



A Comparative Determination of Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Saudi EFL Learners

Choudhary Zahid Javid

Department of Foreign Languages, College of Arts, Taif University, Taif, KSA

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 18th November 2013, revised 3rd February 2014, accepted 17th April 2014

Abstract

This empirical study investigates Saudi EFL learners' patterns of vocabulary learning strategies used by them to learn their discipline-related vocabulary. It also attempts to investigate their preferences towards using various strategies to learn new English vocabulary along gender lines. For data collection a 44-item Likert-scale questionnaire was exploited and given to 82 male and 71 female Saudi EFL learners. Independent-samples t-test was run to calculate the descriptive analysis in terms of means and standard deviations and to see whether any significant differences existed along gender-lines or not. The results of this empirical investigation suggested that Saudi EFL learners represented by the sample of this study liked the determination strategies the most followed by memory strategies. Among the remaining strategies, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies have been assigned 3rd, 4th, and 5th positions respectively. The results also suggest that Saudi EFL learners exploit various strategies to inference the meaning of new words. It is also reported that Saudi EFL learners do not like note-taking strategies and encoding strategies. It is recommended that EFL teachers working in the KSA should convince their students regarding the pedagogical significance of these techniques and encourage them to maintain vocabulary notebooks, use techniques of learning new words through previously learned knowledge such as exploiting some form of imagery, or grouping. The findings of this study seem to suggest that VLS training should be considered important and need to be given priority by EFL faculty so that effective vocabulary learning may be ensured. This study has the pedagogical implication to acquaint EFL teachers with the psychological underpinnings of Saudi learners related to VLS to train them to maximize their vocabulary learning possibilities.

Keywords: Self-reported beliefs; vocabulary learning strategies

Introduction

Among several other dynamics, appropriate and updated knowledge of vocabulary is an extremely important component of effective learning process of English as a foreign language. It has been reported that "vocabulary forms the biggest part of the meaning of any language, and vocabulary is the biggest problem for most learners" (p. 1)¹. Considering the primary role of lexical knowledge in effective ELT and the difficulties of vocabulary learning experienced by EFL learners, "... one would expect that vocabulary instruction would be at the top of the agenda for language teachers. However, the opposite is often the case" (p. 625)². It has been stated that explicit vocabulary teaching is often neglected and EFL learners are left to struggle of their own to pick up lexical knowledge without the required guidance in this regard³. Vocabulary learning is a complex process that "involves such abilities as form recognition (pronunciation, spelling, derivations) Knowledge of its specific grammatical properties, however, as well as the ability to use the word appropriately in certain contexts, and its functions" along with mastering its meaning (p. 1)¹. The above-mentioned procedure clearly seems to suggest that vocabulary learning is a complicated process that needs proper attention for ensuring satisfactory result.

This lack of suitable and appropriate lexical knowledge hinders the progress of EFL learners in other language learning skills as well. Anderson⁴ associated it with slow reading of English language learners that causes major handicap in their learning process. Presence of some unknown words in a reading passage will either result in the failure of the comprehension of the contents or force the reader to quit the reading altogether. Much research has reported that language learners consciously or unconsciously use various vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) to cope up with this situation and an explicit teaching of these strategies is imperative to enable EFL learners to make decisions regarding the effective use of VLS to facilitate lexical knowledge⁵⁻⁷.

Literature Review: A growing mass of research established the significance of vocabulary teaching/learning and manifested itself through modified approaches and methodologies in ELT⁸. Talking about the primacy of vocabulary, it is asserted that "without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed"(p. 158)⁹. It has been stated that language comprises of lexical items connected by grammar and not of rules of grammar filled in by lexis¹⁰⁻¹¹. Research has reported that vocabulary needs of learners are specific based on their personal, professional and academic needs⁹; thus, it should be one of the main focal point of all

programmes to equip the learners with appropriate vocabulary related to the field of specialization as well as train the learners to inculcate the skill of acquiring the required vocabulary of their own⁸⁻¹². It has been reported “that more successful learners, in contrast to less successful learners, employ a group of specific strategies which are related to their success” (p. 159)⁹. They further elaborated that “VLS have been characterized as any strategy which affects the process by which words are obtained, stored, retrieved and used”. Since 1980’s numerous studies have been conducted in ESL/EFL contexts which encouraged that VLS should be taught because they are key for successful SL/FL vocabulary learning¹³⁻¹⁹.

