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A STUDY ON VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES USED BY EFL LEARNERS OF GUJARAT TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Eminent researchers have tried to look for the way(s) by which EFL learners try to develop their English vocabulary into some frames and present them as techniques/strategy. There are various strategies that both teachers and/or learners are adopting for teaching/learning the vocabulary of a foreign language. One may oppose that these techniques are sometimes impractical. Therefore, various studies have been done on the 'real' techniques that EFL learners adapt in different places for learning English language vocabulary.

EFL learners in Gujarat, similar to all other EFL learners around the world, may have their own particular way(s) to learn a new English word in English Language. The aim of this paper is to find out and present the most used and the least used way(s) that Gujarati EFL learners follow to develop their English Language Vocabulary. In this paper, the students of Gujarat Technological University (GTU), are examined with reference to the strategies or techniques that they use to develop their vocabulary of English language with reference to the present scenario.

Key Words: VLS, EFL, GTU Learners' Application of VLS

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INTRODUCTION

Learning vocabulary is considered as an indispensable part of language learning and production as limited knowledge of vocabulary results in learner difficulties in comprehension as well as expression of language. Considering the seriousness of this issue, vocabulary learning strategies, as a part of language learning strategies, seem to be very essential in language learning. As a result of that, being aware of these strategies is important for both teachers and students. Fan (2003) emphasized that all vocabulary learning strategies consist of five steps: (a) encountering the word (b) getting a visual or auditory image of the

word. (c) learning the meaning of the word (d) making a strong memory link between the forms and the meanings of the words and at last (e) using that word.

Review of Related Literature

In the field of education over the last few decades, numerous definitions of language learning strategies have been defined by many researchers. Wenden and Rubin (1987) elaborate language learning strategies as "*any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information.*"

The research studies (Cohen, 2007; Oxford, 2002; Prichard, 2008) have also defined that language learning strategies play a very vital role in foreign language learning.

Oxford (1994) defines learning strategies as *"specific actions, behaviors or techniques students use to improve their progress in comprehending and producing Second Language. He notes that these strategies can make learning easier, faster, more fun, independent, and efficient."*

Medani (as cited in McCarthy, 1990) carried out research on the vocabulary learning strategies of both good and poor learners of English. He has found out that there is remarkable variation in what successful learners did and in what underachievers had done. Learners who were successful used a wider variety of strategies than the under-achievers. For example, the under-achievers seemed to practice new words considerably less than good learners. Successful learners practiced the new words whenever they got opportunity (i.e. writing compositions). They also asked questions to confirm their knowledge and tested themselves by checking through word lists too.

Lawson and Hogben carried out (1998) research project on the effects of teaching of keyword strategy among 40 students. The results showed that most of the learners were well familiar with different vocabulary learning strategies at the same time they found that the most commonly used strategy was repetition.

As Weinstein and Mayer's study indicates (as cited in Lessard- Clouston, 1997), learning strategies have been broadly defined as *"behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning" that are "intended to influence the learner's encoding process."*

An another investigation carried out in Japan by Schmitt (1997 among 600 high school, college and adult learners in which the researcher found that the subjects were using dictionary, oral and written repetition, word spelling, and contextual guessing. It was also found that more proficient learners seemed to use more complex and meaning-centered strategies than the less proficient learners.

Objective of the study

To investigate the use of vocabulary learning strategies / techniques frequently used in learning new words English Language by the students of Gujarat Technological University.

Subjects / Samples

The subjects/ samples in this study are hundred students studying in Government Engineering College, Valsad affiliated to Gujarat Technological University in the 8th/ last semester of academic year 2014-15. Though the college is in Valsad city, the students from various regions of Gujarat got admitted here through centralized admission process conducted by the university. The students actually is the heterogeneous group in terms of geographical area, background medium of instructions in their schools, gender, level of competence in LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading & Writing) skills. The age range is between 21 and 23 years.

Methodology

It is basically a 'case study'. This is to give a realistic picture of the current scenario with regard to vocabulary learning strategies used by the students of Gujarat Technological University. The data collection tool is a 'questionnaire' of approximately hundred EFL learners of Gujarat Technological University.

The instrument used in this survey was a questionnaire containing 25 questions based on Schmitt's Taxonomy. It is specially designed for the purpose of this study. Only 25 strategies from six categories in Schmitt's Taxonomy are used in the questionnaire due to certain limitations on the part of the subjects. In preparation for designing the questionnaire for this survey study, the researcher went through various contents related vocabulary learning strategies and how to prepare a questionnaire from many sources like textbooks, journals and online sources. The 25-items were stated in the questionnaire to discover the frequency of the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) adopted by students of Gujarat Technological University. The scales used to show the frequency of the usage of each strategy are; 0- Never, 1-Seldom, 2- Sometimes, 3- Usually, 4- Always.

