Maryna Vyshnevska*
Ukraine

The Influence of Agency on the Strategies of Learning English Vocabulary by Students Majoring in Economics

Summary

This study investigated the influence of student agency on English vocabulary learning strategies among economics majors. Quantitative research involved a survey of 71 Ukrainian economics students. Results reveal diverse vocabulary learning challenges and strategies across different academic levels. While students utilized various methods, including mobile apps and contextual learning, the study emphasizes the critical role of agency in successful vocabulary acquisition. Findings underscore the need for personalized language instruction to optimize learning outcomes.

Keywords: student agency, vocabulary learning, economics students, higher education, language learning strategies

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and the increasing importance of English as the lingua franca of international business, the ability to proficiently acquire and utilize English vocabulary is crucial for students of economic specialties. Vocabulary acquisition is not only a fundamental component of language learning but also a key factor influencing students' academic and professional success. This article explores the concept of agency in language learning, particularly how it shapes and influences the strategies students majoring in economics employ to learn English vocabulary.

Agency, in educational psychology, refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices. It is a vital aspect of self-directed learning, where students take initiative, set goals, and select appropriate strategies to achieve those goals. According to Aristova, agency is a "holistic systemic property of a personality that manifests itself in the formation of a strong belief in one's ability to actively, independently, creatively and autonomously organize and carry out various types of transformative activities in atypical situations. These activities are aimed at gaining new experience and producing a socially significant result, which is to expand knowledge about people and the world" (2017). Understanding the role of agency in vocabulary acquisition can provide insights into the effectiveness of various learning strategies and the overall success of language learning endeavors.

Recent studies highlight that students with a high degree of agency tend to adopt more diverse and effective learning strategies. These strategies include the use of mobile applications, online platforms, flashcards, and multimedia resources (Malykhin et al., 2024). Such students are proactive and motivated in seeking out resources that suit their learning preferences and needs, leading to more personalized and effective learning experiences. Motivation plays a crucial role in forming a student's agency because it drives their engagement and persistence in the learning process. Intrinsic motivation, which stems from a genuine interest in learning and personal growth, encourages students to take initiative and actively seek out new

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* Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Ukraine.

knowledge. This type of motivation fosters creativity and independence, essential components of agency. Extrinsic motivation, influenced by external rewards and recognition, can also enhance agency by providing students with clear goals and incentives to strive for excellence. Both types of motivation contribute to a strong sense of agency, empowering students to autonomously organize their learning activities and effectively overcome challenges (Aristova, 2015).

However, despite the availability of numerous learning tools and methods, students still face challenges such as rapid forgetting of new words, confusion between similar-sounding words, and difficulty in retaining vocabulary without contextual support. These challenges underscore the need for a deeper understanding of how agency influences the choice and effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies (Vyshnevska & Kugai, 2023).

All that determined the focus of our research on the interconnection between students' agency and their vocabulary learning strategies within the context of economics studies. By delving into survey data, we aimed to uncover the most prevalent vocabulary acquisition methods and tools employed by economics students and to examine the influence of their agency levels on learning outcomes.

2. Research Methodology

Research Background

This study aims to contribute to the existing research in the field by examining the relationship between agency and vocabulary learning strategies among students majoring in economics. By analyzing survey data, the research will identify the most commonly used tools and methods for vocabulary acquisition and explore how varying degrees of agency impact learning outcomes. The insights gained from this study will support the development of language learning programs that cater to the diverse needs of students, ultimately enhancing their academic and professional success.

Sample

The study sample consisted of 71 students from the Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Faculty of Management and Business Design, majoring in economics, who were studying English as a Second Language. The database used to identify potential participants was the university's enrollment list for economics majors within the Faculty of Management and Business Design.

