LEARNER'S STRATEGIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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Abstract:

Learning does not see time and place. Learning can be done by everyone, every time and everywhere. Generally, the effectiveness of learning depends on the ways or the techniques of learning. Every learner has different competence in learning. So, there may be some differences of learning strategy between one learner and others. This learner's choice of learning strategies, of course, affect learning outcomes in term of level and rate of achievement. So, it is necessary for learners to know what specific steps they can take to improve their learning. Thus, the objective of learning can be achieved. As a teacher, we can motivate them by letting them can choose to make the most of the learning opportunities it presents. Therefore, motivating students to learn means not only stimulating them to take an interest in and see the value of what they are learning, but also providing them guidance about how to go about learning it.

Keywords:

Learner's strategies, learning strategies, learning vocabulary

Introduction

Vocabulary is the essential component in language learning. Learners feel that many of their difficulties in both receptive and productive language use result from an inadequate vocabulary. Indeed, vocabulary learning is not an easy job. Rather, vocabulary, unlike structure, has no certain patterns or rules. So, it seems that vocabulary learners have nothing to be based on for their learning. Furthermore, vocabulary is one of major problems confronting English as a foreign language. Besides, vocabulary always becomes a problem in the other skills such as writing, reading, listening and speaking. It is reasonable to remember that knowing the four-language skills requires knowledge of words because they will get nothing without vocabulary. The larger vocabulary students master, the better they perform their language. Moreover, it can happen because when someone is learning a foreign language, many things can get in the way of learning.

To master vocabulary, students apply various learning strategies. Learning strategies help students to understand, learn, remember new information and solve problems. A learning strategy is a person's approach to learning and using information.[1]

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[1]The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, *Learning Strategies.*

Students who do not know or use good learning strategies often face some difficulties in learning English and learn passively and ultimately fail in school. Yet, by using appropriate learning strategies, the learners will be easier to master English and get the best result for their study. So, appropriate learning strategies anyhow play a very important role in achieving the learning objectives. We can say learning strategies lead the learners to be successful learners. Successful learners do work hard, but they realize that how they study is more important than how much time they spend studying.[2] In other words, they know the objectives of learning by doing activities to make their own language learning as effective as possible.

The Importance of Vocabulary Learning

Learning is a process. In line with this process none can know it but one's learning process has happened shown by its result that is what have been done or what have been changed. In general terms, "learning is acquiring or getting of knowledge of subject or a skill by study, experience or instruction".[3] It means that process of learning is doing, reacting, undergoing and experiencing. On the other hand, "learning is a relatively permanent change in a behavioral tendency and is the result of reinforced practice".[4]

Based on those definitions above, there are some important points to note. First, the result of learning can be inspected from his behavior meaning that there is behavioral change. Second, the change is relatively permanent in certain period meaning that someone will change if s/he undergoes the other learning process. Next, behavioral changes need experience. Then, changes in behavioral potential are the result of experience. Finally, experience can reinforce behavior. Behavioral reinforcement should have meaningful things for individuals that are interesting and giving wishes or necessity. Someone can be said to learn something if s/he shows certain behavioral changes for instance, from s/he has inadequate vocabulary into adequate vocabulary.

Vocabulary plays a very important role in developing both productive and receptive skills because with the words needed, people can express thoughts and comprehend ideas easily. In line with this, Palmer said that vocabulary was one of the most important aspects of foreign language learning.[5]

(http://www. kucrl.org/sim/strategies.html. 2012.), accessed on August 2nd, 2012

[2]Myron H Dembo, *Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success: A Self Management Approach (*New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. 2004), p. 9.

[3]H. Douglas Brown, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, 3rd edition (New Jresey: Prentice Hall , Inc, 1994), p. 7.

[4] Ibid.

[5]Jack C Richards, and Theodore S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 32.

