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Using Vocabulary Strategy-Based Program to Develop Overall Language Proficiency

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Abstract:

The present study offers some insight into the effect of vocabulary strategy training on developing vocabulary size and overall language proficiency. It also explores the correlation between vocabulary strategy use and the language development learners achieve. A total of 52 third-year English majors were selected from the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology as participants of the study. Three instruments were required to fulfill the purpose of the study; English proficiency test, vocabulary learning strategy inventory and vocabulary size test. ASSURE model based program was designed to cater for training participants on vocabulary learning strategies. Findings indicated that the experimental group students outperformed the control group in both vocabulary size and overall language proficiency. Positive correlation was also found between learners' language performance and their strategy use. It is recommended that conscious vocabulary learning strategies should be accorded attention in EFL preparation programs with prominence given to autonomy- fostering lexical learning activities.

Keywords: *vocabulary strategy; language proficiency*

Introduction

Though vocabulary study no longer languishes as the neglected Cinderella of applied linguistics-having aroused renewed interest of researchers and an increasing amount of empirical research (e.g., Hakem, 2022; Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2014; Sam & Shalini, 2022; Wang, 2017), consensus is still lacking over issues such as the conceptualization of the process by which vocabulary learning occurs, the importance of context use, the role of individual differences in lexical acquisition, and the effectiveness of various vocabulary learning strategies.

In vocabulary learning (VL), being a crucial component for achieving FL acquisition, individual differences and motivation play a major role in the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS). Along with this notion, McCarthy (1990) and Viera (2016), emphasize the importance of vocabulary learning, being a critical element alongside with grammatical skill for decoding written and oral texts. The use of learner-centered approaches can contribute to retaining new vocabulary in long-term memory and practicing terminology in real life situations. According to Boonkongsan & Intaraprasert (2014), Nation (2001), Richards & Schmidt (2010), Schmitt (2008), Siriwan (2007), vocabulary learning strategy training is a worthwhile approach that has practical implications for language teaching.

Though numerous studies have investigated varied techniques of learning vocabulary (Dobao, 2014; Kang, 2015; Nation, 2011; Schmitt, 2010), there is a dire need for conducting more studies on teaching vocabulary. Studies concerned with developing vocabulary have long aroused debates among researchers, with vocabulary being a persistent challenge drawing attention of researchers (Ender, 2016), particularly in FL context, maintaining that vocabulary learning may not consistently yield positive results (Webb & Chang, 2012).

Recent research has focused widely on learning strategies in relation to various variables and contexts (Sahragard, Khajavi, & Abbasian, 2016). Generally believed as beneficial, (Anderson,

2005; Macaro, 2001; Oxford, 1990; 2011) define learning strategies as deliberate actions adopted by learners to foster their language learning. One of the several merits of learning strategies is that they bridge the gap between instruction and learning as they help students know what to focus on while attempting to learn (Nunan, 1995). In addition, students have the advantage of using strategies autonomously outside the classroom if they are persuaded to (Wong & Nunan, 2011).

Foreign language teachers' proficiency has significantly aroused researchers' interest worldwide with studies using performance-based tests for assessment (Harvey, Conway, Richards, & Roskvist, 2010; Richards, Conway, Roskvist, & Harvey, 2013; Richards, 2017). The literature available gives prominence to estimated and perceived proficiency (Richards et al., 2013), highlighting lack of research on actual proficiency, especially in the context of vocabulary strategy-based programs for language development. Perceived proficiency that refers to the extent to which a person thinks she is competent at language performance is often evaluated through self-report (i.e., questionnaire or survey) (Harvey et al., 2010; Richards, 2017).

Literature indicates that the issue of EFL teachers' language proficiency is quite common (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015; Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Li & Baldauf, 2011; Mori, Ming, Nor, Suppiah, & Imm, 2011). With the exception of Mori et al. (2011), most of these studies probe both the estimated and perceived target language proficiency of foreign language teachers.

Due to their overreliance on devices and their dire need to remember diverse vocabulary, students often struggle with learning new words. Vocabulary learning is inherently tied to memory rather than grammatical rules (Sam & Shalini, 2022). Students often use memory techniques like mnemonics that require rigorous mental processes (Schmitt, 1997). The techniques FL learners often use, discussed by Schmitt (2000), include using images that may help students in associating newly encountered words with familiar concepts. This helps learners

integrate new words with meaningful networks and enhance later recall.

