An Exploratory Study on Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Saudi EFL learners

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Abstract

One of the utmost difficult aspects of language learning is vocabulary. Vocabulary learning has been of prime importance for over two decades. A wide vocabulary is essential for effective and useful communication. Therefore, understanding the strategies that language learners use to learn vocabulary is a matter of great importance. This study was carried out on a group of 219 Saudi learners of English so as to determine two things: first, what their uttermost preferable vocabulary learning strategies are, and second, whether there are any notable statistical disparities in the deployment of such vocabulary that can be traced to the participant's gender. To these ends, a vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire devised by Schmitt (1997) and revised by Omaar (2016) that consisted of 42 items was utilized. The data from this questionnaire were analyzed with descriptive statistics, including standard deviations and means. Statistical analysis of the data collected showed high reliability (r-0.97, P<0.001). The findings pointed out that memory strategies were reported as most preferable by the subjects of study, subsequently determination, social, and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies were reported to be the least preferable. The only statistically significant disparity due to gender was in the use of memory strategies, where P<0.05; no other statistically significant disparities were found based on gender in the other types of strategies. Based on these findings, a list of pedagogical implications was suggested and several recommendations for further research were put forward.

Keywords: English teaching, EFL, Saudi students, Vocabulary learning, Learning Strategies.

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1. Introduction

Enhancing students' foreign language (FL) vocabulary has a significant role in their overall language learning and development process. However, educators are often ill-equipped to implement vocabulary training strategies effectively since they are also pressurized to make lessons more engaging and effective. Both first and second language (L1/L2) researchers and educators agree that mastery over vocabulary plays a central role in ensuring that people become mature language users. While there is no significant difference between learning vocabulary in L1 and L2, there is a major difference in the vocabulary growth rate between the two.

FL instructors and researchers agree that a person's language acquisition skills are likely to remain subpar unless there is a long-term and effective commitment towards improving one's vocabulary. The same was reiterated by Kaya and Charkova (2014), who stated that vocabulary played a fundamental rule in the language learning process. While lack of proper grammar still allows for information to be conveyed, a lack of vocabulary blocks a person's communication abilities to a great extent. Vocabulary is crucial for language learners since it has a tremendous effect on their communication abilities. Conveying one's thoughts and feelings effectively may not be possible in the absence of a comprehensive vocabulary, whether in real life, class activities, face to face communication, or written text (Takač, 2008; Çelik & Toptas, 2010; Subon, 2016).

Language learners often come across unfamiliar phrases and words which can affect their comprehensive abilities. Many learners find themselves in situations that affect their ability to communicate and express themselves effectively due to language incompetence (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013; Afzal, 2019; Al-khresheh, 2020). Language and vocabulary play complementary roles, with each aspect building the other up. Engaging in a language frequently, by reading or hearing, increases one's vocabulary whereas vocabulary knowledge allows people to use language effectively while writing or speaking. Although language learning is affected by numerous variables, researchers consider the variable associated with vocabulary performance to have the greatest impact on a person's linguistic comprehension abilities (Nation, 2001, 2013; Altyari, 2017).

Vocabulary is considered by researchers to be a crucial communication tool. However, language learners woefully face their greatest obstacles while navigating this area. Vocabulary acquisition is influenced by numerous factors including implicit and explicit learning techniques, group-based or individual activities, learning programs, and motivation strategies. As a matter of fact, vocabulary training strategies are considered to fall under general language learning strategies in FL pedagogy (Na, 2016; Ayure, 2018; Afzal, 2019).

Over the last few years, vocabulary learning strategies have seen a surge in interest, with many people displaying considerable interest to improve themselves in this aspect. For example, many researchers and instructors are currently formulating new strategies that aid and encourage vocabulary acquisition. Hirsh (2012) observed that the number of academicians who were researching second language vocabulary had been on the rise for the last twenty years, which has resulted in a greater number of higher degree research students selecting vocabulary as the subject for their next research study. It is clear from this data that vocabulary acquisition skills in the English language are considered to be highly important among those learning English as a FL/L2.