From the statement above it is stated clearly that without sufficient vocabulary, one cannot communicate effectively or express his/her ideas in both oral and written form. Having a limited vocabulary is also a barrier that precludes learners from learning a foreign language. By realizing the importance of vocabulary learning, not only learners but also teachers must give pay close attention to put this aspect into learning a foreign language. Like Indonesian students, learning vocabulary needs special effort because their knowledge background. It means that English as a target language they learned is very much different from their native language and national language. Besides, learning environment does not support the learners to learn English. As a result, they do not succeed in achieving the result of their learning. It is caused by they do not know how to use appropriate learning strategies.

Learners' Strategies

Learners' Strategies are strategies used by learners in learning target language. By strategies, learners can plan their learning to help themselves to know what specific steps they can take to improve their learning. Thus, the goal of learning can be achieved.

Wenden insists that learner strategies are the key to learner autonomy, and that one of the most important goals of language training should be the facilitating of that

autonomy.[6] Based on this idea can be assumed that what make learners successful and unsuccessful depend on the learners autonomy, that is one of the steps to achieve the goals of language training. "Learner autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action (Little 1991:4)."[7] It will grow with reinforced practice or be lost through inactivity. McGarry (1995: 1) sums up, then, the essential arguments for autonomy:

> "Students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, are more likely to be able to set realistic goals, plan programmes of work, develop strategies for coping with new and unforeseen situation, evaluate and assess their own work and, generally, to learn how to learn from their own successes and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future."[8]

From the statement above can be concluded that successful learners know their own learning goals, what, how and when they learn by planning and developing their learning strategies in order to help them to be more effective and efficient learners. Effective language learners are the one who use better learning and can implement it in the appropriate learning strategies. Meanwhile, "efficient learners refer to

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[6]Brown, *Principles of language Learning and Teaching*, p. 124.

[7]Ciaran P.McCarthy," Learner Training for Learner Autonomy on Summer Language Courses." *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol.IV, No.7 (July, 1998) in http://iteslj.org/

[8]Ibid.

how the learners manage time or how much time is needed to complete a given task (Britton & Glynn, 1989)".[9] The characteristics of effective learners are the good language learners. Naiman, Frohlich & Stern states that the good language learner is:

1. Finding a learning style that suits you,
2. Involving yourself in the language learning process,
3. Developing an awareness of language both as system and as communication,
4. Paying constant attention to expanding your language,
5. Developing L2 as a separate system,
6. Taking into account the demands that L2 learning imposes.[10]

Basic Concepts of Learning Strategies

Learning strategies can be defined as specific methods that learners select and control to achieve a particular end or academic objectives. "The concept of language learning strategy or learner strategy refers to learners' attempt to learn",[11] meaning that learners' effort to gain knowledge. Rubin (1987) states that language learning is what learners do to learn and do to regulate their learning.[12] In the other definitions, Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable.[13] Cohen (1998), then, gives definition as processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a L2 through the storage, recall and application of information about that language.[14] In more specific definition can be concluded that learning strategies are certain ways of processing information that enhance understanding or comprehension, learning and retention of the information. So, the learning strategies are useful to achieve successful language performance because it has lead to the students to have more responsibility for their own learning and engage the students with the foreign language material at a deeper cognitive level.

In the area of vocabulary mastery, learning strategies meaning as various methods of all language learners to learn new vocabulary in accordance with the learners' needs and preferences. Besides, "vocabulary learning strategies are specific strategies utilized in the isolated task of learning vocabulary in the target language.

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[9]Dembo, *Motivation and Learning Strategy,* p.139.

[10]NN, L2 Learning Strategies. (http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/SLA/L2_learning_strategies.htm). Accessed on August 1st, 2012.

[11]Visnja Pavicic Takac, *Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Foreign Language Acquisition* (Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2008), p. 47

[12]Ibid. p. 51.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

However, they can be employed in all kinds of tasks."[15] Hosenfeld (1984) listed some strategies of successful readers such as guessing a word's meaning from the context, identifying the grammatical category of a word looking up words or recognizing cognates.[16] According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning strategies are defined by the following features:

1. They involve choice;
2. They are complex, i.e. consisting of several steps;
3. They require knowledge and benefit from training; and
4. They increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and use.[17]

In conclusion, vocabulary learning strategies involve learners' preference, several steps, gain knowledge in order to increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and use.