The value of strategic teaching lies in the contribution it makes to language learning outcomes. The autonomy language learners achieve as a result of self- regulation could be enhanced through instruction (Nguyen & Gu,2013). In a similar vein, Dornyei (2001) stressed the notion that teachers adopt teaching strategies with a view to maintaining learners' motivation. For language learning to be effective, it involves using varied strategies that take into account catering to individual differences among learners, being a fundamental principle (Ellis, 2005). The use of both empirical and logical method to teaching language strategies has been strongly advocated by Ellis (2005), indicating that vocabulary learning could especially make use of strategy employment.

Effective language curriculum should comprise instruction of vocabulary learning strategies. Though a plethora of research was conducted on the contribution of these strategies to language learning (Kim, 2013; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Tseng & Schmitt, 2008), the focus has ignored explicit teaching of strategies. Recent research reveals that examining the effect of vocabulary teaching strategies on enhancing vocabulary knowledge is crucial. Thus, it seems evident that there is a need to investigate the effect of vocabulary strategy-based program to develop strategy use, vocabulary size and overall language proficiency.

Review of Literature

Vocabulary learning is an intricate endeavor which entails varied cognitive processing that is fostered by the method of teaching adopted and consolidated by the increment of knowledge learners obtain. In their attempt to broaden communication, learners need to expand their lexical repertoire and boost linguistic skills. However, FL students may encounter difficulties in pronunciation, inference making, usage or spelling (Pearson et al., 2007).

Insufficient vocabulary, being a foundational component of language learning, may lead to difficulties that hinder language

learning as indicated in various studies (Asgari & Mustapha, 2011; Huy, 2015; Nyikos & Fan, 2007; Saengpakdeejit, 2014; Soureshjani, 2011). As reported by many a research, language learning strategies play a crucial role in language acquisition (Boonkongaen & Intaraprasert, 2014; Goundar, 2019; Gu, 2011; Nation, 2001; Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Schmitt, 2008; Siriwan, 2007; Wanpena, et al., 2013), showing that the use of these strategies yield consistently positive results in language learning.

The term strategy was diversely defined focusing mainly on the actions taken by learners to achieve the aims of their learning (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). In the context of learning language, the term strategy refers to "intentional or unintentional processes adopted by learners while learning" (p. 515). Siriwan (2007) defines language learning strategies as "any planned activity, or behavior language learners employ to help make their comprehension easier, recollect and use information" (p. 41). As regarding strategy training, Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 516) explained that "it is training in strategy use with a view to enhancing learning effectiveness".

Nation (2001, p. 352) illustrates that lexical learning strategies are "part and parcel of language learning strategies." In Wanpena et al. view (2013), vocabulary learning strategies are regarded as a crucial component for students to achieve success in learning technical English (p. 312). Boonkongaen & Intaraprasert (2014, p. 2) define vocabulary learning strategies as "a set of endeavors including the mental processes students report using with a view to boosting their lexical knowledge". Richard's & Schmidt (2010) stated that learning strategies are tactics that help raise students' awareness and enable them to become more in charge of their own learning, let alone fostering their learning strategies (p. 298).

Several researchers have investigated into vocabulary learning strategies maintaining the importance of familiarizing learners with vocabulary learning strategies (Ender, 2016; Fan, 2003; Kim, 2013; Wei, 2015; Zhang & Li, 2011). In addition to that, Tseng, Dörnyei, and Schmitt (2006) highlighted the difficulty of

assessing strategy use using questionnaires due to the fact that the processes of vocabulary learning strategies are highly intermingled.

According to recent research, FL learners should be taught vocabulary learning strategies to deal with unfamiliar words (Webb & Chang, 2012). Deliberate vocabulary learning necessitates employing effective strategies to foster learners' academic success (Ebner & Ehri, 2016). Lexical knowledge involves selecting appropriate strategies to help predict learners' progress. To predict depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, concentrating on word associations and form are crucial (Zhang & Lu, 2015). Deep lexical knowledge can substantially predict reading comprehension (Zhang & Yang, 2016).

