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A SURVEY ON THE USE OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES BY ELT AND ELL
STUDENTS OF DUHOK UNIVERSITY IN NORTHERN IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) by the English language teaching (ELT) and English language and literature (ELL) students as well as the impact of gender and grade levels on the use of learning strategies. A five Likert scale questionnaire, consisting of 36 items was classified under four strategy categories was administrated to 466 participants from the Duhok University. The Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS, version 20) was used to analyse the obtained data. The results of the descriptive statistics showed that Duhok university students were medium strategy users. The study also found that the cognitive strategies were the most popular strategies among the learners. Social strategies were found to be the least preferred strategies. The results of the t-test showed that in general, the scores of female learners regarding the use of VLSs were slightly higher than male learners. Moreover, ELT learners were found to be more strategy users than ELL learners. The results of ANOVA revealed significant differences regarding the use of VLSs and grade levels.

Key words: Learning strategies, vocabulary learning strategies, ELT/ELL learners

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Read (2000, p.1) stated that "words are the basic building block of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole text are formed". The previous statement shows the importance of vocabulary in expressing thoughts and conveying meanings and it can also be an indicator that communication will poorly be understood without a large number of words.

Learners have rarely been taught that they should gain efficient knowledge of vocabulary in order to produce meaningful sentences. Language learners should be taught VLSs in order to be able to determine the meaning of new words and memorize them. Learning becomes more efficient and effective by the use of strategies and learners become more proficient in an L2 when they use strategies. Besides, if learners tend to

acquire the vocabulary in an L2, they need a good knowledge of VLSs. Thornbury (2005) declared that the good language learners are those students who are able to develop their own VLSs so that they do not need to be taught how to learn. Learners spend much time on memorizing words but unfortunately, they face problems and cannot communicate well when they need them. The good language learners are those who use efficient VLSs and control their vocabulary learning. This means selecting the most suitable strategy from a variety of known strategies and determining how to follow the strategy and when to change to another one. It seems that the language teachers' main purpose is to lead students to reach a level of autonomy and make them independent from teachers in learning vocabulary.

1.1 The Problem Statement

As far as the researcher knows, the current situation with Kurdish learners is that, to some extent, many teachers have ignored to teach them different ways of learning vocabulary. Therefore, most of language learners just mechanically memorize new vocabulary, without being aware of different VLSs. The language students generally learn the meaning of the new words based on their phonetic representations or their meanings Kurdish. This might indicate that learners are not quite aware of different VLSs. Teachers also think that there is no need to allot too much time and effort to teach vocabulary.

Shortly, the present situation of learning vocabulary with Kurdish learners can be outlined as follows: 1) Lack of different strategies in learning vocabulary. For a long time, there has not been adequate change in vocabulary teaching methodology. Most teachers do not pay attention to VLSs. 2) Inefficient ways of learning vocabulary. Generally, learners mechanically memorize vocabulary without being aware of other effective learning strategies.

1.3 The Aim of the Study

The main aim this study is to examine and compare the use of VLSs by undergraduate ELT and ELL learners at the Duhok University in Northern Iraq to understand better the ways that they use to learn words in English. Based on the research objectives, the study examines the total level of strategy use, and the most and least used VLSs as well as whether there are significant differences among learners in applying VLSs according to gender and grade levels. Moreover, the study aims to investigate whether there is a difference between ELT and ELL learners in VLS use.

More specifically this study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of VLS use by the ELT and ELL undergraduate learners in Duhok University?
2. What are the most and least frequently used VLSs by the ELT and ELL learners?
3. Are there any significant differences between gender, grade levels, fields of study and the use of VLSs?

1.4 The Significance of the Study

It is important to find effective strategies of learning vocabulary. Based on the problems mentioned above, this study might help teachers and learners to become aware of the importance of vocabulary and solve those problems to enhance the development of the language learning process. If the findings reveal that the learners are not familiar with a wide range of VLSs; this research might help language teachers become aware of different VLSs. Besides, a study of this type will aid students to choose the strategies that are appropriate to their learning styles.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Vocabulary Learning

In most of EFL contexts, students with knowledge of a wide range of words are successful EFL learner. For ESL/EFL learners, vocabulary plays a crucial role in learning a language that supports the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Vocabulary has a clear connection with reading comprehension, such as Matsuoka and Hirsh(2010) stated, "there is a strong link between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension "(p. 56). This strong link is mutual that poor knowledge of words would not make someone a good reader; in contrast, good knowledge of reading comprehension helps someone to acquire more words. Words are the devices learners use to imagine, think or express ideas and thoughts, as Hunt and Beglar (2005, p.2) argued that, "the heart of language comprehension and use is the lexicon".

