

Exploring Vocabulary Learning Strategies among EFL/ESL Learners at Tertiary Level

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate what strategies were more or less common for learning vocabulary among EFL/ESL university students at Fatih University in Turkey, and how their strategy use differed regarding individual variables (gender, nationality, and English proficiency level). A questionnaire adapted by Riankamol (2008) from the taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) developed by Schmitt (1997) administered to around 150 EFL (English as a foreign language) /ESL (English as a second language) students from different nationalities. The results revealed that VLS item 21, i.e. listening to English songs and news, ‘metacognitive strategy’ (MET), was most frequently used and item 4, i.e. asking the teacher to translate a word

into L1, ‘social discovery strategy’ (DIS), was seldom used. Besides, the research showed that VLS use differed significantly in terms of demographic variables (gender, nationality and English level) among students. Although the results of this study can be beneficial paved to the teachers to develop their way of teaching vocabulary by using the most frequent strategies in their teaching.

Keywords: vocabulary; learning strategies; vocabulary learning strategies (VLS); Schmitt’s taxonomy.

* Introduction

Vocabulary is an essential element in language learning. In order to master all the four skills of a language, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, learners need to have sufficient vocabulary knowledge as asserted by Schmitt

(2008, p.329). Vocabulary is the backbone of all language skills, since one cannot speak or write without knowing vocabulary, they cannot read or understand what they listened without it. A lot of research (Schmitt, 1997; Nation, 1990, p.116) states that vocabulary plays an important role in English Language acquisition and it is an important component of reading comprehension.

In the same way, Hatch & Brown (1995, cited in Riankamol, 2008, p.9) states that “vocabulary is central to language and is of great significance to language learners. Words are the building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, ideas without which people cannot convey the intended meaning”.

Thus, teachers and material writers need to find out more about how learners grasp their vocabulary, what strategies they use frequently while coming across unknown words. Vocabulary learning strategies are important to make learners cope with the difficulty they face while learning, whether new words or new information.

The present study shed the light on the most frequent strategies that students use when they encounter unknown vocabulary while reading or listening, as well as the influence of gender, nationality and proficiency

level on their use of VLS. Many studies focused on the importance of using VLS to help them learn a language efficiently, but little concerned about whether or not learners differ in the usage of VLS regarding demographics namely gender, nationality and proficiency level. Vocabulary learning strategies help learners or readers deal with unknown words facing them while reading. They play a vital role in foreign language learning as stated in different studies. (Schmitt, 1997; Nation, 1990, p.116; Hatch & Brown, 1995).

This research study attempts to answer the following research questions:-

- 1- What are the most and least common vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) used by EFL learners at Fatih university, Turkey?
- 2- How will the demographics (gender, nationality and English level) influence the use of VLS by EFL learners at tertiary level?

* **Background**

Learning strategies enhance learner autonomy which has become essential in language learning (Psaltou, 2005, p.15). Oxford (1990 cited in Çelik & Toptas, 2010) defines learning strategies (LS) as “actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques students use, often

unconsciously, to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2". Whereas Griffiths (2008 cited in Griffiths 2015, p.426) defines learning strategies as "actions chosen by learners (either deliberately or automatically) for the purpose of learning or regulating the learning of language". For Riankamol (2008), learning strategies are used in different situations, no matter what the subjects or the settings are. Rubin (1975, cited in Griffiths, 2001, p.426) has defined learning strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge".

According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), which are part of learning strategies, are very helpful for learners to attain the knowledge needed for learning, since they become less dependent on the teacher. And for teachers, VLS can be used as a tool for facilitating the students' effective learning and promoting their autonomy in language learning. It is ascertained by Schmitt, (2007, p.755) "learners can do much to learn vocabulary independently....teachers can aid this process by helping learners become aware of and practiced in using a variety of vocabulary learning strategies".