The method of sample selection involved inviting all students majoring in economics to participate in the survey. Out of the total invited, 71 students agreed to take part, resulting in a self-selected sample. This method ensured that all economics students had the opportunity to participate, but only those who were willing and available chose to do so.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample were as follows:

Year of Study:

31 first-year students (43.66%)

12 second-year students (16.90%)

16 third-year students (22.54%)

12 fourth-year students (16.90%)

Age: The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 22 years old, with an average age of 19.5 years.

Gender: The sample included 45 females (63.38%) and 26 males (36.62%).

This diverse group of students provided a representative sample of the different years of study within the economics major, contributing to the comprehensiveness of the research findings.

Instruments and Procedures

During the research, a questionnaire developed by the author was used. The questionnaire comprised five questions concerning the problems students have in learning new words, and the methods, principles, and strategies they use.

Which of the following problems do you face the most when learning new English words?

I forget new words quickly.

I don't have enough practice.

It is difficult for me to learn a foreign language.

It is difficult to remember the meaning of a word without context.

I'm unable to identify the problem.

Other (please describe).

Which of the following methods do you use most often to learn new words? (Select all that apply)

I write the words in a notebook.

I use flashcards to memorize the words.

I make example sentences with the words.

I listen to audio recordings with new words.
I watch videos with subtitles.
Other (please describe).

What is your principle for choosing words to learn?

I choose words that are most common in the daily speech.
I choose words that I need for a specific purpose (work, study, travel, etc.).
I choose words related to a specific topic that interests me.
I choose words at random.
Other (please describe).

Which of the following tools or resources do you use to learn new words? (Select all that apply)

Mobile apps (Duolingo, Memrise, etc.).
Flashcards.
Online dictionaries.
YouTube videos.
Online language courses.
Other (please describe).

Which of the following strategies have been the most effective for you in learning new words? (Select all that apply)

Making associations with new words.
Using flashcards.
Using new words in conversations.
Creating mind maps.
Using mobile apps to learn new words.
Watch movies and TV shows in the original with subtitles.
Listening to audiobooks and podcasts.
Other (please describe).

Data Analysis

During our research, a survey questionnaire was given to students majoring in economics at the Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Faculty of Management and Business Design. The survey aimed to explore the challenges and strategies related to learning English vocabulary among these students. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: quantitative and qualitative.

Qualitative Analysis

The quantitative section of the questionnaire included questions designed to measure the frequency and type of challenges faced by students in memorizing new English words, the methods they use to learn new words, their principles for choosing which words to learn, the tools or resources they use, and the strategies they find most effective. This part of the survey allowed us to formulate and verify hypotheses using statistical analysis. The data was analyzed quantitatively to provide insights into the patterns and correlations among different variables.

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Students face different primary challenges in memorizing new English words based on their year of study.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the primary challenges faced by students across different years of study.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies varies among students of different years.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies among students of different years.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to understand the frequency and percentage of responses for each question.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative section of the questionnaire included open-ended questions aimed at exploring the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the students. This part of the survey helped us formulate research questions, answers to which are discussed in the Conclusions section.

Research Questions:

1. What specific challenges do students report when memorizing new English words?
2. How do students describe their personal strategies for learning new vocabulary?
3. What additional tools or resources do students find useful that were not listed in the survey options?
4. What unique principles or criteria do students use to select which new words to learn?

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and categorize common themes and patterns in the open-ended responses. This involved coding the responses and grouping them into meaningful categories that aligned with the research questions.

Each part of the survey was given in the presence of the author, and all the respondents were guaranteed total anonymity.

3. Results

After a careful analysis of the respondents' replies concerning the problems they face when learning new English vocabulary, we drew the following conclusions. The problem of forgetting new words quickly was mentioned by 1 student each from the 1st and 2nd years. Lack of practice was a common issue among 1st (3 students), 2nd (1 student), and 4th-year students (2 students). Difficulty in learning a foreign language was noted by 1st (1 student), 3rd (2 students), and 4th year students (1 student). Difficulty in remembering the meaning of a word without context was identified by 1st (1 student) and 2nd year students (2 students). The "other" category was only mentioned by 3 students from the 3rd year. A large number of students chose "not specified", especially among 1st-year students (25), followed by 3rd year (11), 4th year (8), and 2nd year (9).

