
Vocabulary Learning Strategies in First-Year International Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The learning development of a second language is one of the major challenges for foreign and second language learners. This challenge expands more when these learners find themselves in an academic setting as international students in English-speaking countries such as the USA. This research study explores significant literature on remarkable factors that assist students in developing their vocabulary. It also investigates the learning strategies that a group of international undergraduate students from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville put into practice to foster and expand their English vocabulary repertoire. A mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyze data to answer the various questions that arise in regard to the experience and strategies students use in formal and informal settings when applicable. This study confirms two hypotheses: one suggests that first language influences second language vocabulary acquisition, while the other indicates that understanding word meanings through context positively impacts vocabulary learning. Other strategies such as online interactive exercises, dictation, memorization, and real-life examples were also identified, although they have a slightly lesser impact compared to those that support the hypotheses.

INTRODUCTION

Communicating in a second or foreign language is a vital skill that allows for students to maximize their opportunities in social, academic and personal contexts. However, mastering this skill poses a significant challenge for many learners around the globe, especially when learning English. It stands to reason, albeit debatable, that international students are required to have an upper intermediate level of English proficiency if they are aiming to pursue an undergraduate degree in the United States of America. Therefore, prioritizing the best teaching and learning practices in the learning process of this language is of utmost importance to ensure that students reach the linguistic and communicative competences necessary to achieve their academic goals.

Concerning language sub-skills, vocabulary is the most remarkable level of language knowledge for all second language learners who aspire to improve their academic or interpersonal growth (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2003). That is, the achievement of a competent language performance for both professional and personal contexts can be significantly influenced by vocabulary skills. For this reason, pedagogical in-class strategies are used to push students forward to enhance their language proficiency. Even students themselves use their own strategies inside of the classroom in order to

achieve better language production and understanding. It is also worth noting that a considerable amount of international students learn lexicon outside of any formal teaching environment, making it less difficult for them to get involved in daily conversation. However, informal learning input may not prepare them for academic purposes. In view of this, promoting vocabulary learning strategies stands as one of the most fundamental foundations of language acquisition.

In this research study, I intend to investigate the specific vocabulary learning strategies used by a group of first-year international undergraduate students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville SIUE. The objective of this investigation is to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants foster their vocabulary sub-skills in order to expand their English repertoire. I will try to discover whether there are any distinct patterns in the strategies used inside and outside of the classroom to compare their efficiency in students' learning. Finally, I plan to illustrate and discuss the implications that may impact English vocabulary learning among these students, and offer potential suggestions to further enhance their learning experience.

The present study, therefore, sets out to seek answers to the following research questions:

- What specific learning strategies are being utilized by students inside and outside of the classroom to promote vocabulary sub-skills in order to grow their English language repertoire?
- What are the implications that may impact the learning of English vocabulary in first-year international students of undergraduate programs?

In addition to the above research questions, two hypotheses have been formulated for this investigation, as outlined below:

H1: The learning of vocabulary in international students highly relies on the influence that their first language (L1) has in their second language (L2).

H2: Guessing the meaning of words by context positively influences EFL learners with respect to vocabulary learning.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Vocabulary Beliefs and Strategies

Vocabulary denotes the array of words an individual comprehends and can use within a specific language (IMSE Journal, 2023). When it comes to formal contexts, effective vocabulary instruction should aim at empowering students to employ strategies independently, while simultaneously enriching their understanding and resources to foster such sub-skill. It can be easily argued that the best reward students can receive from this is the construct of their autonomy, that is, students become responsible for their own learning.

McKeown (2019) claimed that “many learners accumulate high-quality vocabulary knowledge independently through wide reading and rich language environments that provide abundant practice with words and language form.” This assertion may hold true, but not entirely. In many instances, international university-level students may find difficult to naturally immerse in such environments. Factors such as program's curriculum, motivation, language aptitude, age, cultural background, and L1 interference may negatively affect the development of high-quality vocabulary, especially during their first-year. Hence, specific word instruction and word-learning strategies are used to combat such situations. One of the hypotheses proposed for this study suggests that the learning of vocabulary in international students is influenced by the role of their L1 in their L2. This hypothesis posits that students often depend on elements that encompass translation to comprehend the meaning of new words, which may slow down their language development.