The word ‘strategy’ has been derived from the old Greek word ‘strategia’ meaning the steps or measures taken to win a war. Research has reported that these measures can be used effectively when used consciously “prior to, during, or after language performance in order to enhance the use and the learning of a second or a foreign language” (p. 139)²⁰. Four important factors has been included in his definition of VLS stating that these “a) involve choice, that is, there are several strategies to choose from; b) be complex, that is, there are several steps to learn; c) require knowledge and benefit from training; and d) increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use” (p. 1)¹. The same notion has been presented by Oxford²¹ who stated that strategies are the processes exploited by successful learners “to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information” (p. 4). She further explains the concept of learning strategies and highlights their significance for enhanced learning possibilities by stating that these are “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations” (p. 8)²¹. It is defined that the VLS are the “specific strategies utilised in the isolated task of learning vocabulary in the target language” (p.52)²². Though VLS are the strategies which are limited to vocabulary learning but they bear major similarities with general language learning strategies. This overlap may be witnessed in the language learning strategies taxonomy²¹. Takec²² has suggested four characteristics of VLS which are: i. require selection on the learners’ part, ii. exhibit complexity and necessitate certain processes, iii. depend upon learners’ understanding and can further develop through instruction, and iv. make learning and using vocabulary in L2 more efficient (P. 140).

It has been reported that vocabulary learning includes five steps, i.e., to have access to the material containing new words, associate the new word with some auditory or visual image or both, understand the meaning of the new word, establish a vivid memory link between the meaning and the form of the new lexical item and develop an ability to use the newly learned word appropriately²³⁻²⁴.

Confirming the significance of VLS in successful learning process, numerous taxonomies have been developed to identify ESL/EFL learners’ VLS. The taxonomy developed Omalley and

Chamot²⁵ classified VLS into three categories namely cognitive, metacognitive and effective/social. This classification contained six categories, memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies categorized under two main groups, direct and indirect: the first three categories included in direct whereas the later three formed the indirect group²¹. Schemitt¹⁹ has developed a comprehensive inventory containing 58 items grouped into two categories: the first category was based on Oxford’s²¹ social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies with an addition of determination strategies to be exploited by the learners to understand the new words they encountered whereas the second category was based on Nation²⁶ who proposed the discovery strategies to handle, remember and consolidate the new lexical items. Gu and Johnson²⁷ also developed a 74-item VLS taxonomy grouped into six subcategories, i.e., guessing, dictionary usage, note-taking, rehearsal, encoding and activating.

Though the role of vocabulary has been emphasized much for effective learning/teaching process of learning English as a second/foreign language, yet its importance has not been fully recognized till the beginning of last two decades of the twentieth century. It has been asserted that vocabulary was not given its due importance “... because of certain dominant teaching approaches in the 1940’s until the 1960’s” (p. 625)²⁸. They elaborated it further by quoting the examples of ‘structural linguistics by Fries²⁹ and ‘generative transformational linguistics theory’ presented by Chomsky³⁰ which mainly focused on phonological and grammatical structures as the bases of a language; therefore, it has been suggested that the above-mentioned should be emphasised for better and faster learning. It was theorised “that when the learners have learned the structural frames and the grammatical rules, they will then be able to fill in the lexical items as needed” (p. 625)²⁸. It has also been reported that the later approaches such as the one proposed by Rogas³¹ also considered vocabulary learning process as secondary to functional language use for ensuring communicative competence. All these approaches based their teaching philosophy on the belief that vocabulary does not need explicit teaching and the learners would learn the required lexicon once they have command over the grammatical, functional and phonological structures of the target language³². The beginning of 1980s witnessed an increased emphasis on teaching vocabulary in ELT methodologies to the extent that the controversial lexical approach was presented and supported by many⁸⁻¹⁰. According to this approach, it was posited that a language consists of lexical items connected by grammatical rules of that language and not the rules filled in by the lexical items of that particular language¹⁰. Sokmen³³ has recommended that it is important to teach relevant and required vocabulary to ESL/EFL learners because it is “... not possible for students to learn all the vocabulary they need in the classroom” (p.225). Lexical approach, though remains controversial in ELT, has ended the bias against teaching vocabulary explicitly for better results.