While learning a FL/L2, vocabulary acquisition skills can often drag down the performance of the students. The lack of a sufficiently advanced vocabulary can cause learners with insufficient knowledge to experience major difficulties. Recent research studies on this subject have revealed that Saudi ESL learners are plagued with the following vocabulary-related issues:

1) Lack of a proper vocabulary learning strategy: the teaching methodology has remained static and outdated for a long time since most teachers are apathetic about the issue.

2) Inefficient vocabulary acquisition strategies: learners find themselves forced to memorize vocabulary and aren't taught any other learning strategies. A FL/L2 student must learn a staggering amount of vocabulary during his studies, which could be overwhelming for some people to handle. The need to remember and deploy new vocabulary words, especially in a FL, can be an enormous challenge for young adults, which dissuades them from signing up for advanced English courses. Apart from a lack of self-confidence, students are completely dependent on their teachers for guidance on every tiny aspect for understanding a word's meaning, pronunciation, grammatical position, usage, and other aspects. FL/L2 teachers also face challenges of their own:

❖ They must constantly come up with innovative ways that will capture the imagination of the students.

❖ They must cater to the expectations and needs of all students in large classes.

It must also be noted that most teacher training programs are woefully lacking in vocabulary teaching strategies. Many programs and teachers are either unclear or outright ignorant of the colossal role played by vocabulary during the language acquisition process.

Due to the reasons stated above and after due consideration of the needs and requirements of both students and the teachers, it is apparent that vocabulary learning strategies are essential for helping students to enrich their vocabulary. Furthermore, vocabulary teaching strategies can also aid the instructor in fulfilling their duties in a better manner, which helps students become independent and autonomous learners. The data clearly shows that there is a pressing need for teachers to be sentient of vocabulary learning strategies. This study can accomplish this purpose by giving learners and teachers different strategies that can successfully counter the problems mentioned above. In case the findings show that learners aren't aware of diverse vocabulary learning strategies, they can be taught the strategies that work unsurpassed for their individual condition. Given this, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

❖ What is the uttermost preferable vocabulary learning strategy used by Saudi EFL learners?

❖ Are there any statistically significant disparities in the use of vocabulary learning strategies by Saudi EFL learners due to gender?

2. Literature Review

As people became increasingly interested in learning a FL/L2 during the late 20th century, researchers and teachers soon realized that a universal language teaching method that could provide successful results in all cases did not exist. Some learners displayed success irrespective of the teaching techniques or methods that were used whereas most people found themselves unable to advance successfully due to unreliable teaching methods. As a result, research studies in FL/L2 learning now focus on the individual differences of FL learners and seek to counter challenges faced by students at a personal level, instead of the teaching-oriented research perspective that was prevalent earlier. Among the individual difference variables, researchers and teachers were particularly interested in learning strategies, especially the ones that dealt with vocabulary learning (Brown & Rodgers as cited in Heng (2011); Brown, Waring, & Donkaewbua, 2008; Ayure, 2018).

2.1 Vocabulary learning

Vocabulary refers to the set of words a person knows in a particular language. It develops with age and is a fundamental and useful communication tool which aids knowledge acquisition. Vocabulary plays an extremely important role in learners attempting to acquire new language skills (Cameron, 2001). A person's vocabulary knowledge affects their language learning progress to a greater extent since limited L2 vocabulary is often the culprit that hinders successful communication. The acquisition of a

comprehensive vocabulary base is the biggest impediment to language learning, which has been widely documented by many studies (Subon, 2016; Besthia, 2018).

Vocabulary learning has a prevalent role to take part in a person's language learning progress. Hinkel (2015) stated that vocabulary teaching is important in every aspect, from writing and reading to speaking and listening. A person's vocabulary will dictate their success or failure in learning a particular language. With a larger vocabulary, a person will be able to understand more of what they read or hear, which will in turn help them use vocabulary during spoken or written communications.

Sonbul and Schmitt (2010) stated that vocabulary instruction programs could influence a student's language learning abilities for the better because they could enhance the student's reading abilities and proficiency in the language. Every language in the world requires learners to possess a comprehensive vocabulary if they wish to be successful in communicating and expressing their thoughts in the language. Schmitt (2000) and Rohmatillah (2017) underscored the necessity of having a comprehensive vocabulary base in their studies where they emphasized that extensive lexical knowledge was integral for the acquisition of a FL and to achieve communicative competence.

