Vocabulary Learning Strategies of EFL Undergraduate Students at Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan

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[Abstract] The present study aimed to explore the vocabulary learning strategies used by Jordanian EFL students at Al-Balqa Applied University. EFL vocabulary learning Inventory (EFL-VLI) was used in order to collect the data during the first semester of the academic year 2019/ 2020. The findings of the study showed a moderate level for the use of cognitive, metacognitive, memory and compensatory vocabulary learning strategies, and a high level for the use of affective and social strategies used for vocabulary learning. Statistically significant differences were revealed between male and female participants of the study in the levels of their uses of the various vocabulary learning strategies. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are presented.

[Keywords] Vocabulary learning strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, EFL students

Introduction

Language is one of the most important communication skills among the members of society who use it as a medium for exchanging experiences, information and knowledge with others, and through which interactions with the stimuli in the surrounding environment in general occur. Vocabulary is the main and most important component of learning the English language. As you get a vocabulary, your practice of English in reading, listening, writing and speaking becomes better. With this great importance of vocabulary, many learners are still practicing the wrong ways of learning it or do not know some of the strategies that help them in memorizing and revising the vocabulary. So, research is needed in order to explore the reasons for learning vocabulary, comparing grammar and vocabulary, strategies for memorizing and reviewing vocabulary, and the most common mistakes when learning vocabulary.

Vocabulary learning strategies are part of general language learning strategies, and they can be defined as knowledge about the processes and strategies used by students to find out about the new and unfamiliar vocabulary, or steps and actions taken by them to discover the meaning of the unknown words. Language learning strategies are very important; they enable the learner to organize his learning, attain independence, practice learning outside the classroom, and develop communication competence, (Elashhab, 2019).

Research related to the vocabulary-learning strategies employed by L2 learners has revealed that learners vary in the range of strategies they use and in the effectiveness with which they apply those strategies. A multitude of studies are conducted in order to research the effectiveness of particular vocabulary learning strategies, such as memory-based strategies, differencing strategies, incidental vocabulary learning from reading, or consulting reference sources. It was demonstrated that the conscious and coordinated use of such learning strategies is associated with language achievement and proficiency (Kulikova, 2015).

Using Vocabulary learning strategies for the purpose of acquiring new words is a dynamic and complex process that encompasses several factors, including the context in which learning takes place, the kind and nature of the language learning task and the factors related to the learner's background (e.g. cultural and demographic background such as nationality, sex, social status etc.) that influence the

outcomes of the learning process more or less indirectly (Kovanen, 2014).

As for the criteria of proficiency in learning vocabulary, it is as follows (Lai, 2005; Svensson, 2017):

1) Students can pronounce the vocabulary.

2) Students understand the meaning of independent vocabulary or in context.

3) Students know the method of deriving from vocabulary.

4) The students are able to use the vocabulary in a correct linguistic structure.

5) Students can use the right word in the right place.

A large vocabulary is always regarded as an asset. And regularly we are judged by our ability in using words. Yet, it is not easy for Chinese EFL learners to have a huge reservoir of vocabulary owing to the huge amount of English vocabulary (Yeh & Wang, 2004).

Vocabulary learning incorporates numerous essential features of language development. Learning and acquiring the vocabulary of a certain language is one of the most interesting tasks in language acquisition. Though, foreign language acquisition is not only challenging at a basic level of education; rather, some scholars indicate that difficulty persists even at tertiary levels. As learners are expected to familiarize themselves with new words and store in them in long-term memory for later retrieval, successful acquisition is determined by the vocabulary input strategies employed by learners (Tilfarlioglu & Sherwani, 2018).

Literature Review

Goundar (2019) explored the use of different vocabulary learning strategies among adult learners of English as foreign language and investigated the various vocabulary learning strategies. A quantitative method approach was used with 53 participants who included EFL learners taking part in the questionnaire survey. The results of the present study reveal the common strategies that foreign language learners use in vocabulary learning include the use of translation and using background knowledge and experience in order to increase their vocabulary.

