

# THE EFFECT OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES OF EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ON THEIR LISTENING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

Morad Bagherzadeh Kasmani<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Shahbazadeh Bengar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University, Chalus Branch,

<sup>2</sup>Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch,  
IRAN.

<sup>1</sup>kasmankola.@yahoo.com, <sup>2</sup>shahbazadehahmad@yahoo.com

## ABSTRACT

*The present study is an attempt to investigate whether vocabulary learning strategy has any effect on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL Undergraduate Learners studying at Payam Noor University in Babol. The participants of the study were 35 male undergraduate university students majoring in English Translation chosen based on one step cluster sampling. This study followed Schmitt's classification of VLSs such as determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. The data were collected through using Schmitt's VLS questionnaire adopted from Bennett (2006) and TOEFL listening comprehension test from Barron's. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and stepwise multiple regressions were used to analyze the data. The results for descriptive statistics showed EFL undergraduate students in Payam Noor University in Babol are as medium strategy users who used determination strategies most frequently and social strategies least frequently. The results related to stepwise multiple regressions revealed only contribution of metacognitive strategy (one out of five categories of VLS) to listening comprehension.*

**Keywords:** Vocabulary Learning Strategy; Listening Comprehension; Language Learning Strategy

## INTRODUCTION

Research in vocabulary learning and its relationship to listening comprehension has gained much interest within the field of investigation in second language acquisition. Yet, for many EFL learners, listening is an 'asphyxiate process'. One reason cited and most often experienced by these learners is their lack of vocabulary knowledge. In consequence of this limitation, they often give up trying to understand the meaning of the part or skip if sentences or an entire part contain a small number of unknown words.

According to our research in this university, we considered different problems in this university. Many of the learners match English words with their equivalents in the first language. They also concentrate on literal meaning of single words, and do not learn the meaning of the words in context. Next problem that these learners may consider is about free production of words that they likely to know. These are due to the unfamiliarity of the students with VLS.

The main purpose of the present study is:

1. To identify the level of strategy use of EFL undergraduate learners studying at Payam Noor University in Babol.
2. To explore the most and least frequently used VLS by EFL undergraduates studying at Payam Noor University in Babol.

3. To find contribution of VLS toward listening comprehension of EFL undergraduate students studying at Payam Noor University in Babol.

On the basis of above research objectives, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Are EFL undergraduate students in Payam Noor University in Babol High, Medium or Low strategy users?
2. What are the most and least frequently used VLSs?
3. Do VLSs have an effect on listening comprehension of EFL Undergraduate students studying at Payam Noor University in Babol?

The significance of the study is to prepare meticulous information about why, when, and where strategies should be used. Teachers will be able to improve the students' learning when become cognizant of the number of strategies used by successful and unsuccessful learners. Additionally, teachers can recognize and teach VLSs to learners and help students to become autonomous learners. In this case students take more responsibility of their learning and more learning happens.

The hypotheses of the study are:

1. EFL undergraduate students in Payam Noor University in Babol are low strategy user.
2. Most frequency of VLS studying at Payam Noor University in Babol is Metacognitive strategy.
3. VLSs effect on listening comprehension of EFL undergraduate students studying at Payam Noor University in Babol.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brief foray into the field of VLS to find definitions of VLS, we will use Schmitt's definition for the proposed research, that VLS could be the process, by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved, and used (Schmitt 2001, p. 20).

VLSs are classified as Discovery strategies include determination strategies and social strategies. A learner may discover a new word's meaning through guessing from context, dictionary or asking someone else (e.g. their teacher or classmates). Another strategy is Consolidation strategies which include memorization strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. These strategies are used to keep the vocabularies in our minds for a long time through making connections between the to-be-learned word and some previously learned knowledge, written and verbal repetition as well as some mechanical means and train students to control and evaluate their own learning.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

In order to reach the maximum statistical powerful parameters at Payam Noor University in Babol, The second year students were selected since they had received enough input to answer the VLS questionnaire while the first year students might have not received enough input and could not answer VLSQ. Payam Noor University in Babol offering English as a field if study was randomly selected from among the universities in Mazandaran Province based on cluster sampling. That is why this university is considered as the samples for the present study. Initially, a total number of 50 undergraduate male students of English translation at university took TOEFL listening comprehension test. The result of the Standard

English test led to the deletion of 15 of the participants whose test scores suppressed two standard deviations above and below the mean. Then, among these clusters, some of them were chosen randomly.

Finally, based on single-stage cluster sampling, 35 EFL undergraduate students, was used as the sample of the study.

