
Multifaceted Innovative Strategies for Vocabulary Learning: An Empirical Study

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The main objective of this study was to inquire into EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies with reference to grade eleven at AMSPS. To this end, qualitative method was used to conduct the study. The subjects of the study were fifteen purposely selected grade eleven students and three English teachers of the same class. Three data collection tools were used, namely textbook analysis, written reflection and interview. Textbook analysis was made to see the vocabulary learning strategies addressed in the textbook. Written reflection was conducted with fifteen sample students to assess EFL learners' view on these strategies to learn new words and to crosscheck the results with textbook analysis. The finding revealed that EFL learners predominantly used strategies like contextual clues, synonyms, antonyms, definition and dictionary meanings, whereas they rarely used strategies like word formation, word network, hyponymy, word game and picture interpretation due to poor background knowledge and references and compensate the difficulties through reading, practicing and working together. Based on the findings, it was suggested that EFL learners should consider the importance of all vocabulary learning strategies addressed in their textbook in relation to the new words and should use them to arrive at the meaning needed during vocabulary learning.

Keywords: Innovation, Vocabulary, Learning, Knowledge and Challenges.

Background of the Study

Vocabulary learning strategies refer to actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary (Cameron, 2001:92). Nation (2001:217) says that, "Vocabulary learning strategies are language learning strategies which in turn are part of general language learning strategies". This indicates Vocabulary is central to language learning and is of great significance to language learners.

A good knowledge of vocabulary is essential for communication. Wilkins (1982) asserts that "without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." In many instances, people deal with a particular situation by learning specific words related to that context while they have hardly any mastery of grammatical structures. Words are not merely slot-fillers which simply fill in the pre-assigned function slots determined by structures of language. Rather, they are building blocks of a successful communication since they label objects, actions, ideas without which people cannot convey the meaning. The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recently recognized by theorists and researchers in the field.

Accordingly, numerous types of strategies, methods and techniques have been introduced into the field to learn vocabulary (Hatch & Brown, 1995). Thus, accompanied with the resurrection of interest in vocabulary, there has been recognition of the importance of equipping learners with how to acquire vocabulary on their own (Ranalli, 2003). This made the studies in the field of language learning strategy relevant to vocabulary learning strategy. Conversely, vocabulary learning is a very challenging and demanding process while learning any foreign language. As such, learners try to find out which vocabulary learning method is more beneficial or even the best one.

As stated in (Ellis, 1994) beginners prefer learning words separately, that is, using a list of words to memorize, whereas advanced students, although there are some exceptions, try to learn words in context. Several studies (e.g. Stahl and Clark 1987, Hall 1991, Newton 1993) investigating the moderating effect of generative processing on vocabulary learning reported findings which show that generation enhances the acquisition of vocabulary learning.

In addition, a few local studies have been conducted in the area of vocabulary learning strategies. Getnet Gidey (2008) conducted a study that dealt with the relationship between language achievement and vocabulary learning strategies: the case of high and low achiever students in Gondar college of Teachers' Education. The aim of his study was to investigate vocabulary learning strategies used by high and low achiever students at Gondar college of Teachers' Education. His finding shows that there was a relationship between vocabulary learning strategy use and language learning achievement. Additionally, Alemu Hailu (1994) conducted a study that dealt with depth of vocabulary knowledge: assessing vocabulary knowledge and its role in learners' reading comprehension in English as a FL classroom: the case of two selected high schools at Addis Ababa. The aim of his study was to assess the depth of vocabulary knowledge and its role in learners' reading comprehension in EFL classroom. His finding shows that the depth of vocabulary knowledge played a fundamental role in EFL learners' reading comprehension processes.

The major difference between this study and the above-mentioned studies is the research area they are focusing on; educational levels and research design they followed. Both the above local and international studies focused on the moderating effect of generative processing on vocabulary learning, the relationship between language achievement and vocabulary learning strategies, the depth of vocabulary knowledge and its role in adults' reading comprehension using quantitative research design and addressed higher institutions.

Additionally, the above studies did not incorporate EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies whereas; this study focuses on EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies and addresses secondary and preparatory school using qualitative research design.

Statement of the problem

Learning a second language involves the manipulation of four main skills; speaking, writing, listening and reading, which lead to effective communication. One crucial factor is the amount of vocabulary one possesses as vocabulary forms the biggest part of the meaning of any language (McCarthy, 1990). Vocabulary, however, is the biggest problem for most learners in Ethiopian

schools. In view of this, vocabulary acquisition is currently receiving attention in second language pedagogy and research in Ethiopia.

But it is still a controversial issue how learners acquire vocabulary effectively and efficiently or how it can best be learned. Schmitt (1997:215) states that one approach of facilitating vocabulary learning that has attracted increasing attention is effective vocabulary-learning strategies use. But unable to use appropriate vocabulary learning strategies may lead students not to have adequate vocabularies and this in turn also leads them to lose interest in learning English language.

The researcher, therefore, believes that this stern limitation of using the language for communication at a desirable level of accuracy and fluency has resulted mainly from lack of effective vocabulary learning strategies in schools.