This distribution indicates that a significant portion of students did not specify a particular problem, while the rest faced varied challenges, with lack of practice and difficulty in learning a foreign language being relatively common issues. Figure 1 shows the comparison of problems students face when learning new words.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of responses from students of different years to the question: "Which of the following methods do you use most often to learn new words?".

Among 1st-year students (N=31), the most common methods were listening to audio recordings (9 students) and writing words in a notebook (5 students). Flashcards and example sentences were used by 2 students each, and 3 students watched videos with subtitles. A significant number (23) used other methods, such as reading texts and books (16 students), using associations (5 students), learning words in computer games (3 students), communicating with native speakers (11 students), learning words by heart (12 students), and learning 5 new words every day (1 student).

2nd-year students (N=12) preferred listening to audio recordings (4 students) and writing words in a notebook (3 students). They also watched videos with subtitles (3 students), used flashcards (2 students), and made example sentences (1 student). Nine students mentioned other methods, including reading texts and books, using associations, and communicating with native speakers.

3rd-year students (N = 16) mainly watched videos with subtitles (5 students) and used other methods (12 students), like reading texts and books and communicating with native speakers. Few used notebooks (2 students), made example sentences (2 students) and listened to audio recordings (1 student). None used flashcards.

4th-year students (N = 12) favored watching videos with subtitles (6 students) and using flashcards (5 stu-

Figure 1. Distribution of responses from students of different years about the problems students face the most when learning new English vocabulary
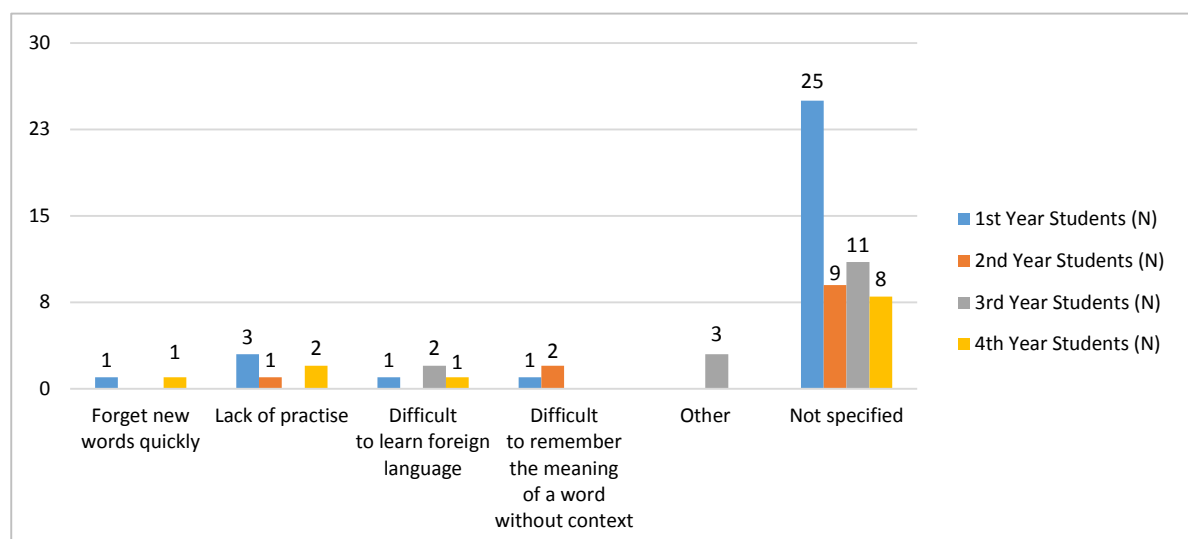
Source: own study (N = 71).

