



وزارة التعليم العالي

والبحث العلمي

الجامعة المستنصرية

كلية التربية الأساسية

وقائع المؤتمر العلمي

الرابع عشر

الجزء الثاني

محور الدراسات الأدبية واللغوية

والإسلامية

للمدة من ٩ - ١٠ أيار ٢٠١٢

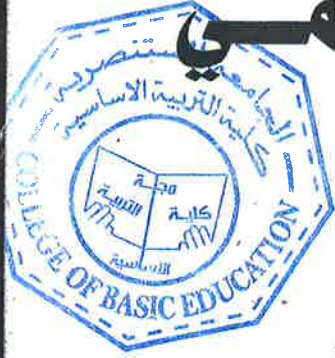
تحت شعار

الارتقاء بالنظام التربوي استجابة الحاضر

وإشراق المستقبل

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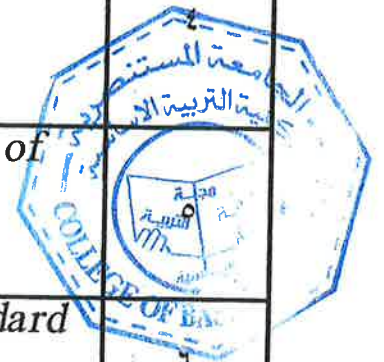
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والشراكة للمستقبل)

للمدة من ٩ - ١٠ أيار ٢٠١٢

٢١٩-٢٠٥	المنهج الوصفي خطواته عند علمائنا القدماء	١٠
	د. اسراء الدوري	
٢٣٠-٢٢٠	المنحى السردي في شعر النواب (بحار البحارين) اختياراً	١١
	م. لؤي آل صيهود	
٣٢٦-٢٣١	٢- اللغة الانكليزية	
٢٤١-٢٣١	<i>The Validity of the Entrance Tests as Predictors of EFL Undergraduate Students' Performance</i> Asst. Prof. Dhuha Atallah Hassan (Ph. D.) Instr. Ridha Ghanim Dakhil (Ph. D.)	١
٢٥٤-٢٤٢	<i>The Effect of Using Brainstorming on the Development of Iraqi EFL Learners' Ability to Write Free-Guided Composition</i> د. عبد الجبار علي دروش م. م انعام طالب م. م وسن عزيز الجاف	٢
٢٦٥-٢٥٥	<i>A Fearless Fight Against Vice and Corruption A Study in Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People</i> Asst. Prof. Abbas Hilal Farhood	٣
٢٨٦-٢٦٦	<i>Classroom Management Problems and Solutions</i> Prof. Fatin Khairi Al-Rifai Asst. Instructor Mohammed Ridha Al-Mousawi	
٢٩٥-٢٨٧	<i>Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies</i> Inst. Maysaa Rasheed and Inst. Narmeen Mahmood	
٣١٥-٢٩٦	<i>Inversion in Standard English and Standard Arabic with Practical Study</i> Mrs. Estabraq R. Ibrahim	٤
٣٢٦-٣١٦	<i>The Reality & Reflection : Eudora Welty's Mirror of Characters in her Story "Death of a Traveling Salesman"</i> Assistant Lecturer Farah A. Raheem	٧



Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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Section One: Introduction

1.1 The Problem and Significance of the Study

Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency because as Richards and Renandya (2002:225) assume that "it provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read and write". It has a very important role in communication because "without a good working knowledge of words and their meanings, both written and verbal communication will be muddled or poorly understood" (WiseGeek, 2012: Int.). Communication is enhanced by knowing more words and their meanings; when people can't communicate clearly and accurately, giving instructions and understanding them will be difficult (Ibid.).

Gattegna (1972:89 as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2003:24) assumes that learning can be seen not as the means of accumulating knowledge only but as the means of becoming a more proficient learner in whatever is engaged in. For this, learners should use a combination of different strategies in their independent learning of vocabulary (Decarrico, 2001:290).

Research on vocabulary in recent years highlighted that vocabulary represents a serious dilemma for most English foreign language learners, and EFL students seem to be very limited in their vocabulary use and had problems with spelling which led to frustration in using the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Lip, 2009: Int.).

