

## Impact of Vocabulary Learning Strategies on Gender Based ESL Learners in Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

The wide spectrum of English language compels readers to find out the exact crux of the language itself. English has won the status of international language. It has become a dire need of this age. The English language is comparatively difficult due to its pronunciation, sentence structure and vocabulary level from local languages in Pakistan. Vocabulary is the utmost aspect of learning a second language. It is the essence and soul of language. The language process depends on learning vocabulary. So the current paper investigates the impact of vocabulary learning strategies for the ESL learners in Pakistan. It was an experimental type of research. One hundred students of Grade-9 in the academic year 2019-20 participated in this study. The data was collected through test and questionnaire. The study results revealed that the students who were taught by the ESL learning techniques (semantic mapping, imaging and pics, visual and auditory, group association and word contact) performed better as compared with the students in the traditional vocabulary learning method. Female students performed better in the experimental group. ESL male learners used group association learning technique at priority, and ESL female learners used visual and auditory learning at their priority. The researchers recommend that English language teachers should use vocabulary learning strategies for teaching English to ESL learners.

## 1. Introduction

Pakistan is a developing country. Its literacy rate is not praiseworthy and is at a low level in the ranking list of literate countries. The situation is even worse in rural areas (Bhatti, 2016). The students, even after twelve years' education, are unable to get command over English Language (Kannan, 2009; Bhatti, 2016). Students just study to pass their exams, and most of them prepare specific areas of the syllabus (Warsi, 2004), which directly affects their learning. Language is a weapon for man. It has to be taught and used in social groups. The studies of Asyiah (2017) revealed that metacognitive and determination strategies were most preferred VLT selected by pupils while teachers often used contextual strategy. According to Jenpattarakul (2012), the techniques, like rote reiteration, meaningful sentences of vocabulary, use of pictures motivated students to learn the English language that increases their imagination and creativity.

In Early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the linguists and researchers paid their attention to gender differences in human language acquisition and explored the difference among gender in using vocabulary, communication, and syntax. Gender and language are the main study areas among applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and researchers in investigating different speech aspects related to gender (Tannen & Deborah, 2006). Gender difference in learning a language is related to psychology, physiology, and personal experiences.

Male students employed social strategies, while female students liked cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Wei, 2016). Premeditated vocabulary learning approaches are supposed to suit students' personal needs (Wei & Attan, 2013). It is the only way to speak with each other, and it is the way by which we can send our messages to others. It is not only used for routine dialogue but also used in education, research and science in spoken as well as in written form. Without it, man is like a dumb animal.

Proficiency over target knowledge of vocabulary can make our students powerful speakers, handsome listeners, good readers and writers. For learning any language, both the oral and written skills are of equal importance. The students' achievement in learning vocabulary is related to accurate vocabulary learning strategies (Yunus & Saifudin, 2019). For this purpose, there is a dire need of interaction among the learner, educator and the study material. In fact, English is being used worldwide as an international language and has become a Lingua Franca and a language of greater opportunities. It also enjoys a supreme status in society. Its sound knowledge is a successful passport for any job. The students are more motivated and engaged when they work in group activities to improve vocabulary in reading classes (Alghamdi, 2019). Basically, learning a second language is never easy. Learning of vocabulary is the very basic point to expertise it in the target language. Vocabulary

acquisition, vocabulary retention and vocabulary transfer are some confusing processes in learning vocabulary. No doubt, the role of vocabulary is very vital in order to language teaching and learning.

Mastery in the vocabulary will enable the students to enhance other skills well. Developing vocabulary is a confusing series of actions to achieve the results. It takes a long time to master English vocabulary. It makes the learning process more meaningful. Lack of vocabulary seems one of the major causes of the failure of our students. It is the major hindrance in the learning process, especially English. Academic English is essential for the success of ESL learners in school settings. It has been observed that in most of our public and private schools, the teachers teach the students only by the so-called traditional ways of teaching English vocabulary. Learners have to wrestle with new vocabulary, rules of grammar, pronunciation and more. In learning a second language, vocabulary is the most paramount part. It is the soul and essence of a language. It is also the first and leading stair in language acquisition. Its knowledge plays an important role in almost all areas of language. So, the whole process of learning a language depends on learning its vocabulary. English vocabulary is marvelous and becomes part and parcel of technology and social interaction.

