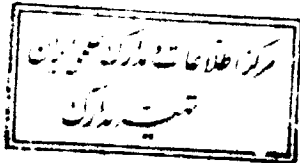


*In the Name of God*

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**The Role of Vocabulary Learning  
Strategies on Vocabulary Retention  
and on Language Proficiency in Iranian  
EFL Students**

۱۳۷۷ / ۹ / ۲۰



By

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**Babak Etemad**

**A THESIS**

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*University for Teacher Education*  
*Department of Foreign Languages*

August, 1998

We Hereby Recommend That This Thesis

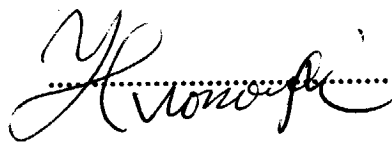
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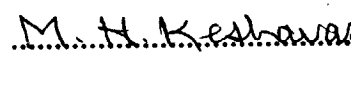
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TO MY PARENTS

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## Abstract

Second language teaching in recent years has moved away from the search for the perfect teaching method, focusing instead on how successful teachers and learners actually achieve their goals. In the case of teachers, this has led to classroom-centred research on the linguistic, discoursal, and interactional structure of teaching events. In the case of learners, it has led to the study of how learners approach learning, both in and out of classrooms, and the kinds of strategies and cognitive processing they use in second language acquisition. This study focused on finding out what kind of strategies are mostly used by Iranian EFL students and whether these strategies help them retain vocabulary and develop their general L2 proficiency. The subjects used in the study were 104 senior EFL students from Allameh Tabatabaee and Shahid Beheshti Universities. Data were collected through a test of vocabulary; to test the students' word power, a Michigan test; to



determine their general English proficiency and a questionnaire to find out about the students' vocabulary learning strategies. Findings indicated that most students use a variety of vocabulary learning strategies. In multiple regression analyses, Self-Initiation and Selective Attention, two metacognitive strategies, emerged as positive predictors of English proficiency. Contextual guessing, use of dictionaries, note taking, paying attention to word formation, contextual encoding, and activation of newly learned words also positively correlated with both general English proficiency and word power. However, repetition and rote learning of new words were negative predictors of both of them. These results contribute to implications for instructional practice.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background

The word 'vocabulary' has meant word lists for a long time, and vocabulary learning strategies have been equal to techniques that help students memorize these lists. Most research on vocabulary learning strategies has, therefore, explored various methods of vocabulary presentation and their corresponding effectiveness in retention (Meara, 1980). As a result, memory strategies are most studied; one of the many aspects of vocabulary learning strategies on the pre-supposition that strategies which are good for vocabulary retention will also benefit language learning in general. Some earlier research focused on rehearsal strategies and addressed questions such as the number of repetitions needed to learn a list, the optimum number of words to be learned at one time, or the timing of

repetitions. Atkinson (1927) found that rote repetition is less efficient than using spaced recall and structured reviews and Gershman (1970) showed that silent repetition and silent writing are less effective than repeating the words aloud.

Research now has extensively revealed that vocabulary can be acquired through reading (Krashen, 1984) or any "fully contextualized activities", to use Oxford and Scaralla's (1994) term. Furthermore, vocabulary words which are acquired in this way, retain not just their referential meaning but also the syntactic, pragmatic, and even emotional information from their context. Most important, vocabulary is no longer believed to be acquired as separate items. It is an integral part of discourse and is developed along with reading strategies such as contextual guessing.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem and purpose of the study**

The present study was conducted to determine whether

among a spectrum of vocabulary learning strategies any strategies work better than others, if all strategies which are good for vocabulary retention automatically benefit the development of general L2 proficiency. And among a whole range of vocabulary strategies, from initial handling of a new word, to contextual guessing, to dictionary use, to note-taking, to reinforcement strategies, and to the activation and use of the newly learned word, which do EFL learners tend to employ.

### **1.3. Significance and justification of the study**

Vocabulary is an important element in learning a second language and, therefore, it is significant to find the strategies and ways which help EFL students increase and retain their vocabulary. Previous studies have shown that students use different strategies in learning vocabulary, but few of these strategies have proved to be helpful.

This study reflects the beliefs and strategies used by Iranian

students in learning English vocabulary. It also examines a wide range of vocabulary learning beliefs and strategies in relation to both vocabulary size and general English proficiency in senior EFL students. The significance of the present research is that it shows what strategies benefit vocabulary retention and help students' English proficiency.

#### **1.4. Research questions and Hypotheses**

The areas of investigation in the existing study are as follows:

- 1) What kind of vocabulary learning strategies are mostly used by Iranian EFL students?
- 2) Do strategies used by students help them in retaining vocabulary?
- 3) Do strategies used by students for retaining vocabulary develop their general language proficiency?

In order to be on the safe side, two null hypotheses are put forward for this study:

Ho(1) There is no relationship between vocabulary learning strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and their word power.

Ho(2) There is no relationship between vocabulary learning strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and their language proficiency.

### **1.5. Definition of technical terms**

Bottom-up processing: A special form of mental processing in which individuals attempt to derive meaning from novel textual information by analyzing individual word meanings or grammatical characteristics of the text.

Cognitive strategy: A strategy that involves mental manipulation or transformation of materials or tasks and is intended to enhance comprehension, acquisition, or retention.

Declarative knowledge: A special type of information in long-term memory that consists of knowledge about the facts

and things that we know. This information is stored in terms of propositions, schemata, and propositional networks. It may also be stored in terms of isolated pieces of information, temporal strings, and images.

Keyword method: A mnemonic device in which individuals form a native-language homophone (the keyword) for the target word in the second language. The individual then imagines a scene in which the homophone and the referent object of the target word are interacting in some manner. Memory retrieval of the meaning of the target word consists of recalling the homophone, then recalling the imagined scene in which the homophone and the referent object are interacting.

Metacognitive knowledge: Knowledge of one's cognitive processes related to learning and the cognitive processes of others.

Metacognitive strategy: A learning strategy that involves thinking about or knowledge of the learning process, planning