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**Title:**

# The Impact of Explicit Vocabulary Learning Strategy Instruction on L2 Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract: The importance of vocabulary learning and teaching is out of question in all language learning situations.It is believed that vocabulary strategy instruction can be used to improve vocabulary teaching. This study tried to investigate the impact of explicit strategy instruction on vocabulary learning in ESP context.To this aim,36 mechanical engeneering students were divided into two groups.Experimental group was instructed through vocabulary learning strategy instruction model proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1994).The material was chosen from the book published by SAMT publications.The vocabulary acquisition and retention was checked with the use of Vocabulary Knowledge Scale,in a post-test and delayed post-test,which was administered 15 days later.Results indicate that experimental group outperformed the control group in both tests.It is concluded that explicit strategy instruction has positive effect on vocabulary learning and retention .This study suggests using explicit strategy instruction in ESP context for teaching vocabulary.

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# Chapter One:


# Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Teaching English vocabulary is an important area worthy of effort and investigation. "If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh" (Harmer,1991,cited in Jones,2007 ). One of the main concerns for those who are working in an ESP context, is how to help the students deal with  authentic academic texts which, by their nature, require a good size of vocabulary. Because although it's possible to find examples in texts (especially scientific or technical texts) where grammatical structure is crucial to understanding the subtle nuances of meaning, what seems more important for comprehension is knowing what the words mean. Vermeer (2001) believes that knowing words is the key to understanding and being understood.Teaching words in ESP context has received attention from the syllabus designers in Iran ,and in this study we want to investigate a way for the instruction of them.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

It is belived that if students are taught the strategies to work out the answers for themselves, they are empowered to manage their own learning (Giriffiths, 2004). Lots of studies around the world have been done to study the effectiveness of  the use of strategies in learning second language . Language learning strategy instruction is a teaching approach that aims to raise learner awareness of learning

strategies and provide learners with systematic practice, reinforcement and self-monitoring of their strategy use while attending to language learning activities(Kinoshita,2003).In order to verify the effectiveness of the strategy instruction lots of researches have been done.

Cohen and Aphek (1980,cited in Kinoshita,2003) trained learners of Hebrew how to recall new words by using 'paired associations and found that better performance in recall tasks occurred when learners formed associations than when associations were not formed (Ellis, 2002 :157). In an investigation by Weinstein (1978,cited in Ellis,2002) ninth grade students were trained in how to use a variety of elaboration strategies and apply them to reading comprehension and memory tasks. The positive results showed students trained in elaboration strategies significantly outperformed the students who received no training (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995,cited in Kinoshita,2003). The consensus of these investigations tell us that language learning strategies are 'teachable' and training language learners to use selected learning strategies can have positive effects on task performance and the language learning process(Kinoshita,2003). On the other hand,research also shows that not all L2 strategy-training studies have been successful or conclusive. Some training has been effective in various skill areas but not in others, even within the same study (Oxford, 1989,cited in Ranjbari and Rasekh,2003).

Also Jurkovic (2006) Studied vocabulary learning strategies in ESP context.When the context changes to ESP the need for useful training gets more important.Atay And Ozbulgan (2007)studied the effect of Memory strategy instruction and contextual learning on ESP vocabulary recall and concluded that there is positive effect.Among other vocabulary learning(VLS) strategy instruction studies we can mention Rasekh and Ranjbari (2003) who studied the effect of metacognitive strategy training on L2 vocabulary learning and reported a positive result. '

However these studies are limited to a few strategies.Most researchers study the memory strategies( Gu and Johnson,1996) and the instruction effect of other strategies are usually ignored.

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## 1.3 Significance of the Study

Among the large number of studies concerned with learning strategies a high percentage study the nature of the strategies and try to categorize them,very few studies are experimental.And among those studies which try to test the effectiveness of the strategy use almost all believe that in order to be effective strategy use has to be conscious and language users active processors of information.(Gu,2005).

According to Najar (1999), it is generally assumed that learners have developed strategies for learning and are applying them in the tertiary learning context. This however, may be an erroneous assumption. It appears that increasing numbers of learners come to university with limited academic experience or with experience; they are unable to apply in the learning context. In response to this situation Najar, (1999) suggests that. Curriculums, which include instruction in learning strategy use, can support learning by encouraging learners to apply learning strategies they already have and to develop new ones.

