Investigating Strategies Developed by University Students in Learning English Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary knowledge is an integral aspect in learning a foreign language since the connotations of new vocabularies are widely highlighted, whether by language teachers or syllabus designers themselves. Vocabulary learning is the core of language learning and teaching due to the bouncing role vocabulary plays in supporting learner's repertoire of language. The present term-paper is intended to shed the light on the importance of learning new vocabularies and the strategies developed by learners in learning more vocabularies. The research is based on an experiment that a sample of (30)students of 2nd -year students in English Department at the College of Education / Ibn-Rushd- University of Baghdad for the academic year 2018-2019 randomly selected to take a pre- test on antonyms and synonyms strategy developed in learning and comprehending the vocabulary embodied in reading passages within a textbook. After three months course teaching of selected passages of the textbook (Select Readings by Lee and Bernard:2011) where the antonyms and synonyms strategy highlighted among other strategies a post-test is administered. Eventually, so as to capture the possible significance of developing such a strategy on students' achievement a(Mann-Whitney U test) is utilized. The results come to refute the null hypothesis, and turn out positively the consolidation accomplished through developing the antonyms and synonyms strategy specifically when enhanced by up-to-date online dictionaries to search for the most appropriate synonyms or antonyms to the vocabulary embodied within reading passages.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Synonyms, Antonyms, Strategy, online dictionaries

1.1INTRODUCTION:

Vocabulary learning and teaching constitutes a big challenge for both learners and teachers due to the fact that there was limited concern on how vocabulary taught and learnt in the past decades. Nowadays the situation is quite different especially after the internet escalating involvement within all aspects of life and the learning and teaching context is not far away from this. Wilkins (1972) simply puts it

"without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" The need every day for a new vocabulary is mounting, moreover English is one of the most creative languages as far as lexis is concerned.

1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

Vocabulary is a core to all languages. Words easily mislead listeners even with a slight change in their pronunciation (Hedge, 2000).Vocabulary is a perquisite for communication. "The more one considers the matter, the more reasonable it seems to suppose that lexis is where we need to start from, the syntax needs to be put to the service of words and not the other way round." (Widdowson in Lewis, 1993).

(Colorado: 2007)indicates that the native English speaker at a nursery school knows at least 5,000 words whereas the English language learner may know 5,000 words of their native language but only a few words in English. The fact is that a native speaker keeps on learning new words while English language learners encounter a contest of having that basis built and bridging that language cleft.

Vocabulary learning is widely considered as an essential contrivance for second language learners because a limited number of expressions in a second language restricts the continuity of communication .Schmitt (2000) focuses that "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language".

Nation (2001) as well depicts the association between vocabulary understanding and language usage as supplementary; awareness of vocabulary accredits language use and, contrarily, language use results in vocabulary knowledge upgrade. Gifford (2013) indicates that "a person having more breadth and depth of vocabulary has wider competence to communicate and to understand a communication, and is to be considered intelligent." Actually, learning vocabulary does not only mean the learning of new words but also to recognize their functions and appropriateness to various situations and settings. In nutshell, the understanding and performance of the language rely on the coetaneous and sophisticated process of eliciting and forming utterances by adopting the proper linguistic associations, at the right place and the suitable time.

In English as a second language (ESL) context and English as a foreign language (EFL) the knowledge of vocabulary items may affect virtually all language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing.(Nation:2011).

Rivers and Nunan (1991)moreover suppose that the attainment of a sufficient vocabulary is necessary for rich second language use for the reason that with no expansive vocabulary, the constructions and utilities the students may have learned for intelligible communication, cannot be used successfully.

Researches have proven that readers in second language depend mainly on vocabulary understanding and the lack in vocabulary is the basic and the widest hindrance for second language readers to exceed (Huckin,1995). In performance, when we have an idea or perception that we want to communicate, we need to have a repertoire of vocabulary by which we can express the meaning or concept. When we all travel, we keep thinking of the suitable word to save our communication.