Inadequate vocabulary items refrain learners from expressing their ideas and thoughts. On the other hand, sufficient or rich vocabulary provides language learners the correct words to apply at the right time. For language learners, vocabulary knowledge is of great significance when using a foreign language, while no one can communicate without lexical repertoire. Oxford and Crookall (1990) noted that vocabulary is not explicitly taught in most language classes. It is clear that both vocabulary and grammar are of great significance in good language classes, but to compare between them, vocabulary is more central than grammar and more attention should be paid to vocabulary instruction. Ellis (1994) indicated that lexical errors tend to obstruct comprehension more than grammatical errors. Besides, Wilkins (1972, p.111) affirms that "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". In comparison with aspects of language, such as grammar and pronunciation, vocabulary is the area of language that learners seem most conscious of (Ellis, 1996). Mastering vocabulary items is an important component of second/foreign language learning.

2.2 What is Involved in Knowing a Word?

In ELT literature, there is a clear distinction between receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. According to Nation (2001), the ability to understand the form of a word while listening or reading means receptive vocabulary whereas, the ability to use the appropriate spoken and written means productive vocabulary. Language learners are not required to recognize all the aspects of knowing a word. Knowing aspects of a word, it can be said, depends on language learners' level of education, whether learners are beginner, intermediate or advanced. For instance, there is no need for young language learners to deal with morphology, register or collocation since these aspects are very difficult for them but advanced language learners need to deal with them if they intend to have a better knowledge of vocabulary. Regarding the aspects of knowing a word, Ur (2002) suggested that knowing a word concerns knowing word form (pronunciation and spelling), grammar, collocation, aspects of meaning (denotation, connotation, appropriateness, and meaning relationships), and word formation. In general, knowing a word means knowing its form and its meaning.

2.3 Which Words Need to be Taught?

In every language there are too many words that EFL/ESL learners need to know in order to understand authentic texts. It seems obvious that in any language, it is sensible to teach the most frequent words before the unusual ones are taught, as they are probably the most useful words for students of that language. Macro (2003) indicated that there 2,000 high frequency words of which many are function words. This would lead us to decide that they must be taught in L2 classrooms and taught in an explicit way. Once learners acquire these words, it is time to begin increasing their vocabulary command by introducing less frequently used words. Without the most frequently used words, learners cannot function in the foreign language. Besides, Schmitt (2000) affirmed that words around 2,000 would be a realistic goal. It seems that since in all kinds of text, high frequency words occur, so this leads us to determine high frequency words should be taught to language learners. Nation (2001) indicated that other categories of words are academic words, technical words and low frequency words. Macro (2003) noted that academic words become essential when learners go beyond the intermediate language learning stage and are starting to learn about academic content (e.g. psychology, economics, areas of study) through the medium of the L2 while technical words are very closely related to the topic and subject area of the context. There are thousands of low frequency words in the language (Nation, 2001). As far as low frequently used lexical items form a large number of words, it is definitely impossible to master them in a/the L2 class. As a result, instead of wasting time on less frequently used words inside the class, language teachers should provide and train on good VLSs for learners. Strategies regarding these words should be taught to learners.

2.4 Vocabulary Learning Strategies

VLS means any devices, tools or techniques used by the language learners to retain their vocabulary easily. Nation (1990) asserts that most of language learners' problems in both receptive and productive usage of vocabulary emerge from their insufficient learning of lexical knowledge. VLSs must contain strategies for learning a word, in addition to using a word. Hedge (2000) proposes that in addition to the teachers'

explanation of the new words to learners, one of their main crucial roles is to improve independence among learners by teaching them effective strategies. Accordingly, VLSs are teachable, that language learners can be taught various kinds of VLSs and how to practice them effectively. Therefore, language learners need to be familiar with a variety of VLSs and acknowledged with a selection of VLS and are taught how to employ them in order to build up their vocabulary or to resolve the problems they face in learning vocabulary effectively.

