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The effect of semantic mapping strategy on EFL learners' vocabulary learning

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Abstract

Vocabulary is the basic access to language; however, language beginners may not be good at applying methods to help them memorize words. The main objective of this study was to compare the effect of semantic mapping strategy on forty Iranian EGP learners' vocabulary mastery. The participants were randomly assigned to a control group that received traditional direct translation and the treatment group that received instruction on semantic mapping. In order to assess the efficiency of the strategy, a pre-test and post-test was administrated to both groups. The results show that using semantic mapping strategy resulted in a significant difference in the participants' vocabulary learning.

Keywords: semantic mapping strategy; direct translation; vocabulary learning strategy

Introduction

Vocabulary is central to language and is of great significance to language learners (Zimmerman, ۱۹۹۸)

Vocabulary is the basic access to a language. It is the foundation of a pyramid. Without words, there would be no language structures. Words are the building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, ideas without which people cannot convey the intended meaning (Nation, ۲۰۰۴). The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recently recognized by theorists and researchers in the field.

Accordingly, numerous types of approaches, techniques, exercises and practice have been introduced into the field to teach vocabulary (Schmitt, ۲۰۰۰). It has been suggested that teaching vocabulary should not only consist of teaching specific words but also aim at equipping learners with strategies necessary to expand their vocabulary knowledge (Hulstijn, ۱۹۹۳, cited in Morin & Goebel, ۲۰۰۱).

As Nation (۲۰۰۴) notes, memory strategies, one kind of the language learning strategies, are considered vital in vocabulary teaching. Oxford (۱۹۹۰) advocated that memory strategies are regarded as "powerful mental tools" for language learners to cope with vocabulary learning difficulties, because they "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p.۸). Johnson and Obi (۱۹۹۳) also claimed that the use of mnemonic strategies may help learning disabled students in the area of spelling and benefit their long-term memory of vocabulary. Wu and Chang (۲۰۰۵) also revealed that memory is the essential medium for learning and gaining knowledge and also supported that teaching students memory strategies would