Krashen, as cited in Lewis, 1993 indicates that researchers claim that vocabulary is an essential- if not the most significant- mechanisms in a foreign language learning, and foreign language syllabi must reveal this. Wilkins (1972) states that:

''There is not much value in being able to produce grammatical sentences if one has not got the vocabulary that is needed to convey what one wishes to say … While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed''

Other scholars such as Richards (1976) and Krashen (1989), as cited in Maximo (2000)indicate certain reasons for drawing attention to vocabulary;

"First, a large vocabulary is of course essential for mastery of a language. Second language acquirers know this; they carry dictionaries with them, not grammar books, and regularly report that the lack of vocabulary is a major problem''.

(Meara, 1980), alternatively, supposes that vocabulary has been recognized as second language students' greatest main basis of problems. This indication may possibly bring about that the creativity of English vocabulary system is conceived to be a source of difficulty encountered by students.

Secondly, the possible reason is that, dissimilar syntax and phonology, words do not have fixed guidelines that students may develop to acquire appropriate understanding of a great deal vocabulary .i.e. it is not quite obvious in second language vocabulary learning what rules to be applied or which words should be learned in the first place. Oxford (1990) asserts as well that words are "by far the most sizeable and unmanageable component in the learning of any language, whether a foreign or one's mother tongue, because of tens of thousands of different meanings" .

In spite of all these problems that second language learners may encounter in second language vocabulary, the students should handle it in their examinations as ''vocabulary has traditionally been one of the language components measured in language tests'' (Schmitt: 1999). Moreover, many students consider second language learning as primarily a process of learning words ; therefore, they allocate much time on recalling lists of second language vocabulary and depend on online dictionaries as a expansive supply to resort to. Accordingly,, linguists and language teachers extensively center on the importance of learning more words and exploring new strategies of developing it more efficiently.

1.2.1Vocabulary Instruction

English students basically have the great deal need to enrich their words, many non-native English students specifically those with limited exposure to the target language have a restricted vocabulary repertoire, in order to develop the students' ability to extend their banks of words, there are certain strategies to be adopted as mentioned in(...owlcation.com › Academia)

1.2.1.1.Speak to Students with Rich Vocabulary

Try to benefit from classroom time by instilling students with a great deal of words in everyday teaching and exchanges with students.

1.2.1.2.Link- up Opulent Vocabulary with Synonymous and Antonyms

When using opulent vocabulary in the instruction, synonymous and antonyms should be developed .i.e. tables of words and their synonyms and antonyms should be provided to the students. For instance, in case the students are asked to explain further; they should be informed of the synonym "elaborate" and the antonym "simplify or uncomplicated or reduce". (...owlcation.com › Academia)

1.2.1.3. Practice a Selection of Opulent Expressions to Converse the Same Message

The top way to logically integrate opulent expressions into daily instruction is to develop various opulent expressions exchange ably to have the same meaning communicated to learners.

For instance, to tell "I'm perplexed by what the author is communicating" and you could tell, "I'm baffled by what the author is communicating." Use signals to communicate a confusing idea, such as getting your finger up to your head and setting on a very contemplative way.

If students still in need of manifesting the rich expression, keep on providing opulent phrases with a synonymous but with a simpler construction. ultimately, there will be no further need to employ the simpler construction due to the fact that the students will have learned how to identify it with the complicated construction. (...owlcation.com › Academia)

1.2.1.4. Pre-Teach Key Vocabulary

Essential words from the text should be taught in advance which is called before-instruction words and it supports them for effective reading exercises.

1.2.1.5. Select Text with Rich Vocabulary and Images

Have a specified, consistent time to students   for reading aloud In a class. To have students read aloud is highly appreciated not to identify new words merely, but to fashion their precise pronunciation.

Select enriched reading texts with words and photos that used to be of students'interests. Impressive pictures provided in a text are truly recommended in interacting words meanings. Avoid breaks in reading because more pauses may constrain reading fluency and frustrate comprehension. (...owlcation.com › Academia)

1.2.1.6 Instruct Affixes

Most of words in English used to be affixed. As a result, have students introduced to these important affixes and their meanings is a successful way to enrich students' repertoire of vocabulary.

When students identify these affixes, they will have the ability to guess or perceive the meanings of words they encounter in a text.

For instance , a student comes across the word *antisocial* in a text as reading. They may not identify the meaning of the word. Yet ,if they have been informed that the

prefix *anti-* means against, then they may assume that *antisocial* is something that contradicts being social.