### Instrumentation

In the present study which is a survey, one questionnaire and one test were used to collect the data. The questionnaire which was used in this study is Schmitt's VLSQ adopted from Bennett (2006). It is a 41 items likert-scale questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.79, the reliability coefficient was obtained by the researcher of this study. All 41-items in the questionnaire are classified under 5 different groups of strategies as determination, memory, social, cognitive, and meta-cognitive. The second instrument used in this study is TOEFL listening comprehension test which is extracted from the Barron's TOEFL test for the intermediate level and consists of 50 questions.

### Procedure

Data collection was done in one sixty five minute session in Payam Noor University in Babol in April 2012. First, TOEFL listening comprehension test was administered to the participants. After a short break, they were asked to answer VLSQ. The students were given 35 minutes to answer TOEFL listening comprehension test but no specific time was assigned to the questionnaire. They were asked to return it as soon as they complete it. The researcher himself administered the questionnaire and the test. The participants were assured that their responses will be kept confidential and will not affect their marks. All required information was given to the participants before administering the instruments, information like how to answer the test.

### Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaire and the test was analyzed using the SPSS. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to answer research question one and two. Oxford's (1997, 2001) scoring system was used to find high, medium, and low strategy users. According to this scoring system, score 1-2.4 showed low strategy use, 2.4-3.5 showed medium strategy use, and 3.5-5 showed high strategy use. Based on this scoring system, mean score for overall strategy use and each category of strategies was calculated. Finally, stepwise multiple regressions were applied to answer research question three. This statistical procedure showed which one of vocabulary learning strategies contributed to listening comprehension of the students. It also showed major and minor contributors.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results

To determine to what extent the learners use the strategies and also answer questions number two, the mean score and standard deviation of overall strategy use (Table 4.1) and each category of strategies (Table 4.3) was calculated.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for overall strategy use (Total mean) related to VLSQ**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Total mean	35	2.10	4.49	2.9986	.37646
Valid N (list wise)					

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics**

<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>N of Items</i>
.791	41

Table 2 and Oxford's (1997) scoring system, the respondents of the present study were found to be medium strategy users with mean score of 2.9986 and standard deviation of .37646 for overall strategy use. Meanwhile, the reliability of the number of these items calculated by the researcher in Table 4.2 is .791.

To answer the question number two, the descriptive statistics related to the participants' reported utilization of VLSs, measured by the VLSQ was summarized in Table 4.3.

**Table 3. Rank order of the reported strategies**

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Determination	35	2.43	4.29	3.1959	.47010
Metacognitive	35	1.80	4.80	3.1257	.74374
Memory	35	2.29	4.41	3.0555	.44547
Cognitive	35	1.57	5.00	2.9102	.75679
Social	35	1.60	4.20	2.5257	.66525
Valid N (list wise)	35				

As depicted in Table 3, determination strategies (mean= 3.1959) were determined as the most frequently used strategies by the respondents followed by metacognitive (mean=3.1257), memory (mean=3.0555), and cognitive strategies (mean=2.9102) respectively. Furthermore, social strategy was determined as the least frequently used strategy with mean score of 2.5257. Four categories of strategies were used at a medium level which showed the learners were somehow familiar with these four categories.

### Multiple Regression Results

To answer question number three and to find the contribution of vocabulary learning strategies to listening comprehension of the students, step wise multiple regressions was used. The following Table shows the contribution of vocabulary learning strategies to listening comprehension.

The following Table shows stepwise multiple regression analysis representing the aspect of VLSs on EFL learners' listening comprehension.

### The Effect of Metacognitive Strategy on Listening Comprehension

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics**

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Listening	29.97	6.428	35
Mean Metacognitive	3.1257	.77374	35

Table 5. ANOVA

<i>Model</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Regression	133.326	1	133.326	3.460	0.049
Residual	1271.646	33	38.535		
Total	1404.971	34			

Table 6. Coefficients

<i>Model</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
1 (Constant)	38.294	4.596		8.333	.000
Mean Metacognitive	-2.663	1.431	-.308	-1.860	0.049

The stepwise multiple regression analysis in Table 4 revealed among VLS, only metacognitive strategy had a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) correlation and contribution (9.5 %) toward learner's listening comprehension. The test results revealed a correlation between the independent variable (metacognitive strategy) and dependent variable (listening comprehension), which was 0.308 (multiple R). The variance value of dependent variable correlated significantly with independent variable. This can be explained through the power which is able to describe the regression model with the value ( $R^2$ ), which is 0.095.

Metacognitive strategy had a contribution as much as 9.5%. This circumstance showed that when metaconitive strategy was added by one unit, the level of listening comprehension was increased by 0.309 units, that is, students who used metaconitive strategies to find the meaning of new words were better at listening comprehension in comparison with those who did not use metacognitive strategies.

The value of R square ( $R^2 = 0.095$ ) showed a correlated level and contribution between metaconitive strategy and the significance toward listening comprehension was moderate. The findings of the variants analysis was the F value= 3.460 (df= 1, 35) and is significant at P level ( $p = 0.000$ )  $< 0.05$ . As an explanation, the value of  $R^2$  was 9.5% based on the contribution of the metacognitive strategy observed.

