# PERCEPTIONS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE EFL LEARNERS STUDYING AT SALAHADDIN UNIVERSITY REGARDING VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

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**ABSTRACT**

This research study explored the vocabulary learning strategies of undergraduate EFL learners' perceptions regarding vocabulary learning strategies. It also investigated whether there were any differences in the learners' perceptions about vocabulary learning strategies in relation to gender, language level and age. This research was conducted at the English Language Department of Salahaddin University with 140 second (pre-intermediate level) and fourth year (advanced level) students in the spring semester of the academic year 2013-2014. The participants of the study were randomly chosen and they took part in the investigation voluntarily. The findings of the study indicated that the perceptions of the participants did not show any significant differences regarding vocabulary learning strategies in relation to gender and age. The participants' reported perceptions regarding vocabulary learning strategies revealed significance regarding language level. The Pre-intermediate learners preferred Social Strategies more than the advanced level learners.

**Key Words:** Vocabulary learning strategies, gender, age, language level, social srategies.

## Literature review

According to Schmitt (2000), the discrete nature of vocabulary acquisition – which makes applying effective strategies easier - might be one of the factors behind using more strategies for learning vocabulary, over learning different language learning activities. Another factor is the classroom tendency of focusing more on discrete activities than integrated activities, such as presentations. It may also be due to the special value of learning vocabulary by students. For Schmitt (2007), language teachers can help students to learn more vocabulary independently outside the classroom and separate from teachers. They can aid the process of independent learning by assisting students to become aware of using different vocabulary learning strategies, and then by helping them to practice various strategies.

Note-taking, repetition, and memorization are the more common strategies that learners use for learning vocabulary. These simple strategies are favored over strategies such as inferring meaning, guessing from context, and imagery, which are more complex and need significant knowledge and active manipulating information.

Schmitt (2007) suggests that, 'deeper processing strategies' like the key word method, or forming associations, are more suitable for intermediate or advanced learners. The strength of these kinds of strategies is that they lead to better (long-term) retention. On the other hand, 'shallower processing strategies' such as rote repetitions can also be effective when the learners are accustomed to utilizing them. These types of vocabulary learning strategies are simple, and can be more useful for beginners.

Tseng and Schmitt (2008) criticized the previous works (for example, the Oxford's (2001) 'Strategy Inventory for Language Learning') which focused on measuring the frequency of using language learning strategies. They state that, the Oxford's assume, in using the questionnaire scale – for measuring the frequency of language learning strategy usage - that those learners who use more

strategies are considered to be better learners. However, these types of scales are unable to reflect how well students can use vocabulary learning strategies.

Tseng and Schmitt (2008) divided the use of vocabulary learning strategy into two parts. The first component is Strategic Vocabulary Learning Involvement (SVLI) - which concerns acts demanding effort either overtly or covertly, to improve or find the effectiveness of specific tactics- refers to the quantitative dimension of vocabulary strategy use. The second part, which they called Mastery of Vocabulary Learning Tactics (MVLT), refers to qualitative dimension and concerns mastering particular methods of vocabulary knowledge acquisition.

Concerning factors which influence the use of vocabulary learning strategies by second language learners, Cohen and Macro (2007) refer to four main factors; (a) the learners proficiency level, (b) gender and individual differences, (c) development of strategy use, and (d) context and situation of learning. Teachers who train learners in learning vocabulary strategies, and researchers who are interested in finding the strategies learners use for learning vocabulary, should consider all of these important factors which affect vocabulary learning strategy usage.

Schmitt's (1997, 2000) taxonomy – which is the basis for this study – to some extent overlaps with Oxford's (2001) taxonomy (memory, cognitive, compensation, meta cognitive, affective, and social strategies). Schmitt classified the strategies into two different categories. First, the strategies are divided into discovery and consolidation strategies. Then they are classified into five major groups: determination, social, memory, cognitive, and meta cognitive strategies.