1.3. Building up Vocabulary Strategies

Vocabulary is of a great significance to support students' language and communication skills. Accordingly, with insufficient storage of words, it'll be so hard to have thoughts, ideas, and feelings related to show who we are and how we explicate the world surrounding us. As indicated in(
Methods for Teaching ESL Vocabulary - Bridge Education Groupbridge.edu › tefl › blog › teach-esl-vocabulary) there are certain strategies for building vocabulary up;

1.3.1. Antonyms and Synonyms

In order to flex your muscle in vocabulary, it's recommended not only to develop words from a certain vocabulary list but it's worthy also to incorporate their synonyms and antonyms.
Using contraries while teaching new vocabulary provides students with the opportunity to learn twice as many words. To make a bigger impinge on students' learning process, provide pictures to demonstrate sentences, or put words into certain sentences that tell a situation.
To ask students replace a word in a sentence by an antonym to match the meaning of a sentence. For instance,
Don't you think that you can <u>expose</u> your negativity by saying things you don't mean. If you're not happy about something, it'll be apparent in your body language.
The students are to replace the word *expose* by *hide* for example and make the necessary amendments to fit the new meaning. Another way to activate antonyms is to ask students questions with two opposite options you mention the first option and expect the students to supply with the second one which is necessarily carries the contrary meaning. For instance,
*Do you like **staying at home** on you off day or………?*
You suppose the students saying *……or going out?*
Using dictionary is of great benefit in the process of vocabulary instruction. Teachers should stimulate students to look words up in dictionaries. Thus, the practice of its use should be instilled since the very inauguration of vocabulary instruction. (Vocabulary - Bridge Education Groupbridge.edu › tefl › blog › teach-esl-vocabulary)
Gonzalez (1999) finds that dictionary utilization is demanding yet , it's necessary, and that English students should be trained how to apply dictionary practically . Examining dictionary entries can be a significant element of understanding a word more intensely.

1.3.2. Vocabulary Games

Games are necessary at early stages of learning ESL and TEFL. They let students think outside the box.i.e.to manipulate what they've learned to practical benefit, bring about experiences with their classmates, and detach from lessons that could

otherwise be boring The popular games and activities like Hangman or Bingo can be used to teach ESL vocabulary in the earlier stages , that's to make bingo cards with pictures they should recognize and tag with a bean or a bottle top they've painted themselves, For older students, have vocabulary words printed using the same format of bingo card. Yet, instead of assembling the vocabulary,

read out the definitions to the students and ask them to put a bean or bottle cap on the equivalent word. This game stimulates students to attentively listen and figure out what they've heard and recall their memory to come up with the right word. (Vocabulary - Bridge Education Groupbridge.edu › tefl › blog › teach-esl-vocabulary)

1.3.3. ESL Songs
Music is captivating and pleasant way to teach new vocabulary in addition to a proper pronunciation and grammar. Take a listen to the academic videos where the tune used to be arresting and has a great deal of repetition that helps students recall with more easily.(Vocabulary - Bridge Education Groupbridge.edu › tefl › blog › teach-esl-vocabulary)

1.4.Pedagogical Implications
Vocabulary instruction is an art that teachers should learn the skills required to have the best approaches applied, the way that will assist students remember new expressions that will permit them to flourish .According to Oxford University Press, cited in(Dominican CA Online Dominican caonline.com › Blog » › Innovative Classroom Strategies ») "Students need to be able to do so much more than reel off lists of vocabulary.
They need to be able to manipulate the language so that it can support their communicative needs." Of course, this could be attained through a blending of certain activities like memorization, reading, dictionary utilization, context and others such as online gaming. vocabulary instruction surpasses recalling vocabulary with flashcards. It is a procedure that starts with coming across a word and finishes when a student can create it.
English words may be scheming for students, especially when English is not their native language. Similar words can usually have various meanings according to the situation in which they are developed. Dictionaries used to change as well by time .i.e. words meaning can alter. Moreover grammar and structure should be dealt with to make sure that expressions are being castoff in a right way. .
As indicated (ibid), there are certain tips to help students enrich vocabulary repertoire;

1.4.1. Adopt an orderly method to vocabulary exercise
Students have to be inspired to acquire new word all the time, but in short course. This is a better way to make it upright, as indicated by experts.
Practice for hours a day would be excessive on one occasion which results in missing most of it in the long term. Rather, if students obligate to about 15

minutes a day of concentrated exercise, students willsoon get a reliable linguistic support of new terms and expressions.

