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Exploring Vocabulary Learning Strategies in a Second Language Setting: A Review

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Abstract
Learning vocabulary is one of the most important and corresponding obstacles that learners confront when learning a second language (L2). In numerous territories, vocabulary learning is considered as the key basis for acquisition of English language as an L2 in which inadequate vocabulary knowledge often led to complications while learning an L2. Hence, this review examined 31 empirical studies on VLS within L2 dimension across the globe through four phases: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. Symbolically, this review also discusses on Schmitt's VLS that has been adapted into recent studies. The purpose of this review is to analyse and recommend approachable practices of VLS for L2 learners in order to acquire vocabulary effectively. Rather than looking for the best strategies that give the best outcomes, this review contends that the task, the learner as well as learning contexts all contribute to the choices, use, and efficacy of VLS in a L2 setting.
Keywords: English Language, Vocabulary, Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS), Second Language Learning, L2 Learners

Introduction

English as an important second language (L2) in many countries is non-arguable, which thus, situates a necessity to motivate L2 learners to learn English (Liu, 2010). However, L2 learners frequently face challenges in learning vocabulary. Most have problems with learning vocabulary when making connections during the process of developing and improving vocabulary (Krashen, 1989; Nation, 2001). A lack of vocabulary knowledge can be a significant factor in learners' reluctance to learn writing and comprehending the language in use. This is because there are obvious characteristics within the wide range of vocabulary challenges for instance, word frequency, saliency, learning burden, and learners' vocabulary needs (Grabe & Stoller, 2018). After all, L2 vocabulary is best taught only when learners are exposed to a lot of target language input (Krashen, 1989). The significance of vocabulary learning in L2 has caused difficulties in facilitating learners in retaining and retrieving words when is needed. Increased demands for English as L2 acquisition has stimulating debates amongst researchers

about how best to meet learners' needs in today's day and age. The issues on vocabulary learning and strategies have been explored since it was often given little priority in language programmes and was often left to fester, receiving very limited attention in most of language learning (Hedge, 2008; Richards & Renandya, 2002).

As such, this review aims to critically evaluate this developing literature to identify different VLS, together with, any research gap in future research. The review also aims to synthesise insights from wider research to help monitor the best vocabulary learning strategy to be employed in Malaysia. Although there is a growing corpus of literature on vocabulary learning, studies on these areas are dispersed across different theoretical approaches, research goals, and methodology. Indeed, the lack of VLS among ESL leaners, in particular, makes studies less comparable and commensurable in the long run that a synthesis of the emerging literature is absolutely necessary. Thereby, this review provides a roadmap for future studies focusing on vocabulary strategies employed by L2 learners throughout the years. The review is proposed in order to investigate the needs and necessities on (i) guiding the analysis of VLS and (ii) identifying possible research gaps in order to situate the study within the wider fields of vocabulary. To this end, which is to identify workable VLS for L2 learners, this review will highlight on discussing a conceptual coverage of learning strategies in relevance to English vocabulary learning. It also aims to offer and address a digest of current research on VLS which has triggered much of interest in L2 learning, as well as to pinpoint areas that need further exploration. Despite the great amount of recent study on strategies of vocabulary learning, it is suggested that inclusive perspective which is reviewed here is still in need to situate existing studies in a broader context and to identify areas for more future efforts.

Several vocabulary learning difficulties among L2 learners, such as innate motivation, learning needs, learning environment, learning techniques, and learners' linguistic awareness, frequently arise during L2 learning. Moreover, learning sufficient words to build a language learner's mental lexicon is a critical aspect, especially while learning a second language. Consequently, it is getting increasingly difficult to disregard concerns with L2 learning problems. There is paramount of vocabulary issues across the L2 learning, namely vocabulary frequency, the formation of core vocabularies as well as vocabularies size which is required for explicit language tasks. To illustrate, L2 learners and educators alike know that most the language acquisition breakdowns that learners' experience often included lack of vocabulary recognition and lexical access course.

Despite preliminary studies on a variety of factors that influence L2 vocabulary learning, this review only focuses on the extent of vocabulary formation which looks into its breadth of vocabulary knowledge, the role of first language in L2 vocabulary learning and vocabulary engagement.