Ramos (2015) stated that a proper vocabulary learning program provided a strong foundation for the acquisition of a L2. Numerous material developers, teachers, and researchers have conducted extensive studies about the role played by vocabulary in determining language proficiency. After being neglected in earlier language learning programs, vocabulary later regained its importance and went on to be recognized as an essential aspect of successful language learning. Educators started prioritizing fluency over accuracy as they went from 'the grammar translation method' to a 'communicative teaching approach'. This resulted in subsidiary vocabulary learning and teaching becoming one of the two most important teaching programs – the second being the intentional teaching approach (Xu & Hsu, 2017).

2.2 Vocabulary learning strategies

The evidence tells us that vocabulary learning is an integral and inescapable aspect of language learning. As a result, vocabulary learning-focused studies have been on the rise for the last 20 years. A vocabulary strategy is an approach that seeks to facilitate better vocabulary learning, which has been successfully used by many students for enhancing their program (Schmitt, 2000). These strategies fall under language learning strategies, which are defined to include activities that are deliberately preferred by learners for amending their language learning processes. They also include direct and indirect learning processes, which learners can exploit for obtaining, storing, retrieving, encoding, rehearsing, and using words.

Learners can create, manage, select, and use vocabulary learning strategies, which enable explicit learning (like recalling words by utilizing flashcards for purposefully acquiring language skills and knowledge) and implicit learning (like reading extensively for increasing one's language skills and knowledge). Learners show a tendency to prioritize vocabulary learning strategies over all other strategies. Successful learners utilize diverse strategies in adaptable and bendable ways to derive improved results (Schmitt, 1997; Griffiths, 2008; Gu, 2012; Farjami & Aidinlou, 2013).

Simultaneously, more studies are being conducted into the way learners move towards and control their own language learning processes. Researchers have conducted numerous studies for categorizing the vocabulary learning strategies utilized by students. Out of them all, Schmitt's taxonomy is widely regarded as the most precise, comprehensive, and complete classification of leading vocabulary learning strategies as it comprises over 58 strategies divided into five groups (Carter, 2012; Manuel, 2017).

Schmitt's taxonomy makes use of Mayer & Nation's Discovery/Consolidation distinction and Oxford's classification system. Out of Oxford's six strategy groups, he adopted four that he considered to be the

most relevant for his objectives and added Discovery strategies to the list, which in turn consists of social strategies, determination strategies, and consolidation strategies. Consolidation strategies consist of metacognitive, cognitive, and memory. Social strategies utilize interactions with others for improving language learning abilities whereas memory strategies complement existing knowledge with new material. Cognitive strategies seek to transform or manipulate the learner's existing language knowledge and are close to memory strategies; except they're not singularly centered on psychological processing strategies. Cognitive strategies may include mechanical and repetition methods like word books, flashcards, word lists for studying vocabulary. A metacognitive strategy involves a cognizant overview of the language learning process and requires learners to make decisions concerning evaluating, observing, or planning the best techniques for studying. They also determine which words should be learned, help make conscious plans, and can determine effective learning methods as well. Determination strategies help students discover new words and their meaning all on their own without relying on others (Schmitt 1997; Huong, 2018; Abbassi, Hassaskhah, & Tahriri, 2018)

2.3 Previous Studies on Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In the last ten years, researchers have started showing renewed interest in new vocabulary learning strategies, underscoring the relevance and significance of vocabulary acquisition skills among L2 learners. Several researchers have analyzed numerous vocabulary presentation methods and the effects they have on retention skills. Many studies have sought to determine the best vocabulary retention strategy for learners in the last 20 years (Omaar, 2016; Carter, 2012; Nation, 2001; Oxford, 1990; Besthia, 2018; Na, 2016).

Phakiti (2003) conducted a detailed investigation into the impact gender had in influencing the results of metacognitive and cognitive strategies among 490 university students who were studying English. Males were found to deploy more metacognitive strategies compared to females. The findings also helped researchers understand the complexities of vocabulary learning strategies and investigation in diverse EFL/ESL contexts. The latest studies on gender & vocabulary learning strategies reveal that gender has an indispensable role in deciding on the success of a teaching method – thus forcing vocabulary learning strategy programs to factor this variable as well.

