

Investigating Business English vocabulary learning strategies employed by 2nd-year students of Annaba Higher School of Management Sciences

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Abstract. This study aimed to unpack Business English vocabulary learning strategies, the effect of non-mastery of vocabulary learning strategies on the four language skills, and the difficulties encountered in learning Business English vocabulary among 2nd-year students of Annaba Higher School of Management Sciences. Forty (40) students responded to the Google Forms questionnaire. Adopting a Friedman test to compare the frequency of use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies such as extensive reading, memorisation, note taking, dictionary use, speaking aloud and listening to media. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in usage frequency ($\chi^2 = 16.37$, $p = 0.022$). Descriptive SPSS analysis revealed that the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary affected the participants' four language skills: speaking, writing, listening and reading. SPSS Pearson correlation analysis revealed a very weak positive correlation ($r = 0.131$) between two variables: the effect of non-mastery of Business English vocabulary on speaking skill and the effect of mastery of Business English vocabulary on reading skill. Cochran's Q test revealed significant statistical results ($Q = 25.98$, $p < 0.001$) regarding the difficulties participants encountered when learning Business English vocabulary, such as understanding Business English terms, spelling, and pronouncing new terms. The study suggests that teachers should identify students' preferred Business English vocabulary learning strategies to guide them in using those strategies efficiently for enhancing their English language mastery and communication proficiency.

Keywords: Business English, vocabulary learning strategies, effective communication

1. Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the key tools of using any language effectively when speaking, reading, listening or writing it [12]. In fact, students worldwide have shown an increasing interest in employing various strategies to enhance their vocabulary mastery and acquisition [22]. Having rich vocabulary knowledge helps learners communicate effectively both inside and outside the classroom. It boosts their academic success by helping them achieve high grades, and it leads to their success in professional life as they effectively communicate in the workplace. Additionally, according to Khany and Khosravian [7], students who lack sufficient vocabulary or effective vocabulary learning strategies are more likely to encounter difficulties throughout their educational careers, which can lead to academic failure.

Researchers have considered that vocabulary mastery exceeds the importance of grammar because, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. Lessard-Clouston [10] viewed vocabulary as the number words of a language in various forms conveying a particular meaning. In the same context, Neuman and Dwyer [14] confirmed that vocabulary is concerned with the number of words needed for efficient communication, including both expressive and receptive vocabulary. Language learning and mastery

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Educational
Dimension



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cannot occur without vocabulary learning and acquisition, as they enable learners to use the language effectively and communicate with confidence.

Furthermore, Ur [21] confirmed that vocabulary is one of the most important things to be taught in learning a foreign language, because it is impossible to speak without a variety of words. Indeed, the variety of words allows the reader to comprehend, as it is not possible to understand a text without a large vocabulary. Nation [13] opined that readers need to know the maximum number of vocabulary in a text for an adequate understanding of it.

As a result, the more vocabulary items are acquired and mastered, the more comprehension can be achieved. This is because meaning is expressed and understood by the number of words that are known and not by grammar knowledge. Henceforth, efficient communication cannot be possible without having enough vocabulary acquisition.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Vocabulary learning strategies

Vocabulary learning has been regarded as the most important part of second or foreign language acquisition. Vocabulary learning is the heart of mastering a foreign language, since one cannot communicate either in written form or in spoken form a foreign language without having an acceptable knowledge of vocabulary [16]. In learning vocabulary, learners employ various techniques and strategies.

Vocabulary learning strategies have been classified in various taxonomies. Rubin and Thompson [16], Schmitt [18] and Nation [13] are few examples of vocabulary learning strategies taxonomies. Rubin and Thompson's taxonomy of vocabulary acquisition processes, as presented in [16], can be broken down into three primary categories or approaches, each employing different techniques during vocabulary learning: the direct approach, the mnemonics approach, and the indirect approach. Every approach employs its own techniques, such as speaking words and repeating them loudly, which belongs to the direct approach; organising words according to grammatical class in the mnemonics approach; and deducing word meaning from the context in the indirect approach.

Schmitt [18] created a more thorough taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies by suggesting five categories: social, cognitive, memory, determination, and metacognition. These five categories fall into two primary classes: consolidation and discovery. The consolidation primary class includes memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies, whereas the discovery class includes determination and social strategies.