The importance of Vocabulary learning and teaching is out of question in all contexts of English learning but in ESP context this importance is far more highlighted by many scholars, for example Robinson (1991:4, cited in Jurkovic,2006) says " It may often be thought that a characteristic, or even a critical feature, of ESP is that a course should involve specialist language (especially terminology) and content". This study focuses on the vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) within the broad framework of language learning strategies. In other words the focus is not on what vocabulary is or which vocabularies must be toutgh but on how to teach vocabulary.

As studying all the strategy types in a single study is impossible , all researchers have focused on a single strategy at a time.In this effort some strategies have received great attention from researchers like memory strategy but some others received little attention. One reason can be the ease of studying the

effect of memory strategy on retention.As better retention  may be considered to be the effect of better memory use. While  good retention can be the result of other factors as well,like deeper processing of mind during learning as believed in the Depth Of  Processing Hypothesis (DOPH).The need to investigate all strategy types might have been ignored in EGP context because in new trends there is such a great variaty that leaves  little space for strategy training.However it is not the case for ESP context. It seems that new ways of instructing vocabulary is needed. On the other hand, dependent on the context a need might be more or less urgent.

## 1.4 Statement of Problem and the Purpose of Study

While there is some recognition of the role of learning strategies in academic success in higher education, it is seldom addressed by curriculums in a dedicated way. (Najar ,1999). Given the pivotal role of vocabulary in virtually all aspects of academic competence, it is alarming that very little attention has been paid to teaching vocabulary in ESP context. What has been done hitherto has been limited to the establishment of a theoretical foundation for ESP courses. Little attention; however, has been paid to devising specific and efficient methodology and techniques for ESP learners (Avand, 2009).

In Iran the situation for ESP courses in universities require great attention from L2 teachers and scholars.First of all In Iran students enter university with different levels of language profeciency of English. While most of them have been in high school learning system only, some have entered special language courses out of the government learning system and while the former group has low profeciency level of language the later one might have higher profeciency level. This situation makes teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) a complicated job. Language teaching is quite improved and up to date in language learning institutes. However, teaching ESP in universities is not that much up to date. One of the reasons can be the different levels of English profeciency level among the students of one ESP class or

another reason can be the lack of a clear instruction in ESP classes .The former problem has a broad scope and must be solved by exact study of the high school courses and general English courses in universities. But about the second problem, that is the lack of a clear instruction (what many scholars have tried to solve) is one of the main concerns of this study. ESP is a very broad topic including all the subtopics of general English in it e.g. syllabus design, needs analysis, etc.

In Iran special ESP course books have been published under the supervision of SAMT publications for almost all fields of study in humanities.( Which can be studied from course book evaluation point of view).However there is no clear instruction on the teaching methodology of the books. On the other hand the short time which is predefined for the course from the ministry of education,that is 32 hours for a  two credit course, seems to be  too short for a huge amount of vocabulary and grammar. The teachers have to choose the best material and the best methodology to get successful in the speed race of 32 hour course.About the best material SAMT publications have devoted great energy and time to publish course books. So in this study I focus the attention on the specific instructions that can be used to make learners learn vocabulary easily and autonomously.

On the area of leaning strategies, there have been lots of studies considering the useful strategies which students use, called good language learner studies including Naiman et al.1978; Lennon 1989; Reiss 1985 and etc (Segler et al, 2001). And also there have been lots of studies for scrutinizing different language learning strategies and its classifications. Most of them are based on questionnaire around which I will focus in detail in the next part. Very few studies have been experimental and a few studies have focused on the effect of the strategy instruction compared to the studies which have focused on the strategy classification and  finding strategy use frequency.

Since the classroom may be the main or only in which students hear or use English, it is important to include the strategic vocabulary teaching in lesson plans. If the textbook does not include this as part of the syllabus or contain presentation and practice activities, it will be up to the teacher as the most experienced user of English to find ways to introduce this type of vocabulary in class (McCarten, 2007:23).The presented situation motivated my current MA research

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In this study an attempt is made to test the effect of explicit vocabulary learning strategy instruction proposed by O'Malley and Chamot(1994) in ESP context proposed by Jurkovic(2006) among the students of mechanical engeering.In order to give an instruction model for teaching new vocabulary in ESP courses.

## 1.5 Organization of the Study

The study has been organized  into five chapters.Chapter one is on the whole in miniature;it covers the background of study,significance of the study,and the statement  of the problem and purpose of the study.In the second chapter we review the related literature in details.Chapter three deals with the design and methodology of the study, selection and sampling of the participants, and data collection procedures . Chapter four describes data analysis and tabulation of the data.Finaly, in chapter five,conclusions,implications,limitations of the study and  suggestions for further study are presented.