Related study on VLS by Riankamol, (2008) investigated the use of vocabulary learning strategies by 24 English gifted students of Triam Udomsuksa School, revealed that metacognitive strategies are the most frequently used by English gifted students who are considered high proficient students in English and the least frequently used vocabulary strategy was "I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs." in cognitive strategies. Also, a study on Emirati EFL university learners (Al Khatib, 2013) showed that they were medium range strategy users and favored using metacognitive strategies.

However, another study on VLS by Zarrin & Khan (2014) using Schmitt taxonomy VLS questionnaire with the undergraduate learners at A.M.U. (Aligarh Muslim University) in India, revealed that the participants are familiar more with memory, social, and cognitive strategies, than determination and metacognitive strategies. Also, it showed that they are medium strategy users for learning vocabulary and they use memory strategies more frequently than other strategies.

*** Schmitt's Taxonomy of VLS**

Schmitt's (1997, pp.13-16) taxonomy consists of 58 items and its categorization is based on Oxford

(1990) taxonomy of language learning strategies. Schmitt asserts that “Oxford (1990) seemed best able to capture and organize the wide variety of vocabulary learning strategies identified”. Four strategy groups were adopted from Oxford’s taxonomy: social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive. However, he argued that there is no category in this taxonomy which describes a strategy utilized by learners while encountering a new word for the first time “...without recourse to another person's expertise” (Schmitt,1997, p.9).

Schmitt’s taxonomy is classified into two dimensions: discovery strategies and consolidation strategies of vocabulary learning. Discovery strategies are the ones learners use to find out the meanings of new words when they first encounter them whereas consolidation strategies are used to consolidate meanings when learners encounter the words again. The table below illustrates the classification of VLS by Schmitt.

Table1. Schmitt’s Categorization of VLS Taxonomy adapted from Schmitt (1997)

Vocabulary Learning Strategy Group	
Strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning:	Strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination: learners apply when they are faced with new words without any additional help, e.g. by analyzing parts of speech, guessing from context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social: learner asks someone for help when they face unknown words again, e.g. learner practices meaning of words in group. • Memory: learner uses to relate new words to prior knowledge, e.g. to study the spelling and sound of a word.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social: learner employs to discover meaning of new words by asking someone who knows, e.g. asking teacher for translating or paraphrasing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive: learner includes repetition and using mechanical means to study words, e.g. using flash cards, word lists. • Metacognitive: learners use to control and evaluate their own learning, e.g. using English language media, i.e. listening to music.

*** Method**

*** Participants**

This study was conducted at Fatih University, Turkey. The researcher used a convenience sample to carry out the study. A total of 150 students participated, 58 (38,7%) were females and 92 (61,3%) were males as illustrated in table 2 below. They are from different nationalities 34,7% were Arabs, 34,7% were Turkish and 30,6% were from other nationalities. They are non-native speakers of English, 51,3% of them were studying English for more than 10 years. Both 25 postgraduate students and 125 undergraduate students majoring in different fields participated. The majority of the subjects (57,3%) were advanced Learners of English language and 36,0% were intermediate learners.

Table 2. Demographic distribution of the participants

Characteristic	frequency	Percentage%
Gender		
Female	58	38,7
Male	92	61,3
Total	150	100
Age		
17-18 years	5	3,3
18-20 years	70	46,7
More than 20years	75	50,0
Total	150	100
Years of studying English		
3-5 years	32	21,3
5-10 years	41	27,3
More than 10 years	77	51,3
Total	150	100
Level of English		
Pre-intermediate	10	6,7
Intermediate	54	36,0
Advanced	86	57,3
Total	150	100

*** Data Collection Instrument**

Data of this descriptive study were collected by using a survey, that is a questionnaire based on Schmitt's taxonomy. The questionnaire consists of 25 items and employs 5-point Likert scale, ranking from 'always use it' to 'never use it'. The questionnaire was administered in English language without any translation. The questionnaire is composed of two sections: the first section aims to collect some personal data. The second section aims to find out students' frequency use of vocabulary learning strategies. This section consists of six categories of strategies according to Schmitt's taxonomy (Schmitt, 1997). The categorization of VLS questionnaire items are determination strategy (1-3), social discovery strategy (4-7), social consolidation strategy (8-10), memory strategy (11-14), cognitive strategy (15-20), and metacognitive strategy (21-25).