In the language classroom, VLSs taught probably build learners' self-confidence to learn vocabulary autonomously. In order to deal with a new word when it occurs and be successful and independent language learners, Harmer (1991) stated that language learners should be familiarized with extensive kinds of strategies, which is very beneficial since they become able to select the type of strategies that are appropriate to their individual learning styles. LLSs create a better self-direction for language learners. Oxford (1990) pointed that independent language learners are self-directed learners, who have the responsibility for their own learning strategies and progressively obtain confidence and proficiency. Schmitt (1997) declared that learners are widely inclined to employ basic VLSs. This in turn makes VLS instruction an important part of foreign or SLL. Language teachers need a good knowledge of VLS that could be useful to plan their teaching more successfully and guide learners in adopting effective strategies. Therefore, training in the VLSs is necessary for language learners.

2.5 Classification of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Scholars have different ways of classifying VLSs. Schmitt (1997) investigated many learning strategies altogether in his own classification of VLSs. He distinguished between the strategies that learners use to determine the meaning of unknown words when they first encounter them from the ones learners use to consolidate meanings when they encounter the words again. Schmitt classified the strategies in his taxonomy as discovery strategies (social and determination strategies) and consolidation strategies (social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies for learning vocabulary). Social strategies are included in two groups of strategies because they can be used for both purposes. Lessard-Clouston (2008) stated that this categorization has been developed based on language-learning strategies' classification organised by Oxford's (1990).

In discovery strategies, determination strategies are used for the discovery of a new word's meaning without attaining somebody's knowledge. Schmitt noted that learners try to determine the meaning of a new word by guessing it with the help of context, dictionary or through using social strategies to ask someone (e.g. teachers, their classmates) for help with unfamiliar words. Group learning work through which learners study and practice the meaning of new words is an example of social strategies for consolidating a word. Memory strategies involve those approaches to relate the word with some existing learned knowledge. Schmitt defined cognitive strategies as "manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner". Cognitive strategies refer to the repetition and employing some mechanical means for learning vocabulary. Lastly, metacognitive strategies are defined as a conscious overview of the learning process and they assist students to control, plan, monitor and evaluate the best ways to study (Schmitt, 1997).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research is designed as a descriptive survey study with quantitative approach. Creswell (2012, p.376) stated that we "use survey research to determine individual opinions". Surveys are designed to process large quantities of data statistically when needed to be researched. Therefore, this study mainly depends on quantitative data collection methods.

3.2 Participants

Table 1 shows the distribution of students according to gender and field of study. The study included 466 undergraduate students at Duhok University, Northern Iraq. The data were collected from the Faculty of Educational Science and the Faculty of Humanities. The questionnaire was distributed to the whole ELT and ELL population in these two faculties.

As table 1 shows, the study included 267 female students and 199 male students. It was originally planned to select an equal or at least a close number of male and female learners. This seemed to be impossible because of the limited number of female learners at Duhok University. 223 of the participants were

ELT students from the Faculty of Educational Science and 243 were ELL students from the Faculty of Humanities.

Table 1: Distribution of students according to their gender and field of study

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Male | 199 | 42.7 |
| Female | 267 | 57.3 |
| Total | 466 | 100 |
| Field of study | | |
| ELT | 223 | 47.9 |
| ELL | 243 | 52.1 |
| Total | 466 | 100 |

Table 2 shows the distribution of the students according to their grade levels in the English language departments.

Table 2: The distribution of students according to their grade levels

| Grade levels | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|------------|----------------|
| 1 st grade | 129 | 27.7 |
| 2 nd grade | 139 | 29.8 |
| 3 rd grade | 106 | 22.7 |
| 4 th grade | 92 | 19.7 |
| Total | 466 | 100 |

All the students in the study were on a BA degree programme in the English Department. The students were four-year degree learners. As can be seen from table 2, the study included 129 first year students, 139 second year students, 106 third year students and 92 fourth year students.