Research has offered valuable insights into the fact that the researchers adopted three approaches to identify what strategies are more effective for different language learners according to their specific needs³⁴. The first category of VLS studies attempted to find out the efficacy of VLS on real vocabulary learning tasks³⁵⁻³⁶⁻³⁷⁻³⁸, the second category recorded participants' language proficiency versus vocabulary size as well as used correlation efficient to investigate the frequency of VLS as reported by the participants through self-reported surveys^{27,34,39,40} and the third category of VLS studies meant to elicit the participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of VLS due to their past language learning experiences^{13,41,19,36}.

Though most of the studies conducted to investigate VLS have concentrated on general vocabulary, yet several researchers^{12,13,42,43} highlighted the differences between the general vocabulary with that of technical, academic and low frequency vocabulary. Scarcella and Zimmerman⁴⁴ identified the technical words as the ones "... that are used in specific academic fields" (p. 28). It has been explained that technical or specialised vocabulary items, though rarely used in general English texts, are found in high frequency in the specific texts related to specific academic fields^{43,45,46}. Talking about the significance of learning the technical words, Casanova⁴⁷ elaborated that along with academic success in the specialized fields, learning specialised vocabulary helps in acquiring the culture of that specific disciplinary community.

Methodology

Research Questions: This study will be directed by the following research questions: i. What are Saudi EFL learners' patterns of VLS they employ to learn the technical vocabulary related to their discipline? ii. What VLS patterns are reported by the participants of the study to be positively linked to learning of the technical vocabulary related to their discipline? iii. Are there any statistically significant gender-based differences in the use of VLS among Saudi EFL learners?

Hypothesis: This research will be centered on the following null hypothesis: Null Hypothesis: There will not be any statistically significant gender-based difference among Saudi EFL learners' patterns of VLS they employ to learn the technical vocabulary related to their discipline.

Participants: This empirical study was a cross sectional survey to gather information related to the frequency and effectiveness of VLS from a randomly selected sample that was drawn from the foreign languages department, Taif University (FLD TU). The participants of this study were consisted of 153 male and female Saudi EFL learners studying at Taif University in Saudi Arabia.

Instrumentation: A 6-point frequency-scale (never-always) questionnaire employed by Aljdee⁴⁸ to investigate the frequency and effectiveness of VLS employed by learners to learn the vocabulary related to their disciplines was used for this survey research. This VLS taxonomy contained 44 items.

Table-1

LLS items distribution according to 6 types

No	VLS strategy	Items	Total
1	Determination	1-9	9
2	Social	10-16	7
3	Memory	17-30	13
4	Cognitive	31-35	5
5	Metacognitive	36-44	9

The questionnaire was translated into Arabic so that authentic responses may be ensured. The Arabic version of this structured questionnaire was administered to the participants of the study to record their reliable responses. Participants' responses were coded, manually entered and analysed by using the latest version of SPSS. Independent-Samples T-test was run to calculate the descriptive data as well as to identify any significant gender-based differences in the responses of the participants.

Work Plan: The empirical work for this study was conducted at FLD TU in ten (10) months. One hundred fifty-three (n=153) randomly selected English-major juniors and seniors (male and female) studying at FLD TU were investigated to collect data. The questionnaires was administered to the participants during their regular teaching sessions and they were given appropriate time to read and record their responses. The female colleagues were requested to distribute and collect the questionnaires in the female campus.

Data Analysis: The data generated through these questionnaires were carefully synthesized and tabulised to find out the answers of the research questions and to show the differences in the opinions of the male and female participants to test the hypothesis. It has been suggested that "the central tendency of groups is often described in terms of means and medians. Comparing the performance of groups will often involve looking at one or both of these basic characteristics"(p. 154)⁴⁹. Independent-Samples T-test was run to calculate the frequency of VLS find out any significant differences to test the hypothesis.

