

## เลือกเส้นทางที่เหมาะสม: กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์สำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ เป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่หลากหลาย\*

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### บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์หลักของนิยามวิชาการนี้เพื่อวิเคราะห์กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ที่แตกต่างกันสำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ บทความนี้แบ่งกลยุทธ์เหล่านี้ออกเป็นห้าประเภทหลัก ได้แก่ กลยุทธ์การหาความหมายด้วยตัวเอง กลยุทธ์ทางสังคม กลยุทธ์การจำ กลยุทธ์เชิงพุทธิปัญญา และกลยุทธ์พหุปัญญา แต่ละประเภทจะถูกวิเคราะห์โดยรายละเอียด โดยมีการอภิปรายทั้งข้อดีและความท้าทายที่เกี่ยวข้องกับกลยุทธ์เหล่านี้ บทความนี้เน้นให้เห็นถึงวิธีการที่สามารถปรับใช้กลยุทธ์เหล่านี้กับคำศัพท์ประเภทต่าง ๆ รวมถึงคำศัพท์ทั่วไป คำศัพท์ทางวิชาการ และคำศัพท์ทางเทคนิค อีกทั้งยังสามารถปรับแต่งให้เหมาะสมกับความต้องการเฉพาะของผู้เรียน ได้ ความสำคัญของบทความนี้อยู่ที่ศักยภาพในการให้ข้อมูลเชิงลึกแก่ผู้สอนเกี่ยวกับแนวปฏิบัติที่มีประสิทธิภาพในการสอนคำศัพท์ และเพื่อสนับสนุนการวิจัยในด้านการได้มาซึ่งคำศัพท์

**คำสำคัญ:** กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์, การได้มาซึ่งคำศัพท์, การพัฒนาคำศัพท์

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## Choosing the Right Routes: Vocabulary Learning Strategies for Diverse EFL Learners\*

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### Abstract

The main aim of this article is to analyze different vocabulary learning strategies for EFL learners. This article categorizes these strategies into five key areas: *Determination, Social, Memory, Cognitive* and *Metacognitive* strategies. Each category is examined in detail, including a discussion of both the benefits and challenges associated with the strategies. The article highlights how these strategies can be adapted to different types of vocabulary, including general, academic and technical words, and how they can be tailored to the individual needs of learners. The significance of this article lies in its potential to inform educators about effective vocabulary teaching practices and to contribute to research in the field of vocabulary acquisition.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Vocabulary Acquisition, Vocabulary Development

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### ***The Importance of Vocabulary in the EFL Context***

The importance of vocabulary in the EFL context cannot be overstated because vocabulary influences every aspect of communication, comprehension and expression (Santillan & Daenos, 2020). In the field of language acquisition, vocabulary size is often seen as an indicator of a learner's language level and potential to progress (Laufer, 1997). This suggests that the size of a person's vocabulary can determine their ability to understand both spoken and written texts and to participate in conversations. Since knowing a word means not only knowing the rules of grammar and collocations, but also knowing how to use the word in different contexts (Nation, 2006), greater vocabulary knowledge enables learners to better navigate complex texts and conversations. Expanding vocabulary is therefore not just about memorizing words, but about deepening the quality of knowledge associated with each term (Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022).

Vocabulary can be divided into different types that fulfill different functions in the mastery of language. Coxhead (2000) introduced the Academic Word List (AWL), which contains words that occur frequently in academic texts but are rare in everyday language. Knowledge of the vocabulary on this list helps students to master the language for academic discussions, lectures and writing. The General Word List, on the other hand, consists of words that are frequently used in everyday communication and form the basis for common English expressions (West, 1953). In addition, the Technical Word List contains specialized vocabulary that is crucial for specific fields and enables professionals and students to communicate precisely in their areas of expertise (Chung & Nation, 2004). By focusing on these vocabulary categories, teachers can adapt their strategies to improve comprehension and language use and provide EFL students with a more personalized learning experience (Suryati et al., 2024).