Figure 2. Distribution of responses from students of different years about the methods they use most often to learn new words
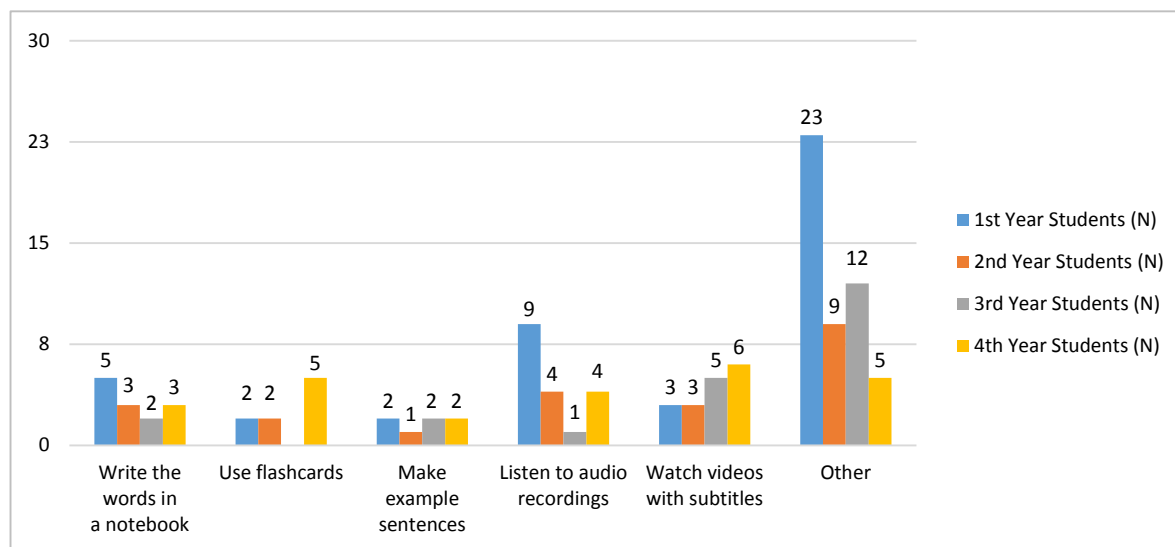
Source: own study (N = 71).

