

## Undergraduate students' use of vocabulary learning strategies

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### Abstract

This study explored the vocabulary learning strategies used by learners at under graduate level from Lahore College for Women University Lahore and its affiliated colleges. It investigated in particular the strategies used by students with Science, Humanities and Management Sciences as academic majors. Survey method was used to collect information from the students through a vocabulary learning strategy inventory (VLS). Data was analyzed using descriptive analysis, frequencies and One- Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). One way ANOVA was used to investigate the different kind of strategies which are being practiced by the three different disciplines (Science, Humanities and Management Sciences). Frequencies were used to examine the most and least used vocabulary learning strategies used by the students. According to the result students from above mentioned groups were practicing all the five strategies namely; Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Social and fell in the category of high and medium strategy users. The result showed that a higher number of respondents preferred the metacognitive strategies and least importance was given to memory techniques as compared to other techniques.

*Keywords:* vocabulary learning, language learning strategies, metacognitive strategies

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## **Introduction**

Language has great importance in learning process. From last few decades, the importance of English language has rapidly increased in Pakistani context. English is an official language in Pakistan and plays an important role because most of the coursework, publications and official reports are demanded to be written in English language. Official communications require high level of English proficiency, so for educational reforms and strategies English language has played an important role.

In language learning, the role of vocabulary is increasing day by day. Few years ago, it was considered that phonological structure and grammatical rules have great importance than vocabulary, which is correct to an extent, but without having sufficient vocabulary students are not able to communicate their views in proper way. Students can easily select words according to their requirement when they can well-read structure frames and grammatical rules.

Saeed (2012) states the importance of vocabulary for expressing and advocating views, opinion and beliefs. Learning vocabulary is essential by individuals for better expression of words and for communication of second language. An individual will be in best situation to convey what ones feel in second language if the person has been equipped with enough vocabulary to be used to make complete sentences which are understandable.

Kırmız (2014) highlighting the importance of Vocabulary learning emphasizes that for mastering a secondary language it is essential to study vocabulary learning strategies. With less and inadequate vocabulary, the learner is stuck with insufficient acquisition of vocabulary.

Asgari and Mustapha (2011) emphasizing on the need and importance of vocabulary learning states that with inadequate information about vocabulary leads to problems for learning secondary language. For this it becomes very important to increase learner's knowledge and skills in teaching and equipping them with new vocabulary.

According to Ghazal (2007) vocabulary is an essential component of language where words are the main structural components of language formation and highly significant to language learners. Without these it would be difficult to communicate the desired ideas.

Gu (1994) defines vocabulary learning as the utilization of specific methods by secondary language learners for execution of new words in second language. According to Scarcella and Oxford, 1992 (as cited by Rebecca, 2003 ) learning strategies are particular actions, traits, methods which are used by particular person for communication or enhancing ones support for

learning new language". Nation (2001) advocated that in context of general learning strategies, the vocabulary learning strategies are an important component. He further states that A strategy requires the inclusion of choices, various strategies are present among which the most preferred ones are selected, which are multifaceted, for which there are different types of stages of learning for which the learners needs to have information regarding what is to be learnt, to attain as much as possible advantage from various exercises, and increase the effectiveness of vocabulary utilization and learning. Rebecca (2003) elaborates that in language learning, learning styles are particular and consists of different means most commonly utilized by student to learn second language, these comprises of visual, global, auditory and analytic. These learning styles make it easy for learners to learn the second language. Extensive research has been conducted on different types of vocabulary learning strategies with ample evidence in literature.

Rebecca (2003) has explored the results of class implication assessing styles and strategies in the L2 undergraduate learners assimilating the extent of L2 guidelines /instructions and strategy guidelines/instructions style preferably adaptive for learners. His findings proclaim basic fact that no single L2 instructional methodology is applicable to all kinds of learners. Sticking to his views on preparing and conducting L2 strategy instructions, the writer has explained following six major groups known as standards of L2 learning strategies in literature.

