

Exploring EFL Learners' Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract: In authentic circumstances, this qualitative case study explores vocabulary acquisition tactics used by English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The study investigates several methods impacted by individual learning preferences, cultural contexts, and exposure to real-world language use through in-depth interviews. The research is guided by two main goals: determining techniques in real-world settings and comprehending learners' assessments of their efficacy. The context of the study is Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science and Technology, Nawabshah. The research paradigm chosen for this study was Qualitative. Population of the study was from the Department of English and Purposive Sampling was used. The results provide valuable perspectives for language education, highlighting the significance of context, interaction, and tailored methods in the growth of vocabulary. Our understanding of language acquisition dynamics is intended to be enhanced, and the study contributes to efficient language learning approaches by providing insights into instructional practices, curriculum design, and learner support measures.

Keywords: Vocabulary Acquisition, EFL, EFL learners, language acquisition, English language learning

1. Introduction

The development of vocabulary is a fundamental component in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction that shapes students' language ability and communicative competence. "In second language (L2) acquisition, vocabulary knowledge is an integral part of English language learning" [7]. "Vocabulary plays an important role in English language acquisition" [8]. The cornerstone of language mastering is the capacity to efficiently navigate a new language's extensive lexicon. "Language learning strategies became the main research theme in the 1970s; and vocabulary learning strategy has been the main component" [9]. This study aims to explore the complex terrain of vocabulary acquisition techniques used by EFL learners in real-world learning environments. It provides a qualitative investigation that illuminates the varied and complex methods that learners use outside of the classroom.

Educators and language experts need to have a thorough understanding of how EFL learners actively interact with and internalize new words to develop engaging and customized instructional techniques. Using a qualitative case study methodology, this research aims to explore the nuances

of each learner's experiences, preferences, and thoughts on the vocabulary acquisition tactics they use. This study intends to provide important insights to the larger conversation on successful language education by acknowledging the variety of factors impacting learners, such as personal styles, cultural backgrounds, and exposure to actual language use.

The goal of the study is to identify trends and individual differences by examining the tactics selected by EFL learners and evaluating their perceived efficacy. The research aims to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the dynamic and individualized nature of vocabulary development outside of the traditional classroom setting through in-depth interviews with a broad sample of learners.

1.1. Research Objectives

1) To Identify Strategies Employed by EFL Learners for Vocabulary Acquisition in Authentic Learning Contexts

2) To Understand EFL Learners' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Different Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies

1.2. Research Questions

1) What strategies do EFL learners employ for vocabulary acquisition in authentic learning contexts?

2) How do EFL learners perceive the effectiveness of different vocabulary acquisition strategies?

2. Literature Review

Vocabulary acquisition is a crucial aspect of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning. EFL learners often face challenges and problems in acquiring new vocabulary, which can impact their overall language proficiency level. Therefore, understanding the strategies employed by EFL learners for vocabulary acquisition is essential to enhance language learning outcomes. Qualitative case study research provides valuable insights into the strategies employed by EFL learners for vocabulary acquisition. Houghton et al. [1] emphasize the importance of rigor in qualitative case-study research, which is essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. Furthermore, they highlight the significance of employing rigorous research methodologies to explore complex phenomena, such as vocabulary acquisition strategies among EFL learners.

In a similar vein, Houghton et al [6] provide an example of qualitative case study data analysis in the context of EFL vocabulary acquisition. Their work underscores the practical application of qualitative analysis methods to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies utilized by EFL learners to acquire new vocabulary. Technology has emerged as a valuable tool for EFL vocabulary acquisition. Khezrlou et al [2] investigated the effects of computer-assisted glosses on EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Their findings suggest that computer-assisted glosses can positively impact vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension in various learning conditions, highlighting the potential of technology-based strategies for enhancing vocabulary learning outcomes.