Recently, technological advances, primarily the internet and artificial intelligence-supported tools, have integrated technology, cognitive science, and learner autonomy into vocabulary learning strategies to enhance learners' attainment levels. According to Huang et al. [6], recent studies have focused on immersion and interaction in promoting autonomous vocabulary acquisition that are fostered by modern learning tools and software, such as gamification and interactive electronic books. According to Lee and Choi [9], modern vocabulary strategies that integrate feedback and repetition have shown a significant contribution to learning vocabulary. Syairofi, Suherdi and Purnawarman [19] suggested that modern platforms, such as WhatsApp and language learning applications, expose learners to and drive the retention of a significant number of vocabulary items.

Consequently, the variety of vocabulary learning strategies offers learners a wider range of options to enhance their vocabulary acquisition. Learners should be encouraged to use various vocabulary learning strategies for effective language learning. Language teachers should include vocabulary learning strategies in their lesson plans. They should also encourage learners to use these strategies autonomously.

2.2. Business English vocabulary

Business English vocabulary belongs to specialised vocabulary that has always been a key issue in the teaching of English for Specific Purposes [13]. Indeed, and according to Robinson [15], the ESP course involves specialist language and content. To become familiar with this specialist language, ESP learners must be acquainted with technical or business vocabulary related to their area of study or interest.

Business English is a sub-branch of English for Specific Purposes, distinguished from other branches by its unique features. According to Ellis and Johnson [2], Business English should be distinguished from other types of ESP because it focuses on both specific and general content that allows learners to meet job area requirements while communicating effectively.

In fact, linguistic proficiency requires the knowledge and acquisition of Business English vocabulary. In this context, Guffey and Seefer [5, p. 441] suggested that: “In the business world, where precise communication is extremely important, surveys show a definite correlation between vocabulary size and job performance”. Alternatively, the accuracy of business vocabulary facilitates efficient communication and contributes to success in the workplace.

2.3. Recent studies about vocabulary learning strategies and research gap

Among the recent studies conducted on vocabulary learning strategies in a Business English context, the study by Thanannathaphak and Palanukulwong [20] is notable. In this study, the authors aimed to investigate the receptive vocabulary size of Business English students and their use of vocabulary learning strategies. This research found that determination strategies were the type most frequently employed by the students.

In 2021, Martins and Ferro [11] conducted research on vocabulary learning strategies in a Business English context, with a specific focus on students majoring in accounting. The authors found that the participants in this study employed various strategies for learning accounting vocabulary, including meta-cognitive and determination-based approaches such as dictionary use, learning words from specific texts, and applying new words in everyday conversation.

However, due to the prevalence of artificial intelligence in education, it is worth citing the study of Aravantinos et al. [1]. Although their study targeted the use of AI in primary education, its focus on learning content and language learning using AI tools can provide insights into using AI tools in learning Business English vocabulary in a business context, as well as investigating how AI tools contribute to enhancing the learning of Business English vocabulary. Furthermore, Lavidas et al. [8] have investigated the factors that explain the use of AI tools in higher education, such as expected performance and habit. This study can provide a pathway for research on vocabulary learning strategies utilising artificial intelligence tools.

Regarding vocabulary learning strategies in the English as a foreign language context, Ghalebi, Sadighi and Bagheri [4] conducted a comparative study between master's students and doctoral students on the use of vocabulary learning strategies. The findings of their research concluded that there are important differences between the two target populations, which may be due to individual differences in vocabulary learning among students.

In the Algerian context, Sadek and Mebtouche Nedjai [17] investigated the degree of use of vocabulary learning strategies among 150 undergraduate Algerian students in a recent study. Their study revealed that determination strategies are highly used by the study participants after assessing the data using Schmitt [18]'s taxonomy [18].

Furthermore, Fatmi and Dahmani [3] investigated how EFL students study new vocabulary to enhance their lexical competency. Their study revealed that vocabulary expansion is often achieved through media, particularly through communication with

native speakers and listening to broadcasts.