As far as vocabulary strategies are concerned, Brown & Lee (2015) proposed allocating designated class time to vocabulary practice, facilitating vocabulary within specific contexts, and engaging students in unplanned vocabulary instruction to maximize their learning. They emphasized

that the most effective internalization of vocabulary occurs from exposure with words within the context of students' environment, as opposed to learning words in isolation. There are grounds for believing that the above approach has helped students to associate new words with meaningful context, enhancing vocabulary production and retention. Additionally, dictionaries serve as valuable resource for clarification and examples of sentences that can assist students in understanding the various uses of words and expressions. Undoubtedly, implementing the aforementioned strategies at a university-level context can greatly boost vocabulary learning opportunities. Vocabulary notebooks also prove to be beneficial because learners can maintain record of words newly acquired and review them regularly –this practice is referred to as word-learning strategy.

In formal educational settings, students tend to have different types of activities that facilitate language skills, as it occurs with reading. Nonetheless, understanding vocabulary using reading materials can pose challenges for students, particularly when they are not familiar with the lesson content. It has been suggested by Brown (1994) that in order to analyze vocabulary in reading materials, learners should attempt to make guesses when words are not identified immediately. To facilitate this process, students could employ techniques such as identifying familiar suffixes, prefixes, roots, and even semantic patterns for clues. Drawing from Brown's recommendations, the second hypothesis put forward for this investigation is supported, implying that guessing the meaning of words can positively influence EFL learners to grasp vocabulary knowledge.

In support of Brown's suggestions above, Birch (2015) pointed out that the retention of words in long-term memory significantly contributes to the learning of new words, along with the development of other strategies including repetition, word formation, and the keyword strategy, which in part are found to be some of the strategies that the target participants used. The latter involves associating the target word with the L1 word by means of recognizing similar word sounds. These strategies not only take place in formal contexts but also outside of the classroom. If considering international students in this context, they often use repetition and the association of L1-L2 words to improve their vocabulary sub-skills.

Taking into account all the vocabulary practices explored in this literature review section, it is evident that their acquisition holds a central position in language learning. While vocabulary has not always been regarded as the primary focus in second language acquisition, its importance has increased in recent years. Hence, it is crucial that new vocabulary items be introduced in academic contexts rich enough that offer clues for student to decipher their meaning, and that language exposure is provided in and out of the classroom to ease the learning process (Celce-Murcia, 2001). A vital consideration is to allow students for intentional and incidental learning too, that is, facilitating them with explicit explanation but also helping them learn through the use of strategies in both informal and formal contexts.

Previous Studies in Vocabulary Learning

A considerable amount of literature has been published in support of vocabulary learning. These studies have illustrated the importance of optimizing vocabulary in second language acquisition. A few of these studies are presented in the chart below:

Table 1. Previous Research conducted on Vocabulary Learning

Source	Participants and Method	Observations
Anber Nacera	46 students of second year university in Algeria, SILL and UWLT tools, frequency and percentage of data for analysis.	Students used cognitive (skimming, pronunciation), metacognitive (active listening, setting learning objectives) and social (interaction, awareness of language's culture) strategies to learn vocabulary.

Zhihong Bai	Questionnaire surveys of vocabulary strategies, second-year non-English majors students, quantitative empirical study.	Study revealed that vocabulary is a continual process and limited vocabulary restricts students thinking and posits challenges in communication.
Qun Wu	50 freshman undergraduate ESL learners at a Chinese university, College English CET-6 vocabulary handbook test.	Research found that students who adopted the cyclical repetition technique (CRT) were able to retain 90.97% of vocabulary making it a highly effective technique for learning it.