3.3 Instrument

In this study, a written VLS questionnaire was used as a main instrument in order to identify patterns and preferences of the participants' use of VLSs. The questionnaire used in this study is the one developed by Tek (2006) who adapted it from Kudo (1999) who relied mainly on the study conducted by Schmitt (1997). This questionnaire was chosen because the researcher believed that they are close to the samples in his study.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, questions are designed to gain demographic information about participants. Questions in this section include the respondents' gender and grade level. The second part includes the questions related to the VLSs. The questionnaire contains 36 items. The items are divided into four categories, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive. Each category consists of nine items. To find the frequency of use for each strategy, a five point Likert scale was used with the options, "never", "sometimes", "often", "usually", and "always".

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The written VLS questionnaire as the main tool for the data collection was used in this research study. The questionnaire was administered to 466 ELT and ELL undergraduate learners studying English in the Duhok University. A VLSs questionnaire in English was applied as a data collection instrument. The original version of VLS questionnaire was used because all the participants majored in English and they were expected to have enough language proficiency to understand the statements.

3.5 Data Analysis

Concerning the data collection, the completed VLS questionnaires of all students were analyzed with the help of the SPSS programme in order to test the use of VLSs. The analysis of the questionnaire was done in order to answer the research questions. Descriptive statistics was used to find out the percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviations of the variables. ANOVA was used to identify the relationships

among the means of more than two variables. In this study, ANOVA was used to identify whether there were differences among grade levels regarding their use VLSs. Independent T-test is a method that used to determine the relationship between two variables. In the present investigation, the T-test was used to identify whether there is a relationship between the students' gender and the use of VLSs. Moreover, T-test was used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the ELT and ELL students in VLS use.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Overall Vocabulary Strategy Use and Level

Table 3 shows that 2.98 is the overall mean score of VLSs used by the students. According to Oxford's (1990) scoring system, the students of this study were found to be medium strategy users.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for overall VLS use

| Number of students | Mean score | SD |
|--------------------|------------|------|
| 466 | 2.98 | 1.10 |

The results of descriptive statistics of this study showed that students were medium strategy users. Therefore, it can be concluded that in general, Duhok University learners had moderate success in employing VLSs due to their limited knowledge of the existing strategies. Since the results reveal that VLSs are not given importance by the language teachers in their lessons, these findings demonstrate that it is crucial for language teachers to teach vocabulary strategies more thoroughly.

4.2 The Frequency of Usage of VLS Categories

To locate the most and least frequently used VLS categories, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations of the four categories were calculated. Table 4 shows the frequency of strategy use of the four categories.

Table 4: The mean score and standard deviation of the four categories of VLSs

| Strategy main category | Number | Mean | S.D. | Strategy level | Rank |
|------------------------|--------|------|------|----------------|------|
| Cognitive | 466 | 3.29 | 1.08 | Medium | 1 |
| Memory | 466 | 3.06 | 1.06 | Medium | 2 |
| Metacognitive | 466 | 2.89 | 1.14 | Medium | 3 |
| Social | 466 | 2.69 | 1.12 | Medium | 4 |

The results in table 4 show that the Duhok University undergraduate learners used all four categories of VLSs moderately. Therefore, Duhok University students reported only average-level use of VLSs of any category (M= 2.98). Cognitive strategies (M=3.29; SD= 1.08) were reported as the most frequently used strategies by the respondents, followed by memory strategies (M=3.06; SD=1.06) and metacognitive strategies (M=2.89; SD=1.13). Social strategies (M=2.69; SD=1.12) were found to be the least frequently used strategies compared to other strategies.

Cognitive strategies were found to be the most frequently used strategies. These strategies were used at the medium level of strategy use with the mean score of 3.29, but compared to the strategies of the other three categories, they were more frequently used. This result goes in line with many previous research findings (e.g., Pourshahian et al., 2012; Bengar&Kasmani, 2013; Karami&Barekat, 2012; Kudo, 1999; Tek, 2006). The frequent use of cognitive strategies might result from students' high English proficiency level. According to Gu and Johnson (1996), the use of cognitive strategies is a positive predictor of general proficiency. Therefore, the main reason behind the frequent use of cognitive strategies might be that Duhok University students were proficient learners of English. Social strategies were the least frequently used strategies among the students. Many previous researchers found that social strategies were least popular among language learners (e.g., Heidari, Izadi&Ahmadian, 2012; Amirian&Heshmatifar, 2013; Karami&Barekat, 2012; Doczi, 2011; Bangar&Kasmani, 2013; Kodu, 1999; Hamzah et al., 2009). Researchers who examined the use of VLSs (e.g., Bengar&Kasmani, 2013) suggested that the infrequent use of social strategies might be explained by the fact that learning vocabulary is an individual process.

