

How Learners, Context, Tasks, and Strategies affect Vocabulary Acquisition in a Foreign Language

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Abstract: Vocabulary acquisition is one of the core parts of foreign language learning. It is unswervingly prompting students' communicative skills and educational achievement. The present research study explores the multi-layered methods of vocabulary acquirement by probing four fundamental dimensions: The Learner, The Learning Context, The Task type, and Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS). Illustrating on pragmatic evidence and hypothetical bases from second language acquisition (SLA) research, the study discovers how individual learner differences like language skills, ability, motivation, intellectual, and cognitive skills interact with relative variables, including teaching styles, tutorial room setting, acquaintance with real language contribution, and so on. Moreover, the role of task proposal is examined, highlighting the effect of task difficulty, grammatical choices, and communicative objects on vocabulary acquisition and its practical usage. Specific consideration is devoted to vocabulary learning strategies, both Cognitive (e.g., revision, rote learning, rehearsal and contextualization, etc.) and Metacognitive (e.g., planning, monitoring), as intermediaries in the learning course. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used for data collection. The findings of the study show that both cognitive and metacognitive strategies are equally important for vocabulary building. There is no single option for vocabulary acquisition. For better vocabulary building, competent teachers and modern teaching styles are equally required. The study gives insight to curriculum planners and policymakers to keep in mind individual learners' needs while finalizing the curriculum. Both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches are the need of the hour for gaining mastery of excellent vocabulary building.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Vocabulary Acquisition, Contextualization, Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies



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Introduction

Vocabulary is considered the heart of any language. One can speak without grammar, but one cannot speak without vocabulary. Decidedly, it is the life and blood of any language. Hence, vocabulary is a crucial part of foreign language acquisition. It helps the learners to express their thoughts efficiently (González-Fernández & Schmitt, 2017). It helps the learners to develop their receptive and productive skills equally. Every language is based on four skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is a fact that learning new words is a painstaking job. There are many factors which are directly or indirectly involved in learning new words. The interest of the learners, dedication, motivation, environment, and background knowledge of the learners are the core factors which ultimately help the students.

The article under reference aims to explore how the basic components, which are the learner, the learning context, the task, and vocabulary learning strategies, contribute to vocabulary acquisition. The knowledge of these factors not only helps the learners but also supports the teachers in this context.

Vocabulary learning is the core of foreign language acquisition since it is such a basic factor that affects the learners' ability to understand and produce the target language and to communicate in target language contexts (Selinker & Gass, 2008). Although the traditional methods of instruction have focused on grammar and syntax, recent research suggests how imperative the role that vocabulary development has in learning a language. Yet developing a strong vocabulary in a second language is a dynamic, multifaceted process that depends on a constellation of factors. Learner-specific variables, contextual variables, task-dependent variables, and the strategies adopted in the learning process are the most influential of these.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the individual learner differences for vocabulary acquisition in a target language.
2. To examine the effect of different learning contexts on vocabulary building.
3. To analyze the usefulness of different vocabulary learning strategies used by students.

Research Questions

1. What are the individual learner differences for vocabulary acquisition in a target language?
2. What are the effects of different learning contexts on vocabulary building?
3. What is the effectiveness and usefulness of different vocabulary learning strategies used by students?

Review of the Literature

Vocabulary is decidedly the heart of any language. No language can survive without the rich granary of its word bank. Owing to this significance, linguists, psychologists, and language teachers are highly concerned about vocabulary and its acquisition (Levenston, 1979). There are many researches which highlight the importance of vocabulary learning strategies. The fact of the matter is that vocabulary learning has become a matter of interest for teachers and teachers. Recently published works, especially the CUP volumes, have attested to the significance of various perspectives of vocabulary acquisition, including Harley (1995) and Coady et al. (1993). Many researchers think that vocabulary acquisition is a pain-taking job which is determined by various factors. These are the interests of the learners, dedication, motivation, environments, the background knowledge of the learners, and finally, the use of different strategies used by the learners. These core factors ultimately help the students to enhance their word bank.

1. The Role of the Learner

It is natural that every student is different from others in different learning contexts. Schmitt (2008) is of the view that interest, dedication, diligence, background knowledge and learning habits are basic factors which deeply influence vocabulary learning. Oxford (1990) views that also highlights the role of learner independence and self-sufficiency as core factors which help learners build their vocabulary bank.