Consequently, and as far as the Algerian and Business English contexts are concerned, a research gap exists regarding vocabulary learning strategies. The research gap may be due to the lack of studies that have investigated Business English vocabulary learning strategies in Algeria, particularly at Higher Schools of Management Sciences. Therefore, the current study aims to fill this research gap by investigating how Algerian management students employ vocabulary learning strategies to enhance their effective communication in a business context. The study addressed five research questions:

RQ1: Do the participants use strategies and techniques in learning Business English vocabulary items?

RQ2: Does the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary affect the four language skills?

RQ3: How are the participants using the vocabulary learning strategies?

RQ4: What are the difficulties that the participants encounter in learning Business English vocabulary?

RQ5: What are the possible solutions to those difficulties that may enhance Business English vocabulary learning and acquisition?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining descriptive statistics (SPSS), the Friedman test, the Pearson correlation test, and Cochran's Q test to address the research questions focused on the participants' use of vocabulary learning strategies, the difficulties encountered by the participants when learning Business English vocabulary, and the possible solutions to those difficulties. The study has not opted for a qualitative approach because the research questions require a descriptive approach that leads to identifying how the participants employ vocabulary learning strategies.

3.2. The participants

The participants in this study are forty (40) second-year students studying at Annaba Higher School of Management Sciences in Algeria. The female participants comprise 80% of the sample, whereas the male participants make up 20%. The participants' ages range from 19 to 20 years. The total number of second-year students at this school for the 2023/2024 university year is eighty (80) students. Therefore, the participants represent 50% of the total number of students under study. The participants have studied English at this school for two years during the foundation programme to enhance their mastery of Business English, enabling them to excel in their field, which is Economics.

3.3. Research instrument, data collection and analysis procedure

To conduct the study, a structured questionnaire was designed and administered via Google Forms. The participants have been asked to provide consent and complete the Google Forms questionnaire to facilitate this research on vocabulary learning strategies. The online questionnaire was emailed to all 2nd-year students ($n = 80$), and after a one-month waiting period, 40 online responses were received. The study took place from May 2024 to December 2024. The questionnaire included thirteen (13) questions. They are a mixture of yes-no categorical questions, multiple-choice questions, ranking questions, and open-ended questions.

To analyse the frequency of use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, a Friedman test was applied. To analyse the impact of non-mastery of Business English vocabulary on the four language skills, descriptive SPSS analysis and Pearson correlation analysis were employed. To analyse participants’ difficulties in learning Business English vocabulary, Cochran’s Q test was applied.

4. Results

4.1. RQ1: Do the participants use strategies and techniques in learning Business English vocabulary items?

The binomial test indicated that 45% of participants reported using strategies in learning Business English vocabulary ($p = 0.785$). This proportion was not significantly greater than the 50% threshold, suggesting that strategy use is not a dominant behaviour among the sample (figure 1).

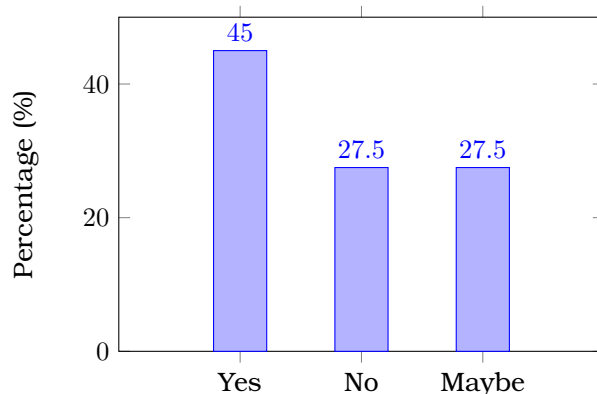


Figure 1: Use of strategies in learning Business English vocabulary.