# Chapter Two :

# Review of the Related

# Literature

**2.1 Introduction**

As learning vocabulary is really an important skill in all language contexts, teaching vocabulary quite obviously plays an important role in the improvement of ESP students' language profeciency.The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of explicit vocabulary strategy instruction on L2 vocabulary learning. The practical part consists of a unit plan introducing VLS instruction in accordance with O'Malley's and Chamot's (1994) 5-step model and in this chapter learning strategies are defined and classified,then vocabulary learning strategies and instruction models are mentioned in detail.then a general explanation is given around vocabulary teaching and testing.

## 2.2 Learning Strategies

Studies in the filed of learning strategies have a long history and it goes back to the mid-seventies. In spite of this awareness, and in spite of much useful and interesting work having been carried out in the intervening years (nearly a quarter of a century), the language learning strategy field continues to be characterized by confusion and no consensus while Ellis (1994:529) comments that the language learning strategy concept remains fuzzy. Rebecca Oxford believes that all learning strategies are related to features of control, goal–directedness, autonomy and self-efficacy(Oxford,1989). Segler (2001) believes that there is no consensus on definition of the term language learning strategies, not least due to different interpretations of the term strategy and learning in literature.

### 2.2.1 Defining Language Learning Strategies

This section begines  by looking at the basic terminology, the frequently conflicting use of which does nothing to aid consensus. I will then discuss definition and classification of language learning strategies.

Learning strategies are defined by many people in many different ways. We can mention some of these definitions which are cited in Ellis (1994:531) as follows:

**Stern 1983***:*

"In our view strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, leaving techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior."

**Weinstein and Mayer 1986:**

"Learning strategies are the behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learners encoding process"

**Chamot 1987:**

"Learning strategies are techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning, recall pf both linguistic and content area information"

**Rubin 1987:**

"Learning strategies are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly"

**Oxford 1989:**

"Language learning strategies are behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable."

**Brown 2000:**

"Strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned design for controlling and manipulating certain information. They are contextualized 'battle plans' that might vary from moment to moment, or day to day, or year to year. "

Ellis (Ellis, 1994:532) suggests that the best approach to defining strategies is to try to list their main characteristics.His suggested list is as follows:

1) Strategy refer to both general approaches and specific actions or techniques used to learn an L2

2) Strategies are problem oriented –the learner deploys a strategy to overcome some particular learning g problems

3) Learners are generally aware of the strategies they use and can identify what they consist of if they are asked to pay attention to what hey are doing/thinking

4) Strategies involve linguistic behavior and non-linguistic

5) Linguistic strategies can be performed in the L1 and in the L2

6) Some strategies are behavioral while others are mental .thus some strategies are directly observable, while others are not.

7) In the main, strategies contribute indirectly to learning by providing learners with data about the L2 which they can process. However some strategies may also contribute directly

8) Strategy use varies considerably as a result of both the kind of task the learner is engaged in and individual learner preferences.

## 2.2.2 Classifying Learning Strategies

Classifying learning strategies seems to be as fuzzy as defining them. In early researches the focus of attention was on compiling inventories of learning strategies that the learners were observed to use and little attention was paid to classifying the strategies. Subsequent descriptive studies have endeavored to classify strategies in broad categories so that more specific strategies can be grouped in those broad groups.

### 2.2.2.1 Classifications According to Different Scholars

Here I deal with the different classifications from the point of view of different scholars. Each scholar has considered a different aspect of learning strategies.

**Wenden's** (1983) research examined the strategies that adult foreign language learners use in order to direct their own learning. Wenden's focus, therefore, is on what O'Malley and Chamot call meta-cognitive strategies. She identifies the following three general categories of self-directing strategies (liu, 2010):

(1) Knowing about language and relating to what language and language learning involves;

(2) Planning relating to the 'what' and 'how' of language learning;

(3) Self-evaluation. It relates to progress in learning and learner's responses to the learning experience. Wenden's framework was considered as a basis for the later EFL learner's training

**Rubin** (1987) views strategy classification from the angle of its directness or indirectness to learning. Rubin' proposed classification scheme subsumes learning strategies under two primary groupings and a number of subgroups. She categorized the strategies in three major groups She describes a typology of three major kinds of strategies learning, (interactive) communication, and social strategies. Learner