This review examined how issues faced by L2 learners such as innate motivation, learning needs, learning environment, learning strategies as well as L2 learners' language awareness can be resolved to develop a more meaningful vocabulary strategy from recent studies. To address this problem, this review identifies issues in vocabulary problems and how these issues influence VLS. This review is led to answer the following question:
(a) What are effective strategies generally used to develop vocabulary learning among second language users?

Methodology

This review is administered through four process where it began with finding articles which are related with vocabulary learning using the Eric and Google Scholar databases. This process went through the identification phase, screening phase, eligibility phase and inclusion phase. In the Identification Phase, a scope for the initial review and search strategy was determined where search terms included 'VLS' and 'second language learning'. Later, by using Eric and Google Scholar databases, a two-stage search was done in the Screening Phase where the primary search was limited to full-text and peer-reviewed journal articles in English. We specified the search within dates of publication within a range of 7-year timeframe (2015 to 2021) in order to identify relevant and related articles to the field. A secondary search of references of identified records was also taken and improvised as show as in Table 1.

Table 1.0: The search terms used in the first and second phases of identifying articles.

	First Phase	Second Phase
Vocabulary learning	vocabulary	acquisition
Second language learning	second language	learning strategies

In the Eligibility Phase, the journal articles were taken from categories that include Social Science and Education as to synthesise data and knowledge expertise to gain insights into the adoption and implementation of VLS across the worldwide researches by academics. Finally, we administered the Inclusion Phase after identifying 31 journal articles that qualified our initial screenings. For each article, the title and abstract were screened for relevance and when it is related, its full text is assessed for review consideration, which are based on four aspects. These articles had to (a) focus on the field of education, (b) relate to vocabulary in English learning, (c) capture the classification of VLS, and (d) include the perspectives of institutions and/or academics regarding VLS. The information was recorded on authorship, year of publication, publication title, types of key-findings in VLS, journal titles as well as country and region.

Upon the first stage, tables were formed to enable analysis on the relationship with subtopics contained in the papers identified as the basis of literature reviews. In the gathered articles, information found is generally viable with the target of my review paper. The results obtained via the gathering of literature, provide an overview of the examined research literatures on VLS in the context of English acquisition from the L2 learners' perspectives.

Literature Reviews Findings

English vocabulary competence is central in increasing learners' grasp of vocabulary. To illustrate, the VLS employed by learners will determine the kind of practices they use to motivate their own independent vocabulary-building skills. According to Van de Wege (2018), there are a surge in interest of vocabulary learning strategies that aim to improve students' vocabulary development and acquisition. This is so as in L2 learning, vocabulary learning process are frequently seen as part of general learning strategies.

Interest in vocabulary studies has grown significantly over the last decade, notably in terms of applied linguistics to L2 learning and instruction (Carter & McCarthy, 1988). Alemi and Tayebi (2011) also pointed out the lack of vocabulary emphasis, consequently, research on vocabulary development has indeed gained insufficient attention. Prior to the early studies, current studies emphasised the underappreciated roles of vocabulary in L2 learning, stating that in the case of applied linguistics, vocabulary is an important aspect of L2 learning

that has earned only scant consideration., and has been very greatly overlooked by recent developments in research. In the 1980s, there was no scarcity of ground-breaking research on VLS (VLS). However, the optimum way to learn vocabulary still remains as a mystery, partially because it is dependent on a wide range of factors.

The study on VLS had grown multi-dimensionally in the 1990s and 2000s to acquire new perspectives (e.g. Godwin-Jones, 2018b; Eyckmans & Brysbaert, 2016), which set the groundwork for a variety of effective VLS classifications. These studies laid foundations of several classifications include individual L2 words juxtaposed with their L1 equivalents, or in other words, learning vocabulary through multiword units to expressing multiple meanings (Lin, 2014; Elgort, Candry & Boutorwick, 2016). Despite the fact that multiple VLS have been explored and deployed in various contexts, no explicit attempt has been made to identify specific strategies to acquire word meanings of new vocabulary, as is the case for current studies across VLS.

However, to further examine effective VLS among L2 learners, it is paramount to understand their relationships with various taxonomies. To illustrate, Schmitt (1997) taxonomy which is an adaptation from the LLS widely acclaimed Oxford's taxonomy (1990), which places more emphasis on the use of memory strategies to support learners store and retrieve any new vocabulary. Schmitt (1997), after all, discerned his taxonomy by establishing a distinction between discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Schmitt (1997), in this manner, claimed that consolidation strategies are concerned on the storage of new words for subsequent retrieval after learners have acquired their meaning. To answer the review question, this review therefore discloses that social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive sub-strategies are frequently used as a general approach to classify subsequent retrieval of word meanings.