2. The Learning Context

The environment is also a key factor towards vocabulary acquisition. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary can be enhanced both by attending vocabulary classes in a specific classroom and outside the classroom as well. Anyhow, suitable environments help the students to learn vocabulary as compared to the common places of learners' interaction. Traditional methods and old classroom practices cannot expand the horizons of learners.

3. Task Types and Activities

Different types of activities motivate and fuel the learners to enrich their knowledge of vocabulary. Ellis (2003) states that the activities which motivate students to learn and use new words are highly appreciated, contrary to those activities which do not prompt students to learn and use new words in their day-to-day lives. Reading activities, social interaction, and vocabulary games make the learners active and spirited to learn better vocabulary.

4. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The use of effective strategies surely encourages the learners to learn new words and use them effectively in their daily lives. Cohen and Macaro (2007) highlight that cognitive and metacognitive strategies equally help the learners to build their vocabulary knowledge. Schmitt (1997) introduced different types of strategies which help students in the field of vocabulary learning.



Types and Role of Different Strategies in Vocabulary Acquisition

There are two types of vocabulary learning strategies which help the learners to boost up their vocabulary knowledge. These are Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies.

Cognitive Vocabulary: Cognitive Vocabulary learning strategies include mental processes and direct manipulation of language to learn vocabulary. The most common among them are Guessing strategies, Rote learning, Grouping, Spelling memorization and Using dictionaries strategies.

Metacognitive Vocabulary: Metacognitive Vocabulary learning strategies encompass monitoring, planning, and evaluating the students' learning process (Diaz, 2015).

Four Trends for Learning Vocabulary

There are four tendencies for vocabulary acquisition. These trends include Memorization and Rote learning, Individual differences, Retention ability and learning context.

At an early stage, Rote learning and Memorization are key to vocabulary acquisition (Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012). At this level, learners find it easy to learn vocabulary through this practice. They learn and study maximum words through this practice. They memorize and repeat the words aloud in an inaudible way. In the same way, retention skills are very helpful at an early level to enrich the knowledge of vocabulary.

Miyake and Shah (1999) state that individual differences also have their own place in the field of learning vocabulary. The relationship between vocabulary strategies and individual differences is very significant at this level. Individual differences comprise self-sufficiency, self-actualization, diligence, enthusiasm, self-efficacy, background knowledge, masculinity, learning process and learning context.

There are various studies which concentrate on the means of differences in learning vocabulary. In Parry (1997), Dimitri used an "all-inclusive" approach, which deeply concentrated on vocabulary learning. Masculinity also matters in learning vocabulary. Male and female have their own approaches towards vocabulary acquisition. According to Boyle (1987), women are not as sharp as men in the art of vocabulary learning.

Learning context is very much influential for vocabulary acquisition (Collentine & Barbara, 2004). Nation (2001) states that learning context helps students to guess the connotative meanings of different words during the reading process. In the same way, both Formal and informal learning contexts enrich the learners' knowledge of vocabulary; nevertheless, informal contexts are very helpful in the growth of vocabulary learning (Schmitt, 2008). Social interaction prospects and the accessibility of reliable resources in the learning context improve vocabulary retention and use (Webb, 2008). A helpful learning setting inspires students to interact with new words and strategies that help best vocabulary acquisition (Cameron, 2001).

Summary of Key Studies

- ▶ Nation (2001) reveals the significance of interaction and repetition in vocabulary acquisition.
- ▶ Schmitt (1997, 2008) gives an outline for vocabulary strategies and debates about individual differences of the learners.
- ▶ Ellis (2003) emphasises the role of tasks and the evocative use of vocabulary.
- ▶ Oxford (1990) and Cohen and Macaro (2007) reveal the ways learners can improve their vocabulary knowledge.
- ▶ This literature review provides a deeper understanding of vocabulary acquisition, which is affected by various interrelated factors. True knowledge of context, strategies usage and role of learners equally support teachers and teach to enhance the word bank of the target language.

Methodology

Research Design

Both Qualitative and Quantitative methods were used to gauge the effect of learners, tasks, learning contexts and vocabulary learning strategies on the acquisition of vocabulary of a target language.



Participants

The participants included 100 foreign language learners from different departments at Mukabbir University Gujrat. A convenient sampling method was used to select the participants for this study. Both male and female students were selected to find the results.

Instruments

The following research tools were used for data collection.