Insufficient word knowledge can negatively affect phonological intelligibility that is crucial for FL reading comprehension (Chiappe et al., 2002; Cunningham et al., 2020; Krenca et al., 2019; Melby-Lervag & Lervåg, 2014). In a study by Lervåg and Aukrust's (2010), findings indicated that it was only through combining both breadth and depth of vocabulary assessment that reading comprehension could be accurately predicted. Cain and Oakhill (2014) maintained that a vigorous vocabulary learners possess can significantly affect reading comprehension than decoding.

Gu and Johnson (1996) outlines vocabulary learning into two categories, metacognitive regulation and cognitive strategies. Metacognitive regulation embraces selective attention and self-initiation whereas cognitive strategies involves sub-strategies such as guessing, note-taking, dictionary use, rehearsal strategies and activation strategies. Vocabulary development is fostered through effective teaching and learning strategies.

In a study by Almosa (2024), the main concern was to examine using new techniques of teaching vocabulary to participants studying varied courses. The study adopted Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies consisting of five distinct categories of "determination", "social", "memory", "cognitive" and "metacognitive". Quantitative analysis was adopted to assess

vocabulary learning strategy use among a total of 230 undergraduate students. Randomly selected, the participants responded to a survey conducted via an online platform. Results revealed that the metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies, whereas the cognitive strategies were the least used.

Rafique et al. (2023) attempted to examine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency among English majors at Lahore University. Using cluster sampling, the participants were selected from the fifth to eighth semesters. Instruments included productive and receptive vocabulary test and depth of vocabulary knowledge test. Results revealed a positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency. In addition, all these variables correlate with speaking performance. It was also found that vocabulary knowledge was the cause of 26% of the variance in speaking proficiency.

The strategies required for learning a new word may start with discovery strategies for elementary information, whereas more accurate meaning is attained through deliberate strategies. Research indicates that the commonly used strategies are rehearsal, commitment to memory and note-taking. These strategies help learners figure out the meaning intended through interacting with others in socialization. More accurate meaning is gained through consulting dictionaries or more knowledgeable person (Mutalib, et al, 2014, p. 363).

In a study by Wu (2019), the main concern was to explore the positive effects of vocabulary learning strategies on vocabulary learning for non-English major college students, in an attempt to identify which component of language is specifically influenced by vocabulary learning strategies. Instruments included a questionnaire, an interview and an observation sheet. Results revealed that vocabulary learning strategies correlate positively with vocabulary size. Results also indicated that vocabulary learning strategies has contributed to improving vocabulary learning.

Shooshtari, et al (2013) attempted to identify any relationship between Iranian learners' strategy use and their age or vocabulary test performance. Findings indicated that the two groups used rote learning strategies more frequently than other types of memory. Though results revealed negative relationship between learners' adolescence age and their lexical performance, no correlation was shown between adults' age and their lexical performance.

The purpose of the study conducted by Yildiz and Mirioglu (2019) was twofold: a) to identify the vocabulary learning strategies employed by 9th grade students in Turkey, and b) to examine differences between male and female in vocabulary strategy use. A total of 172 9th graders responded to VLS questionnaire, and a semi- structured interview was held with 10 students. Findings indicated that the most frequently utilized strategies were social (discovery) and (determination) whereas the least utilized strategies were social (consolidation) and metacognitive strategies. No significant differences were found between male and female participants in VLS. Results revealed that teachers' awareness of learners' strategy use may help in selecting appropriate vocabulary course.

Proponents of vocabulary strategy training maintain that strategy use enhances learners' awareness of processes of learning, enables them to be more active, take charge and develop autonomy of their own learning (Cohen, 2002; 2003; 2008; Oxford, 2003; Schmitt, 2010). Oxford (1996) widely asserted that strategy instruction helps promote: 1) awareness of strategy use; 2) use strategies that boosts efficiency and aids recall; 3) monitor effectiveness; and 4) adopt new strategies and remove less effective ones through metacognitive control (p. 112).