Current State of Knowledge

The current language education paradigm stresses that meaning-based learning, where language features are profoundly taught by use rather than explicit emphasis, with a secondary focus on language forms as desired. While an explicit approach to learning grammatical structures is argued to be effective, there are solid grounds to believe that learning vocabulary still strongly requires a more explicit approach that includes purposeful attention to the lexical objects themselves (Laufer, 2005). This is mainly because recent researches have shown that focused VLS on the targeted words as one of the effective strategies to develop vocabulary, ideally with clear emphasis, generally always leads to higher and faster improvements, allowing rooms for productive levels of mastery of vocabulary learning among L2 learners.

To illustrate, many recent literatures stresses on Schmitt's (1997) theories of VLS and it is seen to be based on different age groups of L2 learners such as elementary learners, secondary school learners, university learners and adult learners. In comparison of learners with better L2 competency, he discovered that less experienced L2 learners depended more on mechanical learning strategies such as oral and written repetition, or memory strategies. Higher L2 proficiency learners, on the other hand, prefer more advanced metacognitive strategies such using dictionaries, guessing from context, visualising word meanings, asking for paraphrases or synonyms, word part analysis, and associating words with individual experiences, as multiple effective strategies generally used to develop vocabulary learning among L2 learners.

To add on, Schmitt's claim was backed up by Nyikos and Fan (2007) and Anderson (2005), who both found that L2 learners who choose more complicated and task-compatible procedures for acquiring new L2 terms succeed in vocabulary learning. In this regard, a very good illustration has been cited by Nopriato and Purnawarman (2019) who studies the level of implementation of VLSs of Indonesian L2 learners and evidenced that Indonesian learners shows moderate use of VLS with more emphasis on the determination strategy of VLSs. Memiş (2018), in her recent study, also reaches similar findings who reported that strategies used by L2 learners varied according to their language levels and own preferred strategy.

It is observed that there are numerous literatures on effective strategies on vocabulary learning, however most are not quickly absorbed into the mainstream pedagogy. On top of that, given the relative usefulness of explicit activities in increasing vocabulary learning, one may expect this to be a common practise in most ESL or even EFL learning environment. Based on Ali (2020) who revealed that in understanding a reading text, EFL Saudi students tend to figure out the meanings of unknown words, mainly by guessing word-meanings through different sub-strategies without comprehending the whole message delivered. Indeed, in any cases, this is because most teachers do not necessarily expose lexical items in their lessons that are still new to their students explicitly. Hereby, researchers should further distinguish but not short change the real value of giving exposure to high-frequency vocabulary, which could support the consolidation and engagement of partially known lexical items in an ESL classroom. At times, henceforth the effective use of vocabulary learning strategy, especially in L2 is believed to be affected by the strategies that teachers apply in the class to teach learners as well as strategies and learning style suited to learners' need. In other words, there should be profound study to clearly indicate that any vocabulary learning program needs to substantially outline the explicit component in exposing lexical items specifically.

Although it is hard to conclude that one strategy is superior than another in all instances, given the complexity and unpredictability of the language learning process (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006). However, in order to facilitate effective vocabulary learning among ESL learners, further research should be conducted on the effect of maximising repeated exposures to target lexical items. This is so as most learners who manage to grasp the general idea often overlook the precise meanings of individual words taught. Guessing from contextual clues, on the other hand, is often unreliable, particularly if the learner does not recognise 95% of the terms in the discourse. This explains why explicit learning need to appear more focused on lexical knowledge and indeed to be further established by researchers in future.

Moving on, equally imperative is the principle of repeated exposure in order to develop effective VLS strategies among L2 learners. Not to forget, researchers must also consider vocabulary learning in longitudinal terms, in which target lexical items are recycled over time in a systematic manner. From memory research, most forgetting befalls soon after the learning session ends and then eventually paces down (Baddeley, 1990), consequently initial repetition is particularly vital and need to take place swiftly. Consequently, it emerges that anything leads to more repeated exposure and attention should be placed on lexical items which contributes to L2 learning in order to reinforce effective strategies used to develop vocabulary learning among L2 learners.