Classification of Learning Strategies

Learning strategies have been classified in a number of ways by a number of experts' clarifications. The following part reviews a number of strategy classifications related to English vocabulary Learning. The learning strategies are presented in this article covers seven learning strategies, namely, cognitive strategies, mnemonic strategies, memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, affective strategies and semantic strategies.

A. Cognitive Strategies

"Cognitive strategies concern mental steps or actions that are employed in learning or problem solving, and that require direct analysis, transformation or synthesis (i.e. direct manipulation) of learning material."[18] In the other words, "cognitive strategies are for processing language information and for integrating it into long-term memory by means of schemata."[19] From those statements, it is stated clearly that cognitive strategies are used to organize learning materials to be memorized in a long term memory. These learning strategies refer to learning words using cognitive skill. This learning activity is to master vocabulary by functioning the mental operations, which operate directly on the incoming information. Generally, some indicators included this strategies are:

1. **Practicing** involves some activities:
   - Repeating;
   - Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems;
   - Recognizing, using formulas and patterns;

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[15]Ibid. p. 52.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid. 53
[19]Rebecca L. Oxford, "Hero with a Thousands of Faces: Learner Autonomy, Learning Strategies and Learning Tactics in Independent Language Learning." in *Language Leaning Strategies in Independent Settings,* ed. Stella Hunt and Tim Lewis (Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 2008) p. 53.

- Recombining and
- Practicing naturalistically.

2. **Receiving and sending messages** involve some activities:
   - Getting the idea quickly and
   - Using resources for receiving and sending messages.

3. **Analyzing and reasoning** involve some activities:
   - Reasoning deductively;
   - Analyzing expressions;
   - Analyzing constructively (across language);
   - Translating and
   - Transferring.

4. **Creating structure for input and output** involve some activities:
   - Taking note;
   - Summarizing, and
   - Highlighting.

B. Mnemonic Strategies

Mnemonic strategies are grouped in the cognitive strategies. It is called "cognitive strategies" because these strategies are a memorizing tool. It means that mnemonic strategies are learning strategies, which are a means of increasing the ability to remember, as an aid to foreign language vocabulary learning based on the keyword method. In this technique, the learners image and create an unusual association between the word form and its meaning.[20] For

example if an Indonesian learner of English wants to remember the meaning of English word *parrot*, s/he create a word that has similar sound by associating it with *parit* as the key word. Then, s/he imagines a parrot lying in a ditch (parit in Indonesian language). On the other hand, learners may generate an image by associating it with a key word. The key word technique is one of the effective ways of understanding unfamiliar vocabulary and discovering its meaning.

C. Memory Strategies

"Memory strategies are those used for storage of information."[21] It is implied that learning words through memory can be facilitated by means of entering information into long term memory and retrieving information. In the other words, these strategies, basically, are to organize learning materials to be memorized into long term. So, memory strategies are also grouped as cognitive strategies. Some indicators of memory strategies can be identified as follow:

1. **Creating Mental Linkages**:
   - Grouping;
   - Associating and
   - Placing new words into a context.

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[20]I. S.P. Nation, Teaching and Learning Vocabulary (Massachussetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1990), p. 166.

[21]Murat Hismanoglu, "Language Learning Strategies in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching." *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol VI, No.8(August, 2000) in http://iteslj.org/

2. **Applying images and sounds**:
   - Using imagery;
   - Using keywords, and
   - Representing sounds in memory.
3. Reviewing well such as structure reviewing.
4. Employing action such as using physical response
   .

D. Metacognitive strategies

The aim of metacognitive strategies is for guiding the learning process itself. These strategies also contain the aspect of learners' awareness of their own strategy use such as enable learners to analyze their own learning. They refer to planning or steps, which are taken the learners to consider the cognitive process, for example, self monitoring, self evaluating, checking the effectiveness of the strategies being used, revising strategies being used and etc.

