Investigating the Effectiveness of Incidental Vocabulary Learning Strategies among EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at exploring the effectiveness of incidental vocabulary learning strategies. The study focuses on the strategies of learning vocabulary in enhancing the students' performance in English language. The study adopts descriptive analytical method in order to elaborate and analyze the cause of the problem via statistical analysis of the gathered data. The researchers assume that learners can easily acquire vocabulary whenever they interact with each other. The sample of the study consists of 30 Sudanese university students' learners of English, from Sudan University of Science and Technology (SUST). Thus in order to collect the necessary data, the researchers design a questionnaire as main tool of this study . The researchers analyze the data by using Statistic Packages for Social Sciences Programme (SPSS) . Based on the analysis and the results obtained, the study reveals that learners who acquire vocabulary communicatively score significantly high and can easily acquire vocabulary incidentally when they interact with each other. Incidental word learning enhances students' ability to acquire word meaning incidentally from written texts. The study recommends that learners have to be motivated through inserting new words in a variety of situation

Key words: Effectiveness, Incidental, Vocabulary, Learning Strategies.

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف فعالية استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات العرضية. تركز الدراسة على استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات في تحسين أداء الطلاب في اللغة الإنجليزية. تعتمد الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي من أجل توضيح وتحليل سبب المشكلة من خلال التحليل الإحصائي للبيانات. يفترض الباحثون أن المتعلمين يمكنهم بسهولة الحصول على المفردات كلما تفاعلوا مع بعضهم. تتكون عينة الدراسة من 30 طالباً سودانياً من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية من جامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا. صمم الباحثون استبياناً كأداة رئيسة لجمع بيانات هذه الدراسة و حُللت البيانات باستخدام برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية. بناءً على التحليل والنتائج التي حُصل عليها ، كشفت الدراسة أن المتعلمين الذين يكتسبون المفردات بتواصلهم يسجلون درجات عالية بشكل ملحوظ ويمكنهم اكتساب المفردات بسهولة عندما يتفاعلون مع بعضهم البعض. يعزز تعلم المفردات العرضية قدرة الطلاب على اكتساب معنى الكلمة من النصوص المكتوبة. توصي الدراسة بضرورة تحفيز الدارسين من خلال إدخال كلمات جديدة في مجموعة متنوعة من المواقف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفعالية ، العرضية ، المفردات ، استراتيجيات التعلم.

INTRODUCTION:

Humans have a natural tendency for communicating and interacting with one another. The daily innovations in sciences and technology, allow people of different tongues in the whole world to communicate and interact with one another. The need for learning or acquiring a language has become very essential and substantial for effective communication with people of other languages. Loewen (2014) refers back the need for second language (L2) learning or acquiring to the new ground of research in applied linguistics that related to the importance of learning or acquiring L2.

To communicate effectively, a substantial amount of vocabulary words is necessary for English first language and English second language learners. The numbers of words learners need to be capable of using another language vary.

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Vocabulary knowledge is undoubtedly a central part of linguistic knowledge, and its study is as old as the study of language learning itself.

Vocabulary learning is an indispensable process for EFL learners to acquire proficiency and competence in target language. Word power facilitates fluent speaking and effective writing. It substantiates both: learners' acquisition of knowledge and production of knowledge. It enriches learners' integrated language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In the same view Nation (2001, 2011) classifies vocabulary knowledge framework into three main components; form, meaning and use. According to him, each component was then broken down into smaller components, which are: spoken form, written form, different parts of the word that have meaning, form and meaning connection, associations with the word, grammatical function, collocations, concepts and referents of each word, and the constraints on use of the words which refers to when and where the word can be used appropriately. Thus, in order to master a word, he suggested that learners need to learn all components of word knowledge. Other researchers investigating vocabulary learning have also found that some aspects of vocabulary knowledge develop prior to others such as; Webb, (2007), Van Zeeland & Schmitt, (2013). Accordingly, for an accurate evaluation of vocabulary knowledge it is important to measure each aspect of word knowledge separately.

2. Statement of the Problem:

No doubt that vocabulary acquisition is very essential for L2 learners. Insufficient vocabulary has been a common complaint or a problem among English language learners. In order to learn an L2 you need an amount of vocabulary in order to communicate with in foreign language. Thus, you need to acquire vocabulary of L2 in two different methods, i.e., deliberated and incidental methods. As mentioned above that L2 vocabulary learning is a dilemma to those who wants to learn. Therefore, a considerable number of universities students find difficulty in expressing themselves in English and consequently in coping with the activities in their daily classes. Most of the Sudanese universities students mainly depend on deliberated vocabulary learning via lectures but they do not bother themselves to search about other sources of increasing their vocabulary i.e.; incidental vocabulary.