Figure 3. Distribution of responses from students of different years about principles for choosing words to learn among students
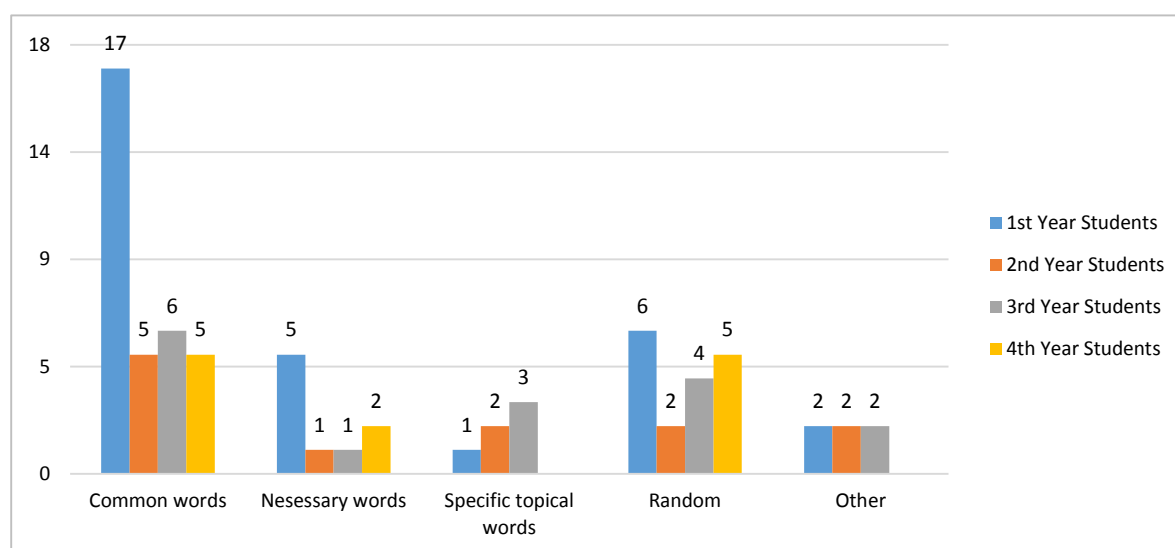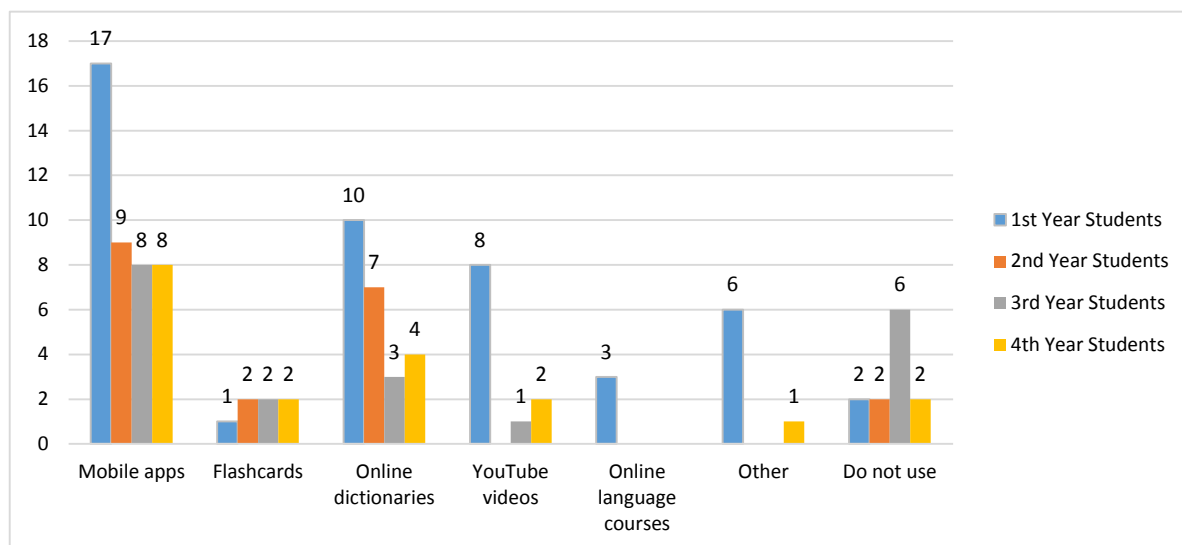

Source: own study (N = 71).

dents). They also listened to audio recordings (4 students) and wrote words in a notebook (3 students). Two students made example sentences, and 5 used other methods like reading texts and books, communicating with native speakers, and learning words by heart.

Students' preferences for learning new words vary by year. *First-year students* frequently listen to audio recordings and use various other methods. *Second-year students* balance between audio recordings, videos with subtitles, and notebooks. *Third-year students* favor videos with subtitles and diverse other

methods. *Fourth-year students* prefer interactive methods like flashcards and videos with subtitles.

Overall, immersive and contextual learning experiences, such as reading, communicating with native speakers, and learning by heart, are valued across all years. This diversity in methods highlights the need for a variety of resources to support vocabulary learning.

Figure 3 represents the responses from students regarding their principles for selecting words to learn. As we can observe, *First-year students* predominantly

Figure 4. Distribution of responses from students of different years about tools and resources used to learn new words

Source: own study (N = 71).

choose common words, with a significant preference (17 students), suggesting a focus on building a foundational vocabulary. They also show a relatively high preference for random words (6 students). *Second and third-year students* display similar patterns, with a balanced approach across common words (5 each), necessary words for specific purposes, and specific topical words. Their responses indicate a strategic selection based on immediate needs and interests. *Fourth-year students* exhibit a diverse approach, with a preference for common words (6 students) and random words (4 students), along with a notable focus on necessary words for specific purposes (5 students).