Students can merge this exercise with their daily classroom activity. Testing and following up can foster the words students have learned and be of a great help.(Dominican CA Online Dominican caonline.com › Blog » › Innovative Classroom Strategies »

1.4.2. Reading for the sake of meaning

Reading for the sake of meaning is a research-based strategy that aides readers decipher perplexing texts. Reading is the most efficient means to instruct words and orderly reading is the strategy that supplies students with the chance to pursue and achieve the stages of critical reading that result in reading realization and word practice upgrading. Strategies can vigorously look for new vocabulary during reading and considering what was already acquired after reading. Just like body exercise, one can get better outcomes from small extents constantly, rather than large extents inconstantly.

Studies have always shown that students will be extremely inspired if they have interest in the topic they are handling. Thus, let the students choose what they have interest in , since it suits the educational direction of better learning. The more texts they read, the best they will be exploring words and that accelerated revelation will facilitate the words get accumulated into the students' long term memory. This in order will empower students to speak and write in a better way. (Dominican CA Online Dominican caonline.com › Blog » › Innovative Classroom Strategies »

1.4.3. Instruct words in context

Reflecting on a list of vocabulary apart from the context, will be of no use. Rather , Use subjects which draw students' attention especially those tackling upon up-to-date topics which matter mostly worldwide populace such as cars ,fashions or health issues. Encourage students to employ adjectives like   fast, , compacted, fuel, electric, automated, smart, overwhelming ,hilarious, coquettish, fit, healthy, diseased ,sickly and so on.

Real life objects are of great importance just the way with games, puzzles, songs and music are all essential means For students to virtually and precisely create vocabulary, they should automatically memorize the words in the first place. (Dominican CA Online Dominican caonline.com › Blog » › Innovative Classroom Strategies »

1.4.4. Instruct words exact to content

 Content specific refers to terms, concepts or words which have obvious meaning critical to have specific content understood. Stahl (2005) states, "Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world." Students' comprehension of certain reading text depend mainly on students' knowledge of words which

encountered in a text; therefore, students should be aware of the content of that text through recognizing the meanings of words within.

1.4.5. Word association
Word association is an activity that can be developed in outsized classes with inadequate resources. Items can be utilized to manifest meanings when the word contains concrete nouns. Zebrowska (1975) rightly says, "Learners remember better the material that has been presented by means of visual aids".
Presenting a new word by viewing the real item usually assists students to recall the expression through visualization. Items in the environment or things brought to the class can be utilized. Gairns and Redman(1986) state that real objects technique is properly adopted for young students or beginners when presenting concrete words.

1.4.6. Associated vocabulary
If an article includes a number of words regarding certain topic, it would be easier to group the all words within same content in a table to have the students recalled them more systematically. Gairns and Redman(1986). For instance, to put the academic words together as in;

Fig (1) Campus Words

canteen	laboratory	undergraduate	grade
Period	tutorial	postgraduate	level

1.4.7. Collocation
Collocation basically refers to the way by which two or more words are naturally come together .i.e. the existence of the first word postulates the availability of the other. For instance, to say ; *heavy rain* but not to say *heavy sun*. Nattinger (1980) cited in Carter and Mac McCarthy (1988), states that; "Collocation teaches students expectations about which sorts of words go with which ones. Students will not go about reconstructing the language each time they want to say something".

1.4.8. Figurative speech
A figure of speech or rhetorical figure is an intention deviated from ordinary language .i.e. there's an implicit meaning behind the superficial meaning of the words. Accordingly, students should be culturally encapsulated with target language values, customs and norms .For instance, to have a statement like; *My brother was boiling mad,* means that "*He's too angry"*. Nattinger (1980) cited in Carter and Mac McCarthy (1988).