Learning vocabulary and mastering it is very important for students who learn English as a foreign language. Hence, it can support them in speaking when they are communicating with people, because if they don't know the meaning of words, they will not be able to speak, write and translate anything in English (Putri, 2010: Int.). Learning vocabulary requires the use of vocabulary learning strategies which have been receiving much attention in the field of FL learning as Lip (2009, Int.) assumes that "the use of vocabulary learning strategies have accompanied the shift from the teacher-oriented to the learner-oriented curriculum". This study is an attempt to investigate vocabulary learning strategies since, according to teachers and experts in language teaching and linguistics, Iraqi learners have limited vocabulary. So, the researchers are trying to find out what kind of strategies students use to learn vocabulary.

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

The present study has depended on Schmitt's (2002) taxonomy (cited in Lip, 2009: Int.) which includes a variety of different VLS which all important in the learner's process:

1. **Determination strategies:** help learners to discover the meaning of words by themselves with no assistance from peers, such as guessing the words from the context.
2. **Social strategies:** engage learners in interaction with their peers, and this helps them to learn from each other, such as observing their classmates and asking their teacher for the meaning of a word.
3. **Memory strategies:** engage learners in learning the new word through mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new word.
4. **Cognitive strategies:** do not engage learners in mental processing but is more mechanical. An example is repeating the pronunciation of new words.
5. **Metacognitive strategies:** are strategies relating to processes involving monitoring, decision-making, and evaluation of one's progress. Metacognitive strategies help the learner in determining appropriate VLS for learning new words.

1.2 The Aim of the Study

The present study aims at determining the vocabulary learning strategies most frequently used by third-year college students according to their frequencies.

1.3 Limits of the Study

This study is limited to third year college female students at the department of English/ college of Education for women / Baghdad University during the academic year 2011-2012.

1.4 Definitions of the Key Terms

- Wenden and Rubin (1987 as cited in Tseng, 2005: 321) define learning strategies as "any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information".
- Also, learning strategies are the thoughts and actions that individuals use to accomplish a learning goal (Chamot, 2004, 13).
- Vocabulary is defined as "all the words known and used by a particular person" (Putri, 2010: Int.).
- The practical definition of vocabulary learning strategies is behaviours or actions used by students to enhance their own learning.

Section Two: Procedures

2.1 Population and Sample

The population of the present study is third-year students from the department of English/ college of education for women, during the academic year (2011-2012). There were 104 students distributed

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

alphabetically into four sections. The sample has been chosen randomly from the population mentioned above. The total number of the sample was 84 students.

2.2 Main Instrument

The questionnaire is the most appropriate tool to achieve the aim of the study. According to Henderson (1978: 60 as cited in Al-Garaghooly), the use of the questionnaire is usually recommended by educators and psychologists especially in the area of research. The researchers have adopted a questionnaire from Lip (2009: Int.) and applied it on 84 students on 1/3/2012 after modifying and changing certain items as recommended by the jury of experts.

2.3 Description of the questionnaire

The questionnaire includes 27 items which covers a variety of different vocabulary strategies such as determination strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies. The five point scale (always, usually, sometimes, rarely, never) is used. The frequencies for each item are calculated by assigning 1 point to the fifth (lowest) level 'never', 2 points for the fourth level 'rarely', 3 points for the third level 'sometimes', 4 points for the second level 'usually', and finally 5 points for the first (highest) level 'always'.

2.4 Pilot administration of the questionnaire

Twenty students are chosen randomly for the pilot study. After applying the pilot study, it is revealed that the time needed to complete the questionnaire items was 45 minutes. As for the clarity of the items, it was noticed that most of the items were clear and the students found no difficulty in answering the questionnaire items.

2.5 Questionnaire Validity

In order to ensure the face validity, the questionnaire was exposed to a jury of experts¹ in language teaching and linguistics who agreed upon its validity and suitability.