Discussions

To cull out effective as well as worthy strategies to make useful pedagogical recommendations for future research, within the existing research framework, as suggested by Charkovas (2018), the most relevant findings to the purpose of this review are those reported in previous studies supported by Gu (1994), Gu and Johnson (1996) and Fan (2003). The reviews had identified a major difference in different types of effective VLS employed between L2 learners with good vocabulary knowledge and L2 learners with limited vocabulary knowledge.

To illustrate, poor L2 learners often uphold the use of a bilingual dictionary as their vocabulary learning strategy to check the meaning of every unfamiliar word they encounter. Whereas for polysemous words, poor L2 learners would pick the surface meaning, overlook the context whereby the word is applied to. Indeed, this type of learner did not pay attention to pronunciation, synonyms or examples of use when it comes to application. For instance, L2 learners often involved mechanical copying of the English words they encounter from their first language translation. The conclusion is that higher learning outcomes as well as effective strategies used to develop vocabulary learning are therefore linked to an intentional effort to obtain deeper understanding of target words on a paradigmatic and syntagmatic basis, as evidenced by the usage of monolingual dictionaries that provide examples of use for exercises.

Discovery and Consolidation Strategies

Drawing upon on literatures reviewed, Schmitt (1997, 2000) proposed two types of effective VLS: discovery and consolidation as adopted by most of recent studies. The former featured determination and social strategies, while the latter covered memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. To illustrate, discovery strategies take place when learners discover and explore learning of new words, while consolidation occurs when a word is reinforced after it has been encountered.

To add on, drawing on previous work on categorising LLSs by Oxford (1990) and considering other existing classifications, recent literatures thereby can conclude that Schmitt (1997) constructed a more complete taxonomy of VLSs. These were further classified into two major groups: discovery strategies which are used to determine a word's meaning by discovery strategies, while consolidation strategies are to consolidate a word when it is encountered again. Successively, discovery strategies are also classified into determination strategies whereby learners acquire the meaning of a new word using a dictionary, context clues or even structural knowledge of the word. Social strategies refer to when learners ask someone to clarify for the meaning. Whereas for consolidation strategies, learners are reported to make use of social strategies, such as practising the meaning of new words with groups of peers, cognitive strategies that utilises repetition and mechanical methods such as using word lists and flashcards to acquire meanings of vocabulary learnt, memory strategies to link the word to be learnt with existing knowledge using imagery or grouping and last but not least, metacognitive strategies that involve planning, monitoring and assessment of learning.

Affecting Factors of Effective VLS

After reviewing these many classifications of VLS throughout recent literatures, this cautious review is still relied on Schmitt's taxonomy as its foundation as it was primarily built using Oxford (2003) taxonomy of LLS as a baseline for recent studies. Therefore, this review

concerns on how the classification of strategies is arguably most extensive in the use of VLS. Schmitt's two groups of strategies as discussed earlier, are still applicable in an ESL setting. Nevertheless, VLS adoption, on the other hand, is based on various factors, including proficiency, motivation, and culture. This is owing to the fact that culture and environment can have a significant impact on a learner's preference for selecting their own learning methodologies for vocabulary learning (Schmitt, 2000). Hence, future researchers may consider the role of multicultural raised in a bilingual context in affecting the factors of VLS.

Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

Aside from reviewing and characterising VLS developed by Schmitt (1997) throughout the reviewed literatures, another major area of this review is to look into the relationship between LLS and L2 performance as acknowledged in the reviewed literatures.

According to recent reviewed literatures from different countries, the most commonly used VLS by L2 learners are using bilingual dictionary, verbal and written repetition, spelling analysis, guessing from context as well as seeking peers for meaning clarification. However, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), learning strategies are the precise actions where learners employ to grasp, absorb, or retain new knowledge. To illustrate, as shown by reviewed literatures, it is indicated that various types of strategies had been employed by learners previously for acquiring vocabulary than for reading, listening, speaking and writing, namely LLS. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), later introduced metacognitive, cognitive, and social or affective as the most elementary three types of learning vocabulary strategies. In conjunction with this vision, for ESL students with low vocabulary, the learning effects are profound.

