

Impact of Vocabulary Learning Strategies on Gender Based ESL Learners

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Abstract: The wide spectrum of English language compels the readers to find out the exact crux of the language itself. English has won the status of international language. It has become a dire need of this age. English language is comparatively difficult due to its pronunciation, sentence structure, and vocabulary level from local languages in Pakistan. Vocabulary is the utmost aspect of learning second language. It is the essence and soul of language. Language acquisition is not possible without vocabulary. The language process depends on learning vocabulary. So the current paper investigates the impact of vocabulary learning strategies for the ESL learners. It was an experimental type of research. One hundred students of Grade-9 in the academic year 2019-20 from Govt.S.D. High School Bahawalpur and Workers Welfare High School (Girls) Bahawalpur participated in this study in both experimental and control groups. The data was collected through test and questionnaire. The study results explored that the students who were taught by the ESL learning techniques performed better as compared with the students in traditional vocabulary learning method. Female students performed better in experimental group. ESL male learners used group association learning technique at priority and ESL female learners used visual and auditory learning at their priority. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that English language teachers should use vocabulary learning strategies for teaching English in general and for the ESL learners in particular.

Keywords: Investigation, Strategies, Vocabulary, ESL learners, Comparatively.

Introduction

Language is a weapon for man. It has to be taught and used in social groups. It is the only way to speak with each other and it is the way by which we can send our messages to others. It is not only used for routine dialogue but also used in education, research and science in spoken as well as in written form. Without it, man is like a dumb animal. Proficiency over target knowledge of vocabulary can make our students powerful speakers, handsome listeners, good readers and writers. For learning any language, both the oral and written skills are of equal importance. For this purpose, there is a dire need of interaction among the learner, educator and study material. In fact, English is being used all over the world as an international language. It has become a Lingua Franca and a language of greater opportunities. It also enjoys a supreme status in society. Its sound knowledge is a successful passport for any job. Recently, network communities made the globalization much easier than ever. The vital role is being played through English language. No part of the world is seen without understanding and speaking English language. The trade, administration, social and educational problems are easily discussed in English language. Most of the people convey their thoughts and perform variety of functions in different situations. In Pakistan, English is used as a second language. Basically, learning a second language is never easy. Learning of vocabulary is the very basic point to expertise it in the target language. Vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary retention and vocabulary transfer are some confused processes in learning vocabulary. No doubt, the role of vocabulary is very vital in order to language teaching and learning. Mastery in vocabulary will enable the students to enhance other skills well. Developing vocabulary is a confused series of actions to achieve the results. It takes a long time to master English vocabulary. It makes the learning process more meaningful.

The knowledge of words relevant to its meaning and explanations is called vocabulary (Schmitt, 2000). Vocabulary is the fundamental aspect in grasping a second language. Vocabulary learning process needs the abilities of retention, acquisition, and transfer of vocabulary (Schneider et al., 2002). According to Oxford (1990), Language learning strategies are behaviors or techniques used by the learners in facilitation and acquisition of language. Language learning aspects must be considered during teaching vocabulary which are: syntax, semantics and arranging of words. Every language has different meanings, sentence structure and arrangement of words which leads to several vocabulary learning issues. The cognitive, social and psychological factors involve in learning and retaining of vocabulary. The social indicators of students' learning process are parents, peers and teachers who help in refining the learning process of the learners through different literary events.

Mobius (1904) (as cited in Na, 2016), also presented the sex differences of human brain. He observed that women are physiologically weak-minded than men as women skull is eight percent less than men. Leonard (1998) (as cited in Na, 2016), found that the cerebral cortex related to complex thinking is thicker in women's brains than men's. The left cerebral hemisphere is dominant in females which facilitates short-term memory and language communication while right cerebral hemisphere is dominant in males and helps to enhance analytical ability and comprehensive competence. The psychological difference revealed that male learners are adventurous, confident, independent and outspoken but careless. On the other hand, females are delicate, quiet and irresolute. It means, male learners are better self-evaluators and self-recognizers. The changing role in gender in human societies supported men to speak more. Douglas and Burman (2006) summarized that boys speak later than girls. After one and half year from birth, females have twice the vocabulary than males. Boys are apt at verbal reasoning. The females are good at grammar and spelling.