Result and Discussion

This chapter deals with the gender-based comparative results as calculated by independent-samples t-test related to five sub categories of VLS. table-2 reports the data related to determination strategies generated by the responses of male and female Saudi English-major adult learners and both groups assigned relatively high values of more than 4 to the majority of items.

The data analysis revealed that both groups favoured stressing the meaning of new words using context clue method followed by use of bilingual dictionaries the most respectively. A growing mass of research has strongly suggested that among determination strategies, use of contextual guessing and bilingual dictionaries are the most commonly used to learn new words.

The finding of Dóczy²⁰ is in the same direction who reported that 98% students use context to guess the new words they encounter and 68% resort to bilingual dictionaries to deal with new vocabulary. The findings confirm the findings of Mokhtar et al.⁵⁰ who reported that guessing and use of bilingual dictionaries are the most commonly used VLS among Malaysian 1st and 2nd year university undergraduates. The finding is partially in line with Komol and Sripetpun¹ who also reported that Thai 2nd year university students also prefer to use bilingual dictionaries to learn vocabulary. Therefore, it is revealed that Saudi EFL learners are also passive learners of vocabulary as categorized by Gu and Johnson²⁷. Medium mean

values were assigned to the items that elicited the participants' responses towards identifying parts of speech of new words, picture clues or gesture clues whereas use of monolingual dictionaries was rated the least preferred strategy in this regard. Overall rating for the majority of determination strategies remained medium to high indicating that Saudi undergraduates use these strategies more often than other categories to handle new vocabulary confirming the findings of previous studies¹⁻⁵¹. Furthermore, results of independent-samples t-test showed that one item exhibited significant difference out of the total nine items in this category revealing that there do not exist any statistically significant differences along gender lines.

Table-2
Data analyses of "Determination" VLS

Problematic areas in Academic writing		Group	n	M	SD	T	Df	p value	
1	Questionnaire Item 1	Male	82	3.865	1.488	-1.083-	151	.281	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.112	1.304	-1.093-	150.97	.276	
2	Questionnaire Item 2	Male	82	4.024	1.498	-.526-	151	.599	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.154	1.564	-.525-	145.86	.600	
3	Questionnaire Item 3	Male	82	3.689	1.546	-.742-	151	.459	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.872	1.620	-.740-	145.65	.461	
4	Questionnaire Item 4	Male	82	4.000	1.387	-.399-	151	.690	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.098	1.666	-.394-	136.72	.694	
5	Questionnaire Item 5	Male	82	3.902	1.357	-2.135-	151	.034	p < 0.05
		Female	71	4.380	1.407	-2.129-	146.18	.035	
6	Questionnaire Item 6	Male	82	4.365	1.409	-.056-	151	.955	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.380	1.775	-.055-	133.02	.956	
7	Questionnaire Item 7	Male	82	4.353	1.391	-.654-	151	.514	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.507	1.510	-.650-	143.61	.517	
8	Questionnaire Item 8	Male	82	3.390	1.748	.962	151	.338	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.126	1.620	.967	150.27	.335	
9	Questionnaire Item 9	Male	82	4.817	1.145	1.746	151	.083	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.464	1.350	1.725	138.06	.087	

Table-3
Data analyses of "Social" VLS

Problematic areas in Academic writing		Group	n	M	SD	T	Df	p value	
10	Questionnaire Item 10	Male	82	2.597	1.284	.519	151	.605	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.493	1.193	.522	150.23	.603	
11	Questionnaire Item 11	Male	82	2.548	1.208	-1.208-	151	.229	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.816	1.533	-1.188-	132.43	.237	
12	Questionnaire Item 12	Male	82	2.426	1.361	-.708-	151	.480	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.591	1.517	-.702-	141.96	.484	
13	Questionnaire Item 13	Male	82	2.378	1.339	1.090	151	.277	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.140	1.344	1.090	147.71	.277	
14	Questionnaire Item 14	Male	82	4.402	1.265	.497	151	.620	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.295	1.387	.494	143.02	.622	
15	Questionnaire Item 15	Male	82	3.658	1.433	-1.200-	151	.232	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.929	1.345	-1.206-	150.00	.230	
16	Questionnaire Item 16	Male	82	3.402	1.472	.772	151	.441	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.225	1.343	.777	150.57	.438	