Al-Ghozify (2008) tested experimentally the efficiency of cognitive strategies on the vocabulary acquisition and retention abilities of 60 FL students of English. The findings showed that experimental group members fared better in the instantaneous post-test compared to the control group. The same was observed in the delayed post-test as well. However, it is to be eminent that there was no statistically significant disparity in the performance displayed by participants in the tardy post-test, albeit it was better than the control group.

A similar study with Iranian English students conducted by Kafipour (2010) also discovered that memory strategies are the uttermost commonly used for vocabulary learning among undergraduates. Postgraduate language learners are often more lucrative in their efforts and be likely to utilize a far-reaching variety of strategies, as opposed to simply depending on memorization and learning by rote.

Farjami and Aidinlou (2013) gave deeper insights into the vocabulary learning problems faced by learners and offered practical teaching and learning strategies for improving these issues. They concluded that learners need to acquaint themselves with a high number of words and maintain them in their lasting memory for learning a FL/L2 proficiently. Their suggestion was that teachers ought to present new words with relevant context, which can help provide learners with the clues they need for guessing the actual meaning without consulting others. This was appreciated by many teachers and students as a highly practical recommendation.

Another study about vocabulary learning strategies conducted by Zarin and Khan (2014) with 46 Indian undergraduates also found that memory strategies were most commonly used and cognitive and metacognitive strategies were the least frequent.

Hamza, Yasin, and Aladdin (2015) sought to find the vocabulary learning strategy that was preferred by Sudanese learners of English. The findings showed that they preferred a medium range of strategies, especially discovery strategies which were used the most.

Omaar (2016) analyzed vocabulary learning strategies utilized by Libyan university students and how gender affected choices. No statistically significant disparities were observed by Omaar in his study about the differences between the performances of female and male students in vocabulary learning programs. However, there were major differences in the mean scores of the social strategies favored by females. Gender influences the determination strategies that individuals use, especially when it comes to word lists and bilingual dictionaries, where females came out on top. Similarly, Ansari, Vahdany, and Sabouri (2016) analyzed the relationship involving usage of vocabulary learning strategies as well as the gender of Iranian FL students of English where it was discovered that a higher proportion of females preferred metacognitive strategies.

Rohmatillah (2017) analyzed the issues faced by university students in developing their English vocabulary, which were hindering their vocabulary learning practices. This was done using questionnaires and interviews that were successful in finding various challenges. Several problems, such as issues with pronunciation, spellings, meanings, inflections of the word forms, and redundancies, were observed. The study provided deeper insights into the issues faced by FL learners at different stages of their learning process.

3. Research Method

This study is quantitative in nature, which was conducted on the basis of a cross-sectional research design applied to a diverse group of Saudi Arabian FL learners of English at a government university. It took place during the 2nd semester of the 2019-20 academic year.

3.1 Participants

A total of 219 participants took part in this study, consisting of 47 females and 172 males. The participants were chosen with the help of random sampling methods from a population of 425 English department students. The researchers also made efforts to ensure that the participants were an accurate representative sample of the entire population. All participants have been studying English for over ten years. The group consisted of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. All participants hailed from similar socio-economic backgrounds. They displayed high levels of maturity and cognitive development, which was deemed to be enough for an accurate self-examination of their learning strategies and learning process. Their ages ranged from 19 – 26.

3.2 Instruments

Many vocabulary learning strategy studies have used the survey method for gathering information (Schmitt, 2000; Catalan, 2003; Gu, 2002; Manuel, 2017). A questionnaire was also used in this study because if learners are to provide an accurate description of their personal preferences, weaknesses, and strengths in their cultural and individual learning styles, it is also important to gather additional information regarding their learning process. The questionnaire allows them to verify the accuracy of the data they've provided and provide additional information that is of value to the study (Schimitt, 2010).