Gender issue in second language acquisition has achieved the vital acceptance and attention among researchers and linguists worldwide (Brantmeier, 2003; Young & Oxford, 1997), strategies of learning (Jimenez, 2003; Young & Oxford, 1997) production of errors (Jimenez, 1992). In all researches different results are achieved. Some studies supported males over females or vice versa even other revealed that gender is an irrelevant issue in foreign language acquisition. Regarding the vocabulary acquisition, the gender role occupied a projecting place among scholars. Studies which addressed gender differences mostly related to lexical acquisition. According to Boyle (1987) males are dominant over females in comprehension.

Scarcella and Zimmerman (1998) also revealed that men performed better than that of women in academic vocabulary recognition test. The studies of Lin and Wu (2003), Lynn et al. (2005), and Edelenbos and Vinje (2000), investigated the superiority of males over females in vocabulary knowledge of foreign language. On the other hand, Sunderland (2000) showed that women had better performance than men in memory test. The findings of Jimenez and Terrazas (2005-2008) revealed a non-significant gender difference in receptive vocabulary performance test. Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000) and Jimenez and Moreno (2004) showed that females performed higher than males in productive vocabulary. The empirical evidences found in favor of females in lexical availability test (Jimenez & Ojeda, 2009). Many studies had mixed results in vocabulary acquisition of foreign language (Jimenez, 2010). In identifying the role of gender in vocabulary learning strategies, Jimenez (2003) found that females were superior to males in qualitative and quantitative terms by using more strategies than males. The female students learn vocabulary rapidly than that of males. However, the male students incorporate more new words into lexicons than female students (Llach & Gallego, 2012).

Vocabulary is needed in learning a second language. According to Nation (2001) vocabulary learning is the first step for achieving the goal. According to Stoller and Grabe (1993), the vocabulary development is essential for both non-native and native learners. Kaivanpanah and Zandi (2009) revealed that first and second languages cannot be learnt without sound knowledge of vocabulary. Hulstijn (2005) told that without knowing the meanings of the words understanding of the text is strictly hampered. Quin and Irvings (1997) revealed that memorizing new and unrelated words is a difficult task. According to Wei (2007), long term retention is necessary in learning new vocabulary. According to Paivo (1986), the success of second language classroom mostly depends on vocabulary.

Vocabulary learning is the major grievance of ESL students. It is difficult for them to memorize the new vocabulary structures for a long time. The words are building blocks for learning a language. Words do not exist in isolated form. They are interwoven to achieve listening and reading understanding to share the ideas in writing and speaking process. Oxford (1990) proposed six learning strategies. They are: retrieving and remembering, cognitive strategy, meta cognitive strategy, compensation, affective and social strategy. In brief the internal and external factors are responsible for learning. Internal factors are age, motivation, intelligence,

attitude, personality and aptitude. The external factors referred to learning environment, teaching methods, social background and evaluation.

Oxford and Scarcella (1994) identified many approaches for teaching of vocabulary based on learners' needs, motivation and difficulty. In the past, vocabulary was taught in the class unsystematically that learners learnt the vocabulary without the guidance of their teachers. The new and modern approach made the learners to learn vocabulary systematically with the help of words which students use frequently. Nation (2001) expressed that learning strategies of vocabulary are part of general teaching.

Word Meaning Theory

There exists a basic structure behind every word, fixed meaning and fuzzy meaning. In fixed meaning the learners acquire the core meaning of a word, the fuzzy meaning is not concerned with fixed meaning (Aitchison, 2003). They are constructed into planning information and process.

Techniques of Vocabulary Retention (TVRs)

Oxford and Crookall (1990) proposed few memory strategies to help learners in recovering and storing new information:

Grouping Association: Grouping is an easier to remember new words. For example (nouns, verbs), semantic (statements) or themes (words about situations). New words based on old memory concepts like, "erroneous means mistaken" the students cannot associate with "error".

Words Context Technique: New words are placed in long-term memory with the help of meaningful dialogues and sentences in a story.

Using Imagery: The meaningful imagery is helpful for new language information.

Semantic Mapping: Related words are arranged by means of arrows and lines in semantic mapping.

Visual and Auditory Learning: Similar sounds help new language words incorporating mother language. The learners create auditory links with familiar and new word through visual link. They may be memorized by using rhymes.