The preceding studies depicted how students employed a variety of strategies tailored to their contexts, and that vocabulary is a long-term process. Furthermore, adopting clear and practical strategies can help learners maximize their vocabulary acquisition, even more when their context is academic, which can relate to the context that the participant of this research experienced. Therefore, there is room to argue that cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies should be incorporated in university-level learning for language interaction and development to occur. Another consideration for this matter, and based on Qun Wu's results is the significance that cyclical repetition technique can have in students. Although, this is worthy of discussion because repetition techniques in formal settings may be more applicable for environments in which students are still learning their L2, as opposed to university-level classrooms, where students are already expected to perform well.

Moreover, these theories present a strong potential for both secondary and university-level students to apply techniques that support the development and retention of language vocabulary. Generally, international students often face greater challenges adapting to a new educational system in the United States –for the context of this study, compared to their home countries, which may be one of the factors that may impede some of these students to move forward in terms of vocabulary acquisition. It is for this reason that this study centralizes in exploring the different techniques that first-year international students use to significantly enhance their language performance while working toward their academic goals.

METHOD

Initially, the pool of participants comprised two groups of international students. Nonetheless, only one group out of both was intentionally selected through purposive sampling, based on their specific language skills and knowledge relevant to the research questions. Additionally, convenience sampling was applied, as the participants were readily available and willing to take part in the study. This particular group consisted of 9 students who were enrolled in the Intensive English Pathway Program within the Foreign Language Department while pursuing their majors in the first semester of their scholar year 2024 at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. The majority of the participants had diverse language backgrounds, and were early English learners in their home countries.

Due to the language proficiency demonstrated upon arriving to the USA, they underwent additional reinforcement to meet the requirements of undergraduate programs at the university. Although most participants were pursuing majors in Robotic Engineering, Literature, and Marketing while studying English, one participant was enrolled in the Intensive English Program with the sole purpose of enhancing her English skills. In addition, they ranged in age between 17 and 24 years old, and they all represented cultural diversity from countries that included Colombia, Vietnam, Ukraine and China.

Prior to the administration of the data collection instruments, the participants underwent both oral and written informed consent procedures to ensure awareness of research ethics on human subjects. As a result, there was no ethical concern experiences throughout the study. It is also important to highlight that both a semi-structure interview and an online survey were the main instruments used for the data collection of this study. The online survey consisted of 16 questions administered through Qualtrics software and it was divided into three sections, as visualized below.

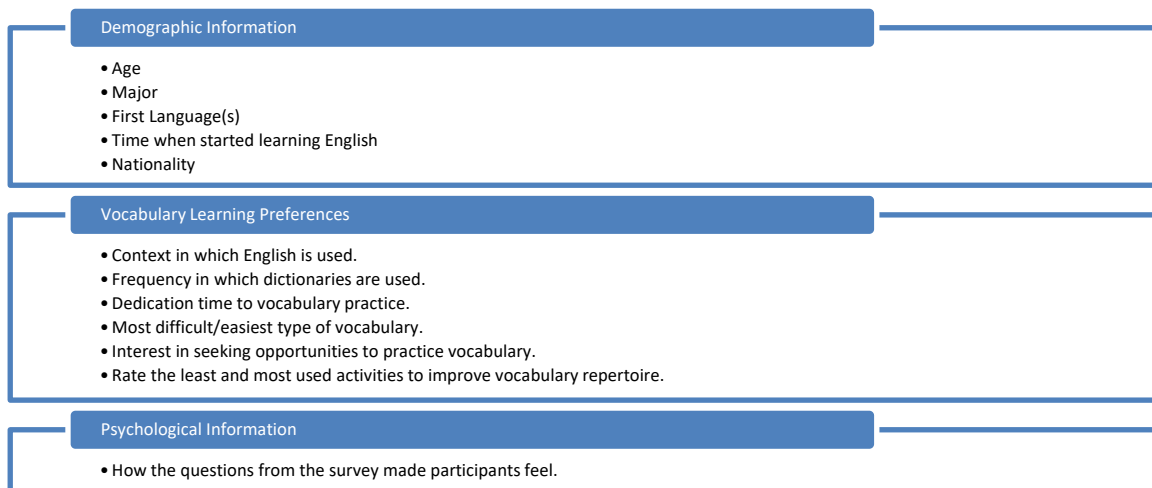


Figure 1. Sections of the Online Survey Instrument

The semi-structured interview comprised 7 questions, all centered around the participants' views on vocabulary learning preferences, strategies employed both inside and outside the classroom, and a broader elaboration of the vocabulary they considered the easiest and the most difficult along with its corresponding explanation. It is noteworthy that both instruments were conducted in English, eliminating the need for switching to their native languages.

