

Reducing Memorization by EFL Undergraduates, Hajjah University – Yemen



Education

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Mustafa Mansoor Yahya
Altaj

International Student Centre S.R.T.M University, Nanded – India.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at clarifying the main strategies used by Yemeni EFL learners to reduce memorization and beliefs about the role of rote learning in English vocabulary learning from their studies. It also attempts to evaluate the effect of the drawbacks on the process of learning and comes up with some suggested solutions for these drawbacks resulted by memorization. In addition many conclusions can be drawn from this quick survey. We can highlight our study upon the following points: First, the learners should read the material before coming to class in groups or individually to become familiar with content and facilitate comprehension of material. Second, it will focus on the amount of the information that learners already have before coming to the classroom. The role of the teacher will be taken into consideration that he/she focuses on the learners need for memorization. Furthermore, the methodology adapted by teachers will be taken into account to minimize the process of memorization.

Introduction

It is truly that Yemeni learners depend mainly upon memorization while studying English as a foreign language. They are not provided with enough opportunities to deal with English not as only a subject, but also as a tool of communication. They don't use it either in the classroom or outside the classroom. They deal with it as if it is a content course. That is because their teachers and environment don't encourage them to practice English as a language. Furthermore, the common method of teaching English, in schools and even in some universities, is only translating into their mother language. This way of teaching might not be sufficient or appropriate for language acquisition. A majority of learners are asked by their teachers to memorize certain content of grammatical rules for exam during the course. In the exam, the learners write down what they have already memorized at home. The exams are, thus, memory-based rather than application, process-based or skills-based.

Language learning strategies

Foreign language or second language learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning quicker, easier, more pleasant, more self-sufficient, more transferable, or more helpful to new situations Oxford, (1990, p8). In the process of identifying and improving language learning strategies, many studies deal with vocabulary learning because of the growing awareness of the significance of vocabulary. Investigation into the specific area of memory strategies in vocabulary learning has mainly been conducted with emphasis on the storage and retrieval process. These strategies consist of two parts:

1- learning strategies: Mayer (1988) states that it is more especially defined learning strategies as "behaviors of a learner that are intended to influence how the learner processes information" (p.11). Whereas the literary definitions show the roots of learning strategy in cognitive discipline, with its core suppositions that human beings process information and that learning involves such information processing. Clearly, learning strategies are involved in all learning, regardless of the content and context. Learning strategies are thus used in learning and teaching science, math, languages, history and other subjects, together in classroom and more informal learning surroundings.

2- Memory strategies

Memory strategies are based on simple principles like laying things out in order, reviewing, and making society. These main beliefs are engaged when a learner faces challenges of vocabulary learning. The use of memory strategies are most frequently applied in the beginning process of language education. Memory strategy consists of studying word with pictorial representation of its meaning, imaging word meaning, and connecting word to a personal experience. This method not only associating the word with its coordinates, correlating the vocabulary, it also

helps in using semantic maps, antonyms and synonyms. Oxford (1990) pointed out "Memory strategies, sometimes called mnemonics, have been used for thousands of years" (p38). Schmitt (1997) mentioned that "Most memory strategies involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned awareness, using some form of descriptions, or grouping". Gray (1997) cited "Mnemonics was not regarded to be just skill of simple memorization, rigorous art which required imagination, good mind, but rather a true, and effort". Further literature papers shows that rote learning may also be one of the memory strategies, seeing that it can memory as well.

- a. **Rote learning:** memory, habit, or remembered, rather than comprehension. To learn anything by memorizing or rote learning means learning something in order to be able to repeat it from memory rather than learning it. Moore (2000) declared rote learning is a strategy involving repetition and memorization. Rote learning is basically a simple and passive process. However, it does illustrate some issues that are relevant to more complex learning issues. Gairns & Redman (1986) indicated that rote learning is a memorization technique which has a long history in language learning.
- b. **Repetition:** Oxford (1990) categorized repetition into cognitive groups, defining it as saying or doing something over and over: listening to something several times, rehearsing and simulating a native speaker.
- c. **Practice** refers to strategies which contribute to the storage and retrieval of language while focusing on truth of usage. Practice implicates strategies such as: rehearsal, repetition, and experimentation, imitation, consideration to detail, and application of rules.
- d. **Memorization** also refers to strategies which focus on the storage and retrieval of language; therefore some of the strategies, such as drill and repetition, used for practice are the same as memorization strategies. Nevertheless, in the case of memorizing, attention is paid to the storage and repetition process.

Objectives of the study:

The present study includes the following objectives.

- 1- To investigate the main drawbacks and shortcomings of the strategy of memorization in the process of learning for undergraduates in Hajjah University.
- 2- To evaluate the effect of these drawbacks on the process of learning.
- 3- To come up with some suggested solutions for these drawbacks resulted by memorization.
- 4- To provide a simple attempt in widening knowledge within the area of language learning and trying to add some work which might be of benefit for the learners of English as a foreign language in Yemen, namely Hajjah University.

