

THE EFFECT OF ETYMOLOGY OF AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' VOCABULARY RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

Not being able to retain and recall prior learned vocabulary has been regarded as one of the most important difficulties of both EFL and ESL learners. There is a variety of techniques reinforcing vocabulary, that making learners aware of etymology of words has been deemed as an interesting and effective technique in enhancing vocabulary size. So the present study focused on the impact of etymology of an additional language on vocabulary learning and also retention of Iranian EFL learners. To carry out this study, 79 EFL learners studying Arabic Literature as their major within the age range of 22 to 30 of both males and females at Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Arak University, Iran, participated in this study. Their English language knowledge was determined by language proficiency test (Quick Placement Test, Version 2). Through administrating this test 60 students (35 females and 25 males) were homogenized and selected for the purpose of this study. Then the students were given two researcher –made tests of vocabulary. The results of both immediate and delayed posttests demonstrated the efficacy of etymology of an additional language on vocabulary learning and retention of EFL learners. In other words, the etymology of English unknown words results in Iranian EFL learners' better retention and better learning by considering some psycholinguistic theories as justification.

Keywords: *Etymology; Vocabulary Learning; Vocabulary Retention; Vocabulary Learning Strategy*

INTRODUCTION

For learning a foreign language, the acquisition of vocabulary is an important part. McCarty (1990) stated that it is not important to understand how much learner knows the grammar and the sound of language, it should be noticed that without vocabulary learners cannot understand others and state their own expression in that language, because an essential building block of language is vocabulary and thus it is central to language learning process. According to Chastain (1988), without useful vocabulary nobody is able to understand other's ideas. Not knowing sufficient vocabulary, students cannot be able to understand others or express their own ideas. Wilkins (1972) wrote that “without grammar very little can be conveyed, while without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed” (pp. 111–112). As you know words constitute a main part of any language. Morimoto and Loewen (2007) stated that in order to have successful language learning, knowing 3000 words is needed, while Schmitt (2008) believe that a mastery of 5000_7000 words for oral discourse is required to function in English successfully. But learning an extensive vocabulary in a target language seems to be difficult work for second/foreign language learners. Some researchers (e.g., Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001) concluded that learning strategies has been deemed as one means for facilitating vocabulary learning and retention, that these strategies can be used consciously or unconsciously in order to process the information. Wenden and Rubin (1987) defined learning strategies as "... any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information." Richards and Platt (1992) stated that learning strategies are "intentional behavior and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information".

According to Ruutemets (2005, as cited in Zolfagharkhani & Ghorbani, 2011), students equipped with different vocabulary strategies can be more successful in how to deal with unknown words and also their ability to apply these different vocabulary strategies in different situation might make the learning process

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of new vocabulary easy for them. Different vocabulary learning strategies can enhance learner's autonomy and self involvement in improving learning process.

According to Intaraprasert (2004, cited in Boonkongsaen, 2012), VLSs are as “any set of techniques or learning behaviors, which language learners reported using in order to discover the meaning of a new word, to retain the knowledge of newly-learned words, and to expand their knowledge of vocabulary”. So for language learners, vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) can help to facilitate their vocabulary learning and a large and rich number of vocabulary can be learned with the help of VLSs (Nation, 2001).

According to Nation (1990; 2001), the most useful way for learning vocabulary is learners' using of strategies independently of their teacher. In his recent publication, strategy training has been proposed to be part of a vocabulary development program. Accordingly, Schmitt (1995) noted the best way for teaching language may be to introduce a variety of learning strategies to students so that they are able to choose the strategies that they prefer.

There are many techniques and strategies for vocabulary learning (e.g. translation, pronouncing the word correctly, semantic mapping, making visual picture, guessing meaning from the context, keyword method, mnemonic devices, etc), that among these techniques **etymology** strategy has been selected for the purpose of this study. The word **etymology** is derived from the Greek **etumus** which means real or true. The ending **ology** is the study of same thing, as in **biology** or **geology**. And that is the etymology of etymology. Etymology is the study of the origins of words: how they are evolved.

