SECOND LANGUAGE VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH WITH EFL STUDENTS AT THE SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY, TETOVO, MACEDONIA, WRITTEN BY BRIKENE XHAFERI, PUBLISHED BY SÜDWESTDEUTSCHER VERLAG FÜR HOCHSCHULEN IN GERMANY

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Organization of thesis

This review deals with the evaluation of the research study performed as a part of the doctoral thesis at the South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo, Republic of North Macedonia. This paper aims to give a review of the thesis, which was published as a book, entitled: "*Second language vocabulary acquisition and learning strategies. An empirical research with EFL students at the South East European University, Tetovo, Macedonia.*" It describes the importance of acquiring English as a second language, especially its vocabulary and learning strategies. This study was designed to find out the perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies — the strategies that the students actually use and their usefulness. This study has practical significance in the field of vocabulary acquisition and provides some new information to both English teachers and students of English in the Republic of North Macedonia and beyond. The results drawn from this research can help learners become more successful in acquiring the vocabulary of the English language. The purpose of this study is to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by students at the SEEU, make them aware of the strategies they used to learn new words, and encourage the teachers to think about strategy training and include it in their regular instruction.

The text of the book is organized into eight (8) chapters, and the total length of the book is 196 pages, including the list of the references and appendices. The text is well balanced in terms of the introduction of the scientific paper, the development of research questions and hypothesis, the review of the most-up-to-date literature, research

methods, and the applied analysis. The empirical work itself is well planned and presented in a structured way. The language of the thesis is English and is easy to understand, and the proofreading of the text is carried out by a native speaker of the English language. Overall, this is a well written thesis, published as a book, with clearly defined subject and practical recommendations for students and teachers of the English language.

This research was a doctoral thesis defended at the Institute for Anglistik and Americanistik at the University of Klagenfurt in 2008, and the book was published in 2009 by Südwestdeutscher Verlag für Hochschulen, in Saarbrücken, Germany. The author of this book, Prof. Dr. Brikene Xhaferi, obtained her Master's degree from the University of Indiana, Bloomington (USA) and her Ph.D. degree from the Alpen–Adria University in Klagenfurt. Her research interests include English language teaching methodology and second-language acquisition. For time being, she teaches at the South East European University in Tetovo, Republic of North Macedonia.

The book is organized into eight chapters, as follows: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methods and Procedures, Study Results and Discussion, Discussion of Findings, Implications for the Future Strategy Training, Limitations, Conclusion, References, and Appendices.

The first chapter of the book introduces the study background, gives an overview of the role of the English language in Macedonia and particularly the role of English language teaching at the Southeast European University (SEEU), and explains the importance and the purpose of the study. The second part of the book reviews the latest literature which sets the research in theoretical context (according to Parry, 1997; Schmitt, 1997; Kojic-Sabo and Lightbown 1999; Raseh and Ranjbary 2003; Shmais 2003; Fan 2003; Yang 2005; Gu 1994). The most commonly used language strategies and vocabulary learning strategies are reviewed. Furthermore, it presents significant studies in language learning strategies and provides some characteristics of a good language learner, and some insights into teaching vocabulary. The next part of the text presents the research questions, gives a detailed description of the pilot study of the present research, and describes in detail the research methods used in the procedures and steps taken. The fourth part of the text "Study Results and Discussion", presents and analyses the findings of the three study methods: vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and think-aloud procedure. The "Discussion of the Findings" summarizes the study, conclusions, and recommendations resulting from the study, and implications for further research and the teaching of vocabulary.

The "Implications for the Future and Strategy Training" suggests some implications and models for the future and strategy training in every language class. It also presents a strategy model appropriate for the group of study participants that will be beneficial for learners and make them aware of the importance of the language learning strategies. In "Limitations", the study limitations are presented. That is followed by conclusion remarks.

The importance and purpose of the study

The research was carried out at the SEEU in Tetovo, and the aim was to explore the perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies that the learners use to learn new words in English, to find out how they feel about learning general and specific vocabulary in English, and more specifically, what discovery and retention strategies they use when they encounter a word for the first time in reading an academic text. The results obtained from this study are similar to Fan's study in Hong Kong, with Cantonese speakers learning English vocabulary. The results show that the most used strategies among the students were: "dictionary use", and "guessing the word from the context", but they also rarely used "the key word method".

The study involves students in different fields of study taking general English course levels (A1, A2, B1, B2) and also students taking ESP (for IT purposes). This type of student population has never been included in any published study on vocabulary learning strategies, even though learning vocabulary is a crucial part of any foreign language. Furthermore, the study aims to help teachers design appropriate vocabulary exercises because it is teachers' responsibility to provide the students with learning situations to enhance their lexical competence. In addition, it aims to make the students aware of strategy use, help the explore different ones and match the strategy with the particular situation. There is no good or bad learning strategy; rather, they are created equally and used in different learning situations. It is the combination of strategies that helps learners become more successful and enhances their vocabulary competence.

The research methods used in the study are: questionnaire, formal and informal interview, and retrospective interviews (self-observation). All of these methods are used in order to identify the vocabulary learning strategies used by the students and make them aware that there are the other vocabulary learning strategies that can enhance their lexical competence. The results of the study showed that the students used different strategies for either discovering the meaning of the unknown words or for committing the words to memory, or

retention strategies. It was found that some learners used two or more different strategies for discovering the meaning of one unknown word. The most frequently used strategies were: discovery strategies: guessing from the context, asking the teacher, using a monolingual dictionary and analyzing parts of speech; retention strategies: repeating the word to memorize it, making associations, translation and visualization, and vocabulary cards.

Conclusion

This study was designed to find out the perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies of SEEU students—the strategies that they actually use and their usefulness. Because study participants reported that vocabulary is the most important part of any language and is critical for effective communication, the data suggest that incorporating vocabulary learning strategies into regular class instruction may have a positive effect on how learners perceive different learning strategies.

This study has practical significance in the field of vocabulary acquisition and provides some new information to both English teachers and students at SEEU and beyond. The students will have access to this study in the university library and they will see the study results. Similarly, English language teachers will also use the results of this study to think more about designing effective vocabulary activities and promoting learner independence and active participation of their own learning. The study will definitely make the students aware of the strategies they use to learn new words in English. What is more, they will have a chance to think about the possibility to use different strategies to learn new English words. At the same time, the teachers will use the study results to think about strategy training and include it in their regular instruction.

The study will serve as a basis for further studies on vocabulary learning strategies not only at SEEU but also at other universities. This study explores the issue and offers some innovative ideas that could help improve the students' vocabulary learning strategies.

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