From the discussion above, the power which explains the regression model by using the stepwise framework revealed only metaconitive strategy had a correlation in contributing and having an affiliated effect toward listening comprehension.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the answer to research question 1 showed that EFL undergraduate students in Payam Noor in Babol University were medium strategy users with overall strategy mean score of 2.9986. Mean score of 2.9986 showed medium use of strategies by the students. It can be concluded that use of various VLS was not very common among the students. According to their results, medium use of strategies by Iranian students was due to their slight awareness of the vocabulary learning strategies.

The results of research question number two showed determination and after that metacognitive strategy as the most frequently used categories of strategies. Determination strategy was found as the first frequently used VLS in the present study that is EFL learners in Payam Noor University used more VLS which were mostly simple. This can be due to the existence of an extensive number of commercially produced educational materials. Today, dictionary, internet and other electronic resources are easily accessed. Moreover, looking up the meaning, reviewing and informal testing is an activity which can easily be performed without presence of a teacher.

Memory strategy was found as the third frequently used strategy which stood in the middle of other four categories of strategies. Thus, it was less frequently used than determination and metacognitive strategies but more frequently used than cognitive and social strategies.

After memory strategies the students use cognitive strategies frequently. According to Gu and Johnson (1996), cognitive strategy is a positive predictor of general proficiency, so the reason that cognitive strategy was used more frequently after memory strategies by EFL undergraduate students in Payam Noor university could be that their level of general English proficiency was almost high.

Social strategy was found as the least frequently used category of strategies with the mean score of 2.5257. This can be due to that English vocabulary learning tended to be done as an individual process, thus, when students were faced with new words, they preferred not to seek other's help. Besides, learning a word does not necessarily require social interaction. Moreover, the educational system in this university is mostly based on individualism. Cognitive, Memory, Determination, Social found not to contribute to listening comprehension while metacognitive strategy had correlation and contribution (9.5 %) of significance ( $p < 0.05$ ) toward learner's listening comprehension. It showed that teachers should try to encourage students to use more strategies to improve their listening comprehension.

The ultimate conclusion of the study is that EFL undergraduate students in Payam Noor University in Babol were found as medium strategy users. Determination and metacognitive strategies were determined as the most frequently used categories of strategies, and social strategy was found to be the least frequently used category of strategies. The results related to the current study showed that among five categories of vocabulary learning strategies, only one category (metacognitive strategy) had significant correlation and contribution toward learner's listening comprehension.

The practical implication of the present study is that both lecturers and students can benefit from vocabulary learning strategies survey used for the current study; it was composed of 41 different VLSQ. For example, participants, especially freshmen made aware of some alternative vocabulary strategies by answering VLS survey. Besides, filling out the survey may encourage some learners to try and use some of the listed vocabulary learning strategies. Students by knowing the mean score of their strategy use will become aware of their strategy profile, their weaknesses and their strong points in strategy use. Moreover, the teachers can decide better how to teach and what strategies to use in their teaching.

Vocabulary is not expressively taught in EFL classes in this university, and it is neglected most of the time. Learners are not aware of the existence of large number of VLSs. This can be due to that some teachers themselves are not trained enough in this area. Thus, teachers first should be aware of various kinds of vocabulary learning strategies. This can make learners to become familiar with different types of VLSs that can help them to learn the meaning of the new words much better.

VLSs may influence the four language skills. This study showed the effect of vocabulary learning strategies on listening comprehension and the effect of VLS on reading comprehension was done by Sarani and Kafipour in 2008. The effect of vocabulary learning strategies on the other relevant variables like speaking and writing of the learners can be investigated in future studies. In order to further validate the general conclusions of the current study, more specific ethnographic research needs to be done. For instance, some strategies may not have been listed in the vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire used in the current study. In addition, qualitative data collection can be added in the future studies to get more realistic picture of the learners' strategy use.

## REFERENCES

- Bennett, P. (2006). *An evaluation of vocabulary teaching in an intensive study program*. Unpublished MA thesis. University of Birmingham, Birmingham. United Kingdom.
- Gu, P. Y. and Johnson, R. K. (1996). Vocabulary learning strategies and language learning outcomes. *Language Learning*, 46, 643-679.
- Oxford, R. (2001). *Language learning strategies*. In R. Carter & D. Nunan, *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. (pp. 166-171). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. L. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction: Three communicative strands in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81, 443- 456.
- Sarani, A. and Kafipour, R. (2008). The study of language learning strategies use by Turkish and Kurdish EFL university students. *Language Forum*, 34(2), 173-188.
- Schmitt, N. (2001). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), (2009) 50.