4.2. RQ2: Does the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary affect the four language skills?

The results of the study revealed that the participants perceived the effect of non-mastery of Business English vocabulary on the four language skills: speaking, writing,

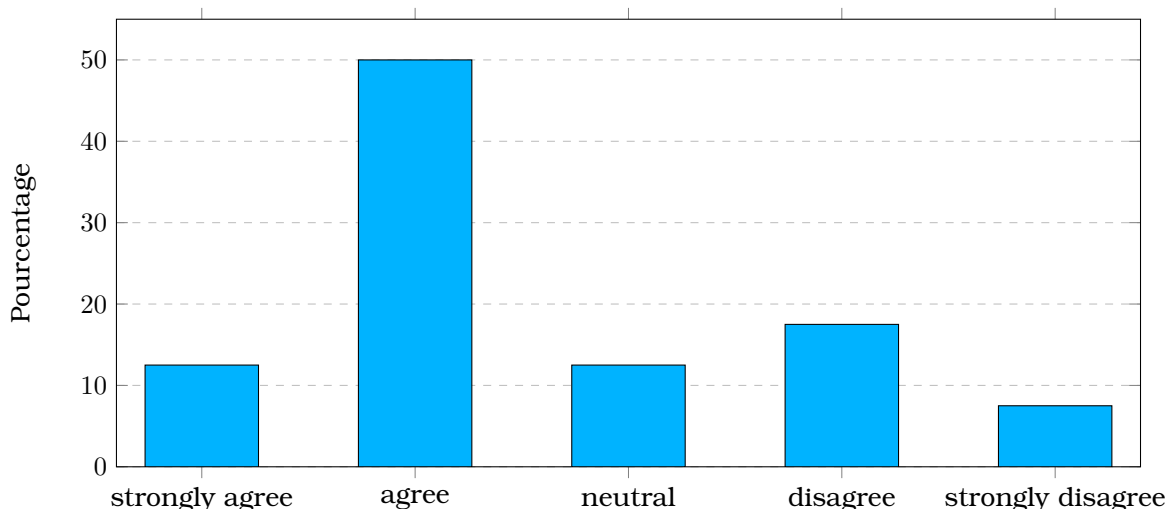


Figure 2: The effect of the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary on the speaking skill.

listening, and reading. For example, 50% of the participants agreed that the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary affected their speaking skill (figure 2).

Regarding the reading skill, 27.5% of the participants disagreed that their reading skill is impacted by the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary. 20% of the participants agreed that the reading skill is impacted by the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary (figure 3).

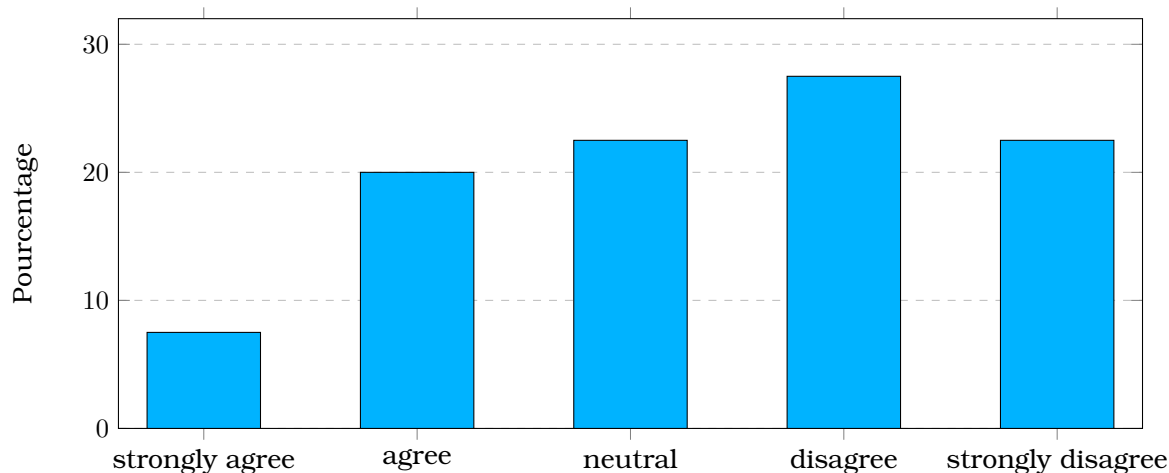


Figure 3: The effect of the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary on the reading skill.

The results revealed a very weak positive correlation between the two variables: the effect of non-mastery of Business English vocabulary and the effect of mastery of Business English vocabulary on reading skill. The Pearson correlation test yielded a coefficient of 0.131 (table 1).