Etymology as Meaningful Learning

Etymology is the study of word origins and it has been attributed to meaningful learning according to some educational psychologists. Etymology is a kind of learning accomplished at the result of connection to prior learning, causing more retainable and generalized learning, which is superior to simple rote learning of vocabulary (Pierson, 1989). Ausabel (1967) described meaningful learning as a task which is relatable on a non arbitrary manner, substantive basis to a previously learned background of ...notions and information, and emphatically differentiates it from rote learning, which he describes as discrete and relatively isolated...only relatable to cognitive structure in an arbitrary, verbatim fashion (p.209). Meaningful learning is less vulnerable than rote learning to be forgotten. Meaningful learning has been done when the learner connects new information to what he or she already knows and this kind of relating new information to old ones leads to a meaningful learning (Thelen, 1986).

Theoretical Supports for the Use of Etymology

Knowing about the storing of words in brain through the association process is the major theoretical support for the claim mentioned above; it means how words are stored in brain through association. The brain can easier store and retain words with having more associations. Not being able to connect these words to the already existing knowledge causes failing in remembering previously learned words.

For example, Schema Theory has been based on this assumption (Nassaji, 2007). “Schemata serve as a reference store from which a person can retrieve relevant existing knowledge and into which new information is assimilated” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Therefore, the etymological elaboration can help learners in associating new information with the relevant existing information being in their cognitive structure. And at the result of etymological accounts consisting of stories being familiar to many learners, the relevant schemata are activated when they encounter new words, and with activating relevant schemata, students can retain the new words easily. There is also another theoretical support for using etymology as a technique for enhancing retention coming from Dual Coding Theory that is based on the general assumption that cognition has been consisted of two classes being verbal versus non-verbal representations. A verbal form is stored alongside non-verbal image being a mental, in the memory. According to Paivio (1990), the non-verbal class, can involve all kinds of “perceptual, affective, or behavioral knowledge.” Another theory which has been deemed as a support for justification of the use of etymological accounts for having better retention of a word is Levels of Processing Model. Richards and Schmidt (2002, as cited in Baleghizade, 2011) considered “elaborative rehearsal” as processing level and state:

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... elaborative rehearsal [...] involves deep semantic processing, resulting in more elaborate associations and more durable memories. For example, if you need to remember a sequence of numbers for later recall, it is useful to transform the sequence into something that is meaningful.

Hosseini *et al.*, (2012) stated:

In another story, Baleghizadeh and Yousefpoori (2011) underwent a single –subject study in which they introduced semantic mapping strategy as vocabulary presentation technique. The researchers employed two semantic mapping strategies and they believed that learner's retention will improve using these strategy. The findings of the study substantiated that semantic mapping strategy did help learners retrieve learned vocabularies better.

According to Hosseini *et al.*, (2012), learning vocabulary through the etymological accounts was more effective and the words were learned and retained easier and the result of their research is in line with Bellomo 's (1999) study in which learners, receiving explicit instruction of latin roots, improved in their vocabulary knowledge.

Noroozi and Salehi (2013) stated that in recent years, many researchers began to focus on idioms through etymology as a technique and they learned the idioms with a story told behind them. Accordingly, Boers *et al.*, (2007, as cited in Noroozi and Salehi, 2013) noted: etymological association is likely to call up a mental image of a concrete scene which can be stored in memory alongside the verbal form. And the result of this study revealed that learners ' idioms learning increase when the content is taught through an etymological elaboration instruction, and this study confirms the etymology in order to teach idioms.

Vasiljevic (2014) in an article entitled the effects of verbal definitions and etymological notes on comprehension and recall of L2 idioms stated that " one way of helping learners recognize the semantic motivation behind idiomatic expressions is to draw their attention to the etymology of these expressions, their original use or the context in which they originated".

Bagheri and Fazel (2010) in their study of Iranian learners of English found that the learners 'awareness of etymological accounts enhanced learners' comprehension and retention of idioms.