3. Literature review

Vocabulary learning is an essential part of acquiring a second language or additional one, so learners need a great number of words to become efficient users of the target language, Schimitt (2008). In this matter and according to Loewen (2014) claims, that researchers have identified two methods of acquiring vocabulary; the international or deliberate vocabulary learning, and incidental vocabulary acquisition. The first method involves explicit attention to learning vocabulary items, which can be accompanied by explicit instructions from the language teacher. The second method in contrast, takes place while an individual learns new vocabulary as a byproduct of a different activity such as; reading, watching TV, teacher talk, and listening to music in the target language. Nation (2011) urges that the vast number of vocabulary items in languages, deliberate teaching and learning of all the words is an unrealistic goal, thus a large portion of vocabulary learning needs to be accomplished through incidental learning. In this matter incidental learning plays an important role in acquiring L2 vocabulary through reading and listening, see e.g. Horst, (2005); Webb, 2007) in term of reading and Van Zeeland & Schmitt, (2013); Vidal (2014) in term of listening. In search of alternative way of L2 vocabulary acquisition that would be available to learners recent studies have been done in incidental vocabulary learning through watching TV programs and movies, e.g. Rogers, (2013).

Incidental learning is the process of learning something without the intending of doing so while intending to learn another, Richards & Schmidt (2002). Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, (1991); Jenkins, Stein, & Wysocki (1984); Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, (1985); Saragi, Nation, & Meister (1978), claim that incidental learning is said to be an effective way of learning vocabulary from context. In same view, Gass (1999); Hulstjin, (2001); and Loewen, (2015), urge that incidental vocabulary acquisition involves learning words as by-product of an activity that is not deliberately designed for that purpose.

English as a source of spoken and written academic discourse is used internationally in symposiums, conferences, academic researches, etc. Therefore English learners need a rich vocabulary to enhance learners' ability to communicate in English effectively. The size of vocabulary that a learner has to acquire is estimated according to some researchers. Coady, (1997); Coady, (1999), suggest that learners need at least 3,000 word families, and 5,000 to 10,000 word families for university-level texts to achieve accurate contextual guessing. McCarthy (1997) claims that a learner knows 80 per cent of the words in a text with a vocabulary size of 2,000 words. Cristina (2010) argues that it takes many years of hard work for a second-language speaker to get to native-speaker level, and goes further stating that; "some linguists estimate that educated native speakers could have an active vocabulary of between 8,000 and 10,000 words. Good second- Language speakers might have an active vocabulary of 3,500 words. Nation (2006) investigated the vocabulary size needed to understand different types of English discourse is to know the most frequent 6,000 to 7,000 word families to understand spoken discourse and the most frequent 8,000 to 9,000 word families to understand written discourse. More recently studies have suggested that knowledge of the 3,000 most frequent word families might be sufficient for comprehension of spoken discourse, Van Zeeland & Schmitt, (2013a); Webb & Rodgers, (2009a & 2009b). Nevertheless, research indicates that most learners in the EFL context are unable to learn the most frequent 3,000 words let alone the most frequent 8,000 to 9,000 words, Webb & Chang, (2012b). This suggests there is value in finding new ways to fuel L2 vocabulary growth. Learning vocabulary incidentally through encountering larger amounts of L2 input in different types of spoken and written discourse may provide the greatest potential to promote L2 vocabulary growth, Webb & Nation, (2017).

Schmidt (1993), Knight (1994), Nation (1997, 2001), and Yoshii (2002) are among many researchers who consider learning vocabulary essential for English second language and English first language learners. Much of the recent research has been conducted to examine the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension. The findings of many studies show a strong relationship between students' vocabulary knowledge and general reading skills (Salem, 2007). Psychologists, linguists, and language teachers have been interested in vocabulary learning strategies for a long time (Levenston, 1979). Actually, researchers began to effectively focus on vocabulary learning research in the mid 1980s and vocabulary learning is now a current focus in English second language pedagogy and research. Learning new vocabulary is, presumably, the most important element in second language learning, Knight, (1994). Candlin (1988) describes the study of vocabulary in its social context by being the heart of the learning process. Other researchers such as Harley (1996) accept the importance of vocabulary learning in language proficiency and academic achievements. However, their ideas about how vocabulary is learned vary widely. They argue that one of the major concerns in first language and second language vocabulary learning is the need to develop effective pedagogical methods for teaching first language and second language vocabulary.