Table 1

Correlation between the two variables.

		effect of the non-mastery of vocabulary on the speaking skill	effect of the non-mastery of vocabulary on the reading skill
effect of the non-mastery of vocabulary on the speaking skill	Pearson correlation	1	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.421
	N	40	40
effect of the non-mastery of vocabulary on the reading skill	Corrélation de Pearson	.131	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.421	
	N	40	40

4.3. RQ3: How are the participants using the vocabulary learning strategies?

A Friedman test was conducted to compare the frequency of use across the eight investigated strategies (e.g., extensive reading, practising new vocabulary, memorisation, note-taking, dictionary use, classroom activity, speaking aloud, listening to media). The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in usage frequency ($\chi^2 = 16.37, p = 0.022$). This difference may also be related to the weak positive correlation between the effect of non-mastery of Business English vocabulary and the effect of mastery of Business English vocabulary on reading skill, as detected by the correlation analysis.

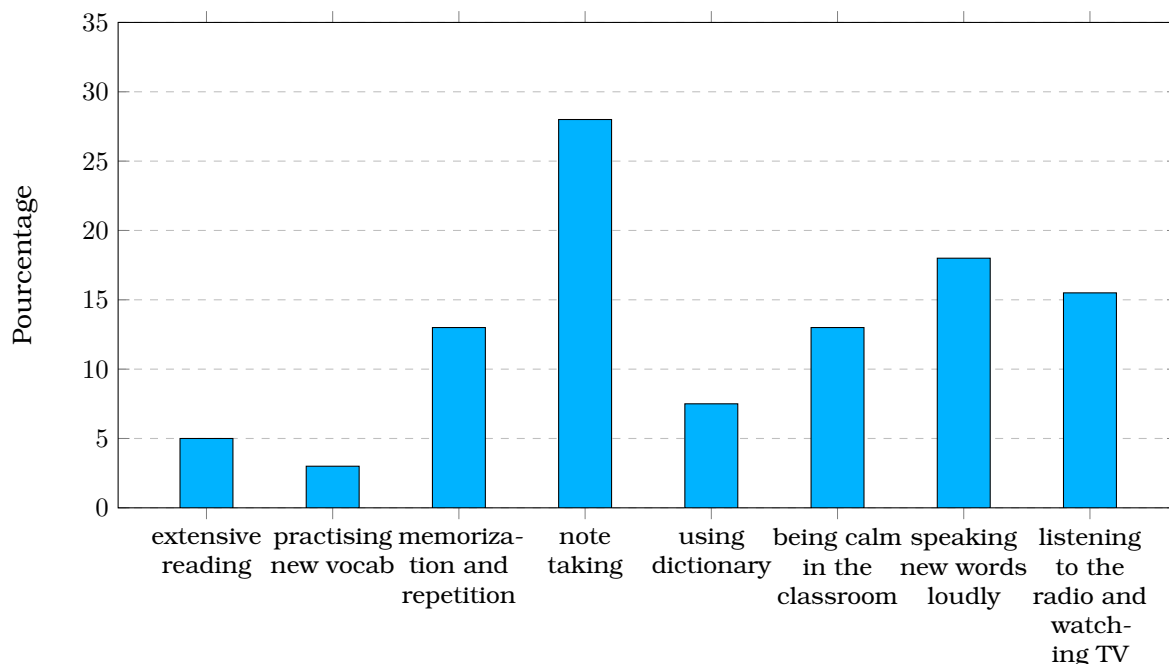


Figure 4: Used strategies in learning Business English vocabulary.

4.4. RQ4: What are the difficulties that the participants encounter in learning Business English vocabulary?

Cochran’s Q test was applied to the binary-coded set of reported difficulties (e.g., understanding Business English terms, remembering new terms, spelling new terms, pronouncing new terms, and using new terms). The test result was statistically significant ($Q = 25.98, p < 0.001$), indicating that the difficulties were not reported with equal frequency.