Pangestu (2019) aimed to describe cognitive strategies, which were used by EFL students, as well as the types of cognitive strategies that were preferred by English good achiever in learning English. This research was a case study with qualitative methods. The data sources were six students who have the highest score in English, including three males and three females. In this study the researchers used an open-ended questionnaire based on O'malley's theory which included 23 questions with 13 questions related to cognitive strategies supported by in-depth interviews. In analyzing data, researchers used several techniques such as data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions / verification. The results of this study indicated that all cognitive strategies were used by six English good achievers.

Al-Bidawi (2018) sought to identify Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) that seem to be used more frequently by Saudi undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and to discuss the sub-strategies amongst the main five strategies identified by Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of VLS. The sample of the study consisted of 94 undergraduates who were selected from Al Jouf University with the use of quantitative survey methodology. The questionnaire was designed based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy, with minor modifications. The results revealed that Saudi undergraduate EFL learners highly preferred social strategies and, to a lesser degree, cognitive, meta-cognitive and determination strategies. Additionally, results showed that memory strategies are the least preferred.

Rachmawati (2018) sought to find out the type of vocabulary learning strategies that are commonly used by the first year students of Faculty of Economics at Merdeka University, Pasuruan. The study used the qualitative research design; that is, to analyse vocabulary learning strategies used by the students. Two instruments were used in the study, the questionnaire, and the researcher one-on-one semi-structured interviews to each of the students in order to get in-depth information about their vocabulary learning strategies. The results revealed that using an English-Indonesia dictionary, guessing meaning from context, and analysing pictures or gestures were the strong preferences. While, the less-used strategies included

checking for L1 cognate, analysing affixes and roots, and analysing part of speech. In terms of strategies for consolidating meaning; studying and practicing meaning within a group, imaging word form, and imaging word's meaning were preferred. While, the less-used strategies for consolidating meaning were testing oneself with word tests, skipping or passing new word, and continuing to study word over time.

Mahmood, Muhammd, & Arslan (2017) explored the relationship between vocabulary. learning strategies (VLS) and vocabulary size (VS) among Iraqi learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Participants included 118 EFL learners at Sulaymaniyah University in Iraq, all of whom were studying in the School of Basic-Education English Department. Two instruments were employed to collect data: a VLS questionnaire designed by Schmitt (1997) was administered in order to determine the range and frequency of VLS use, and a four-level (2000, 3000, 5000 and academic word list) vocabulary learning test (VLT) designed by Schmitt and colleagues (2001) was used to measure learners' receptive vocabulary size.

The aim of the study was to determine the kinds of strategies learners utilized as well as their relationship to students' VS. The results revealed that students utilized consolidation more frequently than discovery strategies. Moreover, the most frequently utilized VLS was studying the sounds of new words, while the least frequent one was working in groups to discover the meanings of new words. In terms of total VLS, the students can be considered as moderate VLS users (M= 3.003). The results of correlation analysis revealed that there exists positive, negative and sometimes no relationships between learners' VLS and VS.

Behbahani (2016) aimed to identify the most and the least common vocabulary learning strategies used by Eastern Mediterranean University international students. Besides, the role of personal factors such as gender and English proficiency level of students were considered. After distributing the questionnaire, the data were analyzed applying t-test and ANOVA. It was revealed that the level of importance of vocabulary learning strategy use was moderate for the EMU international students. Furthermore, it was found that metacognitive strategies and social strategies are the most and the least common vocabulary learning strategies respectively utilized by EMU international students for learning vocabulary. Regarding the role of gender and proficiency level, the t-test and ANOVA results indicated that gender was an effective factor; whereas, proficiency was not an influential factor in preference of students for using vocabulary learning strategies. Male students preferred detrimental strategies but females preferred metacognitive strategies.