Table 3 details the results of the data analysis for seven items of the questionnaire sub-section that meant to elicit the participants' responses towards social strategies to learn new vocabulary items. The participants have ranked items of this sub-category lower to medium values: four items were given extremely low values of less than 3 whereas the remaining three items were assigned medium values. This finding supports previous research which also reported that social strategies are not favourite among ESL/EFL learners to learn new words such as Dóczy²⁰ who stated that only 33% participants he investigated use this strategy. The most preferred item as indicated by the highest mean values remained the strategy of asking classmates for the meaning of the new word. This finding supports the previous research such as the study¹ which also reported that Thai university undergraduates also ranked this strategy as the second most preferred for learning new vocabulary. Second highest mean was calculated for discovering new meanings through group work and third highest value remained for their

preference for studying and practicing meaning of the new words in a group of students. An interesting finding is that both male and female students do not have significant differences in any of the seven items of this category. The remaining four items were related to teacher's role in helping students learn new vocabulary items and extremely low values of less than 3 were assigned to all the items by both the groups. This finding contradicts the findings of Javid⁵² who conducted a study in the same academic echo system to identify their preferred learning styles and found that Saudi undergraduates prefer to have expert teachers who immediately help them with correct answers. Another interesting but pedagogically significant finding is that the participants of this study have exhibited a positive attitude to avoid using Arabic equivalent to learn new words. Rather they showed their liking to figure out the meaning of the new words by indulging in group work and seeking help from their class fellows to reach the correct meaning.

Table-4
Data analyses of "Memory" VLS

Problematic areas in Academic writing		Group	n	M	SD	T	Df	p value	
17	Questionnaire Item 17	Male	82	3.9268	1.4382	-.946-	151	.346	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.1408	1.3447	-.950-	150.09	.343	
18	Questionnaire Item 18	Male	82	4.1098	1.4824	-1.529-	151	.128	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.4648	1.3714	-1.538-	150.32	.126	
19	Questionnaire Item 19	Male	82	3.4268	1.3428	-2.663-	151	.009	p < 0.05
		Female	71	4.0423	1.5159	-2.640-	141.12	.009	
20	Questionnaire Item 20	Male	82	3.6098	1.2546	-2.545-	151	.012	p < 0.05
		Female	71	4.1690	1.4637	-2.517-	138.83	.013	
21	Questionnaire Item 21	Male	82	3.4756	1.2295	-.145-	151	.885	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.5070	1.4528	-.143-	137.90	.886	
22	Questionnaire Item 22	Male	82	4.3171	1.3135	.701	151	.484	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.1549	1.5459	.693	138.19	.489	
23	Questionnaire Item 23	Male	82	2.9512	1.3689	-2.387-	151	.018	p < 0.05
		Female	71	3.5211	1.5843	-2.362-	139.40	.020	
24	Questionnaire Item 24	Male	82	3.7317	1.6707	-1.223-	151	.223	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.0704	1.7511	-1.219-	145.64	.225	
25	Questionnaire Item 25	Male	82	3.3659	1.6140	-1.248-	151	.214	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.6901	1.5909	-1.249-	148.46	.214	
26	Questionnaire Item 26	Male	82	3.3659	1.5031	-.563-	151	.574	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.5070	1.5935	-.561-	145.02	.576	
27	Questionnaire Item 27	Male	82	3.7439	1.3771	-1.208-	151	.229	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.0423	1.6770	-1.191-	135.64	.236	
28	Questionnaire Item 28	Male	82	2.7195	1.3813	-1.699-	151	.091	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.1127	1.4788	-1.691-	144.45	.093	
29	Questionnaire Item 29	Male	82	3.3659	1.5831	.619	151	.537	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.2113	1.4920	.621	149.89	.535	
30	Questionnaire Item 30	Male	82	3.7439	1.3860	.593	151	.554	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.6056	1.4974	.590	143.93	.556	