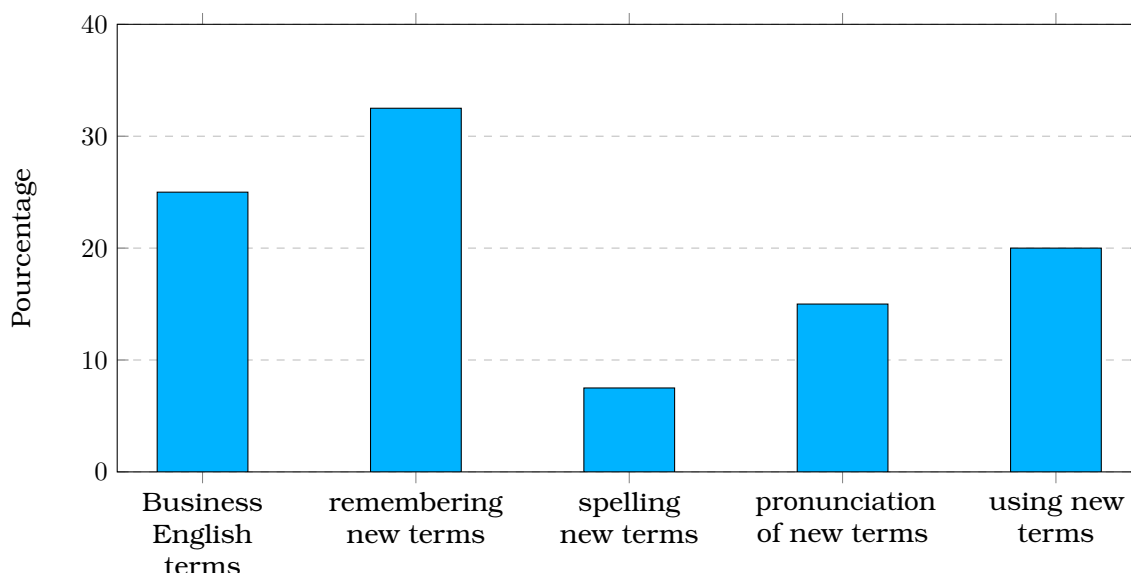


Figure 5: Difficulties encountered when learning Business English vocabulary.

4.5. RQ5: What are the possible solutions to those difficulties that may enhance Business English vocabulary learning and acquisition?

Cochran’s Q test examining the distribution of acceptance rates for proposed solutions related to the different practices in the Business English context (e.g., listening to business programs, writing and posting new words and pronunciation – figure 6) yielded a non-significant result ($Q = 11.75, p = 0.068$).

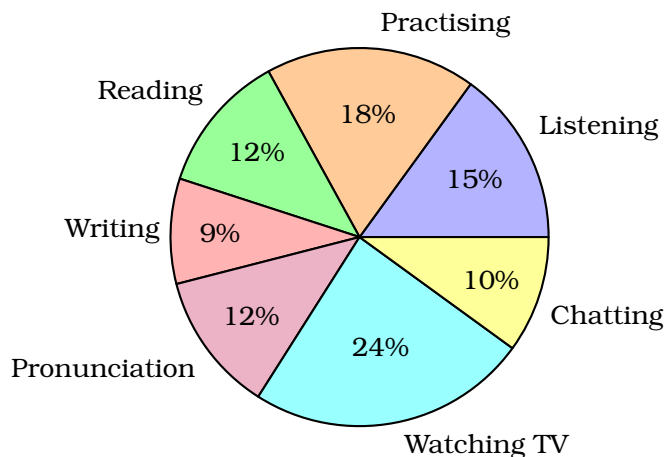


Figure 6: Suggested solutions to difficulties faced when learning Business English vocabulary.

5. Discussion

The study’s findings suggested that the use of Business English vocabulary learning strategies is not universal among this population. This could imply that other factors, such as learner awareness of strategies, training in their use, or motivational aspects, might play a more prominent role in enabling participants to use strategic vocabulary learning strategies to enhance their proficiency in Business English. This suggests that teachers need to raise learners’ awareness of the vital role of employing Business English vocabulary learning strategies. Teachers should also introduce various Business English vocabulary learning strategies.

Furthermore, the findings revealed the impact of the non-mastery of Business English vocabulary on the four language skills. This implies that participants recognise the importance of mastering Business English vocabulary for effective and efficient communication in a business context.