Some indicators of metacognitive strategies can be identified below:

1. **Centering your learning:**
   - Overview and linking with already known material;
   - Paying attention, and
   - Delayed production
2. **Arranging and planning your learning:**
   - Finding out about language learning;
   - Organizing;
   - Setting goals and objectives;

- Identifying the purpose of a language task (purposeful listening/reading/speaking/writing);
- Planning for a language task
- Seeking practice opportunities

3. **Evaluating your learning:**
   - Self-monitoring, and
   - Self-evaluating

E. Social Strategies

Social strategies can be stated that they are related with social-mediating activity and transacting with others. These deal with the efforts made by the learners in order to get as much exposure as possible with the others and to enhance motivation to learn. In addition, "these strategies put learners in an environment where practicing is possible and they do not affect learning directly."[22] This statement can be assumed that learners interact and collaborate with others like peers.

Some activities deal with these strategies as follow:

1. **Asking questions:**
   - Asking for clarification or verification
   - Asking for correction
2. **Cooperating with others:**
   - Cooperating with peers
   - Cooperating with proficient users of the new language
3. **Empathizing with others:**

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[22]Takac, *Vocabulary Learning Strategies*, p. 54.

- Developing cultural understanding
- Becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings

F. Affective Strategies

It is evident that good language learners employ distinct affective strategies. Good language learners are more or less conscious of these emotional problems. Because of their consciousness, thus, learners' can be able to control their feelings, motivations and attitudes related to language learning. Here some indicators of affective strategies are

1. **Lowering your anxiety:**
   - Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing or meditation;
   - Using music, and
   - Using laughter.
2. **Encouraging yourself:**
   - Making positive statements;
   - Taking risk wisely, and
   - Rewarding yourself
3. **Taking your emotional temperature:**
   - Listening to your body;
   - Using a checklist;
   - Writing language learning diary, and
   - Discussing your feelings with someone else.

G. Semantic Strategies

Semantic strategies refer to learning words as a continuing process of getting acquainted with verbal forms in their various diversity within various context. Included in these groups are learning words in list, guessing words in context and using prefixes, roots and suffixes.

1. Guessing Words in Context

Nation states that guessing words in context refers to inferring the meaning of unknown words that learners meet by means of the context clues.[23] Types of clues can provide information to help them in guessing words. The types of clues may be syntactic (such as pattern and function words) and semantic clues (definition, inference, experience, synonym and analysis).

Some learners know around two or three thousand words, they can use the reading skills they have developed to get the meanings of unknown words that they meet. Doing this activity, learners are not only improving their new vocabulary but also getting ideas, action, thoughts and feelings. The more words they are familiar with, at least they know about the contents and its meaning. So, they can expand their vocabulary.

As a matter of fact, many people skip over words they do not understand or other people stop at each unknown words and look it up in the dictionary. Indeed, they can build their vocabulary without using a

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[23]Nation, Teaching and Learning Vocabulary, p. 160.

dictionary each time. There are two rules in guessing words are:

i. Pause a moment on each new word, let it registered in our mind and

ii. Try to guess what the words mean from the context clues or from the words around it.

The key of this method is not to skip over unknown words and do not understandable.

2. Using Prefixes, Roots and Suffixes

These techniques can be used to help the learning of unfamiliar words by relating affixes and roots to know words or to know prefixes and suffixes. It can be used as a way of checking whether an unfamiliar word has been successfully guessed from the context.

Making prefixes and roots useful, Nation states that learners need three skills.[24] They need to be able to break new words into parts so that the affixes and roots are revealed, they need to know the meanings of the parts, and they need to be able to see a connection between the meaning of the parts and the dictionary meaning of the new word.[25] From those statements can be concluded that learners need to be able to find the root of new words into parts, then, know the meanings of the parts and finally, see a relationship between the meanings of the parts

and the dictionary meaning of the new word.

Some Factors Influencing Learning Strategy Choices

In learning a foreign language, learning strategy choices are also affected by some factors. They are:

A. Personality Factors

Personality factors are the intrinsic factor influencing human behavior such as self –esteem, introvert and extrovert, anxiety and etc. "Extrovert like activity and group work; introverts prefer working alone".[26] It is clearly implied that extroverted learners tend to be more helpful and successful than the introverted learners. It can be seen from their preference in doing learning tasks.