Al-Omairi (2020) attempted to pinpoint the most and the least frequently employed lexical learning strategies adopted by Iraqi EFL majors and English for academic purposes (EAP) students. The study also was concerned to determine the differences between EFL and EAP majors in their use of vocabulary learning strategies. The participants consisted of 100 undergraduates (50 EAP students and 50 EFL learners). Instruments included a

questionnaire based on Schmitt (1997) and followed by semi-structured interview with four of the participants. Findings showed that the most frequently used strategies by both EFL and EAP students was determination strategy, while the metacognitive strategies were the least used. No differences were found in using VLS between the five categories of metacognitive, social, determination, memory and cognitive. Most of the participants highly estimated the contribution of VLS to language learning.

The significance of language proficiency emanates from its impact on all life spheres with vocabulary assuming a core aspect of linguistic knowledge (Rafique, Waqas & Shahid, 2023). The pivotal role of English language proficiency permeates diverse aspects of human communication with lexical competence, being a crucial component in assessing learners' performance. Learners' rich vocabulary, being a culmination of extensive reading including word expansion and associations, the strategies they employ to represent meaning in memory e.g. note-taking, dictionary use, semantic mapping and review, enable them to express themselves articulately and assimilate intricate texts effectively. The predominant function of context in determining the meaning intended drives learners to exceed memorization of words to higher order processing of their nuanced meanings within different contexts (Sagarra, et al., 2024).

Scarcely inferior to the lexical component in attaining proficiency is the contribution of grammar, being the mechanism according to which language works. Vocabulary represents the bricks to be used in building the language edifice whereas grammar functions as the cement by which the bricks shape the edifice. Without grammar, we are left with mere labels of the physical surroundings (Leung, 2022).

Equally crucial to proficiency is accurate pronunciation, being the cornerstone of effortless intelligibility among users of English, let alone the confidence reigning the tone between interlocutors. Conversely, poor pronunciation creates barriers that may lead to

major breakdown in communication as a result of misinterpretation (Rao, 2016).

The present study was designed to document what students did to facilitate their lexical learning and to examine how the strategies they adopted related to their vocabulary size as well as to their overall language proficiency.

Statement of the problem

A great number of English majors at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology lack the adequate training required for developing a dynamic living lexicon that may help them recognize and use vocabulary with a view to enhancing overall English proficiency and vocabulary size taking into account students' own conceptualizations about vocabulary learning.

Questions

The following questions are raised:

- (1) What are the effects of a suggested vocabulary strategy training programme on students' overall proficiency?
- (2) What are the effects of a suggested vocabulary strategy training programme on students' vocabulary size?
- (3) How do the strategies students use relate to their overall proficiency?
- (4) How do the strategies students use relate to their vocabulary size?
- (5) How does students' vocabulary size relate to their overall proficiency?

Purpose

The purpose of the study was threefold:

- (1) to probe the effect of a proposed vocabulary strategy training program on learners' overall proficiency.
- (2) to examine the relationship between the vocabulary learning strategies employed by students and their overall language proficiency.
- (3) to determine the relationship between students' vocabulary size and their overall language proficiency.

Hypotheses

The present study hypothesized the following:

- (1) There will be significant differences at 0.01 level between the scores attained by the experimental group students and those of the control group in overall proficiency in favour of the experimental group due to the strategy training programme.
- (2) There will be significant differences at 0.01 level between the scores attained by the experimental group students and those of the control group in vocabulary size in favour of the experimental group due to the strategy training programme.
- (3) There will be positive correlations between students' scores on the proficiency test and those on the vocabulary learning strategy inventory.
- (4) There will be positive correlations between students' scores on the vocabulary size test and those on the vocabulary learning strategy inventory.
- (5) There will be positive correlations between students' scores on the vocabulary size test and those on the overall proficiency test.

Significance

The importance of this study lies in the following:

- (1) It furnishes curriculum planners and language teachers with ASSURE Model-based vocabulary learning program.
- (2) The tools designed for the research, the proficiency and vocabulary size tests, the vocabulary learning strategy inventory could be useful for EFL researchers.
- (3) This study gives prominence to the use students can make of teaching deliberate vocabulary learning strategies that may enable them to recall and use vocabulary productively.

Delimitations

This research is delimited to four strategies, namely, dictionary use, review, note-taking and guessing as they stand for the cognitive processes learners get involved in while learning vocabulary.