Relationships between VLS and LLS

LLS are a subset of general learning preference, whereas VLS are a sub class of LLS. Likewise, scholars like Oxford and Scarcellat (1994) and Schmitt (1997) also argued, in reviewed literatures when considering VLS, it is imperative not to lose sight of its connection to LLS.

Apart from that, VLS are a sub-class of framework for language learning strategies, according to many recent researchers of the reviewed literatures, and are thus relevant to a wide range of language learning tasks, varying from more distant ones namely vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar to integrative tasks which encompass reading tasks and oral communication. Several researches, including one by Schmitt (1997), have revealed that LLS are not comparatively 'decent' for a number of reasons: the contexts where the strategies are utilised, frequency of use, taking account on other prospects such as language portability, prior knowledge, target language and lastly LLS of proficiency level, as mentioned by reviewed literatures as well.

To add on, the circumstance that the vast majority of LLS listed in taxonomies such as Oxford (1990)'s are either VLS can be applied for vocabulary learning tasks which also reflects the relevancy of VLS in prospects of LLS in terms of their actual use. Despite this, studies on LLS are inclined to overlook VLS in favour of focusing on language learning as a whole especially for non-native language users.

Nevertheless, VLS, which have been discussed, are one of the more focused and fundamental contemporary discussions in LLS which is relevant to this review. At the meantime, the development of vocabulary is the centre focal point of learning any language. Without words to express a larger range of word meanings, communication in L2 simply

cannot occur in any meaningful way. Indeed, many recent literatures also support that vocabulary has increasingly merged as critical in language use, with learners' low vocabulary knowledge leading to difficulties during the learning of a L2 and VLS are more preferred and uphold than LLS across many studies in different countries.

Motivation and Contribution of Review

Overall, this review identifies new insights on key roles that VLS plays towards a positive contribution in second language learning. Likewise, vocabulary knowledge load is positively correlated with the VLS adopted. VLS is therefore crucial since lexical mistakes are most common in language learning, which simultaneously constitute significant barriers in communication, especially among L2 learners. With regards to its contribution, this review affirms that a need for a well-established relationship between learners' vocabulary knowledge and their ability to employ where VLS significantly emphasizes on language teachers, curriculum planners, researchers as well as the learners themselves in order to promote a need to incorporate the use of VLS mentioned to improve vocabulary growth. The relevance is noteworthy, considering needs to be delivered while expanding in the expansion of VLS in attempt to resolve with learners' inability to deal with difficult vocabulary in comprehension performance.

Conclusion

While all the mentioned vocabulary issues are almost certainly true, the reviewed literatures also reveal that importance of vocabulary learning make a huge difference especially among L2 users. Exploring L2 learners' VLS is thereby significantly noteworthy in order develop a learning environment that stimulates high-quality learning outcomes for ESL learners that leads to add credits to their learning. In fact, vocabulary learning plays a crucial part in acquiring a L2, which has been highlighted by Paivio (1986) as part of Dual Theory that 'Vocabulary learning is a vital aim for it is far more important and intricate than most foreign language teachers could admit'.

In essence, it is recognised that in Malaysia context, English is a foreign language or L2. However, English language is given as a fundamental role as one of the core subjects at primary school as well as medium of instructional language. Hence, students' academic success in particular is believed to be greatly depended on the level of vocabulary that students possess that they grant for those vocabularies in which they come across their text books or even beyond that. As a result, it is believed that the reason Malaysian students are raised with this language has indeed prepared them to be more productive in secondary and even to the university level. Future research should suggest that mastering subject matter in English in specific and other associated academic areas is strongly reliant on vocabulary level. As a result, in order to achieve at their best academically, learners must know and utilise appropriate vocabulary.

In this regard, with low ability of vocabulary recognition or expansion, learning an L2 will thereby transform into a rather slow decoding progress, and thus it becomes difficult to grasp the flow of the language. In this case alone, this would mean learners will have to struggle a lot and this indeed impedes them to downsides in acquiring the language in the long run. Likewise, it is also apparent that acquaintance of vocabulary items is of good value only if they can be recognised or produced which tolerates real-time language use. For L2 learning process to appear more effective, exposure to the implementation of effective VLS should be directed towards supporting learners to become familiar with and be able to use

the different VLSs, because once they become able to use these strategies skilfully, they will have the confidence to use more appropriate strategies to learn new words, and so the control of choosing this or the other strategies will be theirs.

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