The cognitive, social and psychological factors are involved in learning and retaining of vocabulary. The social indicators of students learning process are parents, peers and teachers who help in refining the learning process of the learners through different literary events. It has to be taught and used in social groups. It is the only way to speak with each other, and it is the way by which we can send our messages to others. It is not only used for routine dialogue but also used in education, research and science in spoken as well as in written form. Recently, network communities made the globalization much easier than ever. The vital role is being played through the English language. No part of the world is seen without understanding and speaking the English language. Trade, administration, social and educational problems are easily discussed in the English language. Most people convey their thoughts and perform a variety of functions in different situations.

Echoing on the above explanation, the present study seeing some gaps and sets its core objectives, namely; (1) to compare the achievement scores of students learning through ESL learning techniques and traditional methods. Then (2) to analyze the effective vocabulary learning strategies between ESL male and female learners. In the end, try (3) to offer strategies and tools to help students in learning new vocabulary. Nevertheless, this study also would like to seeks for (4) the male students' standard deviation and mean achievement of ESL learning techniques and (5) the female students' standard deviation and mean achievement of ESL learning techniques. Therefore, this present study will set an experimental study in

nature, which included both groups: experimental and control group.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Nature of Vocabulary**

The knowledge of words relevant to its meaning and explanations is called vocabulary (Schmitt, 2000). Vocabulary is the fundamental aspect of grasping a second language. The vocabulary learning process needs the abilities of retention, acquisition, and transfer of vocabulary (Schneider et al., 2002). According to Oxford (1990), language learning strategies are behaviours or techniques used by the learners in facilitation and acquisition of language. Language learning aspects must be considered during teaching vocabulary, which is: syntax, semantics and arranging of words. Every language has different meanings, sentence structure and arrangement of words which leads to several vocabulary learning issues.

Cognitive, social and psychological factors are involved in learning and retaining of vocabulary. The social indicators of students' learning process are parents, peers and teachers who help in refining the learning process of the learners through different literary events. Mobius (1904) (as cited in Na, 2016), presented the sex differences of the human brain. He observed that women are physiologically weak-minded than men as women skull is eight per cent less than men. Leonard (1998) (as cited in Na, 2016), found that the cerebral cortex related to complex thinking is thicker in women's brains than men's. The left cerebral hemisphere is dominant in females, which facilitates short-term memory and language communication while the right cerebral hemisphere is dominant in males and helps to enhance the analytical ability and comprehensive competence. The psychological difference revealed that male learners are adventurous, confident, independent and outspoken but careless, and females are delicate, quiet and irresolute. It means that male learners are better self-evaluators and self-recognizers. Douglas and Burman (2006) stated that boys speak later than girls. After one and a half year from birth, females have twice the vocabulary than males. Boys are apt at verbal reasoning. The females are good at grammar and spelling.

Gender issue in second language acquisition has achieved the vital acceptance and attention among researchers and linguists worldwide (Brantmeier, 2003; Young & Oxford, 1997), strategies of learning (Jimenez, 2003; Young & Oxford, 1997) production of errors (Jimenez, 1992). Different results have been achieved through the various researches carried out on that issue. Some studies supported males over females or vice versa, and even others revealed that gender is an irrelevant issue in foreign language acquisition. Regarding vocabulary acquisition, the gender role occupied a projecting place among scholars. Some studies that addressed gender differences mostly

related to a lexical acquisition. According to Boyle (1987), males are dominant over females in comprehension. Scarcella and Zimmerman (1998) also revealed that men performed better than women in the academic vocabulary recognition test. The studies of Lin and Wu (2003), Lynn et al. (2005), and Edelenbos and Vinje (2000), investigated the superiority of males over females in vocabulary knowledge of the foreign language. Unlike foreign scholars, Sunderland (2000) showed that women had better performance than men in a memory test. On the other hand, the findings of Jimenez and Terrazas (2005-2008) revealed a non-significant gender difference in a receptive vocabulary performance test. Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000) and Jimenez and Moreno (2004) showed that females performed higher than males in productive vocabulary. The empirical evidence found in favor of females in lexical availability test (Jimenez & Ojeda, 2009). Many studies had mixed results in vocabulary acquisition of foreign language (Jimenez, 2010). In identifying the role of gender in vocabulary learning strategies, Jimenez (2003) found that females were superior to males in qualitative and quantitative terms by using more strategies than males. The female students learn vocabulary rapidly than their male counterparts. However, male students incorporate more new words into lexicons than female students (Llach & Gallego, 2012).