3.2.1 Students' Survey

A vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire, devised by Schmitt (1997), revised and adapted by Omaar (2016) was sent to 219 students. It included over 42 different items and had a 0.93 reliability

coefficient. The first eight items covered various determination strategies while the next seven covered social strategies. From 16 to 29, the questions involved memory strategies and the next nine items included cognitive strategies. The remaining ones dealt with metacognitive strategies. This questionnaire was split into two parts, the first one dealing with demographic questions, which included gender, age, and university degree level. The next part consisted of two subparts – one containing 13 Discovery Strategy-related items and the second containing 29 Consolidation Strategy-related items.

3.2.2 Validity and Reliability

Gay and Airasian (2005) held a high-reliability coefficient to be an indication of a valid and reliable measure. They declared such tests to always be reliable. In accordance with the conditions established by them, the instruments used in this study were deemed reliable and valid since statistical analysis confirmed the same. (It has a 0.970 reliability coefficient value as per Cronbach's Alpha).

3.3 Data Collection

The vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire had to be administered via Google Forms since the COVID-19 pandemic prevented a conventional administration of the questionnaire. The participants were given a detailed briefing about the primary objectives of this study and its importance in the field of language teaching and learning. Participants were also provided instructions on completing the questionnaire. Blackboard technology was used for administering the test, which was completed within a span of one week during regular class time.

4. Analysis and Results

Data collected from the survey participants were analyzed with' the Statistical Package for Social Science' (SPSS). A scoring system was developed in order to group participants into categories based on their strategy use: low (score of 1-2.4), medium (score of 2.4-3.5), and high (3.5-5). With this scoring system in place, mean scores for each category as well as overall strategy use were calculated.

4.1 Students' Survey Analysis

In order to find out the reliability of the study results, Cronbach's Alpha was run, measuring 0.97, which indicates a high degree of reliability. For each of the five vocabulary learning strategy categories included in the survey, mean scores were calculated. As shown in Table 1, all of these scores were high. With a mean of over 2.66 for all strategies, all of the subjects of the study can be categorized as high strategy users. Of the five strategy types, memory strategies have the highest mean value (2.88, with a standard deviation of 1.04). Cognitive strategies had the lowest mean value (2.76, with a standard deviation of 1.09).

Table 1: Overall descriptive analysis of vocabulary learning strategies

No.	Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
1.	Determination	0	4	2.86	1.02
2.	Social	0	4	2.81	1.07
3.	Memory	0	4	2.88	1.04
4.	Cognitive	0	4	2.76	1.09
5.	Metacognitive	0	4	2.79	1.07

Determination strategies are shown in Table 2. Item 5 dealt with the use of Arabic-English dictionaries in order to look up new words, and had a mean score of 2.91. Item 3 involved analyzing pictures or gestures that accompany new words, and had a mean score of 2.94. Item 1 was about analyzing the

parts of speech of new vocabulary words and this had a mean score of 3.21. Item 8, which involved using flash cards, had the lowest mean score of 2.58, with a standard deviation of 1.14.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of determination strategies

	No.	Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Determination	1.	I analyze the type of new words; for example, whether it is a noun, verb, pronoun, or adjective.	0	4	3.21	1.01
	2.	I analyze the affixes and roots of new words.	0	4	2.81	0.99
	3.	I analyze any available pictures or gestures accompanying the new word	0	4	2.94	0.98
	4.	I guess the meaning of new words from text or context.	0	4	2.86	0.98
	5.	I use a bilingual dictionary, for example, English-Arabic dictionary to find the meaning of new words.	0	4	2.91	1.08
	6.	I use a monolingual dictionary, for example, English-English dictionary to find the meaning of new words.	0	4	2.83	0.93
	7.	I use word lists to find the meanings.	0	4	2.80	1.06
	8.	I use flash cards to find the meanings.	0	4	2.58	1.14

Social strategies are displayed in Table 3. These involve translating new words into Arabic, paraphrasing new words in the learner's own way as well as asking for synonyms, and practicing new words in sentences. These had the highest mean values in this category, from 2.89 to 2.90. In this category, the lowest mean value of 2.72 was for the strategy of studying new words with classmates in pairs or small groups.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of social strategies