*** Results**

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Program, SPSS 23.0. Since the main objective of the present study was to investigate what strategies are more or less commonly used for learning vocabulary among EFL/ESL learners at tertiary level, descriptive statistics were carried out to find mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation(SD) of each item. Moreover, the influence of demographic variables (gender, nationality and English language level) of EFL/ESL learners on vocabulary strategies use was explored in this study. Non parametric analyses were carried out in the study since it was found that the data were not normally distributed (Kolmogorov Smirnov $p \leq, 005$). Accordingly, Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis tests were employed in the study. The findings of the study were presented in the following tables.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of overall VLS

VLS Items	N	\bar{X}	SD
21. I listen to English songs and news.	150	2,9800	1,22321
3. I learn meaning of words by identifying its part of speech.	150	2,3600	1,29677
7. I know some new words when working in group works.	150	2,3000	1,23021
15. I repeatedly practice new words.	150	2,1933	1,31943
24. I do not worry very much about the difficult words, I pass them.	150	2,1867	1,26590
14. I speak words out loud when studying.	150	2,1333	1,37410
19. When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly.	150	2,1267	1,40611
11. I write a new word in a sentence so I can remember it.	150	2,1200	1,38906
12. I study a spelling of new words.	150	2,1067	1,41016
8. I practice English in group work activities.	150	2,0533	1,41320
22. I memorize word from English magazines.	150	2,0533	1,44141
10. I learn words about the culture of English speaking countries.	150	1,9233	1,36429
1. I use a bilingual dictionary to translate words into my mother tongue.	150	1,8867	1,39287
9. I ask native speakers for help.	150	1,8667	1,41737
6. I ask my classmate for meaning.	150	1,8333	1,37288
13. I use physical actions when learning words.	150	1,8067	1,30408
25. I use on-line exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge.	150	1,6400	1,40125
18. I record vocabulary from English soundtrack movies in my notebook.	150	1,4333	1,36798
5. I ask the teacher to put an unknown word into a sentence.	150	1,4133	1,27441
2. I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meanings.	150	1,3333	1,23520
23. I review my own English vocabulary cards before the next lesson.	150	1,1800	1,22101
17. I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs.	150	1,1667	1,26606
16. I write a new word on a flash card so I can remember it.	150	1,1067	1,24322
20. I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go.	150	1,1067	1,26463
4. I ask the teacher to translate the words into my mother tongue.	150	1,0133	1,18144

The table above shows the descriptive statistics of overall VLS use in a descending order. It illustrates that using English language media, i.e. listening to music and news, identifying words' parts of speech, and working in group works are the most frequent strategies used by the respondents with \bar{X} (2,98), (2,36) and (2,30) respectively. Furthermore, strategies as asking teacher for translating words into a learner's L1, using vocabulary cards and flash cards were the least ones used by the respondents with \bar{X} (1,01), (1,10) and (1,10) respectively.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Determination Strategies

VLS Items	N	\bar{X}	SD
3. I learn meaning of words by identifying its part of speech.	150	2,3600	1,29677
1. I use a bilingual dictionary to translate English words into my mother tongue.	150	1,8867	1,39287
2. I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meanings.	150	1,3333	1,23520

According to table 4 above, the item 3, i.e. learning vocabulary by identifying its parts of speech; a part from determination strategies, was the most frequently used strategy by the participants (\bar{X} =2,36, SD=1.29). In the meantime, the least frequently used strategy was item 2, i.e. using

pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meanings, (\bar{X} =1,33, SD=1,23).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Social (Discovery) Strategies

