabulary learning strategies they are using. The first one is cognitive strategy, which deals with a technique for using the vocabulary and for understanding how vocabulary works. The next one is memory strategy; this technique involves using a mental image to memorize new words and meta-cognitive strategies, which learners analyze, assess, and improve the outcome of their learning. Moreover, the result of this study indicates that EFL learners were unfamiliar with language-learning strategies in general because there is an insufficient opportunity to practice their English language outside the classroom. Thus, the researcher recommends raising awareness of the importance of vocabulary strategy by simply conducting a seminar at the beginning of the semester. In line with this study, O'Malley and Chamot (1995), cited by Heng (2011), stressed three main strategies used by second language learners, which are metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. It revealed that selective attention, preparation, self-management, repetition, notetaking, imagery, and translation are among the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies, while social, affective strategies (e.g., cooperation and questioning for clarification) were used rarely.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Nagodavithana et al. (2021) aimed to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by Engineering students to recommend better techniques in teaching vocabulary. It was discovered that during the pre-test, learners used strategies such as context clues, bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, social strategy, and morphological analysis. It has been observed that learners are using their mobile phones to access dictionaries. To test the long-term retention of the vocabulary items the students had previously learned in the ESL classroom, a delayed post-test was conducted wherein the students were no longer allowed to talk to their classmates and use their cellphone. It was found in the delayed post-test that most of the students used context clues to find the meaning of the word. While some of the students used L1 translation as a strategy. This was seen on the test paper as they had written the L1 translation of each word opposing to the relevant words in the test paper, which concluded that learners used memory strategy. The research findings concluded that those who went back to their mother tongue have a low success rate.

In the Philippine context, the study revealed that most Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students oftentimes used strategies in learning vocabulary such as reading books and other materials, looking for clues in sentences, and using the dictionary to unlock the unfamiliar words. The students attained nearly competent vocabulary performance along with context clues, word analysis, and dictionary skills. The context clues and word analysis skills are significantly related to the use of learning strategies when tested at a 0.05 level. The developed vocabulary module to enhance the skills of the students can be validated and utilized for instruction (Carranza et al., 2015).

### **3. Methodology**

This study utilized a scoping review following the guidance of Arksey and O'Malley's methodological framework. The framework entails five steps: (1) identifying the research questions, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. This helped the researchers to carefully select appropriate sources in vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary learning strategies which primarily concerned with articles published in dissertations, peer-reviewed journals, and related studies.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Vocabulary indeed plays a crucial role in learning a second language. As McCarthy (1990) stressed that no matter how well the students learn grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wider range of meanings, communication in L2 cannot just happen in any meaningful way.

The scoping research has found that students used a variety of strategies in learning new words. However, it revealed that there is a lack of awareness among language learners in employing vocabulary learning strategies. On the other brighter side, integrating technology in vocabulary indicates a positive impact on second language learners but still with the supervision of the teachers or the adults.

#### 5. Conclusion

As a second language learner, it is quite complex to learn vocabulary compared to the first language, which is acquired naturally. In L2, it requires you to allocate time and commit an effort to learn the language. Learning vocabulary is not an all-or-nothing piece of learning it is rather a gradual process of one meeting with a word adding to or strengthening the small amounts of knowledge gained from previous encounters (Nation 2001, p. 155). Teachers play a vital role in widening the vocabulary of the students; this could be done through improved techniques and methods.

In conclusion, vocabulary learning strategies foster learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to raise knowledge in vocabulary learning strategies as early as possible because large and rich vocabulary can be obtained through the help of vocabulary learning strategies Nation (2001). Moreover, in an innovative world nowadays, where some people perceive technology have a negative effect on the learner, maximizing usage of the technology with proper guidance would help L2 learners in acquiring vocabulary, as evident in various research.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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