Pickrell (2010) and Thornbury (2008) also identified many other techniques of learning vocabulary. Repeating novice words are pronounced loudly in sentences to improve the retention skills. It is done by reading newspapers and magazines. It helps the students in learning sentence structures and patterns. Flashcards may be used to develop interest among learners. Other methods include matching, filling the blanks; prefixes and suffixes exercises. Current studies are insufficient to tackle the issue. Students may learn many new words but unable to retain in long term memory. The current study is anticipated to help the ESL learners in retaining and learning vocabulary through effective learning techniques used to learn new words.

Objectives of the Study

The core objectives of the study were:

1. To compare the achievement scores of students learning through ESL learning techniques and traditional methods.
2. To analyze the effective vocabulary learning strategies for ESL learners at secondary level.
3. To offer strategies and tools to help students in learning new vocabulary.
4. To analyze effective vocabulary learning strategies between male and female learners.

Research Questions

To achieve the required objectives, following research questions were formulated:

RQ.1 Is there an apparent distinction in control and experimental groups about ESL learners' performance under vocabulary learning strategies?

RQ.2 Is there an apparent distinction in male and female students' performance under ESL learning strategies?

RQ.3 What is the overall mean achievement and standard deviation of ESL learning techniques?

RQ.4 What is the standard deviation and mean achievement of ESL learning techniques in male students?

RQ.5 What is the standard deviation and mean achievement of ESL learning techniques in female students?

Research Design

The current study was experimental in nature which included both groups: experimental and control group. In addition a questionnaire was also filled up by the teachers about their experience regarding ESL vocabulary learning strategies.

Population of the Study

Secondary level ESL learners of Bahawalpur City were the part of this study. The data was collected from ESL learners of secondary level in the academic year 2019-20. The study was limited to the Bahawalpur City only.

Sample of the Study

In this study, one hundred students from Govt. S. D. High School, Bahawalpur and Workers Welfare High School (Girls) participated. ESL learners from Grade-9 were selected randomly. One hundred students participated in this study. Among them fifty students belonged to control group and fifty students belonged to experimental group. Each group had equal participation of male and female students.

Research Tools

Following research tools were used to collect the data from the respondents:

- 1: Questionnaire for teachers.
- 2: Pre-test and Post-test for students.

Data Collection Procedure

Test was used to collect the data to find out the level of vocabulary from the respondents. There were both open-ended and close-ended questions. The instrument, Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) developed by Schmitt (1997, 2000) was used for the study. The vocabulary learning strategies were memory, determination, cognitive, social, and meta-cognition. The second instrument, Vocabulary Level Test (VLT) by (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001) was used by the researchers for measuring vocabulary size of students. It was easy to administer. Test and questionnaires were the research tools used for this study. Questionnaire was delivered to the teachers about their teaching experiences. Their result was also collected on the same questionnaire as their performance.

Data Analysis and Findings

RQ.1 Is there an apparent distinction in control and experimental groups about ESL students' performance under learning strategies?

Table-1 discovered an apparent distinction in students' performance between control and experimental groups under ESL learning strategies. The two groups had an apparent distinction between them. The mean achievement score of control group (M= 57.12, sd= 11.82) and experimental group (M=62.72, sd=12.12) with

(p value<0.05) shows that experimental group had better achievement score as compared with control group. So the research question, “Is there an apparent distinction in control and experimental groups about ESL students’ performance under learning strategies?” answered in positive.

Table 1. Comparison of performance under control and experimental groups

Respondents	Frequency	Mean	Std. D.	t	p
Control Group	50	57.12	11.82	-2.338	.021*
Experimental Group	50	62.72	12.12		

*p<0.05

RQ.2 Is there an apparent distinction in male and female respondents’ performance under ESL learning strategies?

In table 2, there was an apparent distinction in students’ performance between male and female under ESL learning strategies. It is obvious that there is an apparent difference in both genders. The achievement of males (M= 56.98, sd= 11.41) and females (M=62.86, sd=12.44) with (p value<0.05) showed that female respondents performed better as compared with male respondents. So the research question, “Is there an apparent distinction in male and female students’ performance under ESL learning strategies?” answered in positive.

Table 2. Student’ performance under ESL learning strategies in experimental group

Students	N	Mean	Std. D.	t	p
Male	25	56.98	11.41	-2-462	.016*
Female	25	62.86	12.44		

*p<0.05

RQ.3 What is the overall mean achievement score and standard deviation of ESL learning techniques?