So not being able to retain and recall prior learned vocabulary has been regarded as one of the most important difficulties of both EFL and ESL learners. So through investigating the variety of techniques reinforcing vocabulary, making learners aware of etymology of words has been deemed as an interesting and effective technique for the purpose of this study. The present study focused on the impact of etymology of an additional language on vocabulary learning and also retention of Iranian EFL learners hypothesizing that the etymology of English unknown words results in Iranian EFL learners' better retention.

Research Question

Does the etymology of English unknown words result in Iranian EFL learners' better vocabulary retention?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

Participants Iranian EFL learners (both male and female) majoring in Arabic Literature at Arak University were invited to participate in present study. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 30 years old. Regarding the goal of this study, all the participants were given a test of English language proficiency (Quick Placement Test, Version 2) to determine their level of English proficiency. Through administering the proficiency test 60 students consisting of 25 males (%41.7) and 35 females (%58.3) were homogenized and selected for the purpose of this study.

Procedure

A group of 79 Iranian EFL students (both male and female) majoring in Arabic Literature were selected. Firstly to make sure of homogeneity, the proficiency test that was first piloted with similar group was applied. The reliability of this piloting stood at. And it was confirmed that the test enjoyed suitable reliability the results are given in Table 2. Then the administration of two different sets of researcher-made tests was done. The first set consisted of English words having Arabic root, and the second set

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consisted of English words having Middle English root. These researcher-made tests also were piloted with a similar group of ten students in order to ensure of reliability. At the piloting stage, the reliability of the tests was estimated through the KR-21 formula. The results are given in Table 1.

After piloting stage all the students were given a Test of English Language Proficiency (Quick Placement Test, Version 2). Through administrating this test 60 homogeneous students (35 females and 25 males) were selected for the purpose of this study. Then the subjects were given two researchers –made multiple choice tests. These tests were deemed as pre-tests. These tests were consisted of 20 English words with different roots (10 English words with Arabic root and 10 English words with Middle English root) was given to the subjects. In these tests each item was accompanied by four definitions. The participants were supposed to choose one among the four options which corresponded to the suitable definition. Then the participants received treatment (etymology instructions, i.e. they became familiar with the roots of vocabulary).

On the sessions of treatment which each lasted about 20 minutes, all the EFL students knowing Arabic language as an additional language became familiar with etymology strategy, etymological knowledge, the concept of word formation, the story and history behind the root of each word, the significance of etymology and finally its role in vocabulary learning. In order to see whether the treatment given to this group caused any significant change in this group, a posttest in the same format as the pretest was given to them. The words used in the posttest were those 20 words which were selected for the pretest and used throughout the treatment.

After 2 weeks interval (the appropriate interval for controlling the systematic change and practice effect), the participants were given posttests in order that the effect of etymological analysis on vocabulary retention to be examined. The delayed post-tests results were gathered and compared with those of immediate post-tests in order to check the retention of the words.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the results of pilot study

TEST	N	Mean	Reliability	Std. Dev
Vocabulary Test (ME)	10	3.6	0.81	2.87
Vocabulary Test (Ar)	10	4	0.77	2.70

Table 2: Statistics for the proficiency test

TEST	N	Mean	Reliability	Std. Deviation
Quick Placement Test	30	9.3	0.68	4.32

Instruments

To conduct this study, the following instruments were used:

a) Language Proficiency Test

In order to make sure of the homogeneity of all students in terms of general English Proficiency, the Quick Placement Test, Version 2 (QPT), was administered.

b) Tests of Vocabulary in English Language

Two sets of vocabulary tests having different roots being multiple-choice tests were given to the subjects. These tests were deemed as a pre-tests. Then the participants received treatment, after treatment there were immediate post tests and after two weeks the participants were given tests in the same format as the pretests and immediate post tests, these tests (test of words with Ar root and test of words with ME root) were called delayed post tests.

c) Webster 's New World Dictionary

The meaning, root and history behind each root of English word was available in this dictionary. For example:

Jerboa: [Ar. *yarbu*] a kind of mouse or

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Tidy:[ME. **tidi**] seasonable, honest, hence in good condition<tidy] neat in personal appearance, ways, etc

d) *Arabic-Persian Dictionary*

The roots of English words being Arabic ones were examined in this dictionary. For example:

Jerboa:[Ar.yarbu], a kind of mouse **Minaret:**[Ar.manarah, of lamp<base nar,fire] .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Test Normalization

Due to the fact that the statistical procedure used in this study required the normal distribution of gathered data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov was run to confirm the normality of distribution (see following Table). So table of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (Table 3) indicated that nearly all variables because of having p-value being greater than .05 enjoy normal distribution.