The objective of learning a foreign and a second language (FL and SL/L2) is to achieve an effective communication in the target language at the end of the day. In order to communicate, therefore, there must be knowledge of sufficient amount of its vocabulary without which communication is almost impossible. Wallace (1982:2) equates vocabulary learning exclusively to language learning when he writes “learning a foreign language is basically a matter of learning the vocabulary of the language”.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to inquire into Grade eleven learners’ vocabulary learning strategies at AMSPS. Specifically, the inquiry was intended to identify and find out:

- The vocabulary learning strategies addressed in grade eleven English textbook.
- Grade eleven learners’ use of vocabulary learning strategies to learn new words.
- The difficulties grade eleven learners encountered during vocabulary learning and
- The way the learners compensate these difficulties during vocabulary learning.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to address the above objectives.

- How do grade eleven learners at AMSPS use vocabulary learning strategies addressed in the textbook during new word learning?
- How do grade eleven learners at AMSPS choose particular vocabulary learning strategy?
- What are the difficulties grade eleven learners at AMSPS encountered during the choice of particular vocabulary learning strategy?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study might have the following contributions to the users. Firstly, the result of this study might help the learners to practice different vocabulary learning strategies and make them cognizant of the ways they learn most effectively. Secondly, the study might provide valuable insights into the role teachers have to play in order to facilitate vocabulary instruction.

Thirdly, the study might help material and curriculum developers to obtain new directions of designing vocabulary lessons in textbooks. They might reconsider existing materials whether they reflect the common vocabulary learning techniques and encourage the use of various leaning strategies. Finally, the study might serve as a preliminary idea for other researchers who may be interested in the same area of study.

Scope of the Study

The inquiry focused on EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies in EFL classroom. Similarly, the study attempted to see what vocabulary learning strategies are addressed in EFL textbook of grade eleven, how EFL learners view these vocabulary learning strategies, the ways how EFL learners choose particular vocabulary learning strategy, difficulties EFL learners encountered during vocabulary learning and compensation strategies used by EFL learners to alleviate the difficulties. However, the study was not exhaustively exploring all the strategies of vocabulary learning but it focused on contextual analysis of vocabulary, morphological knowledge and skills, word definition, guessing new words from context, synonym and antonym clues.

Limitation of the Study

It should be stated that the study had gone through some limitations due to limited sample population of the study and inconvenient of time to address all grade levels in the school. Besides the textbook analysis requires a critical analysis of every unit to see what vocabulary learning strategies are addressed in grade eleven textbook. This would have been possibly done with sufficient time. However, due to shortage of time the researcher could not analyze deeply those vocabulary learning strategies which are less likely addressed in the textbook.

Moreover, the study was based on fifteen grade eleven students and three English teachers of the same class. The data from fifteen students may not represent all EFL learners of the school in particular and other secondary and preparatory school in general. In addition, the setting of this inquiry is limited to one secondary and preparatory school, therefore; the findings may not be generalized to all secondary schools and all the analysis from the data sources is limited to grade eleven. However, an effort was made to manage and ensure the reliability of the study in spite of these limitations.

Methodology of the Study

Research Setting

The study was conducted at AMSPS with particular reference to grade eleven students in Gamo Gofa Zone, SNNPR. This school was selected purposively for this study for there has been little research that targeted the school and selected grade level in the area of vocabulary, particularly EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies. The underlying premise of the selection of the school was the relative proximity of the location of the school to the researcher and homogeneity of the student population.

Sources of Data

The study was conducted at AMSPS in Gamo Gofa zone. Hence, the data sources of this study were fifteen purposively selected grade eleven preparatory school students and three English teacher's of 2010/2011 academic year in AMSPS. All relevant data were collected from these sources concerning the vocabulary learning strategies employed by EFL learners in FL classroom.

Purposive sampling was used to select the subjects for the inquiry. To gather the data for the inquiry three data gathering tools were employed. These are: textbook analysis, written reflection and interview. Textbook was analyzed to see the strategies addressed in the students' textbook. Written reflection was used to assess how the EFL learners view vocabulary learning strategies addressed in the textbook and to supplement the data gathered through textbook analysis. Interview was conducted with ten students and three English teachers to find out the difficulties EFL learners encountered during vocabulary learning strategy and the way how the learners compensate the difficulties they encountered. To this end, the findings from the inquiry were analyzed, interpreted and discussed qualitatively following four research questions discussed under unit one.

Conclusion

Based on the findings the following conclusions have been drawn.

- EFL textbook of grade eleven incorporates different vocabulary learning strategies like strategies for discovering new words (determination strategy), memory strategy (collocation, using mind maps, synonyms and antonyms, using punctuation), social strategy and metacognitive strategy (word tests, skip or pass new words).
- EFL learners' primarily focus on strategies that mainly promote contextual word learning like guessing new words from context, synonym clues, antonym clues, and guessing new words from reading passage (incidental learning).
- EFL learners rarely used strategies like word formation (morphological analysis), word network, punctuation, collocation, hyponymy, word game, picture interpretation and role play during new word learning.
- As the findings from the study indicated, EFL learners choose particular vocabulary learning strategy to learn new words in their word learning session. However, the way they choose a particular vocabulary learning strategy is different from one another based on the learning strategy each student followed during new word learning.
- An important part of students' vocabulary development depends on the ability to use their own vocabulary learning strategy to cope up with new vocabulary in written or spoken texts and using different vocabulary learning strategies.
- Vocabulary learning strategies like vocabulary network, mind map, role play and picture interpretation are very important like other predominant techniques of vocabulary learning. However, the attention given to these strategies in grade eleven textbook was not sufficient. As a result, students might not learn different words in a circumstance of word net to make a change.

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- Some vocabulary learning strategies like mind-maps, collocation strategies etc. implied in the textbook without practical examples and in a way that arouse students' interest and they may not meet the level of students during new words learning.

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