It is evident from the table 3 that most useful learning technique among ESL learners was visual and auditory learning technique. The second learning technique was group association for the students. The third ESL learning technique was using imagery. Word context technique was the fourth important indicator for ESL learners at school level. The last technique that was used by the students was semantic mapping.

Table 3. Mean score of overall learning strategies among ESL learners

	Semantic Mapping	Word Context Technique	Using Imagery	Group Association	Visual & Auditory Learning
Mean	3.57	3.62	3.64	3.65	3.76
Std. Deviation	1.32	.77	.85	.79	1.04

n=50

RQ.4 What is the mean achievement score and standard deviation of ESL learning techniques in male students?

The Table 4 illustrates that most useful learning technique among ESL male learners was group association learning technique. The second learning technique was word context for the students. The third ESL learning technique was visual and auditory learning. The fourth technique was using imagery. The last technique that was used by the male students was semantic mapping. It is evident from the bar graph below.

Table 4. Mean score of male students learning strategies among ESL learners

Tests	Semantic Mapping	Word Context Technique	Using Imagery	Group Association	Visual & Auditory Learning
Mean	3.093	3.343	3.272	3.400	3.325
Std. D.	1.25	.67	.82	.79	1.01

n=25

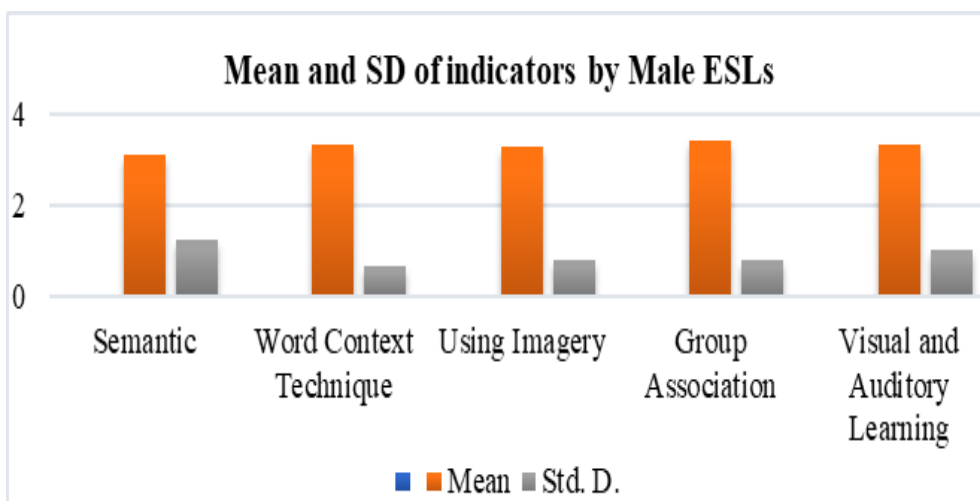


Figure 1. Mean and SD of indicators by male ESLs

RQ.5 What is the mean achievement score and standard deviation of ESL learning techniques in female students?

The table 5 demonstrates that most useful learning technique among ESL female learners was visual and auditory learning. The second technique used by the female students was semantic mapping. The third technique was using imagery. The fourth one was group association learning technique. The last technique that used by female ESL students was word context. It is evident from the bar graph below.

Table 5: Mean Score of Female Students Learning Strategies among ESL Learners

	Semantic Mapping	Word Context Technique	Using Imagery	Group Association	Vis. And Aud. Learning
Mean	4.053	3.910	4.015	3.913	4.195
Std. D.	1.225	.762	.726	.718	.888