Determination strategies, which fall under the discovery category, are used by learners to identify the meaning of unfamiliar words without resource to another individual's expertise. Learners can use different strategies for discovering the meaning of unknown words such as; analyzing any available gestures, using pictures, analysis of the part of speech, guessing meaning from either their first language or from textual context; or, using monolingual or bilingual dictionaries (Schmitt, 2000).

Social strategies "facilitate learning with others and help learners understand the culture of the language they are learning" (Carter and Nunan, 2001:168). Since social strategies can be used for identifying the definition(s) of unfamiliar word(s) (for instance, asking the teacher for a synonym, or asking for first language translation), and for consolidating and remembering that word when it has been encountered (by interacting with other learners or with native speakers), Schmitt (1997, 2000) divided them under both discovery and consolidation categories.

Memory strategies, which are known as mnemonics, facilitate long-term retention of vocabulary via a kind of elaborative mental processing (Schmitt, 2000). These kinds of strategies help students link a new vocabulary item with many kinds of existing knowledge such as, previously known words or experiences. Kafipour and Naveh (2011) believe that memory strategies are integrated from three groups of strategies. First, drawing or shaping an image of a word and its meaning(s) in notebooks or in the mind for the purpose of creating a strong connection between the two (the new word and its meaning(s)) can help learners learn vocabulary. Secondly, by using strategies - such as using a new word in sentences - links words together for the vocabulary recalling purpose. Thirdly, in order to stabilize the word's meanings, using aspects of vocabulary knowledge could be a helpful strategy.

Cognitive strategies serve as a means for learners to manipulate information and to increase their knowledge of words to be learned. Thus, unlike memory strategies, cognitive strategies are not concerned with mental processing (Schmitt, 2000). Verbal and written repetition, using flashcards and notebooks for recording new words, word lists, putting English labels on physical objects, and listening to recorded word lists, are examples of cognitive strategies.

Metacognitive strategies are used by learners to manage and evaluate their general learning process and specific learning tasks (Oxford, 2001). Schmitt (2000) states that metacognitive strategies enable learners to receive maximum exposure to language, improve their decisions about the most efficient methods of study, and allow them to evaluate themselves to gauge improvement. Some examples of metacognitive strategies are: using English language media (movies, songs, and newscasts), evaluating one with word tests, and skipping or passing a new word.

Kudo's (1999) classification of vocabulary learning strategies is basically founded on Schmitt's (1997) vocabulary learning strategies taxonomy, but Kudo put memory and cognitive strategies under a psycholinguistic strategies subdivision. In addition, determination strategies cannot be seen in Kudo's figure of vocabulary learning strategies.

**Theories of Vocabulary Learning**
Since it is impossible for students to learn all the words they need in the classroom, different vocabulary learning theories have emerged to help learners to improve their techniques for learning vocabulary. One of the theories suggests that teachers should select the most important words for learners.

Gairns and Redman (1986) argue that different criteria should be considered for vocabulary selection which are: frequency of items, cultural factors, the level, need, and the expediency. According to Schmitt (2007), another way for facilitating vocabulary learning is using different vocabulary learning strategies, and that using vocabulary learning strategies is the most appropriate way that promotes vocabulary learning, and encourages learners with independent vocabulary learning.

Also, because there are some strategies that learners can use outside of the classrooms and in the absence of their teachers, they can compensate for the limited time spent in language classes, and learners can continue the process of learning anywhere and anytime they wish.

**2.4. Knowing a Word**
Language, with all its aspects and its linguistic scope, is like an interrelated network. Words which we use for different purposes in our daily routine life are not isolated parts of this network. Therefore, having full mastery of a specific word does not just mean knowing its dictionary definition or recognizing its letters and sounds alone, as learners need more knowledge about that word to be able to use it in a larger context. In other words, learners who want to control a word completely should know all aspects of that word.

Schmitt (2000) refers to two types of aspects of knowing a word: (a) Meaning and organization types of knowledge; having knowledge about words' dictionary definitions, its register constraints, and also knowledge of lexical organization and word associations (words are related to each other in different ways and stored in the mind not randomly but in an organized way). (b) Non-meaning kinds of word knowledge; having knowledge about grammatical aspects of a word (word class, formation, and derivation), and also about the word form (written and spoken). Nation (2001) presents various kinds of word knowledge in a table, which an EFL learner, who aspires to use a word in a native-like proficiency level, should be able to recognize.