Ansari & Sabouri (2016) studied the frequency of the use of vocabulary learning strategies by Iranian male and female EFL learners and the relationship between gender and the use of these strategies. Eighty intermediate EFL learners who studied English in Shokouh Language Institute participated in the current research. The present study used Kudo's (1999) classification of vocabulary learning strategies including metacognitive and psycholinguistic strategies. Kudo's (1999) likert-scale questionnaire was also used in the present study. Results revealed that the frequencies mean for the use of psycholinguistic and metacognitive strategies as well as the overall frequency mean were slightly higher for the female learners. However, no significant difference was found between Iranian male and female intermediate EFL learners in the use of vocabulary learning strategies.

Kulikova (2015) explored the vocabulary learning strategies and beliefs about vocabulary learning of 97 university students beginning to study Russian. It also examined relationships between reported beliefs and strategies and their stability over the period of one semester of studying Russian. The data were collected with a self-report online questionnaire administered at the beginning and at the end of the Fall 2014 semester, as well as with interviews with the participants. Descriptive analysis of vocabulary learning strategies demonstrated that besides active use of a dictionary, guessing, and note-taking strategies, virtually all participants reported frequent use of rehearsal strategies, especially repetition.

Analysis of the responses to open-ended questions and interview prompts confirmed that the participants frequently used repetition and rehearsal strategies and considered them most effective for establishing form–meaning connections for new words. The respondents also reported frequent use of contextual encoding, activation, and affective strategies. Comparison of the results of the two questionnaires revealed several vocabulary learning beliefs and strategies that underwent changes as a result of one semester of studying Russian.

At the end of the semester students reported even more agreement with value of repetition, practice, good memory, and cultural knowledge for learning vocabulary. In contrast, they expressed significantly less agreement that it is easier to learn new words when they are presented in context. Besides, participants reported that while learning vocabulary they less frequently tried to recall sentences in which new words were used.

Hamzah, Kafipour, & Abdullah (2009) aimed to to evaluate undergraduate EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies and its relation to the learners' vocabulary size. Five different categories of vocabulary learning strategies were used in the study; determination, memory, social, cognitive, and metacognitive. These categories cover an overall 35 strategies included in vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire. The reliability index obtained for vocabulary learning strategies showed a reliability coefficient of 0.74. The other instrument used in the current study, vocabulary size test, is a standardized test developed by Nation (2007).

A total of 125 Iranian undergraduate students majoring in TEFL participated in the study, who were selected through Cluster sampling. Results showed that Iranian undergraduate EFL learners are medium strategy users, even all five categories of vocabulary learning strategies were reported at a medium level. Among the most frequently used strategies by the respondents only three of them contributed to the learners' vocabulary size as taking note or highlighting, studying new words many times, and using English language media.

Marin (2006) conducted a preliminary study on the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) by 185 students enrolled in a five-year English major at the University of Veracruz. The data collection instruments included an open VLS questionnaire with three general questions and semi structured interviews. The interview data were "surveyed" via the VLS questionnaire that included eight categories (guessing, skipping, dictionary-use, social-discovery, note-taking, repetition, association, and further-consolidation strategies). The results showed that further consolidation emerged as the most frequently used VLS category, followed by dictionary-use and repetition strategies. In contrast, skipping and association strategies were the least frequently reported categories.

In conclusion, most of the studies that focused on vocabulary learning strategies sought to identify the types of strategies which are most commonly used among the EFL students, but almost few of them explored the in the Jordanian or the Arab context. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to examine the levels of using vocabulary learning strategies of EFL students at Al-Balqa Applied University in the Jordanian context.

Problem of the Study
Language learners encounter several difficulties in remembering the large number of words necessary to complete the communication process in an efficient manner, which shows the importance of vocabulary learning strategies that help the learner to deal with these difficulties, because they help them to store the words and recall them from memory when they are needed in the communication process. Most research on EFL has focused mainly on the general learning strategies employed by the students. This study focuses on vocabulary learning strategies in particular, in an attempt to contribute to L2 learning literature.