4.3 The Five Most Used Strategies

Table 5: The five most preferred strategies by the students

| Strategy items | Mean | SD | Rank |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Use English language internet | 3.80 | 1.17 | 1 |
| Take notes in class. | 3.77 | 1.03 | 2 |
| Use a bilingual dictionary | 3.69 | 1.05 | 3 |
| Image word's meaning. | 3.53 | 1.11 | 4 |
| Use a monolingual dictionary | 3.51 | 1.11 | 5 |

The table 5 shows the five most frequent used VLSs by the students of this study. The results revealed that "Using internet" is the most frequent strategy among learners of this study. This means the students see the internet as a main source to find out information to learn a new word. Several years ago, the commercial internet service providers began to emerge in Northern Iraq. Commercial internet services widespread quickly. Therefore, people in general and students in particular found the internet to be a source of new extracurricular language learning activities for them. It can be said, this new advanced technology, to some extent, motivated the students to discover new VLSs. Moreover, because of its novelty and extraordinary character, students probably started to spend much time working on the internet, and thus they tended to frequently come across various unknown words and thus enrich their vocabulary. Finding this strategy as the highest used strategy might also have a connection with the students' very frequent use of various forums or online exercises on the Web. On the other hand, the high frequency of using internet to learn vocabulary might be related to its accessibility.

The second most frequently used strategy is "Taking notes in class". It seems that language teachers have advised the students to memorize and take notes in class as a preparation for examination. This result was similar with the findings of some previous researchers (e.g., Karami&Barekat, 2012; Ahmad, 1989). The possible explanation for the high use of this strategy among the learners could be because of the educational system, which is mainly based on individualism. This means that inside the classrooms, language teachers mostly provide the materials and knowledge in front of the students and the students are required to just listen and take notes. Interaction activities in this kind of classes would occur very rarely, and the least frequency of use of social strategies in this study is the evidence.

The third popular strategy was the use of a "bilingual dictionary". The results of this study showed that the students preferred using bilingual dictionaries more than using monolingual dictionaries. This means that the learners tended more to think the meaning of the unknown word in their L1 translation. However, finding the popularity use of bilingual dictionary among the students of this study does not mean that it is a useful source for learning a word, as in the VLS literature review, Brown (2000, p. 377) stated, "It is unfortunate that such practices rarely help students internalize the word for later recall". Moreover, the use of a "bilingual dictionary" was criticized for several reasons, for example to encourage using the translation, provides little knowledge on how the words are used (Nation, 2001).

4.4 The Five Least Used Strategies

Table 6: The five least used strategies by the students

| Strategy items | Mean | SD | Rank |
|--|------|------|------|
| Test with your parents, if they know English | 1.90 | 1.11 | 1 |
| Ask your school teacher for Kurdish translation | 2.03 | 1.10 | 2 |
| Ask your teacher to check your word lists for accuracy | 2.32 | 1.03 | 3 |
| Listen to English- radio program | 2.45 | 1.24 | 4 |
| Read an English language newspaper | 2.49 | 1.16 | 5 |

As the table 6 shows, the least frequently used strategy among 36 VLSs by the students of this study was from metacognitive strategies, which was "Testing with your parent, if they know English". This finding