Vocabulary is needed in learning a second language. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning is the first step for achieving the goal. According to Stoller and Grabe (1993), vocabulary development is essential for non-native and native learners. Kaivanpanah and Zandi (2009) revealed that first and second languages could not be learnt without a sound knowledge of vocabulary. Hulstijn (2005) told that without knowing the meanings of the words, understanding the text is strictly hampered. Quin and Irvings (1997) revealed that memorizing new and unrelated words is a difficult task. According to Wei (2007), long term retention is necessary for learning new vocabulary.

Vocabulary learning is the major grievance of ESL students. It is difficult for them to memorize the new vocabulary structures for a long time. The words are building blocks for learning a language. Words do not exist in isolated form. They are interwoven to achieve listening and reading understanding to share the ideas in writing and speaking process. Oxford (1990) proposed six learning strategies. They are: retrieving and remembering, cognitive strategy, meta-cognitive strategy, compensation, affective and social strategy. In short, internal and external factors are responsible for learning. The internal factors concern age, motivation, intelligence, attitude, personality and aptitude. As for the external factors, they refer to the learning environment, teaching methods, social background and evaluation.

Oxford and Scarcella (1994) identified many approaches for the teaching of vocabulary based on learners' needs, motivation and difficulty. In the past, vocabulary was taught in the class unsystematically that learners learnt the vocabulary without the guidance of their teachers. The new and modern approach made the learners learn vocabulary systematically with the help of words which students use frequently. Nation (2001) contends that learning strategies of vocabulary are part of general teaching.

## 2.2 Word Meaning Theory

There exists a basic structure behind every word, fixed meaning and fuzzy meaning. In fixed meaning, the learners acquire the core meaning of a word, and the fuzzy meaning is not concerned with fixed meaning (Aitchison, 2003). They are constructed into planning information and process.

## 2.3 Techniques of Vocabulary Retention (TVRs)

Oxford and Crookall (1990) proposed a few memory strategies to help learners in recovering and storing new information

- a) Grouping Association: Grouping is easier to remember new words. For example, (nouns, verbs), semantic (statements) or themes (words about situations). New words based on old memory concepts like, "erroneous mean is mistaken" the students cannot associate with "error".
- b) Words Context Technique: New words are placed in long-term memory with the help of meaningful dialogues and sentences in a story.
- c) Using Imagery: Meaningful imagery is helpful for new language information.
- d) Semantic Mapping: Related words are arranged by means of arrows and lines in semantic mapping.
- e) Visual and Auditory Learning: Similar sounds help new language words incorporating mother language. The learners create auditory links with the familiar and new word through a visual link. They may be memorized by using rhymes.

Repeating novice words are pronounced loudly in sentences to improve retention skills. It is done by reading newspapers and magazines. Moreover, Flashcards may be used to develop interest among learners. Other methods include matching, filling the blanks; prefixes and suffixes exercises. Students may learn many new words but unable to retain in long term memory. The current study is undertaken to help ESL learners in retaining and learning vocabulary through effective learning techniques used to learn new words. The core objectives of the study are to compare the achievement scores of students learning through ESL learning techniques and traditional methods. And also to analyze the effective vocabulary learning strategies between ESL male and female learners. To offer strategies and tools to help students in learning new vocabulary.

**3. Method**

The current study was experimental in nature which included both groups: experimental and control group. In addition, a questionnaire was filled up by teachers about their experience regarding ESL vocabulary learning strategies.

Secondary level ESL learners of Bahawalpur City were those concerned with this study. The data was collected from ESL learners of secondary level in the academic year 2019-20. The study was limited to Bahawalpur City only.

In this study, one hundred students from Govt. S. D. High School, Bahawalpur and Workers Welfare High School (Girls) participated. ESL learners from Grade-9 were selected randomly. Among the overall one hundred students, fifty belonged to the control group, and the other half belonged to the experimental group. Each group had equal participation of male and female students. The following research tools were used to collect the data from the respondents are Questionnaire for teachers, pre-test and post-test for students.

The test was used to collect the data to find out the level of vocabulary from the respondents. There were both open-ended and close-ended questions. The instrument, Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) developed by Schmitt (1997, 2000) was used for the study. The vocabulary learning strategies were memory, determination, cognitive, social, and meta-cognition. The second instrument, Vocabulary Level Test (VLT) by (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001) was used by the researchers for measuring vocabulary size of students. It was easy to administer. Test and questionnaires were the research tools used for this study. Questionnaire was delivered to the teachers about their teaching experiences. Their result was also collected on the same questionnaire as their performance.