### ***Vocabulary Learning Strategies***

To improve EFL learners' vocabulary size, effective strategies for increasing vocabulary are crucial. Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies provides a comprehensive framework that categorizes these strategies into five key areas: 1) Determination strategies, where learners take the initiative to determine the meaning of words on their own using dictionaries or guessing meaning from context; 2) Social strategies like interacting with others in conversations, on social media platforms or in collaborative learning environments, which facilitates the practical application of new vocabulary; 3) Memory strategies related to aids such as mnemonics, flashcards and visualization techniques which help with vocabulary memorization; 4) Cognitive strategies, which involve more intensive mental

processes, such as breaking words down into their roots or prefixes and suffixes to deepen the learner's understanding of the function of words in the language; and 5) Metacognitive strategies that help learners to become more autonomous and effective in vocabulary acquisition, and involve planning, monitoring and evaluating one's learning as well as setting specific goals, organizing learning plans and evaluating progress.

### I. Determination strategies

Determination strategies are of crucial importance in vocabulary acquisition as they enable learners to discover the meanings and uses of new words independently. Schmitt (1997) identifies nine strategies under this category, each tailored to improve learners' ability to determine word meanings through various means (Laufer, 1997; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 1997), as follows: 1. *Analyzing the part of speech*: Understanding the part of speech of a word helps learners to grasp its grammatical use and syntactic role in sentences. This strategy is essential for the correct use of new vocabulary in speaking and writing. Schmitt (1997) discusses the importance of helping learners understand contextual clues that can greatly improve their fluency; 2. *Analyzing affixes and roots*: By breaking words down into their roots, prefixes and suffixes, learners can derive meanings and make connections to other words. This morphological analysis is beneficial for building a richer vocabulary network; 3. *Checking for L1 cognates*: Recognizing cognates—words that look and sound similar in English and in the learner's first language—can accelerate vocabulary learning. However, this strategy also has its weaknesses, such as incorrect cognates, which can lead to misunderstandings; 4. *Analyzing any available pictures or gestures*: This can greatly facilitate word recognition and retention. This strategy links words to visual memory and helps learners to better remember the meanings; 5. *Guessing from textual context*: using contextual clues from the surrounding text to guess the meaning of a word is a crucial skill. It allows learners to continue reading without constantly consulting the dictionary, thus promoting fluency and confidence; 6. *Bilingual dictionary*: This tool is invaluable for beginners who need a direct translation of new words. While useful, overuse of bilingual dictionaries can prevent deeper engagement with the target language; 7. *Monolingual dictionary*: This encourages deeper immersion in the language and helps learners understand detailed definitions and examples of usage in English. This practice can improve comprehension and memorization; 8. *Word lists*: Regular repetition of word lists can help to consolidate vocabulary. However, this method can lose its appeal over time, which can limit deeper cognitive engagement with the language; 9. *Flashcards*: These are a popular means of memorization and can be particularly effective when combined with a technique in which words are repeated at increasingly shorter intervals.

Determination strategies are valuable for vocabulary acquisition but require careful adaptation. Their effectiveness varies according to learner and context. While analyzing parts of speech provides structural insights, it is not necessarily suitable for practical use (Nation, 2001). Bilingual dictionaries facilitate comprehension but may limit intensive engagement with the language (Laufer, 1997). Contextual guessing also requires higher levels of proficiency, which poses challenges for beginners. Therefore, it is important to match these strategies to individual learning styles to improve both depth and breadth of vocabulary (Pavadai & Shah, 2019). Teachers can support this by encouraging students to infer word meanings from context, a skill that is crucial for independent vocabulary development (Nation, 2001).

## II. Social strategies

Social strategies emphasize the role of interaction and communication in vocabulary learning. These strategies harness the power of social dynamics to facilitate the acquisition and consolidation of new vocabulary. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. This perspective underpins the following social strategies that encourage learners to interact with peers, teachers and native speakers to expand their vocabulary knowledge. Schmitt (1997) identifies eight strategies under this category (Schmitt, 1997; Slavin, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978), as follows: 1. *Asking the teacher for an L1 translation*: Asking the teacher to translate a word in the first language can lead to immediate understanding. However, this strategy can limit exposure to the target language and reduce the need for learners to engage cognitively with the new language; 2. *Asking the teacher for a paraphrase or synonym of the new word*: This helps learners understand the nuances of a word through explanations that may be simpler than dictionary definitions. It can increase learners' lexical flexibility by exposing them to synonyms and paraphrases; 3. *Asking the teacher for a sentence containing the new word*: This strategy allows learners to see how the word works in context, which promotes both comprehension and retention; 4. *Asking classmates for meaning*: Sharing knowledge among classmates can reinforce learning and allows students to learn from each other's insights and mistakes. It also creates a cooperative learning environment; 5. *Discovering new meanings through group work*: Group work encourages active engagement and discussion, which can lead to deeper understanding and retention of vocabulary; 6. *Studying and practicing meaning in a group*: Practicing new vocabulary in a group can help strengthen memory through repetition and use in conversation, making learning more engaging and practical; 7. *Checks of students' flashcards or word lists for accuracy by teachers*: Regular checks ensure accuracy and provide feedback, which is important for correcting errors and confirming

understanding; 8. *Interaction with native speakers*: Interaction with native speakers exposes learners to authentic language use and colloquial expressions, improving both cultural understanding and language proficiency.