The research design of the present investigation included a mixed method. By using both qualitative method through the semi-structured interview and quantitative method through the online survey, a more comprehensive and detailed examination of the data was achieved. Besides, both methods allowed for a simpler association of the research questions and hypotheses with the findings. The data from this research used content analysis as a technique for making inferences about the information gathered from both instruments, identifying unique and significant characteristics as well as key variables crucial for the discussion and conclusion of this study.

FINDINGS

The following two section discuss the findings pertaining to the quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted in this study. Both the varying and consistent remarks encountered in this investigation will be described, which will also facilitate a better comprehension of whether the answers for the research questions were addressed, as well as the support or disproof of the hypotheses proposed.

Quantitative Results

Questions 1 and 2 primarily gathered demographic information such as participant's age, nationality, major and the time when they started learning their L2. Notably, one essential piece of information emerged indicating that students' formal English learning journey started between the ages of 3 and 10. This information arose important questions of the language proficiency students should have gained since then, as they claimed to have more than eight years of language experience. However, it is essential to also consider the amount of external second language exposure they had

during those eight years, which seemed to be not enough. Further, 100% of the students rated their English proficiency as intermediate, giving a clear spectrum idea of how they consider their language performance.

Question 3 inquired about the primary context in which students use English the most, 78% of participants reported to use it for social purposes and the rest 22% for academic purposes as displayed in figure 2. Interestingly, while the usage of the language was prevalent in social environments, it was expected from the students to have a reasonable academic vocabulary proficiency, as they were often exposed to it.



Figure 2. Primary context in which participants used the English Language

Question 4 addresses the frequency in which students used a digital or physical dictionary to ascertain the meaning of new words whether inside or outside of the classroom. The results yielded that 55.56% of the participants sometimes used such a tool. However, 22.22% of students never used it, while a percentage of 11.11% always used it, which is the same percentage of the students who rarely used it too.

Question 5 investigated the time that students allocated to vocabulary practice and study outside of the classroom every week. Surprisingly, 66.67% of the students devoted 2 to 3 hours approximately on a weekly basis. Conversely, the remaining 33.33% opted for expending less than an hour weekly, a factor that could probably create difficulties in their performance.

Question 6 and 7 elucidated the type of vocabulary that students considered the easiest and most difficult to learn. The results of these questions were further supported by information obtained in the interview, where participants elaborated on the reasons for their choices. On the one hand, 44.44% of the participants agreed that academic terminology was the most difficult vocabulary type attributing its difficulty to its uncommonness and its challenge in understanding its meaning, as it is used for specific purposes only. Phrasal verbs received 22.22% of the votes and idiomatic expressions collected 33.33%. On the other hand, 88.89% of the participants regarded single words as the easiest to learn because they believed that such vocabulary could be connected to everyday language and it was less difficult to remember.

Question 8 requested students to express whether they ever sought out for similar words of the new vocabulary they learned. Responses to this question varied: 55.56% of the participants indicated that they did not engage in this practice, while 11.11% stated that they did it frequently, acknowledging that it was beneficial for learning new words as almost similar to the remaining 33.33% who affirmed that they searched for similar words because it facilitated the growth of their vocabulary repertoire, and that synonyms could positively help them in future academic assignments.