1. Cognitive strategies employ a learner's capability of handling the language material in direct way. This manipulating involves learning through reasoning, analysis, notes-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, recognizing information to improve plans (information arrangement), working in realistic surroundings and exercising constructions.
2. Metacognitive methods are indicative of an overall learning procedure through management emphasizes on learners preferences style and requirements, development's for an L2 task, collecting and organizing resources and a agenda, evaluating errors, and assessing task achievements, further assessing the accomplishment of any sort of learning strategies.
3. Memory-related strategies provide students an aid to link L2 items or additional concepts but in this method in-depth understanding and knowledge is not essential. The studies have shown that numerous memory-related strategies allow students to acquire and recover given knowledge in an ordered manner like acronyms, but other techniques are likely to create learning retrieval via rhyming sounds, creating images through mental pictures of a word itself or its meanings, producing a mixture of sounds and imageries via keyword method,

through actions and body movements, by using mechanical means like flashcards, or by presenting a location method of utilizing a page or blackboards.

4. Coming to the compensatory strategies, the writer suggested the strategies for L2 learning on advanced level by guessing and comprehending the language from context in reading and listening, by utilization of alternative word and “talking around” the misplaced word to be capable in speaking and reading. The use of gestures or pause words help the learners enable themselves for misplaced knowledge during exercise.
5. Affective strategies present interesting stage of learning related to behavioral responses of the students. The technique identifies one’s attitude and nervousness levels, with reference to sharing information regarding emotional state, pleasing oneself for good performance. This also includes social strategies like inquiring queries for gathering information and confirmations, queries for explanation of a unclear fact, requesting help in performing language related chores, conversation with a local language discussion individuals and discovering ethnic and social customs to help the students work with others and realize the marked background including language. Gu and Johnson (1996) (as cited by Ghazal, 2007) categorizes vocabulary learning strategies into four types,

- Metacognitive
- Cognitive,
- Memory
- Activation strategies

While in another study Gu and Johnson (as cited by Nosidlak, 2013) conducted developed classification of Vocabulary learning strategies with following given categories linked to the above mentioned strategies.

Attitude and view point of about vocabulary learning,

- Metacognitive
- Guessing strategies,
- Dictionary strategies,
- Note-taking strategies,
- Memory, rehearsal strategies
- Memory encoding strategies,

## **Activation strategies**

Schmitt (1997) (as cited by Ghazal, 2008) categorized the division of vocabulary learning strategies given above in to two broad categories, Initial usage of words for meaning determination: These comprise of social and determination strategies. Second encounter combining word meaning: This comprising of social, memory, metacognitive and cognitive strategies.

## **Objectives**

The study wants to investigate the English vocabulary learning techniques which learners of three academic majors utilized at under graduate level. It also investigate the most and least used techniques by the under graduate students from Lahore college from women University, Lahore and its affiliated colleges.

The following research questions were presented to attain the objectives To investigate different kinds of vocabulary learning strategies used by learners from different disciplines (Science, Humanities and Management Sciences)at under graduate level in LCWU and its affiliated Colleges. To find out the most and least strategies used by under graduate students to develop their vocabulary in LCWU and its affiliated colleges.

## **Methodology**

The study is descriptive in nature. The survey method was utilized to collect information from Participants. Random sampling was used to get data regarding English vocabulary learning techniques. The population of this study was the students of Lahore College for Women University, Lahore and its affiliated College.

The participants of this study were under graduate students from Lahore College for Women University, Lahore and its affiliated colleges. The proposed sample size of 415 students from three groups having different disciplines (Arts, Science and Management sciences ) were selected for sampling,180 students from Lahore college for women University, Lahore ,60 students from Jhang Campus of Lahore college for women University, Lahore, 60 participants from Gulberg College, 60 participants from Islamia College Cooper road and 60 from Samanabad College Lahore. An adopted version of a questionnaire concerning vocabulary learning techniques proposed by Xhaferi and Xhaferi (2008) was used to collect information. Five categories (Memory, compensation, cognitive, metacognitive and social) were given in the

questionnaire by the researcher of the current study (used in questioner) were familiar with the use of different VLS.