**Method**
This study aims to explore the undergraduate EFL learners' perceptions about vocabulary learning strategies.Besides, it targets to find out whether there are any differences in the participants' perceptions regarding vocabulary learning strategies in relation to gender, level and age. For this investigation the following research questions were adopted:
1. What are the perceptions of the undergraduate EFL learners studying at Salahaddin University regarding vocabulary learning strategies?

2.  Do the perceptions of the undergraduate  EFL learners at the Salahaddin universityregarding vocabulary learning strategies differ according to age, gender and level?

In this study the undergraduate EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategieswere investigated through a descriptive survey in which a questionnaire was employed. 140 undergraduate EFL learners participated in this study.There were 53 male and 87 female participats. 119 participants were between 19 and 24 years old, 19 participants were between 25and 30, and others were above 30.   The students were from two different language levels (Pre-Intermediate and Advanced). One group consisted of 60 students from the Pre-Intermediate level learners who were second year students. The second group consisted of 80 Advanced level learners who were fourth year students.

In order to collect data, Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategy Questionnaire (VLSQ) was used in this study. The questionnaire had five vocabulary learning strategy categories: "Determination strategies", "Cognitive strategies", "Metacognitive strategies", "Memory strategies", and "Social Strategies". The students replied to each questionnaire item according to the 5-point Likert Scale. The response categories were 'Never', 'Seldom', 'Sometimes', 'Often', 'Always'. The reliability coefficiency (Cronbach's Alpha) of the questionnaire was (0.744).

The collected data was statistically analyzed.  For this purpose, SPSS 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used. To test the differences between male and female students' perceptions a two-tailed t-test was employed. To test the differences between language levels of the participants, another two-tailed t-test was employed. For the purpose of testing whether the learners' perceptions differed according to age, a one way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was employed.

**Findings**

1.  **Analysis of the Perceptions of the Participants Regarding Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Descriptive statistics were used to present the findings regarding the first research question which investigated the perceptions of the undergraduate EFL learners studying at Salahaddin University in relation to vocabulary learning strategies. Table 1.1. below, shows the participants' perceptions for the five items (1-5) regarding Determination Strategies.

**Table1.1.:  Analysis of theItems Related to Determination Strategies**

| | | Never | Seldom | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Check the new word's grammatical form (e.g. find whether its verb, noun, adj., etc.). | 8 | 24 | 52 | 37 | 19 | 140 |
| 2 | Look for any word parts that I know; taking away the prefixes and suffixes (e.g. impossible, possible, possibility, possibly, etc.). | 8 | 43 | 48 | 29 | 12 | 140 |
| 3 | Check if the word is also a word in your native laguage. (e.g. cartoon). | 24 | 31 | 43 | 22 | 20 | 140 |
| 4 | Use any pictures or gestures. (body language) to help me guess the meaning if the words are spoken. | 12 | 17 | 52 | 40 | 19 | 140 |
| 5 | Guess its meaning from its context (what comes before and after the new piece of vocabulary). | 4 | 30 | 48 | 28 | 30 | 140 |
| | % | 8 % | 21 % | 35 % | 22 % | 14 % | 100 % |

The findings showed that 35 % of the participants indicated that they sometimes used Determination Strategies, 22 % of the participants often used Determination Strategies, 21 % seldom used these strategies and 14 % of them indicated that they always employed these strategies. Only 8 % of the participants' perceptions revealed that they never used Determination Strategies.  As a result, these findings indicated that most of the participants preferred to use Determination Strategies sometimes. Item 3, which was "Check if the word is also a word in your ntive language", was the least preferred strategy among the five Determination Strategies, while item 5, which was "Guess its meaning from its context", was the most preferred strategy among the always used Determination Strategies.

Table 1.2.  below, shows the participants' perceptions for the five items (6-10) regarding 'Social Strategies'.