VLS Items	N	\bar{X}	SD
7. I know some new words when working in group works.	150	2,3000	1,23021
6. I ask my classmate for meaning.	150	1,8333	1,37288
5. I ask the teacher to put an unknown word into a sentence.	150	1,4133	1,27541
4. I ask the teacher to translate the words into my mother tongue.	150	1,0133	1,18144

Table 5 shows that the most frequently used strategy at social discovery category, i.e. learners interact and cooperate with other people in vocabulary learning, was item 7, "I know some new words when working in group works." (\bar{X} =2,30, SD=1,23), and the least frequently used strategy was item 4, "I ask the teacher to translate the words into my mother tongue." (\bar{X} =1,01, SD=1,18).

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Social (consolidation) Strategy

VLS Items	N	\bar{X}	SD
8. I practice English in group work activities.	150	2,0533	1,41320
10. I learn words about the culture of English speaking countries.	150	1,9333	1,36429
9. I ask native speakers for help.	150	1,8667	1,41737

According to social strategies for consolidation illustrated in the table above the item 8, "I practice English in group work activities." was the most frequently used strategy among the respondents, (\bar{X} =2,05, SD=1,41). While the item 9, "I ask native speakers for help." was the least common used strategy among them, (\bar{X} =1,86, SD=1,41).

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Memory Strategy

VLS Items	N	\bar{X}	SD
14. I speak words out loud when studying.	150	2,1333	1,37410
11. I write a new word in a sentence so I can remember it.	150	2,1200	1,38506
12. I study a spelling of new words.	150	2,1067	1,41016
13. I use physical actions when learning words.	150	1,8067	1,30408

Regarding memory strategies items shown in table 7; that learners use to promote vocabulary acquisition, the results reveal that the item 14, “ I speak words out loud when studying.” is the most frequently used strategy by the participants. (\bar{X} =2,13, SD=1,37). While the least used strategy was item 13, “I use physical actions when learning words.” (\bar{X} =1,80, SD=1,30).

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive Strategy

VLS Items	N	\bar{X}	SD
15. I repeatedly practice new words.	150	2,1933	1,31943
19. When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly.	150	2,1267	1,40611
18. I record vocabulary from English soundtrack movies in my notebook.	150	1,4333	1,36798
17. I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs.	150	1,1667	1,26606
16. I write a new word on a flash card so I can remember it.	150	1,1067	1,24322
20. I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go.	150	1,1067	1,26463

The table above shows that item 15, “I repeatedly practice new words.” was the most frequently used cognitive strategy among the respondents (\bar{X} =2,19, SD=1,31). And the item 20, “I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go.” was the least commonly used among them (\bar{X} =1,10, SD=1,26).

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of Metacognitive strategy

VLS Items	N	\bar{X}	SD
21. I listen to English songs and news.	150	2,9800	1,22324
24. I do not worry very much about the difficult words found when reading or listening. I pass them.	150	2,1867	1,26590
22. I memorize word from English magazines.	150	2,0533	1,44141
25. I use on-line exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge.	150	1,6400	1,40125
23. I review my own English vocabulary cards for reviewing before the next lesson starts.	150	1,1800	1,22101

According to metacognitive strategies, the results show that the participants most frequently used the strategy item 21, “I listen to English

songs and music.” To promote vocabulary acquisition (\bar{X} =2,98, SD=1,22). Meanwhile, the least used strategy was item 23, “I review my own English vocabulary cards for reviewing before the next lesson starts.” (\bar{X} =1,18, SD=1,22).

Additionally, Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis were carried out in order to find the effects of the demographic variables (gender, nationality and English proficiency level) on VLS use among the participants. It is illustrated in the following tables.