Questions of the Study
1. What is the level of using vocabulary learning strategies among the EFL students at AL-Balqa Applied University?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance (0.05) between the means of responses of Jordanian students at AL-Balqa Applied University which are attributed the variable of gender?

Aims of the Study
This study aimed to reveal the level of the use of vocabulary learning strategies for among EFL

students at AL-Balqa Applied University in Jordan, it also aimed to reveal the impact of the variable of gender at their level of employment of the vocabulary learning strategies.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study is related to:
- Encouraging independent learning among the students, especially in the light of the vast amount of information and technology revolution right now.
- Providing insights for teachers and students about using vocabulary learning strategies.
- The possibility of benefiting universities that provide EFL programs from the results of this study, by working to improve their students use of vocabulary learning strategies through specialized training courses which aim to improve their knowledge and awareness about vocabulary learning strategies.

Study Method

The present study used a descriptive based approach in order to describe the phenomenon as it really is, try to explain it, and analyze it, and the survey method was employed in order to determine the level of the EFL students' use of vocabulary learning strategies at Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan.

Sample of the Study

Population of the current study consists of BA students of English literature at Al-Balqa Applied University. The sample of the study consisted of B.A students of English literature at Al-Balqa Applied University. Of which 45 students were freshmen and 42 were seniors in the academic year 2017/ 2018.

Variables of the Study

Independent Variable: Gender (Males, Females).
Dependent Variable: The level of using vocabulary learning strategies among EFL students at Al-Balqa University.

Instrument of the Study

The EFL Vocabulary learning Inventory, which was developed by the researcher, was used in the current study to measure the level of vocabulary learning strategies among the Jordanian EFL students at Al-Balqa University. Through a thorough review of the relevant literature (Noprianto & Purnawarman, 2019; Yaacob et al, 2018; Marin, 2006) the researcher developed a questionnaire including two sections, the first is concerned with the demographic characteristics of the participants of the study, while the second section consisted of items related to vocabulary learning strategies. The questionnaire was based on Likert 5 points scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree).

Validity of the tool of the study (EFL-VLI) was tested through referees, who are experts in educational, psychological and linguistic studies, from among the instructors at Jordanian universities whose comments were used in modifying the items of the tool. Reliability of the inventory was assessed through consistency coefficients of the sections of the inventory. The tool of the study was applied in the first semester of the academic year 2019/2020. The inventory included (13) items which are answered on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the first semester of the academic year 2019/2020, the instrument of the study (EFL-VLI) was completed by the participants of the sample of the study.

Results of the Study

Results Related to the First Question

What is the level of using vocabulary learning strategies among the EFL students at AL-Balqa Applied University? In order to answer the first question of the study, means and standard deviations of the levels

of using vocabulary learning strategies among participants were calculated, and table (1) shows the results.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations of vocabulary learning strategies' levels among the participants of the sample of the study

Strategy	Mean	SD	Level
Memory	3.134	0.75	Moderate
Cognitive	3.411	0.57	Moderate
Metacognitive	3.460	0.53	Moderate
Compensatory	3.487	0.59	Moderate
Affective	3.587	0.70	High
Social	3.617	0.65	High

Table 1 shows that the levels of using the vocabulary learning strategies among the EFL students at Al-Balqa Applied University were mostly moderate, with the exception of the affective and social strategies which were highly used in comparison to the other types of strategies. The memory strategies have the lowest mean (3.134), which indicates that they are the least used strategies among the EFL students in their vocabulary learning. Cognitive strategies were somewhat more frequently used, although they were moderately used in general. Affective and social strategies were the most frequently used strategies by the participants of the study, based on their means. This result agrees with the results of several studies such as Pangestu (2019) who found a moderate level of using cognitive learning strategies. The moderate level of using the metacognitive strategies can be ascribed to the fact that most subjects don't have a clear idea of how to use metacognitive strategies in learning vocabulary effectively (Leilei, 2016).