2.6 Questionnaire Reliability

In order to find out the questionnaire reliability, the items were divided into two halves (odd and even). Using the Pearson correlation formula, it is found out that the questionnaire reliability is 0.722. After applying the

¹the jury members are:

1. Assistant Prof. Dr. DuhaAttallah Hassan (College of Basic Education, Al-Mustansiriyah University).
2. Assistant Prof. Shatha Al-Saadi (College of Education for Women, Baghdad University)
3. Assistant Instructor ShathaNaiyf (College of Education for Women, Baghdad University)
4. Assistant Instructor Fatima Khudair (College of Education for Women, Baghdad University)

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

Spearman Brown formula, it was found out the questionnaire reliability is 0.838. This shows that the questionnaire is quite reliable and acceptable.

2.7 Statistical manipulation

The average weighted means score of the questionnaire items is 3. Using the Fisher's formula to establish the mean score for each item, the item which obtains a weighted mean score of more than 3 is considered a strong item and the item which scores less than 3 is considered as a weak one.

2.8 Statistical Tools

The main statistical tools of the present study are:

1. Pearson's Formula

$$R_{xy} = \frac{n(\epsilon xy) - (\epsilon x)(\epsilon y)}{\sqrt{(n(\epsilon x^2) - (\epsilon x)^2)(n(\epsilon y^2) - (\epsilon y)^2)}}$$

Where: ϵxy = sum of the xy ,

ϵx = the sum of the students answers on the odd items,

ϵy = the sum of the students answers on the even items, N= number of students,

X= students answers at the odd items, Y= students answers at the even items

2. Spearman Brown's Formula

$$R = \frac{2 \times R_{xy}}{1 + R_{xy}}$$

3. Fisher's Formula

Weighted mean score of an item

$$= \frac{F_1 \times 5 + F_2 \times 4 + F_3 \times 3 + F_4 \times 2 + F_5 \times 1}{\text{Total Frequency}}$$

Where F_1 = frequency of the first level (always)

F_2 = frequency of the second level (often)

Etc...

Section three

Presentation of the Results

Table 1 reveals that the participants use most the of vocabulary strategies but with different weights. However, two of the strategies are proved to be weak or unused by them, like the determination strategy (item 12 and 13) and the memory strategy (item 17 and 19).

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

Table 1
The Weighted Mean Scores for the Items of Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire

Item rank	Item no	Items	Weighted mean scores	category
1.	25	Ask teacher for the new word's synonym	4.952	SOC
2.	11	Use a dictionary to check the words	4.178	DET
3.	8	Check for the LI meaning of new English word	4.119	DET
4.	22	I try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind.	3.928	MEM
5.	10	Guess the meaning of the new word from the story	3.880	DET
6.	20	I remember the sentence in which the word is used.	3.738	MEM
7.	2	I repeatedly spell the word in my mind	3.666	COG
8.	9	Analyze any available pictures or gestures to guess the word	3.666	DET
9.	1	I repeatedly say the word in my mind frequently.	3.597	COG
10.	4	I repeatedly write the word.	3.511	COG
11.	18	Check for the LI meaning of new English word (Arabic meaning)	3.476	MEM
12.	23	I remember words by doing group work activities in class.	3.476	MEM
13.	16	I link the word to another English word with similar sound. (e.g. meat-seat)	3.392	MEM
14.	6	I analyze the word by breaking it into meaningful parts. (e.g. head mistress)	3.392	DET
15.	26	Ask classmates for meaning of the word	3.380	SOC
16.	27	I remember words by doing dictations	3.357	MET
17.	15	I link the word to a visual image in my mind. (e.g. dictionary)	3.357	MET

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

18.	14	Analyze the part of speech of the new word	3.345	DET
19.	3	I repeatedly say the word aloud.	3.345	COG
20.	5	I remember words by doing a project.	3.238	COG
21.	21	I remember the new word together with the context where the new word occurs.	3.261	MEM
22.	24	Ask teacher for the new word's synonym.	3.047	SOG
23.	7	Analyze the affixes and roots of the new word	3	DET
24.	12	I analyze the word by breaking it into sound segments.	2.904	DET
25.	13	I make up my own sentences using the new word.	2.809	DET
26.	17	I link the word to Arabic word with similar sound. (e.g. real ريج)	2.761	MEM
27.	19	I group words together with storyline.	2.726	MEM

This means that there are students who tend to use certain strategies while other strategies seem to be less frequently used; below are the top five strategies used by the sample of the study:

3.1.1 Item no 25 which states "Ask teacher for the new word's synonym"

This item has ranked the first and it has gained 4.952. This shows that learners are dependent when it comes to learning new words' synonyms as they prefer to rely on the teachers help instead of following other strategies which foster learners' independency.