Table10. Mann Whitney U test results of overall VLS use regarding gender variable

VLS Items	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
1. using bilingual dictionary	Female	58	85,45	4956,00	3091,000	.023*
	Male	92	69,23	6369,00		
2. analyzing any available pictures	Female	58	86,40	5011,00	3063,000	.012*
	Male	92	68,63	6314,00		
3. identifying part of speech.	Female	58	76,94	4462,50	2584,800	.740
	Male	92	74,59	6862,50		
4. asking teacher for L1 translation	Female	58	77,64	4503,00	2544,000	.610
	Male	92	74,15	6822,00		
5. asking teacher to put new word in a sentence	Female	58	83,51	4727,50	2319,500	.164
	Male	92	71,21	6597,50		
6. asking classmates for meaning.	Female	58	84,98	4920,00	2118,000	.030*
	Male	92	69,52	6396,00		
7. knowing new words through group works	Female	58	78,37	4545,50	2501,500	.507
	Male	92	73,69	6779,50		
8. practice meaning in group work activities.	Female	58	78,41	4548,00	2499,000	.505
	Male	92	73,66	6777,00		
9. asking native speakers for help	Female	58	76,41	4431,50	2615,500	.836
	Male	92	74,93	6893,50		
10. learning words about the culture.	Female	58	80,28	4656,50	2390,500	.272
	Male	92	72,48	6668,50		
11. using new words in sentences	Female	58	81,29	4715,00	2332,000	.185
	Male	92	71,85	6610,00		
12. studying the spelling of new words.	Female	58	84,59	4936,50	2140,500	.037*
	Male	92	69,77	6418,50		
13. using physical action when learning a word	Female	58	80,61	4675,50	2371,500	.240
	Male	92	72,28	6649,50		
14. speak words out loud when studying	Female	58	84,00	4972,00	2175,000	.052
	Male	92	70,14	6453,00		
15. practicing new words repeatedly	Female	58	80,22	4652,50	2394,500	.273
	Male	92	72,51	6672,50		
16. using a flash card to learn a word	Female	58	81,68	4737,50	2309,500	.144
	Male	92	71,60	6587,50		
17. listening to vocabulary on CDs	Female	58	79,08	4586,50	2460,500	.389
	Male	92	73,24	6738,50		
18. keeping vocabulary notebook	Female	58	79,58	4615,50	2431,500	.345
	Male	92	72,93	6709,50		
19. writing or saying words repeatedly.	Female	58	87,19	5057,00	1990,000	.008*
	Male	92	68,13	6268,00		
20. making vocabulary cards	Female	58	87,72	5088,00	1950,000	.003*
	Male	92	67,79	6337,00		
21. listening to English songs and news.	Female	58	78,01	4524,50	2522,500	.545
	Male	92	73,92	6800,50		
22. memorizing word from English magazines.	Female	58	83,61	4849,50	2197,500	.063
	Male	92	70,39	6475,50		
23. review English vocabulary cards.	Female	58	87,21	5058,00	1989,000	.006*
	Male	92	68,12	6267,00		
24. skipping or passing difficult words.	Female	58	82,82	4806,50	2240,500	.081
	Male	92	70,85	6518,50		
25. using on-line exercise to test vocabulary	Female	58	81,30	4715,50	2331,500	.183
	Male	92	71,84	6609,50		

* $p \leq 0,050$

U test results of VLS use regarding gender variable is illustrated in the table above. According to the results, there were meaningful differences between female and male students in the use of the VLS items 1 (p=,023), 2 (p=,012), 6 (p=,030), 12 (p=,037), 19 (p=,008), 20 (p=,003), 23 (p=,006). In other words, female students seemed to use VLS items (1, 2, 6, 12, 19, 20, and 20) more frequently than male students.