Similarly, Chen et al [3] explored the effects of a mobile game-based English vocabulary learning app on Taiwanese EFL learners. Their case study revealed that the mobile game-based app positively influenced learners' perceptions and learning performance, indicating the potential of gamified approaches to vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. The majority of students find technology-enhanced learning engaging and enjoyable, making it easier to practice English outside the classroom [4]. Alemi and Tayebi [5] delved into the influence of incidental and intentional vocabulary acquisition, as well as vocabulary strategy use, on learning L2 vocabulary. Their research demonstrated the significance of both intentional and incidental vocabulary acquisition

processes, as well as the effective use of vocabulary learning strategies, in facilitating L2 vocabulary learning. These findings underscore the importance of considering diverse vocabulary acquisition strategies employed by EFL learners.

3. Research Methodology

To investigate vocabulary acquisition strategies among English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the research used a qualitative case study methodology. The study's target population was Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Sciences & Technology students in the English department. Ten participants who represented a range of academic levels, language competency, and cultural origins within the department were chosen using a purposive sample technique. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, which allowed for a thorough examination of each participant's perspectives and experiences with vocabulary learning. Four open-ended questions made up the interview questions, which were created to correspond with the two study goals. It was urged of the participants to express their opinions, experiences, and thoughts regarding language acquisition techniques.

Throughout the entire research procedure, ethical considerations—such as participant anonymity and informed consent—were given top priority. The research ethics council of the university developed ethical criteria that were followed in this investigation. Pseudonyms were employed to preserve participant confidentiality throughout audio recordings of interviews, which were done with permission.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, which involved finding and classifying recurrent themes, patterns, and variances in participant replies. The goal of the analysis was to shed light on the various vocabulary acquisition techniques used by EFL students at the chosen university. The qualitative results add to the larger conversation on successful language instruction by offering a deeper knowledge of the tactics students employ in real-world learning environments.

3.1. Results and Findings

Table 1: Questions and Responses

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Response 1	To help me remember new terms, I typically use flashcards. I make cards that have the term and its definition on one side.	I saw an article last week that used the word "ubiquitous." To help me recall, I looked up the term, wrote it down, and used it in sentences.	I have found that using vocabulary applications is beneficial. Learning may be fun when there are games and quizzes to practice new terms.	I found mnemonics to be ineffective. I attempted to make memory aids for specific terms, but I frequently had trouble recalling them afterward.

Table 1: Continued

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Response 2	Watching English-language films is my default tactic. I learn new words from their context and then do some research to have a better grasp.	I remember encountering 'serendipity' during a casual conversation. I asked my friend for the meaning and how to use it, and I noted it down for future use.	I recall things better when I associate new words with pictures. I associate the term with an image in my mind, which helps me remember it.	I tried expanding my vocabulary with a typical dictionary, but it seemed less interesting and more time-consuming than alternative approaches.
Response 3	My main tactic is to read books written in English. I check the definitions of new terms, underline them, and use them in sentences.	I came to discover the term "ephemeral" while perusing a blog post. I used the word to support my understanding in a brief paragraph after looking it up.	Listening to pod casts of native speakers works. It introduces me to slang terms and clarifies how words are utilized in everyday situations.	I did not find rote memory to be as beneficial. For me, just repeating things out of context did not result in long-term recollection.
Response 4	My preferred method of language sharing is through online platforms. I practice speaking with native speakers while conversing with them, which helps me pick up new vocabulary in context.	I read something "perplexing" in an academic publication a few days ago. I inferred the meaning from the surrounding sentences and checked it with a dictionary.	I find word association games to be helpful. They provide interactivity and memorability to the learning process.	I found that writing out lengthy word lists without any context wasn't very effective. I later had trouble remembering them.
Response 5	My preferred source is podcasts. I keep a list of new keywords and listen to podcasts where words are defined.	During a business and everyday meeting, I came across 'entrepreneurship.' I noted it down, looked up its definition, and discussed its usage with a colleague afterward.	I find it easiest to create mnemonic statements. I make up sentences to assist me retain the meaning of the word.	It was useless to learn new terms just through the use of translation tools. My capacity to think clearly in English was hampered by it.