**Table 1.2.: Analysis of the Items Related to Social Strategies**

|    |                                                                      | Never | Seldom | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| 6  | Ask the teacher to give me the definition or an explanation in the form of an example sentence. | 16 | 32 | 58 | 21 | 13 | 140 |
| 7  | Ask my classmates for the meaning/ definition.                        | 2     | 21     | 54        | 38    | 25     | 140   |
| 8  | Discover new meaning through group work activity.                     | 22    | 36     | 48        | 22    | 12     | 140   |
| 9  | Ask the teacher to check my definition.                               | 43    | 43     | 32        | 14    | 8      | 140   |
| 10 | Ask native speakers for a definition.                                 | 54    | 38     | 27        | 14    | 7      | 140   |
|    | %                                                                    | 20 %  | 24 %   | 31 %      | 16 %  | 9 %    | 100 % |

The findings showed that 31 % of participants indicated that they sometimes used Social Strategies, 24 % of the participants seldom used Social Strategies, 20 % of them indicated that they never used these strategies and 16 % of them indicated that they often employed these strategies. Whereas 9 % of the participants, perceptions revealed that they always used Social Strategies. As a result, these findings indicated that most of the participants preferred to use Social Strategies Sometimes. Item 7, which was "Ask my classmates for the meaning/ definition", was the least preferred strategy among the five Social strategies while item 10, which was  "Ask native speakers for a definition", was the most preferred strategy among the always used Social strategies.

Table 1.3.  below, shows the participants' perceptions for the five items (11-14) regarding 'Cognitive Strategies'.

**Table1.3.: Analysis of the Items Related to Cognitive Strategies**

|    |                                                                      | Never | Seldom | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| 11 | Draw a picture of the word to help remember it.                       | 34    | 29     | 39        | 24    | 14     | 140   |
| 12 | Make or imagine a mental image of the words' meaning.                 | 14    | 27     | 55        | 26    | 18     | 140   |
| 13 | Connect the word to a personal experience.                            | 6     | 29     | 50        | 34    | 21     | 140   |
| 14 | Remember the words that follow or precede the new word.               | 8     | 31     | 55        | 32    | 14     | 140   |
| 15 | Connect the word to other words with similar or opposite meanings.    | 3     | 14     | 56        | 37    | 30     | 140   |
|    | %                                                                    | 9 %   | 19 %   | 36 %      | 22 %  | 14 %   | 100 % |

The findings showed that 36 % of the participants indicated that they sometimes used Cognitive Strategies, 22 % of the participants often used Cognitive Strategies, 19 % of them indicated that they seldom used these strategies and 14 % of them indicated that they always employed these strategies. Whereas only 9 % of the participants' perceptions revealed that they never used Cognitive Strategies. As a result, these findings indicated that most of the participants preferred to use Cognitive Strategies sometimes. Item 13, which was, "Connect the word to a personal experience", was the least preferred strategy among the five Cognitive Strategies, while item 15, which was " Connect the word to other words with similar or opposite meanings", was the most preferred strategy among those that always used Cognitive Strategies.

Table 1.4.  below, shows the participants' perceptions for the five items (11-14) regarding 'Memory Strategies'.

**Table1.4.: Analysis of the Items Related to Memory Strategies**

|    |                                             | Never | Seldom | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total |
|----|---------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| 16 | Repeat the words aloud many times.          | 10    | 22     | 54        | 33    | 21     | 140   |
| 17 | Write the words many times.                 | 11    | 36     | 32        | 33    | 28     | 140   |
| 18 | Make lists of new words.                    | 19    | 34     | 51        | 17    | 19     | 140   |
| 19 | Use flashcards to record new words.         | 54    | 47     | 27        | 8     | 4      | 140   |
| 20 | Take notes or highlight new words in class. | 6     | 28     | 51        | 24    | 31     | 140   |
| 21 | Put English labels on physical objects.     | 24    | 47     | 47        | 13    | 9      | 140   |
| 22 | Keep a vocabulary notebook.                 | 12    | 20     | 41        | 29    | 38     | 140   |
|    | %                                           | 14 %  | 24 %   | 31 %      | 16 %  | 15 %   | 100 % |