indicates that the parents might not know the English language therefore; the students almost never tested the meaning of the new word with them. The second and the third infrequently used strategies are from social strategies which are, "Ask your teacher for Kurdish translation" and "Ask your teacher to check your word lists for accuracy". It seems that inside the language classes, interaction activities very rarely happen. The most sensible explanations for the least use of social strategies, particularly asking teachers for the L1 translation or other information to determine the meaning of a new word, is that learning vocabulary items seems to be regarded as an individual process rather than seeking help from others. These findings are also similar with Bengar and Kasmani (2013), who suggested that the reason of the infrequent use of social strategies could be that learning English vocabulary is inclined to be seen as an individual task, therefore, when learners think to discover the meaning of the new word, they prefer not to ask help from others. Another reason for the rare use of asking teachers' help in learning a new word might be found in the peculiarities of the educational system in Northern Iraq, particularly in Duhok University. In language classrooms, teachers seem to be the centre of language learning. This means that language teachers tend to provide information and materials in front of the learners and the students are required to follow the instructions by just listening and taking notes. In this kind of classrooms, interaction activities very rarely would be seen.

4.5 Significant Differences of VLS Use Based on Gender

The results in table 7 show the significant differences only in four individual strategies found between gender and strategy use.

Table 7: Significant differences of VLS use based on gender

| Strategy Items | Gender | N | Mean | SD | T | d.f | Sig |
|---|--------|-----|------|------|-------|-----|------|
| Take notes in class | male | 199 | 3.58 | 1.10 | -3.49 | 464 | .001 |
| | female | 267 | 3.92 | .95 | | | |
| Test with your parents, if they know English. | male | 199 | 1.72 | 1.00 | -2.95 | 464 | .003 |
| | female | 267 | 2.03 | 1.17 | | | |
| Learn by pair work in class | male | 199 | 2.90 | 1.09 | -3.30 | 464 | .001 |
| | female | 267 | 3.22 | 1.01 | | | |
| Learn by group work in class | male | 199 | 3.00 | 1.17 | -3.05 | 464 | .002 |
| | female | 267 | 3.32 | 1.05 | | | |

In this study, the significant differences were found only in using four strategies. Female learners were more frequent strategy users in those four strategies than male learners. The results in table 7 indicate that the female learners (M=3.92) seem to take more notes in the class than the males (M=3.58). This finding suggests that inside the classroom, female learners are more active and follow the teacher's instructions more than male learners. The results also show that female learners (M=2.03) tend to test the meaning of the new word with their parents more than male learners (M=1.92).

In literature review, research studies have investigated that females talk to parents more than males, such as Noller and Callan (1991) stated, "females talk more to parents and disclose more in conversation regarding issues such as interests, family sex roles and relationships". Consequently, females are more verbally interactive with parents and receive affection from parents in general than males. Therefore, this might be a main reason that female learners used to test the meaning of the new words with their parents more than male learners. In the Kurdish background culture, females spend most of their times staying at home compared to males. Therefore, the fact that females spend more time staying at home might be another reason why they are more inclined to test the meaning of the new words with parents than males. The female learners (M=3.22) showed that they preferred more to work in pairs than males (M= 2.90). Interestingly, the same with the frequency of use of strategy "Learn by group work in class", that females (M=3.32) were using it more frequently than the males (M=3.00).

These findings suggest that females tend to build social interaction and learn the meaning of the new word through pair or group work more than males, such as Timmers and Fischer (1998) stated that “females’ communication patterns focus on relationships and females’ focus on power”. The most plausible explanation for the frequent use of social strategies by females could be that females in general are more inclined to interact and build social relationships than men. Several research studies explained that females seek for help more than males, females are more eager to keep on the need for social support and approval (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989). Hall (2011) stated that if the idea of believing that female learners are better L2 learners than male learners is right, then probably it is resulted from their effective social interactions. These findings support the idea that the females tend to use more social strategies than males.

4.6 VLS Use and Grade Level

The results in the table 8 shows, the reported strategies by the students among all the grade levels were used in the medium level.

Table 8: VLS use among the grade levels

| The Grade | Number | Mean | SD | Rank |
|--------------|--------|------|------|------|
| Fourth grade | 92 | 3.03 | 1.05 | 1 |
| Third grade | 106 | 3.01 | 1.10 | 2 |
| First grade | 129 | 2.99 | 1.13 | 3 |
| Second grade | 139 | 2.92 | 1.08 | 4 |