Table 1: Continued

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Response 6	Study sessions in groups are productive. We talk about articles, and when someone comes across a word they don't know, we all try to figure out what it means.	In a novel I was reading, the word "surreptitious" appeared. I read the passage again, made an educated estimate as to its meaning, and then looked it up in a dictionary.	Learning context-based skills through short stories has proven advantageous. When words are included in a story, I recall them more easily.	I was unable to remember the terms using flashcards by themselves without providing context.
Response 7	Participating in internet forums has been beneficial. I take notes during conversations, and if I come across a word I'm not acquainted with, I attempt to look it up and utilize it in my answers.	I saw the term "ephemeral" at a TED Talk recently. I utilized the word in talks subsequently to confirm my understanding of the speaker's excellent explanation.	I find it easier to associate new words to the related ideas when I mind map them. It gives my vocabulary a visual framework.	I didn't find that active participation in reading or listening, which is passive learning, resulted in effective vocabulary retention.
Response 8	I find that using interactive language learning websites with exercises is beneficial. I receive affirmation and comments right away.	When I saw the word "facetious" in a blog post, I looked it up right away and explained it to my study group. We made sentences and talked about how to use it.	Making connections between words and past events aids with memory retention. I connect new words to experiences or tales from my past.	Attempting to learn too many terms at once proved to be too difficult. Mastering a limited collection of vocabulary requires more concentration and effort.
Response 9	Every day, new words are introduced to users of social media networks. I pay attention to intriguing terminology and follow English accounts.	While watching a documentary, I came across the term "ubiquitous." I stopped, figured out what it meant, and went back to viewing. I used the definition in my journal after verifying it later.	Using picture-based flashcards improves my memory. I provide images that illustrate the meaning of the word.	Reading word lists devoid of context made me feel disoriented and less successful in expanding my vocabulary.

Table 1: Continued

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Response 10	There are benefits to joining an English book club. I learn about a wide range of vocabulary through book discussions, and we also interpret words we are not familiar with.	After reading about "serendipity" on a blog, I looked up its definition right away, copied it down, and posted it in a discussion forum online.	Thinking back on my own experiences with language aids in my memory. I associate words with sentiments or recollections.	I found traditional vocabulary exercises boring and the process of learning a language to be uninteresting. The activities were repeating drills.

Response 1:

Analysis: The use of flashcards for memorization aligns with traditional language learning methods. The participant's preference for vocabulary apps reflects engagement with contemporary learning tools, highlighting a blend of conventional and modern approaches.

Response 2:

Analysis: This participant emphasizes the value of exposure to real language and bases their contextual learning on watching movies. A kinesthetic learning style is suggested by the active interaction with visual and aural inputs, demonstrating a propensity for immersive learning experiences.

Response 3:

Analysis: Listening to podcasts of native speakers helps a lot. It introduces the learners to slang terms and clarifies how words are utilized in everyday situations.

Response 4:

Analysis: The participant's utilization of language exchange platforms suggests a proactive approach towards interactive and social learning. This supports the idea that speaking with peers and native speakers improves language skills.

Response 5:

Analysis: This participant's reliance on podcasts suggests an auditory learning preference. Additionally, the use of mnemonics demonstrates an effort to enhance memory through creative associations, reflecting a strategic and individualized approach.

Response 6:

Analysis: The emphasis on group study sessions highlights the importance of collaborative learning. This approach aligns with social constructivism, where learners actively construct knowledge together through shared experiences.

Response 7:

Analysis: The participant's use of online forums demonstrates a predilection for online collaborative learning environments. The application of mind mapping supports associative and visual learning theories, which are relevant to vocabulary retention.

Response 8:

Analysis: Utilizing language learning websites with interactive exercises indicates a preference for hands-on learning. Associating words with personal experiences reflects an effort to make vocabulary meaningful and memorable.