Table 4 contains the data analysis of memory VLS; the subcategory that has 14 items. The participants allocated medium values to most of memory strategies to learn new vocabulary. Another interesting finding is that for all questionnaire items of this category, female cohort assigned higher values as compared to their male counterparts. The finding related to memory strategies is in line with Dóczy²⁰ who reported medium and low mean values assigned by the cohort he investigated. Both groups assigned highest value to the item stating that they study spellings of new words to memorise it. The second and third most favoured items were the ones that elicited their responses towards studying the sound of the new words and making a picture in their mind of the new words to learn the new vocabulary partially contradicting the study of

Dóczy²⁰ which revealed that use of these strategies was not favoured among memory strategies as only 40.4% stated that they use spellings and 15.5% reported that they use pronunciation to learn new words in the target language. Extremely low values of less than 2 were assigned by the male students and nearly 3 by the female participants to the items related to the use of 'scales for gradable adjectives' and 'associating the new words with its coordinates' whereas the remaining 8 items related to different memory related VLS were allotted medium mean values suggesting that Saudi university undergraduates represented by the participants of this study moderately use them to learn and enhance their English language vocabulary.

Table-5
Data analyses of "Cognitive" VLS

Problematic areas in Academic writing		Group	n	M	SD	T	Df	p value	
31	Questionnaire Item 31	Male	82	4.1341	1.4295	-.204-	151	.838	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.1831	1.5335	-.203-	144.34	.839	
32	Questionnaire Item 32	Male	82	3.9146	1.2881	-2.000-	151	.047	p < 0.05
		Female	71	4.3662	1.5046	-1.978-	138.74	.050	
33	Questionnaire Item 33	Male	82	2.8902	1.5154	-.940-	151	.349	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.1268	1.5940	-.936-	145.45	.351	
34	Questionnaire Item 34	Male	82	2.9390	1.6581	.452	151	.652	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.8169	1.6759	.452	147.42	.652	
35	Questionnaire Item 35	Male	82	3.5610	1.6487	.795	151	.428	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.3521	1.5865	.797	149.30	.426	

Table-6
Data analyses of "Metacognitive" VLS

Problematic areas in Academic writing		Group	n	M	SD	T	Df	p value	
36	Questionnaire Item 36	Male	82	4.9634	1.5189	1.785	151	.076	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.5352	1.4325	1.793	149.87	.075	
37	Questionnaire Item 37	Male	82	4.8049	1.4524	1.500	151	.136	p > 0.05
		Female	71	4.4366	1.5832	1.491	143.38	.138	
38	Questionnaire Item 38	Male	82	4.3415	1.5171	1.753	151	.082	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.8873	1.6865	1.740	142.15	.084	
39	Questionnaire Item 39	Male	82	3.3902	1.5694	-.237-	151	.813	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.4507	1.5747	-.237-	147.74	.813	
40	Questionnaire Item 40	Male	82	2.9146	1.3895	1.190	151	.236	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.6479	1.3742	1.191	148.33	.235	
41	Questionnaire Item 41	Male	82	3.1585	1.4441	.955	151	.341	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.9437	1.3189	.962	150.55	.338	
42	Questionnaire Item 42	Male	82	2.9390	1.4085	.281	151	.779	p > 0.05
		Female	71	2.8732	1.4825	.280	145.41	.780	
43	Questionnaire Item 43	Male	82	2.9756	1.3331	-.523-	151	.602	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.0986	1.5780	-.516-	137.77	.606	
44	Questionnaire Item 44	Male	82	3.0000	1.4315	-.402-	151	.689	p > 0.05
		Female	71	3.0986	1.6049	-.398-	141.59	.691	

