

Vocabulary Learning Strategies of English as a Foreign/Second Language

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Abstract: English has become the most widely spoken language in the world, and memorizing vocabulary is a fundamental step in acquiring this language. Many English as a foreign language (EFL)/English as a second language (ESL) learners have difficulty remembering new words, so vocabulary learning strategies are studied globally. This literature review examined international research across ages and discussed three learning strategies: the keyword method, pictorial association, and the mind-mapping method. Results suggested that the three learning strategies effectively improved students' vocabulary recall and retention, and learning strategies help EFL/ESL learners with vocabulary studies.

Keywords: EFL/ESL, learning strategies, vocabulary memorization

1. Introduction

English is one of the most important and widely spoken languages worldwide, which is considered as the official language in 53 countries and has approximately 1.27 billion global users [1]. Learning English goes beyond just communication with native speakers, it also stands as the world's most prevalent second language [2]. English is currently considered important not only in countries that have a connection to English culture, but also in the many areas of business and culture [2]. Moreover, learning English has become a highly practical and even indispensable skill. Across the globe, people recognize the significance and necessity of learning English, prompting many countries to incorporate it as a second language in their schools, commencing instruction from an early age. English assumes the role of the language of science, aviation, computers, diplomacy, and tourism. Proficiency in English significantly increases one's prospects of securing excellent job opportunities in multinational corporations [3].

In the process of learning English, learners often face various difficulties. They may struggle to apply grammar proficiently, have trouble with accurate pronunciation, and find it challenging to understand native English speakers [4]. However, one of the most fundamental and widespread challenges is vocabulary memorization, which often leaves students feeling frustrated and anxious. The vocabulary of a language is like the bricks of a tall building; although the pieces are usually small, they are essential to Great structure [5]. If students spend too much time learning grammar, their English ability will not have much improvement, if they learn more, their English will improve a lot if they use vocabulary and expressions; when people speak English, they can say maybe very little about grammar, but we can say almost anything with words [6].

To assist students in enhancing their vocabulary learning and memory, there are three effective language vocabulary memorization strategies. The first one is the keyword memorization strategy, which connects the target vocabulary with the learner's already mastered native language or other familiar languages, making it easier for them to remember new words and deepen their understanding [7]. The second strategy is the pictorial association strategy, which involves linking new vocabulary with known knowledge, enabling students to form engaging memories during the learning process, and enhancing memory efficiency [8]. The third strategy is mind mapping. This strategy relates words and concepts, helping students create connections between vocabulary and information which improve memory retention [9].

The purpose of this study is to detail these vocabulary memory strategies and discuss how they will help students learn and memorize English vocabulary. We provide a comprehensive literature review and detailed information on three different strategies, highlighting their main features, advantages, and some practical cases, such as experimental results. We also analyze the detailed methods and steps of using these strategies to help students better understand and master different types of English vocabulary.

2. Keyword Strategy

The keyword mnemonic strategy is one of the methods and techniques that enhance students' vocabulary memory abilities [10]. This strategy can be used by educators to improve students' memory skills when learning vocabulary, which requires students to think and identify new words from the given keywords provided by the teacher, using the keyword strategy to stimulate students' interest in vocabulary and enhance their memory of it easier [11].

Using the keyword strategy can be simplified into three steps [12, 13]. The first step is selecting relevant keywords. Choose a word, preferably in the language the student is familiar with or the language they are learning, that have some similarity in pronunciation or writing to the word to be memorized [14]. Choosing a specific entity as a keyword will help students remember more easily. For example, if the word to be memorized is "captain (capt)," the student can choose the keyword "hat" and establish a connection with the word "capt" due to their auditory similarity. Next, make strong associations between keywords to ensure immediate recall when you encounter or hear a word that students are aiming to remember [13]. This ability to associate can be developed through a variety of practicing, such as trying to combine two similar or related vocabulary together and creating a meaningful sentence. For example, students can combine the word "captain" with the keyword "hat" which is associated with it, to construct an interesting sentence, such as "captain (capt) wears a hat." The final step combines keywords and vocabulary, which target remembering to create some images. This is done to construct a vivid visual image that incorporates the content and features of the keywords and the vocabulary needed for students to memorize [13]. It is beneficial to create an image that is visually striking, peculiar, and unconventional to enhance memorability. For example, while creating a picture of the sentence "captain wears a hat," the student can imagine a stylish captain wearing a naval hat, as this vivid and lively depiction greatly helps in memory recall.

Nurchurifiani, Nissa, and Febriyanti had a study about the use of keyword strategies for vocabulary memorization [10]. From this research, Nissa and her colleagues used pictures, paper, and cards as tools to implement the keyword strategy. The students were divided into groups to work together. Their experiment concluded that the keyword memory strategy is an effective strategy for improving students' vocabulary memorization, which helps students remember more information and learn new vocabulary words by connecting them to related keywords. It also enables students to acquire a greater understanding of the texts they read. Ultimately, the keyword technique enhances their vocabulary skills [10].