Response 9:

Analysis: The participant's use of social media for exposure to new words highlights the integration of informal learning environments. The reliance on visual aids with flashcards aligns with dual coding theory, enhancing memory through visual and verbal information.

Response 10:

Analysis: Participation in a book club signifies a commitment to immersive language experiences. Reflecting on personal experiences associated with words suggests a reflective learning style, emphasizing a connection between language and life events.

4. Discussion

The qualitative exploration into vocabulary acquisition strategies among EFL learners at the Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Sciences & Technology has unveiled a tapestry of insights into the diverse and nuanced approaches employed by the participants. The thematic analysis of the interviews has provided a deep understanding of the effective language learning strategies within this specific academic context. A striking revelation from the findings is the remarkable diversity in the vocabulary acquisition strategies adopted by the participants. From traditional methods such as flashcards and dictionary use to contemporary approaches like engaging in online forums and watching English movies, the participants exhibited a wide range of preferences that reflected their individualized learning styles. This diversity underscores the importance of recognizing and embracing varied instructional approaches to cater to the unique needs of learners. The theme of contextual learning emerged prominently, with many participants emphasizing the significance of encountering and using new words in authentic situations. Engaging in conversations, watching movies, and participating in group study sessions were highlighted as effective ways to contextualize and internalize vocabulary. This emphasizes the need for instructional strategies that simulate real-life language use scenarios, fostering a deeper understanding and retention of vocabulary.

The social dimension of learning was a recurrent theme in the participants' strategies, underscoring the importance of interaction in the language learning process. Language exchange platforms, group study sessions, and online forums played a crucial role not only in vocabulary acquisition but also in providing a collaborative and supportive learning environment. These social and interactive approaches emphasize the value of creating learning environments that promote communication and collaboration among learners. Visual aids, particularly the use of flashcards with images, emerged as a popular and effective strategy among the participants. Mnemonics, such as creating sentences or associating words with personal experiences, were highlighted for their role in enhancing memory retention. This finding suggests that incorporating visual and mnemonic elements in instructional materials may contribute to more effective vocabulary acquisition in EFL settings.

The study also illuminated the individual preferences and adaptations that EFL learners make in their language learning journeys. Technological tools like vocabulary apps were favored by some participants, while others leaned towards more traditional methods such as reading books or engaging in language exchange. This highlights the importance of acknowledging and accommodating individual preferences within instructional designs, fostering a learner-centered approach. In terms of pedagogical implications, educators can leverage these insights by incorporating a mix of traditional and modern approaches in their instructional practices. Contextualizing vocabulary within real-life scenarios and fostering social interaction in language learning environments are pivotal considerations. The findings advocate for a flexible and adaptive pedagogical approach that acknowledges the diverse strategies learners bring to the language learning process.

5. Conclusion

The study conducted a qualitative investigation into vocabulary acquisition strategies among English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners at Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Sciences & Technology. The results demonstrate the varied and intricate nature of language learning approaches, highlighting a range of strategies from traditional methods to contemporary, technology-driven approaches. The study's key findings underscore the significance of contextual learning, with participants stressing the importance of exposure to authentic language in real-life situations. Social and interactive approaches were identified as important means of contributing to vocabulary development, highlighting the importance of collaborative learning environments and meaningful interactions with peers and native speakers. The study's focus on the various preferences and learning styles within a particular academic context helps to understand the vocabulary acquisition tactics used by EFL learners. The necessity for adaptable and flexible teaching methodologies is shown by the acceptance of customized approaches and the integration of various strategies. Teachers can use these findings to build more dynamic and engaging language programs by considering the implications for teaching in EFL situations. Vocabulary training can be made more effective by incorporating a blend of classic and modern methods, encouraging social interaction, and adapting instructional procedures to meet different learning styles.

This study provides significant contributions to the current discussion on efficient language teaching methods by elucidating the complex network of vocabulary growth techniques. The study's many techniques highlight how dynamic and individualized language acquisition is, enhancing our knowledge and directing future efforts in the field of language education.

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