Question 9, which is considered the most important question in this quantitative data collection pertained to the participants' ratings of the activities they most and least frequently employed to learn vocabulary on a regular basis. This rating was implied on a scale of one to ten, one being the most frequent and ten being the least frequent activity. Ten activities were established as options for students, which included cognitive and social strategies. From the data gathered, the two most and the two least used activities were selected to facilitate this study's discussion, and some of the activities were merged, as they strongly correlated.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the most and the least used activities by participants

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
vocabulary review	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	22.22%	11.11%	22.22%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%	9
interactive online exercises	11.11%	0.00%	11.11%	11.11%	0.00%	33.33%	11.11%	11.11%	11.11%	0.00%	9
guessing the meaning by context	0.00%	22.22%	11.11%	0.00%	22.22%	22.22%	0.00%	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%	9
translating to your first language	55.56%	11.11%	11.11%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%	9
reading comprehension	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	22.22%	0.00%	11.11%	11.11%	22.22%	0.00%	9
note-taking	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	33.33%	11.11%	0.00%	9
creating word lists	0.00%	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%	44.44%	11.11%	9
dictation	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	11.11%	11.11%	0.00%	11.11%	44.44%	9
examples of vocabulary in real context	11.11%	0.00%	11.11%	22.22%	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	9
memorization	0.00%	22.22%	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	9

Note that an important pattern was noticed in the above statistics. Creating word lists was regarded as one of the least used activities. However, if combined with memorization, it yielded an acceptable percentage for considering them as feasible and simultaneous activities to learn vocabulary. The same could be implied with guessing meaning by context and reading comprehension.

The results of this question clearly revealed that 55.56% of the participants regarded translation from their L1 to their L2 as the most effective activity to learn vocabulary, followed by guessing the meaning of words by context, which was merged with reading comprehension, yielding a 44.44%, and vocabulary review, which obtained a 33.33% of the votes. In contrast, dictation and creating word lists were the least activities that students used, both displaying a 44.44% of the votes, followed by the use examples in real context, with 33.33%. As noticed, there were surprising variables in the different activities students considered efficient, which partially affected their performance, mainly when they believed that using real context examples was not effective.

In response to question 10 (do you find it more important to understand vocabulary or to produce it?), 33.33% expressed that understanding it alone was sufficient, while 66.66% revealed that both understanding and producing it held equal significance. This way of perceiving vocabulary may positively influence language development in students as most of them try to strive for both receptive and productive vocabulary skills.

Question 11 had the purpose of investigating whether students sought opportunities to practice new vocabulary in informal settings. As depicted in the graphic below, 44% of the participants often engaged in this practice while 56% did not prioritize it, and thus only did so occasionally. It is believed that the social and cross-cultural environments were the main cause of this behavior. In simple terms, students felt more comfortable with people who belong to their same culture, causing their communication to be in their native language. For example, if they socialized or completed assignments with classmates from their same culture, there was a low possibility that the new academic lexicon could be practiced, leading to a slow vocabulary learning progress.

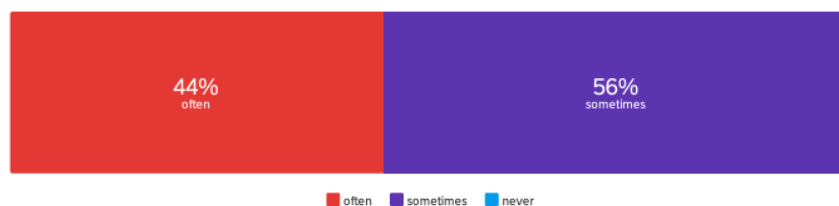


Figure 3. Frequency in which students sought informal practice of new vocabulary.

Question 12 was particularly significant, as it asked students to describe how vocabulary learning occurred in the classroom. Responses emphasized the importance of the strategies employed by the instructor. The most remarkable strategies highlighted by the students were explicit explanation of word meanings, engaging in vocabulary games, writing words on the board to later discuss their meaning in groups, and participating in collaborative activities where speaking takes place.

The last question of this quantitative analysis addressed students' reactions to the online survey. Most of them exhibited a degree of self-reflection in their responses in that some of them expressed a desire to find additional motivation for expanding their vocabulary knowledge. Others admitted not dedicating enough time to practice, while few found the survey engaging and interesting.