The findings showed that 31% of the participants indicated that they sometimes used Memory Strategies, 24% of the participants seldom used Memory Strategies, 16% of them indicated that they often used these strategies and 15% of them indicated that they always employed these strategies. Whereas only 14% of the participants' perceptions revealed that they never used Memory Strategies. As a result, these findings indicated that most of the participants preferred to use Memory Strategies sometimes. Item 19, which was "Use flashcards to record new words", was the least preferred strategy among the five Memory Strategies while item 22, which was "Keep a vocabulary notebook", was the most preferred strategy among those who always used Memory Strategies.

Table 1.5.  below, shows the participants' perceptions for the five items (23- 27) regarding 'Metacognitive Strategies'.

**Table 1.5.: Analysis of the Items Related to Metacognitive Strategies**

|    |                                                          | Never | Seldom | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| 23 | Use English-language media (songs, movies, the internet).| 1     | 14     | 49        | 28    | 48     | 140   |
| 24 | Test myself with word tests.                             | 7     | 24     | 61        | 23    | 25     | 140   |
| 25 | Study new words many times.                              | 4     | 24     | 46        | 42    | 24     | 140   |
| 26 | When I do not understand a word I pass or skip that word.| 36    | 39     | 37        | 18    | 10     | 140   |

| 27 | Pay attention to English words when someone is speaking English. | 2 | 11 | 32 | 36 | 59 | 140 |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| % | | 7% | 16% | 32% | 21% | 24% | 100% |

The findings showed that 32 % of the participants indicated that they sometimes used Meta cognitive Strategies, 24 % of the participants always used Metacognitive Strategies, 21 % of them indicated that they often used these strategies and 16 % of them indicated that they seldom employed these strategies. Whereas only 7 % of the participants' perceptions revealed that they never used Metacognitive Strategies.  As a result, these findings indicate that most of the participants preferred to use Metacognitive Strategies sometimes. Item 24, which was "Test myself with word tests ", was the least preferred strategy among the five Metacognitive Strategies, while item 27, which was "Pay attention to English words when someone is speaking English ", was the most preferred strategy among  those that always used Meta Cognitive Strategies.

To sum up, The findings of the study indicate that the participants tended to use Meta Cognitive Strategies in vocabulary learning more than the other strategies. Social Strategies were the least preferred category among the participants.

Diagram 1.1. below, displays the mean portions of vocabulary learning strategies employed by the participants.

**Diagram 1.1.:  Rank Order and Frequency Use of Five Categories of Vocabulary Learning Strategies Employed by the Study Sample (Std: Standard Deviation)**.
The findings revealed that Meta Cognitive Strategies were employed the most, with a mean score of 3,38,  followed by Determination Strategies with a mean score of 3,14. The participants' perceptions indicated that Cognitive Strategies comes third place, with a mean score of 3,12, followed by Memory Strategies with a mean  score of 2,95. The participants perceptions regarding the use of Social Strategies when learning vocabulary indicated that they were the least preferred strategies by the participants with a mean score of  2,70.

1. **Analysis of the Perceptions of the Participants Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Relation to Gender, Level and Age**

The t-test results for male and female learners' perceptions indicated thatthere were no significance differences between male and female students' perceptions regarding the vocabulary strategies that they use.

**Table2.1.: The Results of t-test for the Perceptions of the Participants Regarding Vocabulary Learning**
**Strategy in Relation to Gender.**

| Strategy | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-test | d.f. | P-Value |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Determination Strategy | Male | 53 | 3.03 | 0.62 | -1.62 | 138 | 0.19 (NS) |
| | Female | 87 | 3.21 | 0.64 | | | |
| Social strategy | Male | 53 | 2.68 | 0.59 | -0.36 | 138 | 0.72 (NS) |
| | Female | 87 | 2.72 | 0.79 | | | |
| Cognitive Strategy | Male | 53 | 3.09 | 0.64 | -0.56 | 138 | 0.58 (NS) |
| | Female | 87 | 3.15 | 0.61 | | | |
| Memory Strategy | Male | 53 | 2.93 | 0.63 | -0.38 | 138 | 0.71 (NS) |
| | Female | 87 | 2.97 | 0.63 | | | |
| Meta  Cognitive | Male | 53 | 3.42 | 0.63 | 0.53 | 138 | 0.59 |

| Strategy | Female | 87 | 3.36 | 0.55 | | | (NS) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