Definition of Terms

- **Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Vocabulary learning strategies can be defined as students' conscious efforts exerted to retrieve or expand newly encountered words in order to improve vocabulary learning (Gu, 2019). Wang (2018) defined vocabulary learning strategies as deliberate actions taken by learners to assimilate and recall new words. In the present study, vocabulary learning strategies is operationally defined as the mental processes students perform to recognize and produce vocabulary.

- **Proficiency**

Language proficiency refers to the capacity to accomplish a series of panoramic communication activities in diverse contexts, advancing from elementary to intricate levels with a given degree of precision (Rao, 2016). In this study, proficiency is defined as the ability to perform higher linguistic tasks of cohesion, coherence, vocabulary, structure and transfer into, from and equivalent to a text originally written in the target language.

- **Vocabulary size**

Nouri and Zerhouni (2016) define vocabulary size as the number of words FL learners recognize at a given level of proficiency (p.19). Vocabulary size test aims to measure the breadth of vocabulary learners know at least the surface meaning (Astan & Tsmah, 2015; Coxhead, Nation & Sim, 2014). It is operationally defined in this study as the number of words learners can identify and (or) produce appropriately.

Method

The present study adopted a quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of vocabulary strategy training in enhancing English proficiency.

Design and Participants

The participants, totaling 52, were randomly selected from third year EFL majors at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology who were equally distributed to represent the control and experimental groups during the academic year (2023/2024). The intervention lasted for 13

weeks for the experimental group whereas the control group received the regular instruction.

Instruments

To fulfill the purpose of the study, three instruments were constructed; an inventory of vocabulary learning strategies, English proficiency test and vocabulary size test.

The vocabulary learning strategy inventory

Following Likert's type, the inventory of vocabulary learning strategies was constructed to cover four core ideas: 1) comprising seven items , the note- taking strategies core concentrated on the details included in the notes, the frame of the notes taken (synonyms and antonyms, collocations and usage); 2) in the five items of review, learners were asked to report if they examined their notes elaborately and systematically (e.g., finding Arabic equivalents, complete sentence); 3) six items related to dictionary use included data pertaining to the frequency of learners' use of dictionary, the information they look for (e.g., the best way of using dictionary, the examples illustrating differences in meaning of words); and 4) eight items related to guessing strategies contained information related to structure of words (part of speech, prefix , root and suffix), prior knowledge of topic, expressions and definitions supporting guess.

The English proficiency Test

The test was constructed to represent four sections as follows: cloze (40%), multiple choice vocabulary (20%), grammar (20%) and translation into Arabic (20%). 1) The Cloze Test Construction: There are two options, fixed ratio versus rational deletion. Fixed ratio type is constructed by deleting words following a fixed pattern (e.g. every seventh word). Rational deletion refers to the control testers have to select the words deleted. The present research adopted rational deletion so as to test higher order skills of syntactic features, coherence and cohesion; 2) Grammatical Structures: Learners are required to create sentences different from the one provided where they either change into different form, complete, correct or supply; 3) Multiple Choice Vocabulary: learners are asked to supply a missing word out of four distracters

given; 4) Translation: a passage of 100- words about memory. The aim was to measure students' skills to accurately render all the lexical and grammatical features of the source language to the target language both in style and meaning.

The Vocabulary Size Test

It is a kind of test in which students are provided with a list of words, the majority of which are real while others are fabricated. Students are required to identify the words they know and warned against those they didn't see before. This type of test has the advantage of being easy to design and carry out. It usually consists of 100 words, 25 of which are apparently real, selected of generally academic vocabulary.

Treatment

Description of the Vocabulary Learning Program

The program was constructed using ASSURE model for instructional systematic design. The purpose of the program that lasted for 13 sessions with 3 hours each was to enhance overall language proficiency.

Procedures

Prior to treatment, the instruments, overall proficiency test, vocabulary size test, and the vocabulary learning strategy inventory were administered to the participants. The experimental group received the vocabulary strategy-based program whereas the control group received the regular content and method of teaching. On finishing the program, the instruments were administered to the two groups as posttests. Students' scores were statistically analyzed, and results reached were discussed.