Social strategies are effective for vocabulary learning, but difficult to implement in EFL classes as they depend on the quality of interaction and the engagement of the participants. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of interaction for cognitive development, but success often depends on the learners' linguistic competence. Interaction with native speakers, while valuable, may not be accessible to all learners. In addition, strategies such as asking for L1 translations provide quick comprehension but may prevent full immersion in the text. To use social strategies effectively, teachers should balance them with activities that promote independent language use and cognitive engagement. For example, group activities such as vocabulary scavenger hunts can promote both retention and practical application of language skills (Bilen & Tavil, 2015).

### III. Memory strategies

Memory strategies improve vocabulary retention through the use of various techniques that link new words to visual images, personal experiences or other mental associations. These strategies draw on different aspects of human cognition and make vocabulary learning more interesting and effective (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 1997). Schmitt (1997) outlines several such strategies that can significantly improve vocabulary retention., as follows: 1. *Learning a word with a visual representation of its meaning*: Associating words with corresponding images helps to anchor them in memory. This visual association is particularly beneficial for visual learners but may not be suitable for those who learn better by auditory or kinesthetic means; 2. *Imagining a word's meaning*: Creating a mental image of the meaning of a word can improve recall. However, this strategy may be less effective with abstract words that are difficult to visualize; 3. *Associating the word with a personal experience*: Associating new vocabulary with personal experiences can deepen memorization by making the learning process more meaningful. While this strategy is effective, it requires that learners have relevant experiences to associate with new words, which is not always possible; 4. *Associating the word with its coordinates*: Learning words in pairs or groups, such as coordinate pairs (words that share a category but are not synonyms, such as “apple and peach”), could build a network of related vocabulary. This method is useful but can become confusing if not well organized; 5. *Connecting the word to its synonyms and antonyms*: This strategy helps to understand the nuanced differences and similarities between words and promotes both vocabulary and critical thinking skills. However, it requires a basic knowledge of other words, which can be an obstacle for beginners;

6. *Using semantic maps*: Semantic maps visually organize the relationships between words and their meanings, categories, synonyms, or antonyms. They are effective for visual learners, but require careful construction so as not to overwhelm learners with too much information at once; 7. *Using “scales” for gradable adjectives*: This involves using scales to understand the intensity or degree of adjectives (e.g. hot, hotter, hottest). This is a practical approach, but it is limited to adjectives and not applicable to other word forms; 8. *Peg method*: This mnemonic method involves associating words with a previously learned “peg” system” (usually a familiar sequence such as numbers or the alphabet). It is very effective for sequential recall, but requires an initial investment of time to learn the pegs; 9. *Loci method*: Each new word is associated with a specific location in a familiar place (e.g. a room or a journey). This method is excellent for memorizing vocabulary lists, but may be impractical for everyday learning without structured review sessions; 10. *Grouping words to learn them*: Learning words in thematic or conceptual groups improves recall by creating mental connections between them. This method is simple but can lead to confusion if not well organized; 11. *Grouping words spatially on a page*: Arranging words visually on a page helps to create a spatial memory for the words. This is effective for visual learners, although less effective for those who prefer auditory learning styles; 12. *Using new words in sentences*: Using new vocabulary in sentences promotes contextual understanding and retention. This practical application provides a deeper embedding of the words, but requires a good understanding of grammar and sentence structure; 13. *Grouping words together within a storyline*: Learning words through narratives or stories makes the learning process engaging and memorable. However, it can be time-consuming to construct or find suitable stories; 14. *Studying the spelling of a word*: Focusing on the spelling helps to reinforce the visual form of the word, which is crucial for reading and writing. This method is simple but does not address the usage or pronunciation of the word; 15. *Learning the sound of a word*: Learning the phonetic aspects of a word improves pronunciation and listening comprehension. It is important for oral communication but does not help with meaning or spelling; 16. *Saying the new word aloud while learning*: Vocalizing words strengthens auditory memory and pronunciation. This technique is effective for auditory learners, but may be less useful in quiet learning environments; 17. *Image of word form*: Visualizing the written form of a word can facilitate recall, especially for visual learners. This strategy is less effective with abstract or non-visual words; 18. *Underlining the initial letter of the word*: This helps to draw attention to the visual identity of words, but may not have a significant impact on retention of other aspects; 19. *Configuration*: Studying the physical arrangement of letters in words can help with vocabulary recognition and recall, although it may be less helpful for understanding language use; 20.