Overall, the data suggests that as students advance through their academic years, their criteria for choosing new vocabulary words become more varied and strategic, incorporating a mix of foundational vocabulary, specific needs, and interests.

Figure 4 demonstrates the responses from students across four academic years regarding the tools and resources they use to learn new words. The categories include mobile apps, flashcards, online dictionaries, YouTube videos, online language courses, other methods, and not using any tools. *First-year students* show a strong preference for mobile apps (17 students) and online dictionaries (10 students). They also frequently use YouTube videos (8 students) and other methods (6 students), with a smaller number using flashcards and online language courses. *Second-year students*

also favor mobile apps (9 students) and online dictionaries (7 students). They show minimal use of YouTube videos (2 students) and other tools, with 2 students not using any tools. *Third-year students* use mobile apps (8 students) and online dictionaries (3 students) most frequently. They have similar use of YouTube videos and flashcards, with 2 students not using any tools. *Fourth-year students* prefer mobile apps (8 students) and online dictionaries (4 students). They also use YouTube videos and flashcards, with 2 students not using any tools.

In the "other" category, students mentioned various resources including textbooks for learning English, Reverso context, the Internet, Google Translate, books, grammar tutorials, video games, computer games, songs in English, movies, and books, with one student indicating each of these options.

In general, mobile apps and online dictionaries are the most popular tools across all years. First-year students show the highest engagement with these tools, while the use of additional methods like YouTube videos and other unspecified resources is also notable. The consistent use of these tools indicates their perceived effectiveness and accessibility for vocabulary learning among students.

Figure 5 presents the responses from students regarding the strategies they find most effective for learning new words. *First-year students* most frequently find making associations and watching movies and

Figure 5. Distribution of responses from students of different years about effective strategies for learning new words
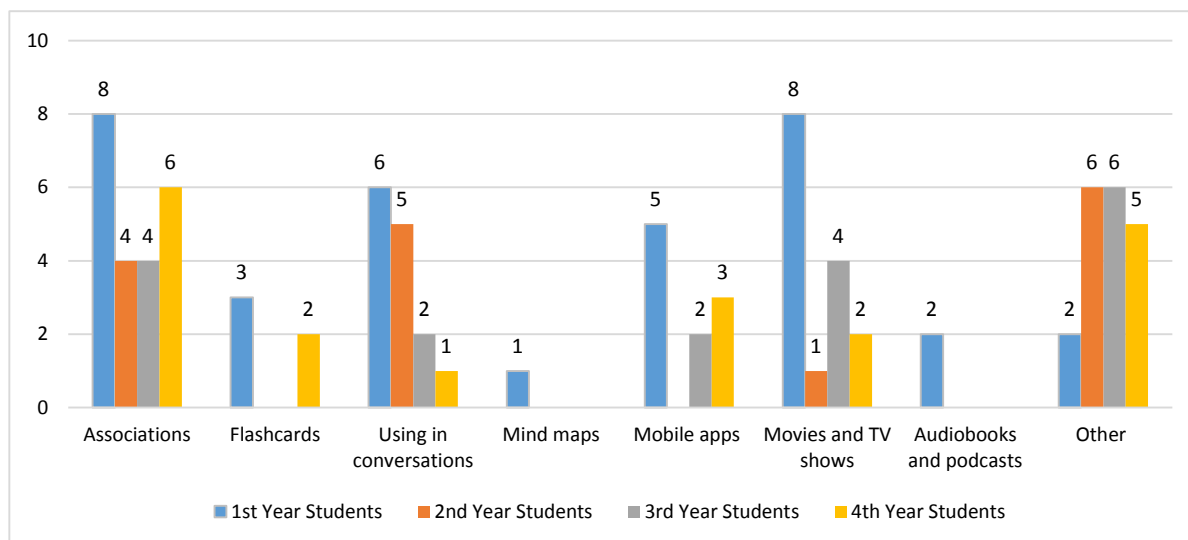
Source: own study (N = 71).