Results and Discussion

The first hypothesis

There will be significant differences at 0.01 level between the scores attained by the experimental group students and those of the control group in overall proficiency in favour of the experimental group due to the strategy training programme.

Table 1. The "t" Value of the Experimental Group and the Control Group on Overall Proficiency of the Pre-test

Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Pre	control	26	19.82	3.76	0.714
	experimental	26	20.58	4.69	

Inspection of the above table reveals that there is no significant difference in the pretest between the control group and the experimental group in overall proficiency.

Table 2. The "t" Value of the Experimental Group and the Control Group on Overall Proficiency of the Post-test

Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Post	control	26	20.18	3.32	18.11
	experimental	26	43.17	6.09	

Table (2) indicates that there is a significant difference at 0.01 in the posttest between the control and the experimental groups in overall proficiency in favour of the experimental group. This means that hypothesis 1 was verified.

The second hypothesis

There will be significant differences at 0.01 level between the scores attained by the experimental group students and those of the control group in vocabulary size in favour of the experimental group due to the strategy training programme.

Table 3. The "t" Value of the Experimental Group and the Control Group on Vocabulary Size of the Pre-test

Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Pre	control	26	23.21	5.43	- 0.305
	experimental	26	22.52	6.79	

The above table shows that there is no significant difference in the pretest between the control group and the experimental group in vocabulary size.

Table 4. The "t" Value of the Experimental Group and the Control Group on Vocabulary Size of the Post-test

Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Post	control	26	22.18	4.25	12.81
	experimental	26	49.76	11.18	

Table (4) shows that there is a significant difference at 0.01 level in the posttest between the experimental and control groups in vocabulary size in favour of the experimental group. This means that hypothesis 2 was verified.

The third and fourth hypothesis

There will be positive correlations between students' scores on the proficiency test and those on the vocabulary learning strategy inventory.

There will be positive correlations between students' scores on the vocabulary size test and those on the vocabulary learning strategy inventory.

Table 5. Correlations Between Scores on Strategy Use and Scores on Proficiency and Vocabulary Size Tests of the Control Group

	Group	Note-Taking	Review	Dictionary Use	Guessing
Proficiency	Cont	0.17	0.09	0.15	0.04
Vocabulary Size		0.11	0.18	0.18	0.14

Table (5) shows that there is no correlations between the vocabulary learning strategies and the two dependent variables of proficiency and vocabulary size. This means that hypotheses 3 and 4 were partly verified.

Table 6. Correlations Between Scores on Strategy Use and Scores on Proficiency and Vocabulary Size Tests of the Experimental Group

	Group	Note-Taking	Review	Dictionary Use	Guessing
Proficiency	Exp	0.67	0.48	0.19	0.98
Vocabulary Size		0.59	0.61	0.48	0.62

Inspection of the table above shows that the review, guessing and note-taking strategies are correlated with overall proficiency. A positive correlation was also found between vocabulary size and the strategies of dictionary use, note-taking and review. It also reveals that there was no positive correlation between dictionary use strategy and overall proficiency. Thus, hypotheses 3 and 4 were partially verified.

The fifth hypothesis

There will be positive correlations between students' scores on the vocabulary size test and those on the overall proficiency test.

Table 7. Correlations Between Posttest Scores on Proficiency and Vocabulary Size Tests of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Experimental	Control
Proficiency and Vocabulary Size	0.89	0.18

Examining the table above indicates that the experimental group student's scores in the vocabulary size test and the proficiency test are positively correlated. It also shows that the control group students' scores in the vocabulary size and the proficiency tests were not correlated. Thus, hypothesis 5 was partially verified.

The present study examined the impact of strategy-based lexical training program to develop vocabulary size and proficiency in English overall and to probe the correlation between these two variables and the strategies learners used to improve vocabulary learning. The training presented proved effective for the treatment group having been exposed to a number of tasks proposed to foster lexical learning.

The experimental group students might have got engaged in deliberate processes fostering meaning retention; using a dictionary to verify guesses, keeping a diary for new words, annotating word meanings in text margins, seeking out extracurricular vocabulary content beyond class requirements—these actions, whether all or some of them might have enhanced retrieval behavior, resulting in higher performance in their favor in both vocabulary size and overall proficiency in comparison to the control group students. The control group students, on the

contrary, might have employed less effective vocabulary strategies, e.g. reviewing notes and self-testing of new words, resulting in inadequate processing of word meanings necessary for later recall.