Table 3: One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

	pre.test. Ar	post.test.A r	delayed. Ar	pre.test. ME	post.test. ME	delayed. ME
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	1.063	1.658	1.452	1.352	1.189	1.195
p-value	.208	.008	.030	.052	.118	.115

The results of pretest, immediate posttest and delayed posttest have been obtained in two different tests of vocabulary (a vocabulary test with Middle English root and a vocabulary test with Arabic root). Means and Std. Deviations of both tests (on different occasions) are presented separately in following Table 4.

Table 4:

N	Words with English roots		Words with Arabic roots		*P-value
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std.Deviation	
60					
Pretest	3.38	2.23	4.02	1.68	0.07
Immediate Posttest	6.33	2.10	7.52	1.96	<0.001
Delayed Posttest	2.98	1.54	6.72	2.08	<0.001

(Paired T-test)*

To know the initial differences between the two tests' means on pretest, a paired T-test was applied. It should be reminded that a t-test is a "statistical test which is employed to make sure whether significant (non-chance) differences can be found between two means or not" (Riazi, 1999, as cited in Zolfagharkhani, 2011).

The results have been indicated in Table 4. Based on Table 4, the means of vocabulary test scores with ME root and Ar root are 3.38, 4.02, respectively.

Based on Table 4, the P-value=0.07 which is greater than 0.05. So there is no significant difference between the means of two tests on pretest. But on immediate posttests, the mean of vocabulary test with Ar root is 7.52 which is greater than the mean of vocabulary test with ME root being 6.33.

So because of having P-value< 0.05, there is statistically significant difference between the means of two tests.

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Also the mean of vocabulary test scores with Arabic root on delayed posttest is 6.72 which are greater than the mean of vocabulary test scores with Middle English being 2.98. So because of having P-value < 0.05, there is statistically significant difference between the means of two tests (see Table 4).

As you see on immediate posttests and delayed posttests of both tests (test with ME root and Ar root), there are statistically significant difference between the means. And these differences revealed the impact of etymology as a strategy (Notice to the following Table).

Table 5: Tests of Within-Subject effects

Measure: MEASURE_1							
Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
time.Ar	Sphericity Assumed	396.923	2	198.462	137.937	.000	.704
	Greenhouse-Geisser	396.923	1.746	227.292	137.937	.000	.704
	Huynh-Feldt	396.923	1.827	217.247	137.937	.000	.704
	Lower-bound	396.923	1.000	396.923	137.937	.000	.704
time.Ar * gender	Sphericity Assumed	.834	2	.417	.290	.749	.005
	Greenhouse-Geisser	.834	1.746	.478	.290	.719	.005
	Huynh-Feldt	.834	1.827	.457	.290	.729	.005
	Lower-bound	.834	1.000	.834	.290	.592	.005
Error(time.Ar)	Sphericity Assumed	166.899	116	1.439			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	166.899	101.286	1.648			
	Huynh-Feldt	166.899	105.969	1.575			
	Lower-bound	166.899	58.000	2.878			

Noticing to above table (Table 5) and p-value which is smaller than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05), we conclude that the mean of scores has been changed significantly during the time. In fact time is an affective factor. And also the degree of this effect is 0.70 which is very high (Partial Eta square = 70), it means 70% of model's exact is because of this variable and with holding this variable and omitting other variables like gender only 30% of model's exact has been decreased.

Table 6: Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts

Measure: MEASU							
RE_1							
Source	time.Ar	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
time.Ar	Linear	213.075	1	213.075	112.052	.000	.659
	Quadratic	183.848	1	183.848	188.370	.000	.765

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And also noticing to Figure 1 illustrated below and table 6, we can say that the means of scores in both males and females firstly raised and then fell.