As it can be seen in Table 2.1, male undergraduate EFL learners used overall vocabulary learning Strategies for Determination Strategy (mean=3.03) less frequently than female students (mean=3.20). Other differences that can be seen in the Table 4.7 are the frequency use of different Vocabulary Learning Strategies categories and rank order of Strategy use categories by male and females. For instance, while male students used Social Strategies less frequently (mean=2.68) than females (mean=2.72), other categories of Strategies such as Cognitive Strategy were used by male students less frequently (mean=3.09) compared to female learners (mean=3.15). In addition, Memory Strategy was used by male students less frequently (mean=2.92) than females (mean=2.97) while Meta Cognitive Strategy was used more frequently (mean=3.42) by male students than female students (mean=3.36).

According to Table 2.1., female participants used each category of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (Determination, Cognitive, Memory, and Social Strategies) more frequently than male students, while males used the Meta Cognitive Strategy more than females from each level. Also, male students used overall Strategies (mean=3.42) more frequently than female ones (mean=3.36). Both male and female participants used Meta Cognitive Strategies most frequently, while Social Strategies were used least frequently.

As shown in Table 2.2. below, the statistical analysis reported perceptions of the students at two different language levels indicated significance only for "social strategy". The findings indicate that pre-intermediate level learners used more social strategies when learning vocabulary than advanced level learners.

**Table2.2.: The Results of t-test for the Perceptions of the Participants Regarding Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Relation to Level**

| Strategy | Your level of English | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-test | d.f. | P-Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Determination Strategy | Second Level | 60 | 3.03 | 0.64 | -1.75 | 138 | 0.08 (NS) |
| | Fourth Level | 80 | 3.22 | 0.33 | | | |
| Social Strategy | Second Level | 60 | 2.92 | 0.63 | 3.06 | 138 | 0.003 (HS) |
| | Fourth Level | 80 | 2.55 | 0.75 | | | |
| Cognitive Strategy | Second Level | 60 | 3.16 | 0.64 | 0.65 | 138 | 0.52 (NS) |
| | Fourth Level | 80 | 3.09 | 0.61 | | | |
| Memory Strategy | Second Level | 60 | 2.95 | 0.57 | -0.08 | 138 | 0.94 (NS) |
| | Fourth Level | 80 | 2.95 | 0.67 | | | |
| Meta Cognitive Strategy | Second Level | 60 | 3.34 | 0.54 | -0.79 | 138 | 0.43 (NS) |
| | Fourth Level | 80 | 3.42 | 0.61 | | | |

As can be seen in Table 2.2. Determination Strategy (mean=3.03) was used less frequently by second level students than fourth level students (mean=3.22). While fourth level students used Social Strategies less frequently (mean=2.55) than second level students (mean=2.92). Other Strategies, such

as Cognitive Strategies were used by second level students more frequently (mean=3.16), compared to fourth level (mean=3.09). Memory Strategy used by second level is identical (mean= 2.95) with fourth level (mean=2.95). While Meta Cognitive Strategy was used more frequently by fourth level students (mean=3.42) than second level students (mean=3.34).

The possible reasons for restricted use of Strategies by the EFL learners University students could include the fact that they are never trained in learning Strategies. As discussed in the literature review part of this study, training learners in learning strategies enables them to be aware of various strategies, increased their familiarity with Vocabulary Learning Strategies, and also gives students positive attitudes toward the usefulness of Strategy usage.

Table 2.3 below, shows the statistical results of the ANOVA test regarding the reported perceptions of the participants about Vocabulary Learning Strategies in relation to age differences. The statistical results of the ANOVA test indicated that there were no significant differences regarding the reported perceptions of the participants about Vocabulary Learning Strategies in relation to age differences.