The results in table 8 show that there is a slight difference among the frequency of use of the grade levels and strategy use. Despite this, a close look at the results shows that the fourth and the third year students use more strategies than the second and the first year students. Therefore, it can be said, that the results reveal that there is a significant difference in the frequency of use of VLSs between the fourth, third year students and the second, first year students. This finding suggests that the more experienced students (fourth and third year students) in studying English reported more frequent use of VLSs than the less experienced students (second and first year students) in learning English. Similar result was found by some previous researchers (e.g., Ahmed, 1989; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Schmitt, 1997). It is a common belief that the use of learning strategies has a positive relation with language proficiency. Ahmed (1989) stated that the more experienced learners use more strategies. It seems that the experienced language learners in English combine and orchestrate their use of particular vocabulary in a successful way. The high frequency of use of VLSs by fourth and third level learners might have several reasons, for example, they might have a good knowledge of vocabulary. Researchers (e.g., Boonkongsan & Intaraprasert, 2014; Hamzah et al., 2009) revealed that the students with high and low vocabulary knowledge tend to use VLSs differently. Moreover, the fourth and third year students could have high proficiency of vocabulary, thus this high proficiency might have motivated them to use VLSs frequently.

4.7 Significant Differences of VLS Use Based on Field of Study

Table 9 illustrates the significant differences in two major fields of study and strategy use. The findings revealed that the ELT and ELL learners studying at the Duhok University were more alike than different in VLS use. As can be seen from the table 9, the ELT learners were frequent users of the “Connect the words with its synonyms and antonyms” strategy than ELL learners. This could be because the ELT teachers during their lessons focused more on connecting the word to its synonyms and antonyms. The ELT students preferred to use new words in sentences, ask teachers for sentence including the new word and ask teachers to check their word lists for accuracy more frequently than ELL students. A close look at the high frequency of use of these strategies by the ELT learners, shows that these strategies have more relationship with the ELT learners than the ELL learners. This could be because ELT learners deal with the structure of sentences and grammar rules more frequently than ELL learners. Therefore, this might have led the ELT students to use the new word in sentences. ELT students preferred to use “Memorize parts of speech” strategy to learn the meaning of a new a word more frequently than ELL students. The ELT learners might have more experience in parts of speech than ELL learners, who rarely deal with parts of speech.

Table 9: Significant differences of VLS use based on field of study

| Strategy Items | Major Field | N | Mean | SD | T | d.f | Sig. |
|---|-------------|-----|------|------|-------|-----|------|
| Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms | ELT | 223 | 3.27 | 1.03 | 3.609 | 464 | .000 |
| | ELL | 243 | 2.91 | 1.08 | | | |
| Use new word in sentences | ELT | 223 | 3.44 | 1.07 | .128 | 464 | .000 |
| | ELL | 243 | 3.08 | 1.03 | | | |
| Ask your teacher to check your word lists for accuracy. | ELT | 223 | 2.47 | 1.08 | 3.139 | 464 | .002 |
| | ELL | 243 | 2.17 | .96 | | | |
| Ask your teacher for sentence including the new word | ELT | 223 | 2.58 | .78 | 5.207 | 464 | .000 |
| | ELL | 243 | 2.27 | 1.13 | | | |
| Memorize parts of speech | ELT | 223 | 3.51 | .99 | 5.197 | 464 | .000 |
| | ELL | 243 | 3.02 | 1.04 | | | |
| Use English language internet | ELT | 223 | 3.64 | 1.22 | -2.80 | 464 | .005 |
| | ELL | 243 | 3.95 | 1.12 | | | |

The results show that the ELL learners were more eager to use internet to find the meaning of a new word than ELT learners. The reason could be that when the ELL students deal with literature, especially medieval literature, they probably face many difficult words that might not be found in modern dictionaries. Therefore, these difficult words might have affected the students to use internet to find the meaning of the new words. To summarize, it was concluded that there were minor differences between the ELT and ELL learners in strategy use. In general, the ELT students were statistically more strategy users than the ELL students.

5. Implications and Recommendations

5.1 Implications

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the students were familiar with limited VLSs. The medium level of VLS use indicated that the students were not quite aware of different VLSs. Therefore, several implications can be made based on the results of this study:

In Duhok University language classes, vocabulary was not taught explicitly, since only several VLSs among 36 strategies were popular among the students. This indicates that even language teachers might not know enough about VLSs. Therefore, this study can assist the teachers and the students to have more knowledge on VLSs. Training learners by using various strategies would probably lead to better independent L2 learners in the language learning process. To do this, teachers need to be familiar with different kinds of VLSs at first. Then, they are required to train their learners with different learning strategies.