All the respondents marked the questionnaire according to their beliefs about vocabulary learning.

## Results

**Table 1: Mean scores, standard Deviations and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) for overall usage of five strategies regarding Academic Majors**

	Arts		Science		Commerce		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	P
Memory	3.14	.637	2.78	.649	2.99	.641	16.62	.000
Cognitive	3.34	.747	2.84	.800	1.06	.794	17.04	.000
Compensation	3.33	.727	3.05	.704	3.15	.773	9.10	.000
Metacognitive	3.51	.869	3.20	.018	2.94	.066	7.89	.000
Social	3.51	.887	2.99	.013	2.74	.020	12.43	.000
Overall	3.39	.524	2.93	.589	2.74	.564	23.55	.000

**Academic Major**

The results of table:1 shows that five strategies used by three groups (Humanities, Science & Management Sciences) have significantly difference between the academic majors and five strategies.  $F(4/415) P= .000$ , while the mean difference was very small. Table: 1 result presents that students from Arts background having high mean of overall strategies use. It indicates that they are practicing these vocabulary learning strategies more as compare to the Science and Management sciences groups. The result also shows that Arts students prefer Metacognitive

( $M=3.51$ ,  $SD=.869$ ) and Social strategies ( $M=3.51$ ,  $SD=.887$ ) more. The obtained mean of other two groups Science ( $M=2.93$ ,  $SD=.589$ ) and Management Science ( $M=2.74$ ,  $SD=.564$ ) is similar which shows they were using almost same number of overall strategies.

**Table 2: Most used strategies by the students**

Item No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Mostly						
1	I ask my teacher for a meaning of a new word.	11.0	14.3	18.9	28.9		3.44	
2	I use online dictionary to discover the meaning of a new word.	11.2	15.8	19.3	18.4		3.49	
3	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English	11.0	13.6	24.1	24.6		3.41	
4	I study new words later in order to remember them	11.0	15.0	25.5	25.1		3.40	
5	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	13.4	15.0	24.1	26.0		3.23	

*Note: 1=Never or almost never used this strategy, 2= I occasionally use the strategy, 3= I sometimes use this strategy, 4= I usually use this strategy, 5= I always use this strategy, 4+5=Mostly. Results presented in percentages.*

### Most frequently used techniques

The first most frequently used technique by the learners was “I ask my teacher for a meaning of a new word” ( $M=3.44$ ,  $SD=.314$ ) According to the frequencies result that social strategy was most preferred by the students because in our scenario mostly students rely on their teachers whenever they want to know about secondary language. The second most frequently used strategy was “I use online dictionary to discover the meaning of a new word” ( $M=3.49$ ,  $SD=.394$ ), it seems that students were well aware with the usage of technology and they could easily access the online dictionary which are rich approach to discover meanings of new words.

The third most frequently used strategy was “I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English” ( $M=3.41$ ,  $SD=.305$ ). Concerning to the fourth most frequently use strategy was “I study new words later in order to remember them” ( $M=3.40$ ,  $SD=.942$ ), and the fifth frequently used strategy by the students in this study was “I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English” ( $M=3.23$ ,  $SD=.305$ ).

## Least used Techniques

The frequency of first least used strategy by the students was “I use flashcards to remember new English words”, ( $M= 2.36, SD=.314$ ). The frequency of second least used strategy was “I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page” ( $M= 2.79, SD.364$ ). The result reported statement no 2, 3 and 6 have equal mean average. The frequency of forth least used reported strategy was “I read English without looking up every new word”( $M=2.79, SD=.307$ ) and the fourth least used strategy which reported in table 4.14 was “I try to use of prefixes and suffixes when learning a word” ( $M=2.81, SD=.311$ ). The fifth least used strategy was “I think of relationship between what I already know and new things I learn in English.