1.5.Methodology
The methodology of the current study is an experimental one. It is interestedly engaged in the teaching period of the course for the experimental group where students have been taught antonyms and synonyms strategy along the three months depending mainly on the up-to-date online dictionaries whereas the control group

has been taught the same material depending mainly on the textbook exercises and examples.

The researcher has prepared a pre-test and post-test ,the test has been validated by being reviewed by expert professors in the field of English Language Teaching and Linguistics in the University of Baghdad and the Department of English at the College of Education/Ibn Rushd.

1.5.1. Discussion of Results:

Firstly, the pre-test prepared by the researcher on figuring out the meanings of certain vocabulary enlisted within a reading text been administered for both groups ;the control and the experimental one consist of (30) students for each ,according to their knowledge of words through being exposed to so many passages along the previous years in addition to the exercises provided within the textbook. The results were recorded and tabulated.

After three months semester of teaching reading texts optimizing the strategies of learning vocabulary in general and utilizing the strategy of finding out the antonyms and synonyms in particular by using up-to-date online dictionaries to the new vocabulary encountered in the reading texts , a post-test has been administered to the two groups. The results have been tabulated and compared to the previous ones through Mann-Whitney U test. It has been proved that there are differences in favour of the experimental group which contradicts the null hypothesis and verifies positively the antonyms and synonyms strategy developing through up-to-date online dictionaries which flex students' muscles in learning more novel vocabulary ,the matter which ultimately have students' repertoire of vocabulary been fortified and flourished.

1.6. Conclusions

There are certain conclusions extracted of this study can be summarized as follows;

- In teaching new vocabulary a logical order should be followed and words should be put into meaningful sentences as often as possible.
- Reviewing what already been taught from one lecture to the next, and engaging students by concentrating on topics that interest them the most. Encouraging students as well to develop the habit of looking up an up-to-date dictionary or asking the teacher about the meanings or the synonyms of words and how these can be utilized outside their classroom in their own daily life.
- Identifying vocabulary as one of the unrestricted skills, in the sense that it is a skill that one can keep on developing over life span.
- Vocabulary learning strategies need to be variably utilized in ESL classrooms according to students' proficiency levels .i.e. whereas pictures and L1 equivalents tasks and word games are more suitable for students at the beginning and intermediate levels, less controlled tasks like writing essays and collocation may be more appropriate for the advanced level.

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تقصي الستراتيجيات التي يتبعها طلبة الجامعة دارسي اللغة الانكليزية في تعلم مفرداتها

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الملخص:

يشكل تعلم المفردات مفصلا حيويا من تعلم لغة مقابلة ذلك لما للمفردات من دلائل ذات معاني متنوعة بتنوع نصوصها,مما يجعل مصممو المناهج ومدرسو اللغة يولونها الكثير من الاهتمام.وتتأتى اهمية المفردات من الدور البارز الذي تلعبه في دعم الخزين المفرداتي لمتعلمي اللغة المقابلة. ان الغرض من هذا البحث هو تسليط الضوء على اهمية تعلم المزيد من مفردات اللغة المقابلة والتعرف على الستراتيجيات التي يتبعها الطلبة في اكتساب المفردات واثراء الخزين اللفظي. وقد بنيت الدراسه ع تجربة لعينة اختيرت عشوائيا (30)طالبا من المرحلة الثانية في قسم اللغه الانكليزية كلية التربية/ابن رشد/جامعة بغداد للعام الدراسي 2018−2019 وقدخضعوا للاختبار القبلي حول ستراتيجية المترادفات والمتضادات في تعلم المفردات الواردة في النص المقروء لكتاب القراءة الاكاديمية المنهجي(نصوص قرائية منتقاة ل/ لي وبيرنارد2011) وبعد تدريسهم لفصل دراسي على مدة 3 اشهر حيث التركيز ع حفظ المترادفات والمتضادات وتفعيلها في التعرف ع معاني المفردات الواردة في النص الاكاديمي المقروء خضعوا للاختبار البعدي وقد تم تحليل النتائج وفق (اختبار مان وتني) وجاءت النتائج لتثبت فعالية الستراتيجية ايجابا في اغناء المخزون اللفظي للعينة وتدحض الفرضية الصفرية وتثبت وجود فروق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المفردات، المترادفات، المتضادات، الستراتيجية، القواميس الالكترونية