*Using the keyword method:* Associating a new word with a familiar, similar-sounding keyword can improve memory. This method is creative, but can lead to confusion between the keyword and the actual vocabulary item; 21. *Memorizing affixes and roots:* Remembering words by their roots and affixes can help learners decode many words with common roots and increase their vocabulary efficiently; 22. *Recognising parts of speech :* Recognizing the grammatical category of words helps to use them correctly, improving both vocabulary and grammar knowledge; 23. *Paraphrasing the word meaning:* Paraphrasing the definition of the word in learners' own words promotes understanding and memorization. This method is effective, but requires a certain amount of knowledge to paraphrase accurately; 24. *Using cognates in study:* Studying cognates-words that look and sound similar in two languages-can accelerate vocabulary acquisition. Care must be taken to avoid confusion with incorrect cognates; 25. *Learning the words of an idiom together:* Learning all the words of an idiom as a unit helps to understand and use idiomatic expressions correctly. However, idioms can be culturally specific and difficult to memorize; 26. *Using a physical action when learning a word:* Associating words with actions improves memory through physical activity, which is especially effective for kinaesthetic learners, but may be impractical in traditional classrooms; 27. *Using semantic feature grids:* This involves arranging words in a grid based on semantic features (e.g. part of speech, nuances of meaning). Although this method helps to understand word relationships, it can be complex and overwhelm beginners.

Thus, memory strategies offer a variety of tools that can be adapted to different learning preferences to improve the retention and recall of new vocabulary. However, these strategies have their limitations and need to be used carefully to maximize their effectiveness. While visual aids such as pictorial representations or semantic feature grids are beneficial for visual learners, they may not be as effective for those who learn better through auditory or kinaesthetic methods (Norhasanah et al., 2022). Similarly, creative strategies such as the keyword method or physical actions can sometimes cause confusion or be impractical in certain learning environments. Therefore, educators should consider the specific needs and contexts of their learners when selecting and adapting memory strategies. It's also important to combine these strategies with other learning activities to create a balanced approach to vocabulary acquisition that goes beyond memorization to include practical application and deeper understanding of words.

#### IV. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies involve the active mental processing of language to improve comprehension and retention. These strategies are fundamental to vocabulary acquisition as they encourage learners to

engage directly with new words through various manipulative and reflective techniques. According to Schmitt (1997), cognitive strategies enable learners to actively and effectively consolidate their vocabulary knowledge. Schmitt (1997) identifies nine strategies under this category (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 1997), as follows: 1. *Verbal repetition*: Repeating words out loud helps to reinforce pronunciation and retention. To enhance this method, learners can repeat words in sentences to also practice using them in context. Although this is helpful, oral repetition can become monotonous and may not ensure deep comprehension if not combined with other strategies; 2. *Written repetition*: Writing words several times helps with memorization and spelling. Variations can include writing words in creative sentences or paragraphs. As with oral repetition, this strategy may not deeply embed word meaning unless it is used in conjunction with context-rich exercises; 3. *Word lists*: Repeating words from lists can help to memorize them quickly. To increase effectiveness, thematic categorization of words can improve recall. However, this strategy can lead to passive learning if it is not combined with more engaging activities; 4. *Flashcards*: The use of flashcards is very effective for repetition and self-testing. To maximize the benefits, learners can write example sentences or synonyms on the cards. Flashcards are useful but may not be sufficient to cover word usage in different contexts; 5. *Taking notes in class*: Note-taking helps learners to grasp new vocabulary in a meaningful learning context. An improvement to this technique could be to review and organize the notes regularly. However, it relies heavily on the learner's initial ability to quickly recognize and jot down relevant information (Nation, 2001); 6. *Using the vocabulary section in textbooks*: Engaging with structured vocabulary exercises in textbooks ensures systematic learning. To reinforce this, learners could create additional examples using the new words. This strategy is limited by the vocabulary selection of the textbook, which does not always match the specific needs of the learners; 7. *Listening to tapes with word lists*: Listening to recordings can improve pronunciation and auditory recognition. Combining this with speaking or writing responses to what is heard can deepen the learning effect. However, this method may not be suitable for learners who are less aurally inclined; 8. *Labeling physical objects with English names*: Labeling objects in the environment helps learners associate words with their physical equivalents. To encourage this method, using these objects in sentences can integrate these new vocabulary items into more complex language use. While this method is practical, it can lose its effectiveness if the vocabulary is not regularly updated or if used in isolation; 9. *Keeping a vocabulary notebook*: This encourages continuous exposure to new words. To enhance this strategy, learners can categorize words or reflect on their use in personal journal entries. However, the success of this strategy depends on the consistency and depth of the entries.