Questionnaire items 31 to 35 are related to cognitive VLS and their data analysis has been presented in table 5. Like memory VLS, the participants have also assigned medium to lower values to these five items indicating their medium use of these strategies. The findings are in line with the findings of a growing mass of research in various ESL/EFL contexts¹⁻²⁰⁻⁵¹⁻⁵⁰⁻⁷. Both groups saw eye to eye to each other and did not show any significant differences in their responses towards cognitive VLS except for one related to 'writing the new words many times' in favour of female participants of this study. Like the trend exhibited in the previous tables female cohort allocated higher mean values to nearly all items of this subcategory as well. Both groups assigned highest values to the items that were related to 'repeating the new words over and over again' and 'writing the new words many times' to help them memorise them properly. Least values were allocated to the items related to 'keeping a vocabulary notebook for expanding rehearsal' and 'making own lists of new words' respectively showing their disliking for these items confirming the findings of previous research¹⁻⁵⁰⁻⁷ that also reported the note taking strategies as the least favoured. The findings also confirm the findings of Javid et al.⁵³ who also reported that Saudi university undergraduates do not prefer writing related activities.

Data analysis of the last 9 items related to metacognitive VLS has been presented in table 6 and the participants have shown interesting trends towards various items of this subcategory. The first two item have been allocated extremely high values by both groups which were related to 'watching English TV channels' (males: 4.96 and females: 4.53) and 'using computer programmes' (males: 4.80 and females 4.43) to develop their vocabulary knowledge. Unlike the trend visible in the previous four subcategories of VLS in which female participants assigned higher values to various VLS as compared to their male counterparts, the results of 'metacognitive VLS' exhibited opposite trend as majority of the items were assigned higher values by the male participants of this study. The results offer valuable insights into the facts that Saudi university undergraduates are visual learners and they tend to learn better when watch TV programmes and use computer programmes. The EFL faculty should exploit rich resource of audio-visual and online resources to motivate their students learn vocabulary effectively. 'Listening to English radio programmes' remained third among the most preferred metacognitive strategies. As far the least preferred items were concerned, the participants ranked 'I revise the newly learned words soon after the initial meeting', 'I revise the newly learned words using spaced repetition' and 'I skip the new words' the lowest respectively. All these items were assigned mean of less than 3 by both groups. This trend highlights the psychological underpinning of Saudi students that they are not in the habit of reviewing the newly learned material. Considering its pedagogical significance EFL teachers should try to make their students understand the benefit of this rewarding exercise and encourage them to do it to retain and strengthen the newly learned contents. The remaining items were given medium values by the participants.

Conclusion

The study in hand is an attempt to investigate Saudi English-major adult learners' preferences towards using various strategies to learn new English vocabulary along gender lines and results of independent-samples t-test did not reveal any gender-based significant differences rejecting the null hypothesis of this study. As far the broad classification is concerned, the participants of this study favoured the determination strategies the most followed by memory strategies where as the remaining three subcategories have been assigned 3rd, 4th, 5th position to cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies respectively. Schmitt¹⁹ states that determination strategies are exploited by students when they depend on resources other than other persons' experience to discover the meaning of new words in the target language. Use of context, guessing, structural knowledge of the target language, reference materials etc. are the other options in this regard. It seems a positive indicator that the participants prefer to exploit various strategies to inference the meaning of new words.

Based on the results of this empirical investigation, it is concluded that Saudi EFL learners as represented by the participants of this study do not like note-taking strategies despite the fact that much research has favoured its frequent use to enhance and strengthen vocabulary size⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶. Thus it is recommended that EFL teachers working in the KSA should convince their students regarding the pedagogical significance of this useful technique and encourage them to maintain vocabulary notebooks. Furthermore encoding strategies or mnemonics: techniques of learning new words through previously learned knowledge such as exploiting some form of imagery, or grouping¹⁹, have also been reported less favoured by the participants of this study. Considering the significance of these techniques in learning new vocabulary as reported by much research⁵⁷⁻⁵⁸, it is highly recommended that the students should be exhorted to use them effectively. The findings of this study seems to suggest that VLS training should be considered important and need to be given priority by EFL faculty so that effective vocabulary learning may be ensured. This study has the pedagogical implication to acquaint EFL teachers with the psychological underpinnings of Saudi learners related to VLS to train them to maximize their vocabulary learning possibilities.

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