B. Gender

Many empirical studies show that women are different from men in language learning strategy use, with women generally using more strategies than men, but not in all cases (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Green & Oxford, 1995; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Lee & Oh, 2001; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).[27] Moreover, according to Green and Oxford (1995), 15 of 50

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[24]Ibid. 169
[25]Ibid.

[26]Tatyana Putintseva, "The Important of Learning Styles in ESL/EFL." *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol.XII, No. 3, (March, 2006).
[27]Kyoung Rang Lee & Rebecca Oxford, "Understanding EFL Learners' Strategy Use and Strategy Awareness." *Asian EFL Journal*, Vol.10,1 (March, 2008).

strategies on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL; Oxford, 1990) showed differences between women and men in terms of strategy use, with women using them more frequently, while only one strategy was used more often by men than women.[28] In the other words, women use more learning strategies than men and use those strategies more often. This is caused by a naturally reality that women tend to have greater social orientation, stronger verbal skills and greater conformity to norms, both linguistically and academically.

C. Age

Age is one of important factors influencing the learning strategy choices. Several studies showed that young learners tended to use social strategies more than other types of strategies, including discussing with and asking help more others (Lee, 2000; Wong Fillmore et al., 1985).[29] In contrast, adult learners have shown high use of metacognitive strategies for planning, organizing and evaluating their own L2 learning (Oh, 1992; Touba, 1992).[30] These findings proved that there are age differences in the acquisition of different aspect of language. Then, young learners tend to use social strategies because they prefer having

social relationship with peers or others. Meanwhile, adult learners like metacognitive strategies because they have high awareness toward their result of learning so that they have certain objectives and planning in order to be successful learners.

D. Attitude

The way of thinking or attitude also influence on the language learning choices. Learners who have positive thinking can motivate them to learn a language they want and can plan purpose of their own learning. For instance, one of the factors influencing how we experience the process is our attitude towards the foreign culture itself.

E. Language Teaching Method

Language teaching method often influence on the language learning choices. As a teacher, learning or instructional strategies are needed in order to achieve the learning objectives. Thus, the learning objectives point you towards the instructional strategies, which is they will point you to the medium that will actually deliver the instruction such as self- study, classroom and etc.

F. Language being learned

The foreign language being learned also influence on the learning strategies choices meaning that learners who assume that a difficult foreign language to be learned, they

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[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.

will be chosen by highly motivated, strategy- wise students rather than the easy one.

G. Duration

Duration refers to a number of years of language study. A long study or course level of language also influences on the language learning strategies choices. Learners who choose short course might be use much practicing strategy rather than those who have long course. This also indicates that learners use different learning strategies based on duration of the course or study.

Vocabulary in Learning English as a Foreign Language

English as a means to communicate with the others, unavoidable, vocabulary is very much needed to convey the messages. There is distinction between second and foreign language learning. Second language learning indicates that the language has communicative functions inside the community where learner lives. Whereas, foreign language learning meaning that the language has no established functions inside the learner but will be used mainly for communicating with outsiders. English taught in Indonesia is the example of learning English as a foreign language.

Conclusion

Being a successful learner cannot be separated by language

learning strategies. As mention in the previous discussion that language learning strategies are used by students to help them understand information and solve problems. All language learners use language learning strategies in the learning process. Since the factors like personality, gender, age, attitude, language teaching method, language being learned and duration affect the way in which language learners learn the target language. Teachers here has an important role in giving instructional strategies, must be creative in order to make the students more active learners by teaching them how to learn and how to use what they have learned to solve problems and be successful learners so that the learning objectives can be achieved.

There are several things should be remembered by teachers: First, schooling should be as enjoyable as possible. Therefore, whenever teacher's instructional objectives can be met through a variety of activities, emphasize activities that students find rewarding and avoid ones that they find boring or aversive. Second, teachers should provide students with quality opportunities to learn by bringing students to the lesson meaning that requiring them to think about the materials and supporting their learning efforts. Finally, teachers should see the individual differences especially motivation then help them to stimulate it in order to maximizing the quality of learning.

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