The findings reached by this study are consonant with those of Almosa, 2024; Cohen, 2008; Oxford, 2011; Sam & Shalini, 2022 maintaining that more detailed vocabulary content consolidates retention. Though repetition exercises could be beneficial for memorizing lexical items for short term, they are not adequate for lasting effect due to lack of details about the items to be learned.

The findings reached by this study reveal that high correlation is found between overall proficiency and use of vocabulary strategies of guessing, review and note-taking. An explanation for this may lie in the response the experimental group students made to the tasks required in the proposed program in the form of using context to make up for dictionary use, guessing at the meaning of unfamiliar words they took notes of resulting in positive correlation between their proficiency level and their scores on strategy use. The fact that dictionary use is correlated with vocabulary size could be interpreted by the students' perception that learning the meanings of words is directly proportional to the use of dictionary, which could have influenced their answers to vocabulary learning questionnaire.

The fact that vocabulary size and overall proficiency of the control group students are not correlated with strategy use could be explained through the counterproductive belief maintaining that all learners need to learn a foreign language is a tenacious memory, repeating and memorizing individual words and being guided by dictionary meaning and similar notions could be the strategies the control group students employed to learn vocabulary and consequently might have been reflected on their responses to the instruments of the study.

The results obtained by the present study are in harmony with those reached by Khan et al. (2018) confirming that strategy instruction plays a crucial role in vocabulary learning and

speaking performance. Similarly, the results reached by the present study resonate with those found by Aslam (2020) indicating a positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and speaking performance of Pakistani college students. This result implies that adopting adequate strategies for language learning may enhance lexical competence and speaking performance.

In a similar vein, Gonzales-Fernandez & Schmidt in their study conducted in (2017) reached a conclusion that developing depth and breadth of vocabulary contribute significantly to language proficiency. Several studies have consistently revealed strong correlation between lexical knowledge and language proficiency (Aristi, Parawati & Maria, 2016; Johnson, Acevedo & Mercado, 2016; Milton, Wade & Hopkins, 2010; Seffar, 2015; Uchihara & Clenton, 2020; Uchihara & Saito, 2019; Uzer, 2017.

Recent studies indicate that lexical knowledge is closely associated with language proficiency overall (Schmitt, 2014). Vocabulary, representing the bricks of the language building, forms the basis of mutual understanding among interlocutors. Rich vocabulary enable speakers to express themselves powerfully in significant discussions.

Conclusions

The present study stresses the compelling correlation between overall language proficiency and vocabulary learning strategies. The ultimate target intended is to enhance language learning and teaching practices so that college students could upgrade their overall language proficiency. Deliberate vocabulary strategy training was successful in fostering vocabulary size and overall language proficiency. Repetition and memorization strategies of lexical learning proved less fruitful than meaning- oriented strategies. Dictionary use strategy proved effective in boosting vocabulary size whereas the strategies of guessing, review and note-taking were more successful in enhancing overall language proficiency. It could be inferred that EFL majors were not either sufficiently or adequately exposed to extracurricular training of lexical knowledge. The results reached

have implications for teachers of English, policymakers and curriculum planners in the field of language teaching to draw their attention to fostering students' lexical knowledge and consequently their proficiency overall.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are suggested:

- (1) Self-initiated vocabulary-based activities should be accorded attention with a view to helping students take charge of their own learning.
- (2) Future research is crucial to explore the processes that enable learners to easily recall learned words for productive use and the context in which this occurs.
- (3) Appreciating the benefit of time spent on vocabulary acquisition, additional time should be assigned to learning vocabulary.
- (4) Rote learning based on repetition-memorization of words is of limited value contrasted with context-based strategies of vocabulary learning particularly for FL students.
- (5) Deliberate vocabulary learning strategies should be the cornerstone of the lexical component in the curriculum of teacher preparation programs.
- (6) Lexical learning should be lifelong process in which activities selected match with learners' interest so that they could enhance overall language proficiency.

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