	No.	Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Social	9.	I ask the teacher for Arabic translation of new words.	0	4	2.89	1.05
	10.	I ask the teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new words.	0	4	2.90	1.04
	11.	I ask the teacher for a sentence including the new word.	0	4	2.89	1.05
	12.	I ask my classmates for the meaning of new words.	0	4	2.77	1.08
	13.	I discover the meaning through group work activity.	0	4	2.75	1.07
	14.	I study and practice the meaning of new words in pairs or a group in a class.	0	4	2.72	1.08
	15.	My teacher checks my word lists for accuracy.	0	4	2.77	1.08

Memory strategies are shown in Table 4. The strategy with the highest mean value (2.95) is saying new words aloud. Other memory strategies, including pictorial representations, associating words with coordinates, using synonyms to create associations, and studying the spelling of new words all show similar mean values around 2.90.

Table 4: Descriptive analysis of memory strategies

	No.	Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Memory	16.	It is easy for me to learn new words when they have pictorial representation of their meaning (e.g., images, and drawings with words).	0	4	2.90	1.10
	17.	I image word's meaning.	0	4	2.88	1.03
	18.	I connect the word to a personal experience.	0	4	2.89	1.01
	19.	I associate the word with its coordinates, for example, fruits (apple, orange, peach).	0	4	2.90	0.99
	20.	I connect the word to its synonyms.	0	4	2.91	0.97
	21.	I use the new word in a sentence.	0	4	2.95	1.03
	22.	I study the spelling of a new word.	0	4	2.90	1.06
	23.	I study the sound of a new word.	0	4	2.80	1.07
	24.	I say new words aloud when studying.	0	4	2.95	1.09
	25.	I image word's form to remember it.	0	4	2.89	1.02
	26.	I remember the affixes and roots of new words.	0	4	2.77	1.08
	27.	I remember the part of speech of new words.	0	4	2.84	1.05
	28.	I try to use my own language to explain and remember the meaning of new words.	0	4	2.88	1.07
	29.	I use physical actions when learning a new word.	0	4	2.81	1.04

Table 5 shows the mean values for cognitive strategies. These ranged from 2.59 to 2.86, showing consistent high use among participants of these strategies. The standard deviations for these, however, ranged from 0.99 to 1.17. The highest mean score in this category was for verbal repetition of new words and taking notes about them, and the lowest was for listening to recorded word lists.

Table 5: Descriptive analysis of cognitive strategies

	No.	Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Cognitive	30.	I verbally repeat new words several times.	0	4	2.86	0.99
	31.	I write new words several times.	0	4	2.80	1.06
	32.	I use wordlists, and revise them over time.	0	4	2.76	1.13
	33.	I use flash cards to remember words.	0	4	2.70	1.10
	34.	I take notes about new words.	0	4	2.82	1.09
	35.	I use the vocabulary section in my textbook.	0	4	2.77	1.05
	36.	I listen to a CD of word lists.	0	4	2.59	1.17
	37.	I put English labels on physical objects.	0	4	2.77	1.11
	38.	I keep a vocabulary notebook.	0	4	2.72	1.14

Table 6 shows the mean scores of the metacognitive strategies. They range from 2.68 to 2.87. This shows a high overall use of these strategies. These include a variety of self-regulated learning methods, such as studying new words over time, as well as using English media, including social media, to learn new words. The lowest-scoring strategies in this category included self-testing with word lists, with 2.68, and skipping or passing new words, which scored 2.75.

Table 6: Descriptive analysis of metacognitive strategies

	No.	Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Meta	39.	I use English social media (songs, films).	0	4	2.86	1.05
	40.	I test myself with word lists.	0	4	2.75	1.08
	41.	I skip or pass new words.	0	4	2.68	1.13
	42.	I continue to study new words over time.	0	4	2.87	1.03

4.2 Gender Differences

This study also examined differences in survey responses based on participants' gender. In order to measure any potential differences between the vocabulary learning strategies of female and male EFL learners, the Independent Samples T-test was used to analyze the data.