**4. Findings**

**4.1 The Comparison between Students Learning Through ESL Learning Techniques and Traditional Methods**

**Table 4.1** The comparison of performance under control and experimental groups

Respondents	Frequency	Mean	Std. D	t	p
Control Group	50	57.12	11.82		
Experimental Group	50	62.72	12.12	-2.338	.021*

\*P<0.05

Table 4.1 discovered an apparent distinction in students' performance between control and experimental groups under ESL learning strategies. The two groups had an apparent distinction between

them. The mean achievement score of the control group is (M= 57.12, SD= 11.82) and the experimental group is (M=62.72, SD=12.12) with (p value<0.05) shows that experimental group had better achievement score as compared with the control group. So the research question, "How to compare the achievement scores of students learning through ESL learning techniques and traditional methods?" can be answered by the affirmative.

**4.2 Analysis of The Effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies Between Male and Female ESL Learners**

**Table 4.2** Student' performance under ESL learners' strategies in experimental group n=50

Students	N	Mean	Std. D	t	p
Male	25	56.98	11.41		
Female	25	62.86	12.44	-2.462	.016*

\*P<0.05

In table 4.2, there was an apparent distinction in students' performance between male and female under ESL learning strategies. It is obvious that there is an apparent difference in both genders. The achievement of males is (M= 56.98, SD= 11.41) and females (M=62.86, SD=12.44) with (p value<0.05) showed that female respondents performed better as compared with male respondents. So the research question, "How to analyze the effective vocabulary learning strategies between ESL male and female learners?" can be answered by the affirmative.

**4.3 The Strategies and Tools to Help Students in Learning New Vocabulary**

**Table 4.3** Mean score of overall learning strategies among ESL learners

	Semantic Mapping	Word Context Technique	Using Imagery/ Pics	Group Association	Visual & Auditory Learning
Mean	3.57	3.62	3.64	3.65	3.76
Std. Dev.	1.32	.77	.85	.79	1.04

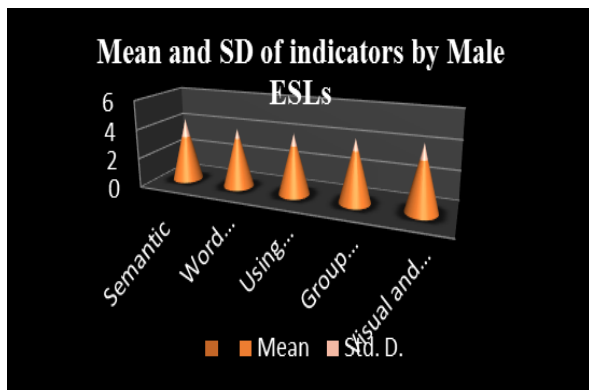
It is evident from table 4.3 that the most useful learning technique among ESL learners was visual and auditory learning technique. The second learning technique was a group association for the students. The third ESL learning technique was using imagery. Word context technique was the fourth important indicator for ESL learners at the school level. The last technique that was used by the students was semantic mapping.

**4.4 The Mean of Achievement Score and Standard Deviation of ESL Learning Techniques for Male Students**

**Table 4.4** Mean score of male students learning strategies among ESL learners n=25

Tests	Semantic Mapping	Word Context Technique	Using Imagery	Group Association	Visual & Audit. Learn.
Mean	3.093	3.343	3.272	3.400	3.325
Std. D.	1.25	.67	.82	.79	1.01

Table 4.4 illustrates that the most useful learning technique among ESL male learners was group association learning technique. The second learning technique was the word context for the students. The third ESL learning technique was visual and auditory learning. The fourth technique was using imagery. The last technique that was used by the male students was semantic mapping. It is evident from the bar graph below.



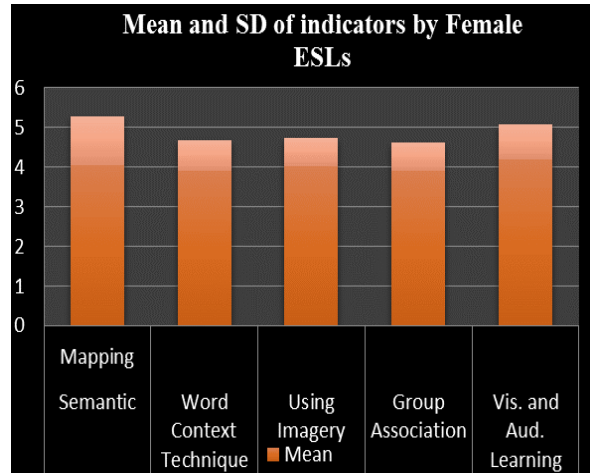
**Figure 4.1** Mean and SD of indicators by male ESLs