TV shows with subtitles effective (8 students each). Using new words in conversations (6 students) and other methods are also common strategies. Mobile apps are moderately popular (5 students), while flashcards, mind maps, and audiobooks/podcasts are less frequently used. *Second-year students* also favor making associations (4 students), using new words in conversations (5 students), and watching movies and TV shows (3 students). Other strategies include flashcards and mobile apps, each used by 2 students. *Third-year students* find using new words in conversations (5 students) and watching movies and TV shows (4 students) most effective. Making associations and flashcards are also used by 4 and 2 students, respectively. *Fourth-year students* have a varied approach, favoring making associations (6 students), using new words in conversations (6 students), and other methods (6 students). Watching movies and TV shows, flashcards, and mobile apps are also notable strategies. In the "other" section, students mentioned different personalized methods for learning new words. These included taking notes on Post-it notes, practicing and translating, using a combination of different methods, and systematic repetition. Additionally, students highlighted the importance of contextual learning, creating associations, and engaging in activities like playing video games, using mobile apps, and watching movies.

Generally, making associations, using new words in conversations, and watching movies and TV shows

with subtitles are the most effective strategies across all years. The consistent use of these strategies highlights their effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary learning.

4. Discussion

The study aimed to examine the relationship between agency and vocabulary learning strategies among economics students, identifying commonly used tools and methods and exploring how agency impacts learning outcomes.

Our findings show that mobile apps and online dictionaries are the most frequently used tools, especially among first-year students. This aligns with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of technology in language learning. As students progress, they diversify their methods, indicating an evolving approach based on individual preferences and experiences.

Students favor immersive and contextual strategies such as making associations, using new words in conversations, and watching movies with subtitles. This supports the concept of agency, where students actively choose methods that suit their learning styles. The "other" category revealed personalized methods like taking notes on Post-it notes, practicing and translating, and systematic repetition. These responses highlight a high level of agency and a multi-faceted approach to learning, aligning with the emphasis on contextual learning.

Notably, while traditional methods like flashcards are still used, interactive and digital tools are more popular, reflecting a shift towards engaging and immediate feedback-driven learning experiences.

Scientific Significance and Future Directions

This study underscores the importance of agency in vocabulary learning among economics students, providing insights that can help develop tailored language learning programs. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these strategies on language proficiency and academic performance and consider cultural and motivational factors. Integrating technology with traditional practices could offer a balanced approach to maximize learning outcomes.

5. Conclusions

The study investigated the relationship between student agency and vocabulary learning strategies among economics students at the Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Faculty of Management and Business Design.

Our research tested two main hypotheses: first, that students face different primary challenges in memorizing new English words based on their year of study, and second, that the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies varies among students of different years. Both hypotheses were confirmed, revealing significant differences in the challenges faced and strategies employed by students across different academic years.

The study addressed the following *key research questions*:

1. Students reported specific challenges in memorizing new English words, with a notable emphasis on the lack of practice and difficulties remembering words without context.
2. Personal strategies for learning new vocabulary included the use of mobile apps, online dictionaries, and contextual learning methods such as watching movies with subtitles and making associations.
3. Additional tools and resources identified by students included using textbooks, practicing with Google Translate, and engaging in video games and movies in English.
4. Unique principles for selecting new words to learn were based on the words' relevance to

daily speech, specific purposes, or topics of interest.

The results underscore the importance of agency in vocabulary learning, demonstrating that students' autonomy in choosing their methods significantly impacts their learning outcomes. These findings support the development of tailored language learning programs that consider students' individual preferences and evolving needs throughout their academic journey.

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