Table 7: Gender difference as per vocabulary learning strategies

No.	Strategies	Gender	Number	Mean	Std. Dev	t	df	P
1.	Determination	Male	172	2.85	1.00	0.49	10.75	0.63
		Female	47	2.91	1.07			
2.	Social	Male	172	2.81	1.04	0.56	10.36	0.59
		Female	47	2.84	1.16			
3.	Memory	Male	172	2.83	1.04	5.31	18.99	3.9e-05
		Female	47	3.05	1.02			
4.	Cognitive	Male	172	2.75	1.05	0.26	13.44	0.80
		Female	47	2.77	1.25			
5.	Metacognitive	Male	172	2.74	1.04	1.36	3.09	0.27
		Female	47	2.96	1.15			

This analysis showed that there is no statistically significant disparity overall between females and males in the use of vocabulary learning strategies. Only memory strategies showed a statistically significant difference in mean score between genders.

5. Discussion

Having described the results of the statistical analysis above, this section discusses the research questions posed by this study. It begins with a discussion about the most preferable vocabulary learning strategies employed by the subjects of this study and ends with the question of gender differences in vocabulary learning strategies.

5.1 Discussion on Research Question 1

❖ What is the uttermost preferable vocabulary learning strategy used by Saudi EFL learners?

The findings of this study point out that students consistently use strategies from all five categories in the taxonomy developed by Schmitt (1997). Memory strategies were the most preferred overall, and cognitive strategies reported the least used. Determination, social, and metacognitive strategies all ranked in the middle.

The possible explanation of this preference might be attributed to the fact that Mnemonic tools for vocabulary learning are considered to be extremely effective. These include methods such as creating acronyms, associating new words with synonyms, images, and other keywords. They help language learners link new vocabulary items together in their minds.

Humans are capable of storing 100 trillion bits of information, but memory strategies are necessary to utilize that potential (Oxford, 1990). In order for new vocabulary to be stored in long-term memory, links must be developed between new words. Memory strategies involve making associations between different things in order to reinforce the meanings of the new words. This is why they are good for helping new vocabulary stick in the long-term. They consistently lead to positive outcomes.

Vocabulary acquisition is a critical element of learning a new language. It provides learners with the ability to actually converse in the new language and write effectively. This is likely why these vocabulary learning strategies are well-liked with Saudi EFL learners.

The effectiveness of vocabulary learning is dependent on how new words are practiced. Memory strategies have been shown to improve integration and recall by putting new words in context and increasing associations between them. They also provide students with autonomy in the learning process. Language instruction should aim to increase the retention of vocabulary without greatly increasing study time. Students forget much of what they learn, so adding memory strategies to one's learning process helps improve long-term outcomes.

The cognitive strategies were the least frequently used by students who participated in this study. The subjects of study used fewer cognitive vocabulary strategies, and mostly tended to use methods that were more simple and direct, that used low-level mental processing compared to the more involved memory, social, and metacognitive strategies. This is likely owing to the fact that the subjects may not be as acquainted with these strategies, and so they depend on the more straightforward strategies.

The results of this study were lined up with those found by Zarin & Khan (2014) and Kafipour (2010). They also found that the memory strategies were used frequently, and contradictorily metacognitive strategies were the least common. However, Hamza et al. (2015) found that discovery strategies were the most frequent.

5.2 Discussion on Research Question 2

❖ Are there any statistically significant disparities in the use of vocabulary learning strategies by Saudi EFL learners due to gender?

Statistical analysis of the data from the survey in this study determined that there was no significant statistical disparity in the use of vocabulary learning strategies overall between genders. The only category that showed a significant disparity was in memory strategies, where female subjects showed the highest mean, 3.05, with a standard deviation of 1.04, while male subjects showed a mean of 2.83 with a standard deviation of 1.04. This indicates that females are more likely to apply memory strategies than men. However, this was the only category that had any disparity, and so this survey data would indicate that no absolute conclusion can be drawn.