**Table 2: Least used strategies by the students**

Item no	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
		Seldom						
1	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	37.7	16.2	22.2	15.5	6.7	2.36	.314
2	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page.	23.2	19.8	24.1	16.5	14.3	2.79	.364
3	I physically act out new English words.	20.8	22.0	24.1	19.3	11.7	2.79	.307
4	I keep a vocabulary notebook to jot down new words I want to learn.	23.9	18.6	25.3	15.0	15.0	2.78	.375
5	I try to use of prefixes and suffixes when learning a word.	21.2	20.3	25.8	19.6	12.2	2.81	.311
6	I read English without looking up every new word.	21.0	18.9	26.0	23.2	7.6	2.79	.350
7	I try not to translate word-byword.	18.6	20.5	24.1	22.9	11.9	2.89	.296

*Note: 1=Never or almost never used this strategy, 2= I occasionally use the strategy, 3=sometimes use this strategy, 4= I usually use this strategy, 5= I always use this strategy, 1+2=Seldom. All frequencies are reported in percentages*

## Discussion and Conclusion

The researcher concluded that for the rationale of learning vocabulary students were using different types of visuals in their minds such as making picture, graphs, and telling stories with actions. They also practiced of writing English sentences and tried to talk in English to improve their skills in second language (English). The findings of this study showed that all the participants of the current study were falling in high and medium strategy users. Arts categories (especially from Urdu medium background) were being used all strategies in wide range.

It has concluded by the researcher that in Pakistani context students with Arts background had less experience to learn English that's why they adopt these strategies more to learn new words of second language(English). The result showed that due to insufficiency of knowledge regarding second language (English) students with Urdu background have to use more strategies to learn English while students with English background have less difficulties to learn second language(English) and did not use all these techniques very much .Kazi and Iqbal (2011) also reported in their research that students with Urdu background were higher strategy users the reason seemed that they had not any experience to read English in any other subject except compulsory subjects. So these learners are more competent about their grades and using more strategies to learn and improve their language skills.

The past studies also concluded, (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Politzer, McGroarty 1985; (as cited by Sung & Chang, 2008) that the University learners belonging to Arts, Education and Social Sciences majors more practiced these techniques as compared to other majors. The most favored techniques found by the students were Metacognitive strategies in this study. Other studies regarding VLS perspective (Kazi & Iqbal, 2011; Kafipour & Hosseini, 2011 & Mubeen 2014) also reports that metacognitive strategies are most favored by the students. Metacognitive leading to self-learning adopted by students thus taking control over their own learning. The main reason found for this was the presence of wide number of material available for learning such as internet, educational materials etc. and it also shows that students wants to improve their language skills. (Dai & Zhou; 2015) stated highest number of students used Metacognitive and Cognitive strategies.

As reported by Rabeeca (2003) Metacognitive methods are indicative of an overall learning procedure through management, emphasizes on learners preferences style and requirements, development's for an L2 task, collecting and organizing resources and agenda, evaluating errors, and assessing task achievements, further assessing the accomplishment of any sort of

learning strategies. As related by past studies, Kafipour and Hosseini (2011) indicated the most highest prevalence was of metacognitive followed by cognitive and memory strategy for learning vocabulary. The researcher of current study was also concluded that all the participants of the current study were giving less preference to the Memory strategies. Rebecca (2003) has explored that Memory-related strategies provide students an aid to link L2 items or additional concepts but in this method in-depth understanding and knowledge is not essential.

This study suggested, it is crucial demand to conduct more researches on vocabulary learning strategies in urban and rural areas. It is also needed that to create awareness regarding English vocabulary learning techniques through media, seminars and workshops. To accomplish inclusive information about vocabulary learning strategies, there is requirement of conducting other research methods like observations, interviews, experimental design and longitudinal studies. For provision of clear and detailed knowledge, there is also requirement of conducting researches on various factors influencing vocabulary learning strategies such as gender, personality, learning styles, self motivation, mother tongue, level of proficiency and beliefs in Pakistan.

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