N=25

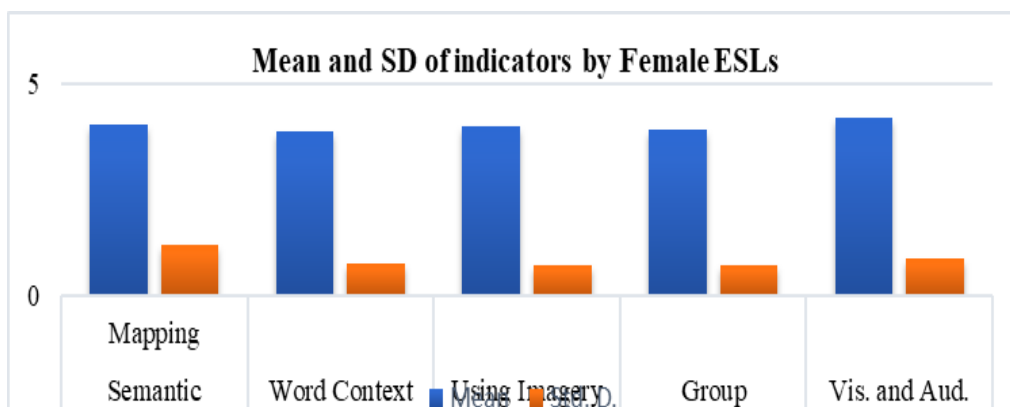


Figure 2. Mean and SD of indicators by female ESLs

Data Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

A questionnaire was also prepared to check the views of the teachers about the strategies to improve vocabulary of the ESL learners. Teachers told that when they provided their students proper guideline, their students took more interest in learning vocabulary items. They considered themselves part of that activity and took part fully. At the same time 80% teachers told that they found their students more confident. 89% teachers were agreed that the use of vocabulary learning strategies through different activities had a positive impact on the minds of the students. 100% teachers were strongly agreed that secondary level students' vocabulary skill was improved with the help vocabulary learning strategies.

Results and Discussion

A significant difference in students' performance between control and experimental group under ESL learning strategies was found. The mean achievement score of control and experimental group shows that experimental group had better achievement score as compared with control group. There was an apparent distinction in students' performance between male and female under ESL learning strategies. The achievement score of male students and female students shows that female students have performed better as compared with male students. The current study supported the findings of Sunderland (2000) which showed that women had better performance than men in memory test. Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000) and Jimenez and Moreno (2004) showed that females perform higher than males in productive vocabulary. The empirical evidences found in favor of females in lexical availability test (Jimenez & Ojeda, 2009). Jimenez (2003) found that females were superior to males in qualitative and quantitative terms by using more strategies than males. The female students learn vocabulary rapidly than that of males.

On the other hand, (Boyle, 1987; Scarcella & Zimmerman, 1998) showed that males are dominant over females in comprehension. Many other studies conducted by Lin and Wu (2003), Lynn et al. (2005), and Edelenbos and Vinje (2000), investigated the superiority of males over females in vocabulary knowledge of foreign language. Male students incorporate more new words into lexicons than female students (Llach & Gallego, 2012). The findings of Jimenez and Terrazas (2005-2008) revealed a non-significant gender differences in receptive vocabulary performance test. Many studies had mixed results in vocabulary acquisition of foreign language (Jimenez, 2010).

The overall most useful learning technique among ESL learners was visual and auditory learning technique. The second learning technique was group association for the students. The third ESL learning technique was using imagery. Word context technique was the fourth important indicator for ESL learners at school level. The last technique that was used by the students was semantic mapping.

ESL male learners used group association learning technique at priority. The second learning technique was word context for the students. The third ESL learning technique was visual and auditory learning. The fourth technique was using imagery. The last technique that was used by the male students was semantic mapping. ESL female learners used visual and auditory learning at their priority. The second technique used by the female students was semantic mapping. The third technique was using imagery. The fourth one was group association learning technique. The last technique used by female ESL students was word context.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to develop vocabulary of secondary students through different strategies. After the data analysis of the results of both groups, it was proved that various activities and strategies were fruitful and full of entertainment for the students during the experiments. On the contrary the students taught by the non-effective way of teaching made it clear that there is no meaningful difference. Therefore, it has been exposed that there is a significant difference in the results of pre-test conducted before teaching the lessons according to the plan of researchers and post-test after the favorable accomplishment of the research tasks. It is a fact that gender-based vocabulary learning strategies are perfect means for the secondary level students to improve their vocabulary. It was concluded that when a teacher creates a learning environment in the classroom by using interesting vocabulary learning strategies then naturally the students' response is positive.

Recommendations

Based on the current research findings, following recommendations were made:

- There is a dire need to develop vocabulary. So, vocabulary must be given more importance in the language teaching to get the mastery over the language being taught.
- The researchers further recommend that English language teachers should use different strategies for teaching English in general and for improving vocabulary in particular at secondary level.
- They should also motivate their students to work through pair and group in the classroom.

- Public schools should be equipped with libraries, language labs and audio-visual materials such as tape recorder, video-player, overhead projector, multi-media and such facilities may properly be used for developing vocabulary of secondary level students.
- Teachers should develop students' vocabulary by giving them an exposure for the new phrases and words they might encounter.

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