Regarding the participants’ use of vocabulary learning strategies, the findings suggested that learners exhibit clear preferences for certain strategies over others. The significant variation in usage frequency highlights the need for targeted pedagogical interventions to promote underutilised but potentially effective strategies. Identifying which strategies are most and least frequently used can inform teachers about learners’ habits and guide the development of balanced vocabulary instruction.

Besides that, and as for the difficulties that the participants encounter in learning Business English vocabulary, the findings revealed that participants encounter specific types of difficulties more often than others. This non-uniform distribution suggests that instructional design should prioritise addressing the most prevalent challenges. For example, if terminology and retention of new words are reported more frequently, teaching interventions should incorporate activities focused on repeated exposure, contextualised usage, and semantic mapping. This implies that teachers should detect the preferred Business English vocabulary learning strategies by their learners in order to guide them towards the efficient use of those strategies.

Additionally, regarding the possible solutions to the difficulties encountered by participants when learning Business English vocabulary, the findings suggest that while there is some variation in the acceptance of proposed solutions, this difference does not reach conventional significance levels. This suggests that participants tend to view the listed solutions as similarly viable. The marginal *p*-value indicates a possible trend toward differences, which could emerge more clearly in a larger sample. This uniform acceptance implies that learners may be receptive to multiple pedagogical interventions, offering educators flexibility to adopt varied approaches. This implies that teachers must identify the difficulties faced by their learners when using Business English vocabulary learning strategies. They have to help and guide learners in finding solutions to the difficulties of learning Business English vocabulary.

6. Limitations and future research

While this study illustrated how second-year students of Annaba Higher School of Management Sciences employ Business English vocabulary learning strategies and provided valuable insights into the difficulties encountered by the participants when learning Business English vocabulary, it is not without limitations. First, the sample size is small, which prevented the conduct of other tests in SPSS software. Second, the sample is from only one category, specifically 2nd-year students, whereas the school includes various categories of students. This cannot lead to generalizability. Third, the study could have benefited from a triangulated research approach that combined questionnaires, observation, and interviews for greater credibility and reliability. The triangular research tool could have facilitated the gathering of specific and precise data about vocabulary learning strategies and their frequency of use among the participants.

These limitations open up new avenues for future research perspectives in the area of vocabulary learning strategies. Consequently, future research should target a bigger sample from various categories. Future research should compare the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies across two categories and explore how efficiency can be enhanced through this comparison. Other studies that examine the integration of Artificial Intelligence in vocabulary learning strategies may be of interest and relevance. Artificial intelligence would be more reliable in measuring the effect of employed strategies on the number of new vocabulary items acquired.

7. Conclusion

This study concluded that the participants perceived the importance of mastering Business English vocabulary for efficient spoken and written communications in a business context. The findings indicated that the participants employed cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies in learning Business English vocabulary, such as watching TV, listening to podcasts, using flashcards, taking notes, reading business books, and using dictionaries.

However, the findings revealed that the use of Business English vocabulary learning strategies is not universal in this population. This recommends providing further efforts to raise students' awareness about the usefulness of employing a variety of Business English vocabulary learning strategies that may combine both cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies.

The study highlighted the participants' preferences regarding the use of specific vocabulary learning strategies, with significant variation. Pedagogical implications involve teachers' roles in motivating students to employ the most effective vocabulary learning strategies, which lead to language mastery and communication proficiency in their area of study.

Furthermore, the study unveiled the non-uniform distribution of difficulties that the participants encounter in learning Business English vocabulary. Pedagogical implications suggest that teachers should prioritise addressing the most dominant challenges and difficulties. Prioritisation leads to gaining time and to efficient results by targeting the top prevailing difficulties.

Finally, the possible suggested solutions to difficulties have been accepted with variations, which implies that teachers should deeply analyse the difficulties and challenges of their students at both group and individual levels. This in-depth analysis leads to a reliable diagnosis, which allows for suggesting the most suitable solutions. Indeed, vocabulary learning strategies are a broad area of research that requires continuous efforts to identify the most effective strategies that fit a given group of students. It is recommended that teachers suggest suitable solutions that match the level, motivation, preferences and language proficiency of their students. Teachers must employ concrete pedagogical practices, such as integrating gamified vocabulary learning applications, opting for AI-based feedback tools, and planning targeted pronunciation activities for students.

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