Qualitative Results

For this investigation, content analysis approach was used as the main qualitative research method. On that same note, when analyzing data qualitatively, it is important to understand what it means. Content analysis, as described by Mihailescu (2019), can be understood as the exploration and interpretation of information in a subjective manner. One of its purposes is formulating references and inferences for the meanings and contexts contained in the gathered information. Taking this into consideration, the findings outlined in this section address the qualitative results drawn from the interpretation of the responses collected from the semi-structured interview conducted to the participants. The key observations are summarized below.

Drawing by the participants' opinions, they all agreed that learning vocabulary was an important process in the learning process to learning the English language. The rationale for this viewpoint primarily was supported by the fact that vocabulary is a crucial element for effective communication in language. Participants emphasized that learning vocabulary facilitates clear comprehension when engaging in conversation with others, and it also contributes to making language easier in order to be fluent. Two participants' insights are provided below with respect to the importance of vocabulary learning: "if you don't learn vocabulary, you may not understand others" and "by learning vocabulary, you can expand your repertoire and communicate more easily."

In line with the insights gathered in question 9 from the quantitative data, it was well supported that students almost always employed the use of L1-L2 translation when they did not understand the meaning of new vocabulary words. Along with that, the ability to guess meaning by context received a higher value in the interview compared to the online survey, making the data even more interesting. Even when the reliance on dictionaries was infrequent, a significant number of participants opted for vocabulary reinforcement beyond the classroom. This reinforcement was predominantly concentrated on practicing speaking skills with their speech community to enhance their English proficiency, engaging in activities such as watching YouTube videos and movies, occasionally opting for subtitles to facilitate their understanding, and seeking guidance from more proficient individuals.

Moreover, the majority of students employed syntactical exercises including fill-in-the-blank and sentence structure practice, note-taking and conversational practice that they considered very useful. When these activities were not employed, students utilized translation tools. It is essential to note that the above activities were used in formal settings specifically.

The findings of this study stated that the formal and informal strategies used by students could have been aligned with their learning styles, but also there was a strong emphasis on their native language as depicted in previous paragraphs. The influence of other factors such as motivation, personality, communication skills and environment could have impeded students from seeking interaction with other people who did not belong to their speech community. One striking feature of these findings was that they answered both research questions formulated in this study. The results also supported the hypothesis that L1 has a strong influence in students' L2 vocabulary learning process.

As noted in questions 6 and 7 from the quantitative data, students generally perceived academic terminology as the most difficult type of vocabulary due to its infrequent use, which also led to potential confusion and forgetfulness. However, single words were regarded as the easiest vocabulary category because they are not difficult to remember. As observed, these responses aligned with those from the quantitative data supporting students' perception of vocabulary in terms of its difficulty and ease.

For the last remark on this qualitative analysis, most of the participant revealed that the process of learning and remembering vocabulary was somewhat challenging, as they must actively engage in real-life scenarios to apply such knowledge, otherwise, they risk forgetting what they have learned. At times, this challenge may be supported by the fact that students encountered vocabulary that was not commonly used even in their native language, further complicating the retention process.

DISCUSSION

This study has explored the specific strategies employed by international students inside and outside of the classroom in order to promote their language vocabulary (research question 1). This research also shed light on students' preference toward using translation from L1 to L2 to facilitate the understanding of vocabulary. This not only corroborates the first hypothesis regarding the impact of L1 on L2 vocabulary acquisition, but also emphasizes the linguistic and social factors that may affect this behavior including age, learning styles, language aptitude and personality.

Undoubtedly, vocabulary learning needs a multifaceted approach that encompasses direct vocabulary instruction, the use of vocabulary-learning strategies, extensive reading and word learning from contexts that provide students with opportunities to practice in multiple encounters (Grabe, 2009). The network of relationship identified in the present study demonstrates that translation, guessing meaning by context, vocabulary review, engaging in conversation, and watching movies using English captions seem to be to most frequent strategies that students use to learn vocabulary in both formal and informal contexts. The results of this study also lends support to earlier findings in which cognitive and social strategies were used as means for improving vocabulary sub-skills.