Memory strategies for vocabulary learning are used in order to acquire new vocabulary; cognitive strategies are used to understand texts; compensatory strategies are used to cover lack of information, metacognitive strategies in order to organize learning processes, affective strategies are used to manage feelings and emotions; and social strategies are used through interaction with others. These functions explain the differences in the levels of their use among the participants of the study. The high level of the use of social strategies among the participants of the study can be ascribed to the positive interaction between the students themselves, and between them and their instructors at Al-Balqa Applied University, who encourage an atmosphere of interaction and cooperation between the students. This result agrees with the results of Al-Bidawi (2018) study which revealed that social learning strategies were preferred over cognitive, metacognitive and compensatory strategies.

Concerning the high level of using the affective strategies in learning vocabulary among the participants of the study, it can be ascribed to the goals of these strategies which are used to reduce anxiety and stress, as well as the frustration that the learner can get in the way of learning EFl. Thus, this strategy is used to improve the psychological state of these students, and decrease their stress, fear and anxiety.

Results Related to the Second Question of the Study

Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance (0.05) between the means of responses of Jordanian students at AL-Balqa Applied University which are attributed the variable of gender? In order to answer the second question of the study, means and standard deviations were calculated based on the variable of gender, and table (2) shows the results.

Table 2
Means and standard deviations based on the variable of gender

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Male	3.38	0.47
Female	3.55	0.47

Table 2 shows the presence of statistical differences between the means of the male participants of the study and the means of the responses of the female participants. In order to examine the significance of the differences between the results of the group of male students of English Literature, and the group of female students, ANOVA test was applied, and table (3) shows the results.

Table 3
One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of between group and within group means

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.094	3	0.031	4.787	0.004
Within Groups	0.498	76	0.007		
Total	0.592	79			

Table 3 shows that the difference between the male and female students of English Literature at Al-Balqa University explains about 4.787% of the variation in the scores of the students, so, the relationship between the variable of gender and the level of students' use of vocabulary learning strategies is weak but statistically significant. Table 3 revealed an F value of 4.787, which with 1 and 58 degrees of freedom is statistically significant at the .000 level ($P < 0.05$). These figures indicate that the difference across the independent variable category (male Vs. female students) is significant.

This result can be ascribed to the differences in learning strategies between male and female students, which agrees with the results of previous studies such as the study of Catalan (2003), which revealed that male and female learners differ significantly in the number of strategies used, and which revealed also that the females' total strategy usage percentages are higher than the males', which may be ascribed to different perceptions of vocabulary learning behaviors or different patterns of vocabulary strategy usage for males and females. However, this result disagrees with the results of some studies, such as the study of Manuel (2017) which revealed that lack of statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the male students. This disagreement can be ascribed to the differences between the populations of the two studies. However, this disagreement highlights the need for additional studies which focus on the gender differences in the use of vocabulary learning strategies.

Conclusion

Results of the current study revealed a moderate level of the use of cognitive, metacognitive, memory and compensatory learning strategies used by the students of EFL at Al-Balqa Applied University. Additionally, results revealed high levels of the use of social and affective vocabulary learning strategies among the participants of the study. Statistical significant differences were found between the results of male and female participants in their levels of using the vocabulary learning strategies. Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommends: 1) Conducting additional studies to explore the factors affecting the level of using the vocabulary learning strategies among the EFL students at Jordanian universities, and the challenges they encounter. 2) Developing educational courses that enhance the knowledge about the vocabulary learning strategies and the various strategies which can be employed by the students in order to

enhance and improve their acquisition of vocabulary. 3) Exploring the impact of the vocabulary learning strategies employed by the students on their studying practices and their academic achievement.

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