Yet, here, it is important to mention what Nation (2001) states about the difference between two categories of vocabulary concerning the teachers' and learners' aims, and the efforts they exert: high-frequency words, and low-frequency words. High-frequency words do not require as much effort as low-frequency words. For the latter, he claims that "the teachers' aim is to train learners in the use of strategies to deal with such vocabulary. These strategies are guessing from context clues, deliberate studying words on word cards, using word parts, and dictionary use. A number of questionnaires, interviews and case studies Gu & Johnson, (1996); Jones, (1995); Hogden, (1996); Porte, (1988); Sanaoui, (1995) – as quoted in Hulstijn (2001) – handled the concern of learners of a second language with the burden of vocabulary learning. They investigated two major hypotheses: students should learn words intentionally, even by memorizing, and students should learn or acquire new vocabulary by picking up words incidentally, as a by-product of being exposed to second language input in reading and listening tasks. According to the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (Krashen 1981), second language learners have two distinct ways of developing ability in second languages: learning and acquisition. Language acquisition is similar to the way children develop their first language. Learners can acquire second language without meaning to. What they are aware of is using the language for some communicative purposes. What is more, they are often not aware of what they have acquired; they usually cannot describe or talk about the rules they have acquired. Language learning is different. It involves knowing about language or formal knowledge of a language. Language learning is thought to profit from explicit presentation of rules and from error correction. Error correction, supposedly, helps the learner come to the correct conscious mental representation of a rule. "Error correction has little or no effect on subconscious acquisition, but is thought to be useful for conscious learning", Krashen, (1982). Similarly, Saville- Troike (2012) argues that: Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers both to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language." "The scope of SLA includes informal second language learning that takes place in naturalistic contexts, formal second language learning that takes place in classrooms, and second language learning that involves a mixture of these settings and circumstances.

4. The method

The study employed a descriptive analytical method, to find out the effectiveness of incidental vocabulary learning strategy among Sudanese universities students. The researchers conducted a questionnaire to suite such cases as main tool to collect the necessary data. The collected data were analyzed statistically using (SPSS), to detect the participants' opinions on the study problem.

The sample

The sample of the study consists of 30 university students from (SUST) including both sexes, as a case study and has been chosen randomly.

Tools of the study

The questionnaire consists of five items derived from the hypothesis of the study. Each five items or statements are derived from one hypothesis, then the questionnaire is adjusted by specialized professional teaching staff and then it was distributed to learners of English Language at Sudan University to express their opinions towards the items of the questionnaire. Then it was analyzed statistically using SPSS to detect the participants' opinions on the study.

5. Data Analysis

This part presents statistical analysis of the data collected via the questionnaire. The analysis is provided by the SPSS program then an illustration for every statement of the questionnaire is provided below each table. This chapter is also designed to identify, describe and explain the answers of some students who have expressed their opinions towards the study.

Questionnaire Analysis:

The following is the statistical analysis for the items of the questionnaire that consists of five domains and was distributed to undergraduate students who have expressed their point of views towards the study.

Table (1): Vocabulary is easily acquired via learners' incidental interaction.

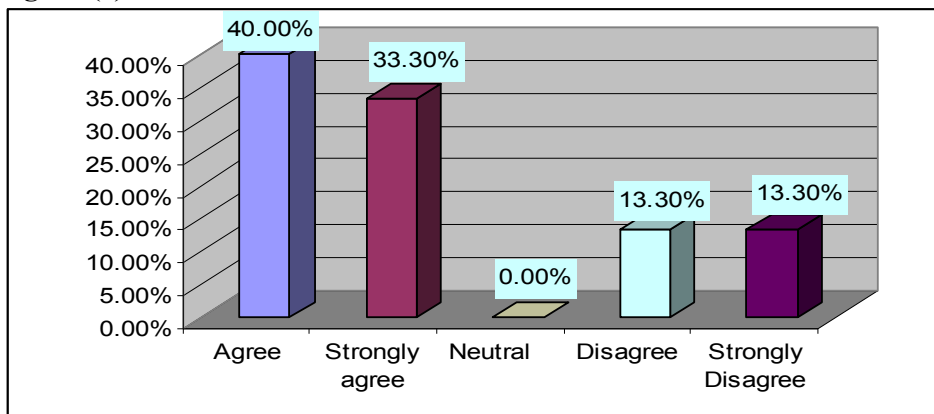| Valid	Frequency	Percent
Agree	12	40.0%
Strongly agree	10	33.3%
Neutral	00	00.0%
Disagree	04	13.3%
Strongly Disagree	04	13.3%
Total	30	100.0%

Figure (1)

Table and Figure (1) above show the percentages of the respondents who have expressed their opinions towards the above statement. According to the analysis above a vast majority of respondents (73.3%) support the statement, whereas (26.3%) of the respondents expressed their disagreement with the statement; therefore, respondents believed that vocabulary is easily acquired via learners' incidental interaction. On the light of the above analysis the statement has positively supported the first hypothesis.