Perhaps it can be said that raising manner firstly was because of etymological treatment and falling manner after that was because of time interval. But in comparison to Figure 2 (ME root) illustrated below, it is noticed that in Figure 1 there is no sharp falling because of etymology of that language (see Figure 1 and 2).

Table 7: Pairwise Comparisons (test with Ar root)

Measure:MEASURE_1						
(I) time(Ar)	(J) time.A	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-3.52*	.224	.000	-3.974	-3.078
	3	-2.70*	.255	.000	-3.214	-2.192
2	1	3.52*	.224	.000	3.078	3.974
	3	.82*	.181	.000	.461	1.185
3	1	2.70*	.255	.000	2.192	3.214
	2	-.82*	.181	.000	-1.185	-.461

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

The results of above table (Table 7) indicate that the means of scores in all three different times are different from each other in pairs and there is statistically significant difference between the means of scores on pretest and immediate posttest (time 1 and time 2) and on immediate posttest and delayed posttest(time 2 and time 3) and also on pretest and delayed posttest(time 1 and time 3).

Table 8: Pairwise Comparisons (test with ME root)

Measure:MEASURE_1						
(I) time(MA)	(J) timeM	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-2.79*	.302	.000	-3.395	-2.187
	3	.55	.285	.056	-.016	1.124
2	1	2.79*	.302	.000	2.187	3.395
	3	3.34*	.197	.000	2.951	3.741
3	1	-.55	.285	.056	-1.124	.016
	2	-3.34*	.197	.000	-3.741	-2.951

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments)

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But noticing to Table 8 (test with ME root), we conclude that there is no significant difference between the means of scores on pretest and delayed post test (time 1 and time 3) because of time interval. So we conclude that most of the words are forgotten in comparison to the test with Ar root because of time interval and students' not familiarity with the root of unknown words (see Table 7 and 8).

So time is an affective factor. But in comparison to the test with ME root, students because of being familiar with the root of unknown words did better in test with Ar root (see Figure 1 and 2).

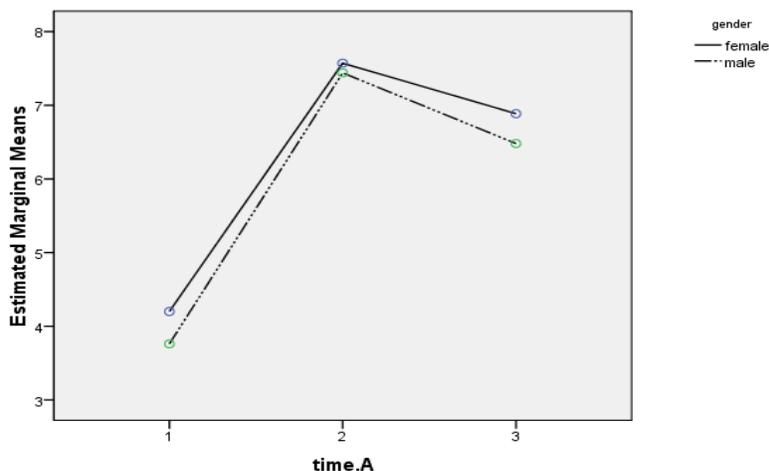


Figure 1: The means of males and females' scores on 3 different occasions in vocabulary test with Ar root