Vocabulary Knowledge Test (VKT) was used to judge the vocabulary knowledge of the students. A Questionnaire was used to learn about the student's background knowledge, learning contexts and different strategies used by the students for vocabulary acquisition. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and was validated by the experts. A pilot study was also conducted for the validation of a questionnaire. Semi-structured Interviews were also conducted with 15 students to gain a better understanding of their practices and perceptions about vocabulary acquisition.

Procedure

1. At first, a Vocabulary Knowledge Test was conducted to measure the vocabulary knowledge of the participants.
2. After that, Questionnaires were filled out by the participants at a margin of 20 minutes.
3. Fifteen students were conveniently selected for the interview.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data, which were based on a Questionnaire and Vocabulary Knowledge Test (VKT), were analyzed by Descriptive Statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) and Correlation Analysis to find relationships between variables such as contexts, tasks, learner factors, and strategies.

Qualitative data, which was based on structured interviews, were analyzed through Thematic Analysis to find periodic themes and patterns in learners' experiences and strategies.

Ethical Considerations

The Participants of the study were properly informed about the object of the research study. The participants participated with their own choice and were free to withdraw whenever they felt so. Data gathered from the participants were kept secret, and the identities of the participants were also protected using pen names.

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the intricate and symbiotic nature of vocabulary learning in a target language. It is clear that no single factor from the variables like tasks, strategies, learners, or context is sufficient to serve the purpose. Rather, all the present variables are equally important to serve the needs of the study.

Learner-related factors, such as motivation, background knowledge, learning style, aptitude and motivation, are equally important for better vocabulary learning (Nagy, 1995). The learners who were deeply spirited involved themselves greatly to meet the challenge of vocabulary acquisition. They used effective strategies to enhance their vocabulary knowledge. The learners who used both cognitive and metacognitive strategies performed well in the test and were high achievers.

Learning context is a crucial factor in vocabulary learning (Sternberg, 2014). Learners who are social in habits and interact with others around them can easily learn and use their knowledge of vocabulary (Tocaimaza-Hatch & Santo, 2020). The proper environment is also a key factor towards vocabulary acquisition. Appropriate environments help the students more to learn vocabulary as compared to the common places of learners' interaction. Traditional methods and old classroom practices cannot expand the horizons of learners.

Task types are also very important for vocabulary acquisition. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies, with full practice, play a key role in vocabulary enhancement. Different types of activities urge the learners to improve their knowledge of vocabulary. Ellis (2003) illustrates that the tasks which inspire learners to learn vocabulary and use new



words are highly appreciated, contrary to those activities which do not prompt the students to learn and use new words in their day-to-day lives. Engaging in reading activities, participating in social interactions, and playing vocabulary games significantly boost learners' enthusiasm and motivation to acquire new words. These dynamic approaches not only make vocabulary learning enjoyable but also foster deeper understanding and long-term retention of vocabulary knowledge for students (Derakhshan & Khatir, 2015).

Vocabulary Learning Strategies The Use of effective strategies surely facilitates the learners to learn new words and use them effectively in their daily lives. Cohen and Macaro (2007) highlight that cognitive and metacognitive strategies equally help the learners to build their vocabulary knowledge.

Schmitt (1997) introduced different types of strategies which help students in the field of vocabulary learning. Decidedly, the present research study divulges that vocabulary learning is a multidimensional process moulded by the active interaction of individual differences of the learners, their contextual background, motivation, previous knowledge and their strategies usage. The findings and results of the present study are reliable with previous research and favour the idea that vocabulary acquisition is much more operative when approached holistically.

Conclusion

This study determines that fruitful vocabulary development in a target language is the outcome of a synergistic relationship among four major variables, namely learners, context, tasks, and learning strategies. Each variable donates evocatively and, when augmented collectively, meaningfully augments vocabulary acquisition.

The learner's role with his personal drive and motivation, his background knowledge, and his mental ability are core to vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, a proper learning environment, evocative activities, and planned approaches are equally important for vocabulary development. In the same way, social behaviour, interaction, knowledge of the target language and strategies are equally beneficial for the growth of vocabulary knowledge.

These perceptions grip momentous inferences for target language instructors and curriculum designers. They must struggle to generate sensible learning environments where the key four factors are addressed and combined into the learning process.

Future researchers should further discover the long-lasting effect of each factor through various age groups, aptitudes, and social upbringings to better understand how to modify vocabulary teaching and training for various learners.



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