Participants

The participants in the study were regular attendants of Haj-

jah University in Yemen and were enrolled in their (1-2 and 3) year of study. They were enrolled in the English Language and Literature program at the University and were taking the Methodology in English Language Teaching course. They were mixed of male and female learners. About 100 EFL learners participated in this study. All the learners in the study were on a B Ed. degree course in the English Department, at Hajjah University, Yemen. This means that only learners involved in English department participated in this study. The reason was very simple; it was just the researcher's convenience in the English Department of that chosen university to collect the data. The research tool used for the present study was a structured questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

There were a total of 18 questions in the questionnaire. Questions 1- 8, and 9-18 related to learners attitudes towards memorization and retention. Questions 9 -18 related to learners participation in class, the perceived effectiveness of classroom strategies and whether strategies encouraged them to memorize or understand and retain information. For these questions, learners were given statements and asked to answer using the following five ratters: A (Always), B (Often), C (Sometimes) and D (Never). The questionnaire was designed to get learners perceptions of the effectiveness of the major teaching strategies used in the classes.

A basic pen and paper method was used by learners to complete the questionnaires. Questionnaire results are total percentages for all classes combined. Male and female percentages of all classes were analyzed as well.

Procedure of data collection:

Study took place over the course of three semesters in three different levels. Learners were of level one in the first semester. Also, learners of level two in the third semester and learners of level three in the fifth semester as well. The same questionnaire was distributed in each level in a similar manner; the teaching strategies implemented were based on strategies that had been recommended in the literature and that had been deemed effective in previous semesters.

In this context, the researcher made a distinction to learners between memorization and retention. Memorized material was explained as material stored (usually for the short term) with no connection to any previous concepts and no expectation that learners would make any connections to new situations related to what was memorized. Retained material on the other hand, was explained as material that was understood so that it can be retrieved over the long term, it would be connected to previous knowledge and learners would be expected to make connections with the material learned. Learners were given a questionnaire to fill out at the end of each semester with questions related to class activities and their experiences. The focus was on their perceptions of whether the strategies prompted them to memorize or understand and retain material. In addition, at the end of each semester, each class was asked as a group to give feedback on the course, and their answers were documented. A total of 100 questionnaires were completed between male and female: 30 each from level one; 40 from level two and 30 from level three.

Findings

The study presents the important findings that the researcher got from the questionnaire. After analyzing the data, the researcher has provided the following findings:

1. (72%) of learners should read the material before coming to class because this will help them understand and retain information. Researcher suggests that reading before coming to class gives learners the opportunity to become familiar with content which facilitates comprehension of material.
2. (48%) of learners decreased memorization in classes, activities should involve indentifying and clarifying important

information and concepts and making sure they were understood.

3. (65%) of learners reported that questions asked in classes helped learners understand and retain information.
4. (72%) of learners emphasized that activities introduced by the teachers in classrooms should require learners to practice memorization because it is necessary in some cases.
5. (49%) of learners reported that their teachers often raise questions in the classes and they in turn answer those questions but most of the questions are of memorization nature.
6. (68%) of learners emphasized on preparation and reading before classes either in groups or individually are very helpful to learners.
7. The learners voiced out the problem of this type of teaching assuming that their teachers (69%) ask them to memorize information. This clarifies the nature of teaching being provided in the Yemeni classes. It is concluded that this type of teaching depends on memorization and it needs to be minimized to get some other effective teaching.
8. (76%) of learners explained the benefit they gained from the class in memorization way saying that at the beginning of the course, they thought of it as unusual, strange class because they never tried to figure out or think in class's they had before. In their exams, they found that a lot of information or let them say all information were clear and they connected to all what was said, done in class with the information they had.
9. (49%) of learners reported that they feel confidence, happy and comfortable when their teacher helps them understand the lessons without need for memorization.
10. (87%) of learners also added that they were happy when they had to answer according to their understanding, and to write down on exams in their own words not to memorize every word and write it down.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended here that the teachers in the Yemeni schools should pay more attention to the way they teach and to create a new environment of teaching in their schools.
- It is recommended also that other studies should be conducted to uncover the reality of teaching in our schools and pinpoint the drawbacks of the current methods of teaching.
- Schools administration should help providing a good atmosphere for the change in the way of teaching.
- Memorization is a strategy of teaching but it should get its normal limit in order not to affect the process of teaching.
- Teachers should read such concerned studies because these studies may help them change their mind about the way they teach and this will step by step help in developing the field of teaching.
- Developing the field of teaching is a corner stone in any development process in any country and this is also the case in Yemen.

Conclusion

Using one of the strategies mentioned above would contribute in reducing memorization of English Yemeni learners because the broaden learner's perceptiveness. Further, they enable learners to master language easily and make them active participants in a very interesting effective process of learning. Through them, learner could save time and efforts and could improve their ability of memorization. So, learners understanding about learning strategies and their beliefs are a very important because they help in underlying their strategy choice. To understand the reason why Yemeni EFL learners use rote learning, it is vital to understand Yemeni learners' beliefs about the role of rote learning in learning.

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