**Table2.3.: The Results of ANOVA test Regarding the Perceptions of the Participants for Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Relation to Age**.

| Strategy | Age Groups | Mean | Std. Deviation | F-test (one way ANOVA) | P-Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Determination Strategies | 19- 24 | 3.155 | 0.627 | 0.215 | 0.807 (NS) |
| | 25 - 30 | 3.053 | 0.742 | | |
| | > 30 | 3.2 | 0.283 | | |
| Social Strategies | 19- 24 | 2.761 | 0.706 | 2.639 | 0.075 (NS) |
| | 25 - 30 | 2.358 | 0.753 | | |
| | > 30 | 2.8 | 0.849 | | |
| Cognitive Strategies | 19- 24 | 3.126 | 0.621 | 1.099 | 0.336 (NS) |
| | 25 - 30 | 3.179 | 0.607 | | |
| | > 30 | 2.5 | 0.141 | | |
| Memory Strategies | 19- 24 | 2.972 | 0.613 | 0.592 | 0.555 (NS) |
| | 25 - 30 | 2.804 | 0.711 | | |
| | > 30 | 3 | 0.808 | | |
| Meta Cognitive Strategies | 19- 24 | 3.398 | 0.592 | 0.445 | 0.642 (NS) |
| | 25 - 30 | 3.305 | 0.539 | | |
| | > 30 | 3.1 | 0.141 | | |

**Discussion**
Here, discussion of the findings for the first research question will be discussed which will be followed the discussion of the findings for the second research question.

1. *What are the perceptions of the undergraduate EFL learners studying at Salahaddin University regarding vocabulary learning strategies?*

Data analysis revealed that Metacognitive Strategies were the most frequently used strategies by the undergraduate EFL learners. The wide use of Metacognitive Strategies suggests that most of the students were taking control and planning of their vocabulary learning. Metacognitive Strategies which are useful for consolidating and remembering words include the following sub-strategies: (a) the use of English-language media (songs, movies, and the internet), (b) self-evaluation with word tests, (c) continuing to study words over time, (d) skipping new words, and (e) paying attention to English words when someone speaks in English (Schmitt 2000).

Due to the reasons below, it is not surprising that Metacognitive Strategies placed first among other categories of vocabulary learning strategies: Firstly, this result corroborates the results found in O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) extensive research on learning strategy. They found that intermediate students used Metacognitive Strategies more than other strategy categories. Secondly, the result of this study is also similar to results found by Kafipour and Naveh (2011). They concluded that Iranian undergraduate learners used Metacognitive Strategies most frequently. Thirdly, easy access to the internet, the media, a wide range of educational materials, and other electronic resources could be another reason for Metacognitive Strategies usage preference by EFL learners. Fourthly, since self-evaluating, reviewing, and informal testing are the main features of Metacognitive Strategies, and as these activities can be fulfilled by learners even in the absence of teachers - they might find using these kinds of strategies easier than other strategies for remembering words.

Determination Strategies were found to be the second most frequently used strategy by undergraduates at Salahaddin University, showing that the EFL learners use strategies to discover the meaning of new words more than using memory, cognitive, and social strategies which are useful for consolidating newly introduced words. Domination of the grammar approach in the system of English language education in the participants' country could be a reason undergraduate learners are more likely to use determination strategies.

This approach enables learners to be familiar with analyzing parts of speech as well as word forms, and this also leads to more familiarity of learners with determination strategies. Another reason for using more determinations strategies could be due to the simplest and easiest way of finding the meaning of new words through using dictionaries in an environment where the target language is not the peoples' first or second language.

The results of this study are congruent with the findings of Hamzah, Kafipour, and Abdullah (2009). In their research study, they found that using determination strategies – discovering a new word(s)/meaning(s) – is more preferable than other strategies usage by Iranian EFL undergraduate learners. The results are also like findings explored in Sahbazian's (2004) study. She concluded that Turkish undergraduate students used Determination Strategies more frequently than Cognitive, Memory, and Social Strategies.