Table (2): Students are expected to score significantly high when they acquire vocabulary communicatively.

| Valid	Frequency	Percent
Agree	10	33.3%
Strongly agree	08	26.7%
Neutral	03	10.0%
Disagree	06	20.0%
Strongly Disagree	03	10.0%
Total	30	100.0%

Figure (2)
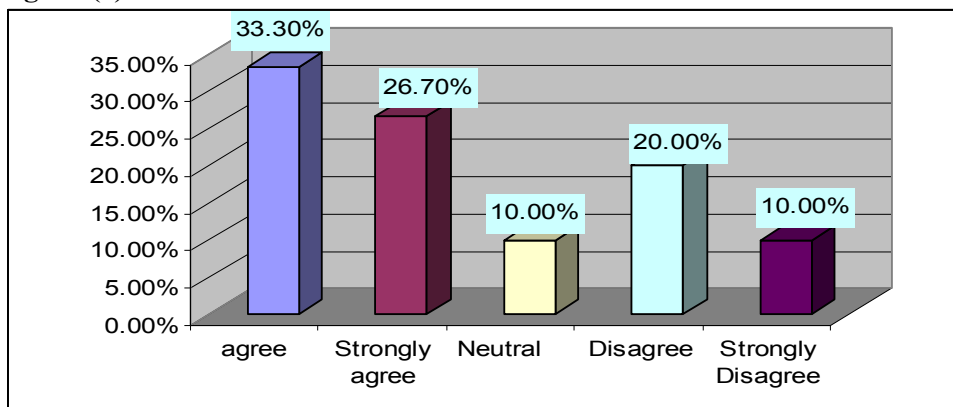
The table and Figure (2) above explain the percentages of the respondents to the statement that students are expected to score significantly high when they acquire vocabulary communicatively reached (60%) of the respondents who are in favor of the statement, while the percentages of those who disagree with the statement are estimated by (30.0%). Therefore, the statement has positively supported the first hypothesis true.

Table (3): Incidental vocabulary learning needs ample and repeated exposure to the same word in a variety of texts.

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Agree	20	66.7%
Strongly agree	05	16.7%
Neutral	02	06.6%
Disagree	03	10.0%
Strongly Disagree	00	00.0%
Total	30	100.0%

Figure (3)
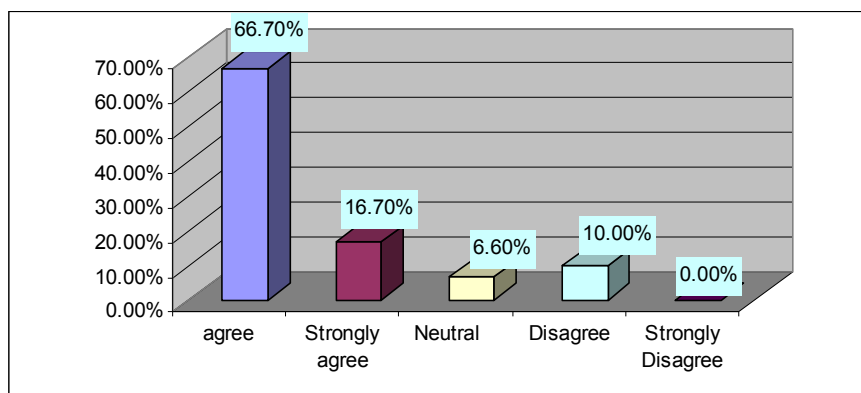
The table and Figure (3) above show the percentages of the respondents who have expressed their opinions towards the above statement. According to the analysis above a vast majority of respondents (83.4%) support the statement, whereas only (10%) of the respondents expressed their disagreement. Therefore, it is strongly believed that Incidental vocabulary learning needs

ample and repeated exposure to the same word in a variety of texts. On the light of the above analysis the statement strongly supports the first hypothesis

Table (4): Learners who are involved in experimental group can automatically acquire new vocabulary.