#### 4.5 The Mean Achievement Score and Standard Deviation of ESL Learning Techniques for Female Students.

**Table 4.5** Mean Score of Female Students Learning Strategies among ESL Learners n=25

	Semantic Mapping	Word Context Technique	Using Imagery	Group Association	Vis. & Audit. Learn.
Mean	4.053	3.910	4.015	3.913	4.195
Std. D.	1.225	.762	.726	.718	.888

The above table demonstrates that the most useful learning technique among ESL female learners was visual and auditory learning. The second technique used by female students was semantic mapping. The third technique was using imagery. The fourth one was a group association learning technique. The last technique used by female ESL students was word context. It is evident from the bar graph below.



**Figure 4.2** Mean and SD of indicators by female ESLs

### 5. Discussion

As stated earlier, a questionnaire was also prepared to check teachers' views about the strategies to improve the vocabulary of ESL learners. Teachers told that when they provided their students' proper guideline, their students took more interest in learning vocabulary items. They considered themselves part of that activity and took part fully. At the same time, 80% of teachers told that they found their students more confident. 89% of teachers agreed that the use of vocabulary learning strategies through different activities had a positive impact on the minds of the students. 100% of teachers strongly agreed that secondary level students' vocabulary skill was improved with the help of vocabulary learning strategies. The study supported the findings of the previous studies like Alqahtani (2015) that communicative competence has good vocabulary knowledge. The successful learners responded well during interaction with second language learners. According to Teng (2014), vocabulary learning has proved a successful communication. The study of Davoudi and Chavosh (2016) affirmed that comprehension improved the vocabulary knowledge of learners.

A significant difference in students' performance between control and experimental groups under ESL learning strategies was found. The mean achievement score of the control and the experimental group showed that the experimental group had better achievement score as compared with the control group. There was an apparent distinction in students' performance between male and female under ESL learning strategies. The achievement score of male students and female students shows that female students have performed better as compared with male students. The current study supported the findings of the studies Yunus and Saifudin (2019) that students' achievement in learning vocabulary is related to accurate vocabulary learning strategies.

The overall most useful learning technique among ESL learners was visual and auditory learning technique. The second learning technique was a group association for the students. The third ESL learning technique was using imagery. Word context technique was the fourth important indicator for ESL learners at the school level. The last technique that was used by the students was semantic mapping.

ESL male learners used group association learning technique at priority while ESL female learners used visual and auditory learning. The second learning technique used by the male learners was word context, whereas the female learners used semantic mapping. The third technique used by male learners was visual and auditory learning, while the female learners used imagery. The fourth technique of the male students was using imagery while the female learners were group association learning technique. The last technique used by the male students was semantic mapping, whereas female students used word context.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop gender based vocabulary learning strategies of secondary level students through different strategies. After the data analysis of the results of both groups, it was proved that various activities and strategies were fruitful and full of entertainment for the students during the experiments. The study also supported the findings of Wei (2016) that male students were more unwilling and independent to be dominated, and they have underprivileged vocabulary because they dislike the study of routine language. Female students improved their language competence via note-taking and dialogue reciting. Therefore, it has been demonstrated that there is a significant difference in the results of pre-test conducted before teaching the lessons according to the plan of researchers and post-test after the favourable accomplishment of the research tasks. It is a fact that gender-based vocabulary learning strategies are perfect means for the secondary level students to improve their vocabulary. It can be concluded that when a teacher creates a learning environment in the classroom by using interesting vocabulary learning strategies, then naturally, the students' response is positive.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the current research findings, the following recommendations were made:

There is a dire need to develop vocabulary. So, vocabulary must be given more importance in language teaching to get mastery over the language being taught. The researchers further recommend that English language teachers should use different strategies for teaching English in general and for improving vocabulary in particular at the secondary level. They should also motivate their students to work through pair and group in the classroom.

Public schools should be equipped with libraries, language labs and audio-visual materials such as tape recorder, video-player, overhead projector, multi-media, and such facilities may properly be used for developing the vocabulary of secondary level students. Nevertheless, researchers should develop students' vocabulary by giving them exposure to the new phrases and words they might encounter.

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