This result varies from other studies about vocabulary learning strategies and gender. Na (2016) concluded that female EFL students use more cognitive strategies such as note-taking, translation, and recurrence more frequently than male students. Omaar (2016) found that the statistical difference between genders was only with determination strategies, specifically, the use of dictionaries and word

lists. Finally, Ansari, Vahdany, and Sabouri (2016) found that female students had a higher frequency of using metacognitive strategies.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The main pedagogical implications based on the preceding discussion and analysis have revealed a rich treasure trove of information regarding the vocabulary learning strategies used by Saudi EFL learners in enhancing their English vocabulary. Important details about the pressing obstacles faced by them and the solutions that successfully tackled these obstacles were also obtained after a comprehensive analysis of the findings of this study. It was found that enthusiastic participation of the students in collaboration with peers and teachers could work out in their benefit in terms of vocabulary enrichment. Students need to be taught a variety of vocabulary learning strategies along with the pros and cons of each method. This could help them discover the efficiency and usefulness of each strategy and modify them accordingly to suit their own convenience and skillset. Students ought also to be taught vocabulary learning strategies at the university level along with strategies like the repetition of new words, note-taking, flashcards, etc.

Students must have ample optimism and confidence in their ability to use, learn, and deploy their English vocabulary effectively by practicing the words that they've learned over the course of their English course. They should not be deterred from asking for help from their friends and teachers and shouldn't stop their efforts, come what may. While asking for help from peers is not a bad idea, it should be noted that peers may be the source of misinformation, which could compromise their progress.

A sense of independence and hard work is always good in a student. They need to work to figure out the learning strategies that work well for them, which will enable them to acquire a diverse and comprehensive vocabulary set. For instance, training students to guess meanings from the context of the word could aid them in becoming self-reliant, instead of having to turn to the dictionary. Instead of merely sticking to study materials recommended by their syllabus, students should also be encouraged to refer to other literary texts that can help them master the language in the truest sense of the word.

A reading habit will go a long way in boosting the English abilities of the students and help them learn new words and phrases. Listening and reading are two activities where students come across new and refined words, thus providing them with an opportunity to enhance their vocabulary. A listening and reading habit, paired with the use of a comprehensive dictionary, can work wonders in upgrading the FL abilities of a student. They must also learn to listen and read extensively and consult the dictionary frequently to learn more about the new words that they have just learned. This will help them understand where to deploy new words effectively as well.

The dictionary is probably the most valuable asset an ESL learner can have since it provides accurate information about a word, including its correct pronunciation, example sentence, word parts, etc. Repetition of a word either in a written or oral form can be useful in helping them remember the words. While memorization is mostly considered by modernists to be an outdated method for learning vocabulary, do note that it can still help new learners - especially those lacking in confidence or the ones who lack an environment where they are allowed an opportunity to deploy the words they've learned.

The third most frequently seen metacognitive strategy is direct learning from the dictionary. However, given that Saudi Arabian EFL learners typically utilize bilingual dictionaries, there is a pressing need to encourage them to start utilizing monolingual dictionaries since they are more useful than others.

Teachers can also teach students to utilize vocabulary learning strategies after a thorough assessment of their abilities, meaning that teachers can assign diverse vocabulary learning strategies to their

students anchored in their skill levels and requirements. Each learning strategy usually has a specific deficit that it targets to overcome. By assigning vocabulary learning strategies on the basis of their competency levels, teachers will be able to improve the language skills of their students. Listening to native English speakers and English films can help them improve their pronunciation as well. Interactions with native speakers must be maximized to ensure that students have adequate exposure to the people with the right diction and pronunciation. In summary, a well-rounded vocabulary learning strategy is one that has been designed after taking a student's unique circumstances and factors into consideration. Such vocabulary learning strategies can target weak areas effectively and help students develop their vocabulary and gain language proficiency in a holistic manner.

7. Conclusion

This study contributed more detailed insights into the vocabulary learning strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners. With an overall mean of 2.66, study participants were high strategy users. Memory strategies proved to be the most preferred among participants, followed by determination, social, and metacognitive, with cognitive strategies being the least commonly used. The only significant disparity between genders was in memory strategies.

With these findings in mind, more research is recommended, particularly qualitative research, in order to determine other relevant variables in the choice of learning strategies and the effect of those strategies in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The effectiveness of various vocabulary learning and teaching strategies on distant kinds of vocabulary is also a prime area for study. Finally, it would be interesting to examine how the uses of various learning strategies affect students' depth, breadth, and fluency of vocabulary.

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