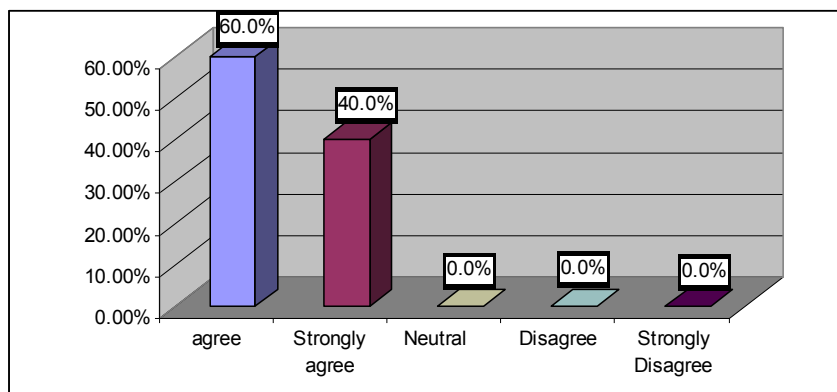| Valid	Frequency	Percent
agree	15	50.0%
Strongly agree	09	30.0%
Neutral	00	00.0%
Disagree	04	13.3%
Strongly Disagree	02	06.7%
Total	30	100.0%

Figure (4)
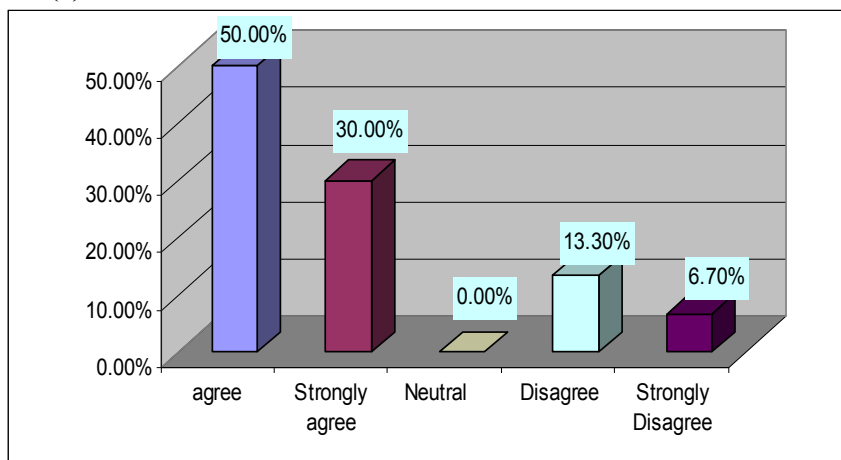
The table and Figure (4) above illustrate the percentages of the respondents who have expressed their options concerning the above statement. According to the analysis above, a vast majority of respondents (80%) support the statement, whereas (20%) of the respondents have expressed their disagreement with the statement. Therefore, the majority of the respondents strongly believed that learners can automatically acquire new vocabulary when they are involved in experimental group and depending on what is mentioned above the first hypothesis is greatly supported by this statement.

Table (5):Incidental word learning enhances students' ability to acquire word meaning incidentally from written texts.

Valid	Frequency	Percent
agree	18	60.0%
Strongly agree	12	40.0%
Neutral	00	00.0%
Disagree	00	00.0%
Strongly Disagree	00	00.0%
Total	30	100.0%

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Figure (5)

The table and Figure (4.5) above show the percentages of the respondents who expressed their agreement with the above statement reached (100%) which indicates that the statement is completely supported by all respondents that means none of the respondents have expressed their disagreement with the statement and the analysis proves that Incidental word learning enhances students' ability to acquire word meaning incidentally from written texts. According to the analysis the statement has strongly supported the first hypothesis.

6. Results & Discussions

After the comparing and calculation of the sub-hypotheses; it has been found that the total percentage of all sub-hypotheses percentages concerning the main hypothesis is (79.3%) which represents positive response; therefore, the hypothesis has been confirmed by its all sub-assumptions and it has been accepted.

7. Conclusion:

1. Learners who acquire vocabulary communicatively are expected to score significantly high.

2. Learners can easily acquire vocabulary incidentally when they interact with each other.

3. Incidental vocabulary learning is effectively done via an ample exposure to the same word in various texts.

4. Learners are strongly motivated to acquire and retain new vocabulary when it is used in a variety of situations.

8. Recommendations

1. Visual aids should be used effectively in learning vocabulary intentionally.

2. Learners have to be motivated through inserting new words in a variety of situations.

3. Learners should be exposed to intensive real interactive situations.

9. Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher suggests that more studies are to be conducted in the area of vocabulary so as to enhance the performance as follows:

1. Extra studies regarding the effects of incidental and intentional vocabulary learning strategies can be conducted for more and useful findings.

2. Investigating the impact of using translation in learning vocabulary.

3. Examining the role of the interactive situations in acquiring new vocabulary in terms of pronunciation as well as meaning.

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