3. Pictorial Association

Many EFL/ESL learners use the pictorial association method to help them memorize vocabulary. Especially when we first learn a language when we are young, we point to pictures and cards and say what they are. Therefore, this strategy is widely studied among EFL/ESL learners. According to Thornbury, the pictorial association strategy makes words more memorable for visual learners by letting them make associations with what they see or imagine, so they can later retrieve the words easily from their long-term memory into working memory, which indicates successful learning and memorization of new words [15]. Due to the significant advantage of this strategy, EFL/ESL learners may choose it compared to other learning strategies when memorizing vocabulary. In Pérez and Alvira's study, the participants chose the preferred vocabulary learning strategy depending on their perceived task difficulty and how valuable and effective the strategy was to them [16]. Before the experiment, the participating students reported that they believed the pictorial association method would be the most effective among the three provided vocabulary memory strategies. After the intervention, students went through a final vocabulary test, and the outcome showed that associating words with pictures was the second helpful strategy that helped students to recall words, very close to the most effective strategy. Lee et al. did a quasi-experimental study and showed that pictures effectively helped young Malaysian English learners acquire vocabulary [17]. In the study, 60 Year 1 students used a modified version of Emily Calhoun's Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM), which had a clear learning structure used by the teachers [18]. By comparing the pre-and post-test scores, the Experimental group had higher vocabulary scores and better vocabulary knowledge recall and retention than the Control group. This outcome reflected the effectiveness of the mentioned intervention among young Malaysian English learners, and, more importantly, this study showed how the pictorial association method could be applied in real-world scenarios. As an effective classroom tool, this adapted PWIM could help teachers with teaching and assist young EFL/ESL learners with learning. The positive outcomes of reviewed research show that by linking vocabulary memorization with imagination and visualization, the pictorial association method effectively helps EFL/ESL learners with vocabulary memorization.

4. Mind-Mapping

Mind mapping is a widely used helpful vocabulary-learning strategy in many countries. According to Feng et al., the mind-mapping technique is a graphical technique that demonstrates brain functioning, and they defined mind-map as a visual representation that a central concept emanates narrower sub-topics [19]. They researched how the mind-mapping technique affected Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary recall and retention. Using the Oxford Quick Placement test (OQPT) and doing statistical analyses, researchers concluded that the experiment group using the mind-mapping technique outperformed the control group using the traditional technique. They suggested that this intervention improved Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning and also encouraged their creativity.

In their article, Li et al. clearly described the application of mind maps and suggested four patterns of English vocabulary mind maps to assist vocabulary learning [20]. For many Chinese students, memorizing words could be tedious and painful, and rote recall had low effectiveness for long-term memorization. Therefore, Li and the researchers suggested that using mind maps might be a suitable choice for Chinese university students to draw mind maps based on spelling patterns, categorization, synonyms, and free association. Drawing mind maps to memorize vocabulary is a more scientific and effective technique for Chinese university students.

Gómez and King's study was based on how human brains think and work [21]. Mind maps are effective for memorizing because thinking is not linear, and mind maps help us visualize and connect concepts. Gómez and King's research used software that could provide mind-mapping activities and

applied it in the EFL/ESL classroom. They found the activities effective for vocabulary acquisition and suggested teachers add technology tools into traditional teaching methods so that students could acquire new knowledge effectively and this technological era.

Using a mind map to assist in memorizing vocabulary effectively improves EFL/ESL learners' recall of information. In this decade, various forms of application are used inside and outside the classroom, showing the acceptance of using the mind-mapping technique to learn vocabulary, and the research results provided evidence that this learning strategy benefits learners in different contexts.

5. Conclusion

Vocabulary memorizing strategies such as the keyword, pictorial association, and mind-mapping methods helped EFL/ESL learners learn new vocabulary effectively. These strategies involve using various techniques to enhance memory retention and improve vocabulary acquisition. Utilizing the keyword method, learners associate new words with familiar words or phrases, making it easier to remember their meanings. The pictorial association method involves creating mental images that connect new words with their definitions, making the learning more engaging and memorable. The mind-mapping method allows learners to organize and connect new vocabulary words in a visual and structured way to better understand and recall new vocabulary. Therefore, it can be deduced from the results that vocabulary learning strategies are effective for EFL/ESL learners' recall, retention, and accuracy.

English is the most widely spoken language in the world, and vocabulary memorization is a significant component since words are a language's building blocks. The process of vocabulary memorization could be tedious and difficult for EFL/ESL learners, so many of them use learning strategies to assist themselves in memorizing vocabulary. Learning strategies such as using keywords, associating with pictures, and creating mind maps effectively improve foreign learners' English vocabulary memorization.

This paper mainly focuses on the three mentioned learning strategies; a comparison was not provided to the readers. Some past research compared different learning strategies, such as the keyword and pictorial association methods [13]. Therefore, future research can seek a balance between studies on learning strategies. For example, there is relatively less research focused on the keyword method. There could be more discussion about the less-mentioned strategies in the future. Also, future research can compare and contrast different vocabulary learning strategies and find the most effective one for other groups, such as students from different countries or ages. In this way, we believe that the research outcomes would better help more EFL/ESL learners.

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