3.1.2 Item no 11 which states "Use the dictionary to check the word"

This strategy has ranked the second and it has gained 4.178. Using the dictionary seemed to be one of the most frequently used strategies as it gained the second rank; this strategy helps the learners to discover the meaning of words by themselves with no assistance from peers.

3.1.3 Item no.8 which states "Check for the LI meaning of new English word"

This strategy has ranked the third and has gained 4.119. Checking the Arabic meaning of new words doesn't necessary mean that this is a good strategy because this will not increase the learners vocabulary repertoire.

3.1.4 Item no.22 which states "I try to use newly learned words in imaginary situations in my mind"

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

This strategy has ranked fourth and has gained 3.928. This could be a good strategy because students' mental process will be reinforced by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new word.

3.1.5 Item no. 10 which states "Guess the meaning of the new word from the story"

This strategy has ranked fifth and has gained 3.880. The researchers think that this is a good strategy of learning new vocabulary but certain words cannot be learnt without checking their definite meaning in a dictionary.

Here are the bottom four strategies used by the sample of the study:

3.2.1 Item no.12 which states "I analyze the word by breaking it into sound segments".

This strategy has gained 2.904. It is revealed that this is one of the least used strategies because students are aware there is no correspondence between the sound and spelling in English which can never guide them to learn or remember new words. However, this strategy is useful in learning many English words.

3.2.1 Item no.13 which states "I make up my own sentences using the new word".

This has gained 2.809. The researcher thinks that students rarely use such strategy because it might be considered time consuming. The other reason is that because students have a problem in grammar that is why it is one of the least used strategies.

3.2.3 Item no.17 which states "I link the word to Arabic word with similar sound. (e.g. real ربح)"

This strategy has gained 2.761 which is one of the memory strategies. Students rarely depend on such strategy; this is not because they have limited background, but because they are not used to follow such strategy in learning or remembering new words.

3.2.4 Item no. 19 which states "I group words together with storyline".

This and has gained 2.726. This can be explained that students have limited mental processes and weak background knowledge in vocabulary; that is why it is one of the least used strategies.

Section Four: Conclusion, Suggestions and Recommendation

4.1 Conclusion

A. It is proved that certain strategies like:

1. Asking teacher's help;
2. Using a dictionary to check the meaning;
3. Check for the LI meaning of new English word
4. trying to use newly learned words in imaginary situations ; and finally
5. guessing the meaning of the new word from the story.

Seemed to be the most widely used strategies. While those strategies which are less frequently used and which gained less than 3 are:

1. analyzing the word by breaking it into sound segments;

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

2. making up my own sentences using the new word;
 3. linking the word to Arabic word with similar sound. (e.g. real ریح); and finally
 4. grouping words together with storyline.
- B. The most widely used strategies are the determination, social and memory strategies. These strategies may be helpful to the EFL in:
1. engaging learners in interacting with their peers, and this helps them to learn from each other;
 2. engaging them in learning the new word through mental processing;
 3. helping them to discover the meaning of words by themselves with no assistance from peers.

4.2 Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1. Encourage students to use all types of vocabulary learning strategies;
2. Raise students' awareness about the importance of applying these strategies to improve their learning
3. Motivate students to use certain strategies not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom.
4. motivate students to learn helpful techniques or resources to support their vocabulary

4.3 Suggestions for Further Research

In the light of the results obtained, the following suggestions are putforward:

1. Investigating the effect of vocabulary learning strategies on EFL college students.
2. Examining the relationship between the use of vocabulary learning strategies and gender.
3. Investigating the most useful vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners.
4. Investigating the vocabulary learning strategies used by successful learners and those of unsuccessful ones.
5. Investigating strategies used in learning other areas like: grammar, spelling, etc.

Investigating Iraqi EFL Students' Use of Vocabulary Learning

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