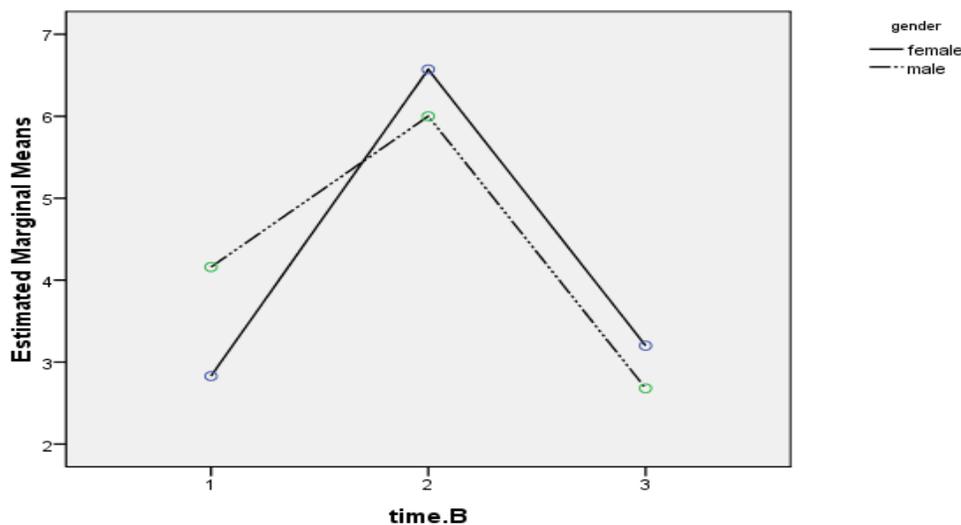


Figure 2: The means of males and females' scores on 3 different occasions in vocabulary test with ME root

As a whole, the results obtained revealed that etymology as a strategy would improve Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning and retention. (see the Figure 1). So the hypothesis stating that the etymology of English unknown words results in Iranian EFL learners' better retention has been accepted. And also the findings of this research are in line with those obtained by Zolfagharkhani and Ghorbani (2011), stating that "the students in experimental group significantly outperformed the students in control group in vocabulary learning through the etymology method". And also are in line with those of Fekri (2011), concerning "the effect of etymology in enhancing vocabulary learning". And also the results obtained by Baleghizadeh & Yousefpoori (2011) clearly indicate "the considerable effect of presenting

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etymologies on vocabulary retention, particularly when it comes to long-term retention". Furthermore, the results of the present study seem to be satisfactorily consistent with the prior mentioned psycholinguistic theories, i.e. Schema Theory, Dual Coding, and Levels of Processing.

Conclusion

The present study focused on the impact of etymology instruction on vocabulary retention of Iranian EFL learners majoring in Arabic Literature at Arak University. After collecting the data (pretest, posttest and delayed posttest), the participants' responses were analyzed using SPSS and various statistical analyses including both descriptive and inferential ones. The results obtained from different tests revealed that etymology strategy would improve Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning and retention (see the figure 1 and 2). So the hypothesis stating the etymology of English unknown words results in better retention of Iranian EFL learners has been accepted.

Therefore, the findings of this study can be beneficial for language teachers, language learners and researchers as well. Primarily, the findings of this study can have considerable pedagogical implications for university students and teachers. According to Roger (1980), a successful teacher has two features: question of what to teach and question of How to teach. What to teach refers to the knowledge to be taught, and How to teach refers to teacher's strategy to transfer his/her knowledge. According to humanism (confluent education), learning is defined as a whole person process (holistic learning), and emotion or how to learn has priority to cognition or what to learn. Question of What is science and of how is art, so a successful teacher should be both scientist and artist in order to have more independent learners, it means teach them how to learn. The findings of the study indicated that etymology strategy can help students to understand better and retain the words they are exposed to more successfully. Based on these findings, we suggest teachers of English use this technique in teaching new vocabulary and motivate students to use this helpful strategy rather than asking them to memorize the vocabulary in a rote manner.

All learning strategies have advantages, that one of the main benefits of strategies for vocabulary learning is enabling learners to take more control of their own learning in order that learners are responsible for their studies (Nation, 2001; Scharle and Szabó, 2000). Therefore, the strategies enhance "learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction" (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

So, further research is needed to replicate the present study with more participants, vocabulary items, and treatment sessions. Using some groups with different additional languages would probably increase the validity, and help researchers to make stronger claims regarding their findings. And also having enough time would give this chance to the researcher for telling the story and history behind each root completely. The participants for this study consisted of college students majoring in Arabic literature; a new study could use participants' of diverse age groups and diverse majors (in different settings) and with more additional languages. And this study focused merely on one group knowing an additional language (Arabic), but it is hoped that further research will study the role of etymology in different groups knowing different additional languages (i.e., Fr, Ger and Turk.) in learning English language as Foreign language.

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