Cognitive strategies are crucial for active vocabulary acquisition, but they have their limits. Although they promote the retention and application of vocabulary, they often require a high level of motivation and can become monotonous, leading to withdrawal from the lesson (Schmitt, 1997). In addition, methods such as word lists and labeling objects, while initially useful, may not fully prepare learners for different contexts (Nation, 2001). To address these issues, educators should combine cognitive strategies with social and metacognitive approaches. In this way, a holistic learning experience can be created that goes beyond memorization and emphasizes meaningful communication and reflective practice, ultimately enabling learners to become effective communicators in the target language.

#### **V. Metacognitive strategies**

Metacognitive strategies are crucial for the development of self-awareness and self-control in vocabulary learning. These strategies involve planning, monitoring and evaluating one's own learning process, which can significantly increase the effectiveness and efficiency of vocabulary learning. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), metacognitive strategies enable learners to take control of their learning and adapt strategies to suit their personal learning style and goals. Schmitt (1997) identifies five strategies under this category (Nation, 2001; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Schmitt, 1997), as follows:

1. *Using English-language media (songs, movies, news programs, etc.):* Exposure to English-language media exposes learners to natural language use in a variety of contexts. To optimize this strategy, learners can choose media topics that interest them and actively memorize new vocabulary. While this method can significantly improve listening comprehension, it may be less effective for beginners who need structured language input;
2. *Testing oneself with word tests:* Self-testing is an effective way to strengthen memory and test vocabulary knowledge. To make best use of this strategy, learners can use different test formats, such as multiple-choice tests or cloze tests, which can help identify gaps in knowledge. However, relying too much on tests can lead to learning vocabulary for test purposes rather than for real-life application;
3. *Using spaced word practice:* Staggered practice of word recall has been shown to improve long-term retention performance. This strategy can be further improved by gradually increasing the intervals as the learner masters them. Although it is very effective, it requires discipline and consistent timing, which can be a challenge for some learners;
4. *Skipping or passing on a new word:* Sometimes learners choose to skip or pass over new words that seem less relevant or too difficult for them at the moment. This strategy can help maintain reading flow and reduce frustration. However, it can also lead to gaps in vocabulary if the words are not picked up again later;
5. *Continuing to learn words over time:* This is crucial for vocabulary to move from short-term to long-term memory. With this approach, the context and usage

situations should be varied to reinforce word knowledge. While this strategy is effective, it requires sustained effort and can be time consuming.

Metacognitive strategies that focus on self-regulation and self-assessment are crucial for promoting autonomous learning in vocabulary learning. These strategies give learners control over their learning but rely heavily on self-motivation and awareness (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). The use of English media, while engaging, can be too unstructured for less experienced learners and can lead to misunderstandings. Self-tests and timed practice encourage retention of what has been learned, but require consistent discipline, which can be challenging (Schmitt, 1997). If new words are skipped to maintain reading fluency, there is also a risk that important vocabulary will be forgotten. Therefore, while metacognitive strategies are invaluable for advanced learners, they need to be combined with structured approaches to ensure thorough vocabulary development at all levels.

### **Conclusion**

This article has provided an analysis of vocabulary learning strategies and categorized them into determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. While each of these strategies offers different benefits, the effectiveness of their application depends heavily on how well they are adapted to the different needs of EFL learners. However, as highlighted earlier, there are gaps in both research and classroom practice that need to be addressed. These gaps include the lack of tailored vocabulary instruction, inadequate teacher training and insufficient use of technology in vocabulary learning. To summarize, integrating these vocabulary learning strategies into EFL instruction provides a dynamic and responsive approach that not only expands learners’ vocabulary but also improves their overall language proficiency.

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