Cognitive Strategies which were ranked at number three on the list, were in the middle of all categories of strategies. Thus, they were used more frequently than Memory and Social strategies, but they were used less frequently than Metacognitive and Determination Strategies. Gu and Johnson (1996) found that Cognitive Strategies are good predictors to assess the general proficiency level of EFL learners.

Thus, it could be a suitable justification for medium use of cognitive strategies by the EFL learners at Salahaddin University, since their general English proficiency level is around Intermediate/Upper-Intermediate.

According to Schmitt (1997) the main difference between Cognitive Strategies and Memory Strategies is that, unlike Memory Strategies which focus on manipulative mental processing, Cognitive Strategies focus greatly on the mechanical means of vocabulary learning. As can be seen in Table 4.1, the mean score of using cognitive strategy (mean=3.124) is higher than the Memory Strategy usage mean score (mean=2.950) Therefore, from Schmitt's view point and according to the mentioned results, we can say that the undergraduate learners preferred to use mechanical tools rather than traditional memorization patterns for learning vocabulary.

Memory Strategies were found to be the fourth frequently used Strategies for learning vocabulary. This was lower than Meta Cognitive, Determination, and Cognitive Strategies, but they were used more frequently than Social Strategies. This low frequent usage of Memory Strategies could be due to the time consuming feature of these kinds of Strategies. According to Schmitt (2000) Memory Strategies involve manipulative mental processing that is used for long-term retention of vocabulary Low frequency use of memory strategies by the EFL undergraduate learners could also be due to the reason mentioned in the Cognitive Strategies discussion; where participants in this study prefer to use mechanical tools (such as keeping a vocabulary notebook) rather than rote vocabulary learning (connecting the word to its synonyms). Some examples of Memory Strategies which are mentioned in Schmitt (1997-2000) are; an image of the word's meaning and form, studying the spelling of a word, connecting the word to a previous personal experience, and grouping words together to study them. This teaching approach obliges students to listen to their teachers, or take notes throughout the lesson. Therefore, group work or student interaction with each other or with the teacher – which are key features of social strategies – can be rarely observed in these kinds of language classrooms. Another possible reason could be due to the EFL learning environment. In these contexts where English is not the population's native language, there are very few opportunities inside the classroom to ask for others' help for the meaning of unfamiliar words. This leads learners to rely more on other categories of strategies rather than social strategies.

  2. *Do the perceptions of the undergraduate EFL learners at the Salahaddin university regarding vocabulary learning strategies differ according to age, gender and level?*

The learners' proficiency level, gender, age, development of strategy use, and context of learningare factors which influence the use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies by learners (Cohen and Macro, 2007). Gender, as a main factor that influences the use of vocabulary learning strategies, was chosen to be examined in this study.

The results of the female and male EFL learner's performance on Vocabulary Learning Strategies are presented in Table 4.7. The rank order of frequency strategy usage was similar for the female and male participants. In other words, Meta Cognitive Strategies were used most frequently by both genders (rank=1), and Determination, Cognitive, and Memory Strategies received rank numbers of 2, 3, and 4 respectively. Social Strategies, which were used least frequently, placed at rank number 5 in both female and male groups, although both female and male EFL learners were medium Strategy users. The results are in contrast with the findings of the current study, in which, the female undergraduate learners used more Strategies than male learners. Finally, according to the results of using Vocabulary Learning Strategies and from the above discussions it can be concluded that the EFL female learners are better Strategy users than their male counterparts.

Cultural attitudes toward female learners in the participants' culture, and assuming that females are not as much in need of learning foreign language as men (because women traditionally stay at home, while men need to learn other languages for various purposes such as business or tourism) are factors that decrease female motivation to learn a foreign language. Also in EFL situations (inside and outside of the classroom) in the participants' culture, the opportunities for interpersonal relationships for females are more limited than for males. In summary, although female learners in this study used more cognitive, metacognitive, and memory strategies than male learners, this does not mean that males'

abilities in these strategies were weaker than female, but, as mentioned in the previous sections, they might use these strategies unconsciously.

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