Besides, this study indicated that the aforementioned strategies partly support the second hypothesis, as guessing meaning by context seems to be a prevalent practice for vocabulary comprehension in almost half of the participants whether inside or outside of the classroom. This positive assertion aligns with the observation of Brown and Celce-Murcia regarding the efficacy of guessing, which is a strategy widely acknowledged in literature. Notably, making the transition to help students learn to recognize clues in order to guess meaning by context is paramount in language learning.

As language educators, there should be room for recognizing potential implications in this regard. The rationale behind students' preference for practicing with their speech community rather than be exposed to the target language community is likely a phenomenon. One possible cause of this situation is the minimal negotiation of meaning that may be present between native speakers and international students when engaging in conversation. This is not something new as there have been past studies who support this cause. Nonetheless, it is imperative to advocate for linguistic diversity and recognize that from a sociolinguistic perspective, all students have a unique way of using their second or foreign language.

It is plausible to say though that young students leave in an era of technology and are much familiarized with the use of it. Even though technology can help them use digital tools such as the use of digital dictionaries, they are not a priority. Instead, students opt to use technology that can assist them with translation apps or websites, as they appear to be more efficient according to them. However, it is crucial to explore other alternative or traditional strategies that are more in line with exploring the nature of the target language.

Undoubtedly, every vocabulary strategy holds merit and contributes to enhancing language proficiency. With this in mind, let's not forget that learning variability, cognitive load, a low quality

of instruction, demotivation, cultural background, and even age may be regarded as factors that can affect the learning process of students. Consequently, there is a call to action for instructors to delve deeper into students' personalities and behaviors to gain better understanding of their academic needs. This may enable the customization of appropriate vocabulary learning strategies that can help students in enhancing their language proficiency in formal and informal contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study combined the literature of vocabulary learning strategies with recommendations offered by previous researchers on the matter. It was revealed that while translating from L1 to L2 and vocabulary review are the most frequently employed strategies in formal settings, guessing the meaning of words along with conversational practice are the predominant strategies used in informal settings. Two hypotheses were validated in this study, one highlighting the influence that L1 has in L2 regarding vocabulary learning, and a second hypothesis suggesting that guessing the meaning of words by context has a beneficial effect on vocabulary learning.

The findings of this investigation suggest educators to motivate and assist students in discovering methods to promote vocabulary learning that do not solely rely on translation to the mother tongue. Instead, they should emphasize the integration of the target language by actively implementing various classrooms activities such as reading comprehension, frequent vocabulary review, the development of activities that recycle vocabulary, teaching a limited set of words for depth and precision, using visuals, and ensuring wide exposure to vocabulary. As for students, this study encourages them to continue maximizing their guessing strategies and engaging in conversation with individuals outside the classroom while also advocating for increased academic exposure to their target language, and the willingness to embrace challenges such as conversing with native speakers or minimizing the influence of translation to promote their learning autonomy.

For future studies, researchers may consider examining sophomore, junior or senior international students in order to discern potential variables in the strategies employed for vocabulary acquisition in American universities or universities around the globe. In addition, alternative research methodologies such as ethnographic approaches might be helpful to observe classroom dynamics that may provide a comprehensible understanding of the strategies utilized by both students and instructor in formal settings.

LIMITATIONS

In this study, it is important to note that the sampling used for this investigation imposed certain constraints on the data due to the low amount of participants. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. In addition to that, time management and students' language proficiency suffered slight limitations during the collection of the data. Despite the semi-structured interview aiming at gathering detailed and elaborated information, some of the students experienced challenges articulating their thoughts resulting in longer-than-anticipated duration for each interview. This subsequently impacted the allocated time for each interview.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to the World Health Organization (2024), it is crucial to uphold ethical principles to protect the dignity, rights, and welfare of research participants. In light of this, the present study used informed consent disclosures for both research instruments in order to protect the information of the participants. No personal identifiable information was illustrated or included in the data and no conflicts of interest were reported either. For more details about ethics, refer to the data access section below.

DATA ACCESS

Access to the informed consent forms, online survey reports and the semi-structured interview (SSI) scanned answers can be found at the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10MzDuIGwcQtpd8fTJeaic5gZkn3WktzL?usp=sharing>

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