The least frequency of use of social strategies indicates the poor social interaction in language classes. Language teachers are required to design more cooperative learning discussions and communicative competence activities in their L2 classroom. To do this, the university first must provide a curriculum, which is more directed towards collaborative and interaction activities to enhance learning in L2 classes. Then, language teachers are also required to arrange suitable group activities in order to encourage learners to share ideas when learning new vocabulary. Therefore, language teachers need to be aware of the importance of incorporating strategies inside language classrooms. Moreover, language teachers should be aware of differences in VLSs preferences between male and female learners and provide different opportunities for learning words.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Research

Further research should be done to get better understanding of student's VLSs use. Since the respondents of this study were medium strategy users of VLSs, it would be interesting to see how the teachers teach words and whether they apply any of the strategies in their own classrooms. Moreover, the parents' English language as a factor affecting their childrens' learning process seems important to be investigated

more widely in future studies. Using qualitative data collection to triangulate the data could reveal whether the respondents' answers in the written questionnaire are similar with what they actually do. To attain this aim, qualitative data collection method and classroom observation should be employed. In addition, although this study showed that there was only a slight difference between male and female learners in VLS preferences, this does not mean that male and females are similar in other fields or levels of education. No difference between males and females among English majors does not mean that there is no difference among the students majoring in other subjects. No difference in VLS use between male and female learners among university students does not confirm that there is no difference between males and females in the basic or preparatory schools. All these aspects need to be investigated in future studies in order to get a better understanding of gender differences in SLL.

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Appendix

Questionnaire of vocabulary learning strategies

Please answer the questions first, before you continue on to the following questionnaire.

- Sex: male / female (circle one)
- Grade level: 1st grader / 2nd grader / 3rd grader / 4th grader (circle one)

The following list is a list of vocabulary learning strategies. Learning strategies here refer to the methods by which you learn vocabulary. I would like to know what you actually do, NOT what you should do or want to do. I would like you to indicate how often you have used a certain strategy over the last two weeks, irrespective of the skills (i. e. listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and of the place of learning. Please indicate the frequency of the strategies you use.

- Paraphrase the word's meaning by yourself.

| | | | | |
|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |

- Learn words from paper tests (learn from failure)

| | | | | |
|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |

- Guess from textual context in reading.

| | | | | |
|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |

- Ask your school teacher for Kurdish translation.

| | | | | |
|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |

- Test yourself with word tests.

| | | | | |
|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|

| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
|---|-------|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| 6. Put English labels on physical objects. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 7. Use English-language songs. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 8. Ask your teacher to check your word lists for accuracy. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 9. Learn by group work in class. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 10. Use a monolingual dictionary. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 11. Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 12. Use spaced word practice. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 13. Test with your parents, if they know English. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 14. Do written repetition. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 15. Learn by pair work in class. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 16. Use new word in sentences. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 17. Study and practice meaning in a group outside of class. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 18. Connect word to already known words. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 19. Take notes in class. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 20. Memorize parts of speech. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |
| 21. Group words together within a storyline. | Never | occasionally | often | usually | always |
| | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% |

| | | | | | |
|---|--------------|-------|---------|--------|--|
| 22. Keep a vocabulary notebook. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 23. Image word's meaning. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 24. Connect a word to a personal experience. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 25. Listen to English- radio program. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 26. Use a bilingual dictionary. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 27. Learn words written or commercial items. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 28. Ask your teacher for paraphrase or synonym. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 29. Ask your teacher for sentence including the new word. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 30. Associate the word with its coordinates. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 31. Ask your classmates for paraphrase or synonym. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 32. Read an English language newspaper. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 33. Say new word aloud when studying. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 34. Ask your classmate for Kurdish translation. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 35. Use English language internet. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |
| 36. Use physical action when learning a new word. | | | | | |
| Never | occasionally | often | usually | always | |
| 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | |

Please write any other strategies you have used that are not written above, if any. Thank you very much for your cooperation. I will use your answers as effectively as I can.