The data will be collected for all the strategies of all six categories from hundred respondents. Then, the data will be analysed for all the strategies of respective categories. Once the detailed analysis is done, the average of all the strategies of vocabulary learning will be found out

for a particular category. Thus we shall have the particular conclusions ready exhibiting the most used VLS (vocabulary learning strategies) category and the least used VLS (vocabulary learning strategies) category that are applied by the students of Gujarat Technological University.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Detailed Analysis of the responses in various categories

Scale	Vocabulary Learning Strategy					
	0	1	2	3	4	
Determination	-	59	21	14	6	1. I use a bilingual dictionary to translate English words into Gujarati language.
	-	-	27	61	12	2. I use pictures illustrated in the book to understand the word meanings.
	37	58	5	-	-	3. I can understand the meaning of words by recognizing its part of speech.
	-	-	13	26	61	4. I ask the teacher to translate the words into Gujarati.
Social (Discovery)		3	16	32	49	5. I ask the teacher to use the new into a sentence to help me understand the word
	-	-	-	87	13	6. I ask my classmate/friend for meaning.
	-	14	26	40	20	7. I know some new words when working in group works.
Social (consolidation)		51	31	18	-	8. I practice English in group work activities.
	98	2	-	-	-	9. I ask native speakers for help.
	4	65	31	-	-	10. I learn words about the culture of English speaking countries.
Memory		20	21	51	8	11. I write a new word in a sentence so I can remember it.
	-	-	-	19	81	12. I study a spelling of new words.
	-	51	49	-	-	13. I use physical actions when learning words.
	-	27	59	14	-	14. I speak words out loud when studying.
	-	-	17	74	9	15. I repeatedly practice new words.
	88	11	1	-	-	16. I prepare flash card of the word so I can remember it.
Cognitive		8	1	-	-	17. I learn words by listening to vocabulary audio CDs.
	16	5	65	14	-	18. I record vocabulary from English movies soundtrack in my notebook.
	-	-	4	68	28	19. I write or say the word repeatedly to remember it.
	81	12	7	-	-	20. I prepare vocabulary cards and keep them with me wherever I go.
	-	-	42	46	12	21. I listen to English news and songs.
Metacognitive		19	68	13	-	22. I memorize word from English magazines/books/news papers.
	88	2	10	-	-	23. I review my own English vocabulary cards before the next lesson starts.
	-	-	39	59	2	24. I do not concern very much about the difficult words found when reading or
	19	41	27	13	-	25. I use on-line exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge.
Six categories in Schmitt's Taxonomy						

Table 2: Average statistics in each category

Sr. No	VLS Category	Statistical Average of all the items of respective category In percentage (%)				
		Never (0)	Seldom (1)	Sometimes (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
1	Determination	12.34	39	17.66	25	6
2	Social (discovery)	00	4.25	13.75	46.25	35.75
3	Social (Consolidation)	34	39.34	20.66	6	0
4	Memory	00	24.50	32.25	21	22.25
5	Cognitive	46	6	15.84	26	6.16
6	Metacognitive	25.20	22.20	26.20	23.60	2.80

Findings and Discussion

The study of the table 2 reveals that the students of Gujarat Technological University have used the "Social Strategies (discovery)" for learning the new words in English Language most frequently. It is just because these strategies are easy to use and easily available at most of the time without extra efforts. The strategies are

1. asking the teacher to translate the words into Gujarati
2. asking the teacher to use the unknown word into a sentence to help understand the word meaning
3. Asking classmate/friend for meaning.
4. Knowing some new words when working in group.

As the students hardly have the environment of English Language outside the classroom, they generally take the help of either their teacher or their friends (when they are in group).

An observation from table 2 presents the scenario that the students of Gujarat Technological University have used the "Memory strategies" for learning the new words in English Language after the Social Strategies. This is the result of the VLS (Vocabulary Learning Strategies) that they used to rest on during their Language Learning in their schools. One of the reason they might have continued the same in the college as well is that they feel comfortable in the same. The strategies are,

1. Writing a new word in a sentence so that they can remember it.
2. Studying a spelling of new words.
3. Using physical actions when learning words

4. Speaking words out loud when studying.

So far engineering students are concerned; they are generally observed concentrating more on technical subjects rather than studying the subject from the perspective of language. That's why they don't bother about the other ways of learning new words. They only try to learn the words which they would come across during their study or are helpful to them in the examination and are important for reproduction in the examination.

Social Consolidation Strategies, which ranked the lowest percentage in frequency of strategy use are strategies that help learners understand the culture of the language they are learning and mostly deal native speakers which are rare so far as social scenario of Gujarat is concerned. Even though the students wish, it is very difficult to find out the native speaker around them. As a result of that, this strategies are least used.

Metacognitive strategies help learning with many English sources and it can generate interest and motivate learners. The examples are listening to English songs and news, and memorizing words from English magazines. The real factor that works behind not using these strategies much is the students hardly read anything extra in English Language than their books of syllabus. So far as the songs are concerned, they, most of the time, find it difficult to understand the accent if there is a native speaker.

Last but not the least, the Cognitive Strategies are conscious attempts to develop vocabulary in English language through to vocabulary CDs, vocabulary cards, practice and recording vocabulary from English soundtrack

movies in notebook. It falls under 50-50 scale. Some students consciously use these strategies to develop their word power but again with some limitations.

Conclusion and Suggestions

To conclude, it has been evident that from the data analysis that the students of Guajrat Technological University use the "Social Strategies (discovery)" in which the students would like to ask the teacher to translate the words into Gujarati, ask the teacher to use the unknown word into a sentence to help understand the word meaning and ask classmate/friend for meaning. They are dependent on the others for the development of their vocabulary. In the field of education in schools of Gujarat, the students need to make extra efforts on their own than the spoon feeding by teachers. This habit should be developed right from the school days so that they can actively concentrate on their vocabulary development task. Thus, the teachers, playing the role of genuine facilitator in this process of vocabulary learning, should make the conscious attempt to help the students by imparting ideas on how various strategies can be applied for developing vocabulary in English Language effectively. Because, *"The teachers can play a major role in motivating learners to take vocabulary seriously"* (Thornbury, 2002).

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