Table 11. Kruskal Wallis results of overall VLS use regarding nationality variable

VLS Item	Nationality	N	Mean Rank	df	X ²	P	Difference
1. I use a bilingual dictionary to translate English words.	A. Arabs	52	78,50	2	9,023	.003*	B-C
	B. Turkish	52	88,58				
	C. Others	46	61,41				
2. I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meanings.	A. Arabs	52	76,24	2	24,742	.000*	A,B, A-C
	B. Turkish	52	94,92				
	C. Others	46	62,21				
3. I learn meaning of words by identifying its part of speech.	A. Arabs	52	70,57	2	7,024	.004*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	88,56				
	C. Others	46	66,09				
4. I ask the teacher to translate the words into my mother tongue.	A. Arabs	52	79,51	2	3,159	.070	
	B. Turkish	52	79,50				
	C. Others	46	66,62				
5. I ask the teacher to put a unknown word into a sentence.	A. Arabs	52	77,30	2	8,445	.000*	B-C
	B. Turkish	52	86,70				
	C. Others	46	60,80				
6. I ask my classroom for meaning.	A. Arabs	52	73,67	2	15,972	.000*	A,B, A-C
	B. Turkish	52	92,30				
	C. Others	46	58,11				
7. I know some new words when working in group works.	A. Arabs	52	75,34	2	3,091	.036	
	B. Turkish	52	85,86				
	C. Others	46	66,55				
8. I practice English in group work activities.	A. Arabs	52	74,44	2	2,868	.071	
	B. Turkish	52	79,93				
	C. Others	46	67,19				
9. I ask native speakers for help.	A. Arabs	52	71,41	2	5,888	.002	
	B. Turkish	52	86,57				
	C. Others	46	65,02				
10. I learn words about the culture of English speaking countries.	A. Arabs	52	65,00	2	20,877	.000*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	97,00				
	C. Others	46	63,00				
11. I write a new word in a sentence so I can remember it.	A. Arabs	52	65,42	2	12,331	.000*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	92,19				
	C. Others	46	67,91				
12. I study a spelling of new words.	A. Arabs	52	68,66	2	0,184	.932*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	90,88				
	C. Others	46	66,62				

13. I use physical actions when learning words.	A. Arabs	52	71,18	2	7,263	.023*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	88,08				
	C. Others	46	66,16				
14. I speak words out loud when studying.	A. Arabs	52	70,25	2	3,797	.010	
	B. Turkish	52	84,77				
	C. Others	46	70,06				
15. I frequently practice new words.	A. Arabs	52	71,20	2	0,036	.881	
	B. Turkish	52	86,05				
	C. Others	46	68,43				
16. I write a new word on a flash card so I can remember it.	A. Arabs	52	72,50	2	10,725	.000*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	89,06				
	C. Others	46	62,88				
17. I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs.	A. Arabs	52	76,56	2	2,492	.088	
	B. Turkish	52	81,06				
	C. Others	46	66,60				
18. I record vocabulary from English soundtrack movies in my notebook.	A. Arabs	52	71,50	2	4,754	.001	
	B. Turkish	52	85,14				
	C. Others	46	67,02				
19. When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly.	A. Arabs	52	78,11	2	0,580	.014*	B-C
	B. Turkish	52	88,41				
	C. Others	46	63,59				
20. I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go.	A. Arabs	52	74,05	2	10,454	.000*	B-C
	B. Turkish	52	88,42				
	C. Others	46	61,85				
21. I listen to English songs and news.	A. Arabs	52	73,04	2	0,379	.846	
	B. Turkish	52	79,74				
	C. Others	46	73,89				
22. I memorize word from English magazines.	A. Arabs	52	68,97	2	0,126	.932*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	89,62				
	C. Others	46	69,41				
23. I review my own English vocabulary cards before the next lesson.	A. Arabs	52	70,04	2	7,202	.000*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	87,04				
	C. Others	46	67,61				
24. I do not worry very much about difficult words, I pass them.	A. Arabs	52	72,88	2	4,529	.001	
	B. Turkish	52	84,87				
	C. Others	46	66,74				
25. I use on-line exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge.	A. Arabs	52	67,30	2	0,812	.000*	A, B, B-C
	B. Turkish	52	76,21				
	C. Others	46	68,14				

*P<0,050

The table above shows that Arabs use VLS items (2, 6) more frequently comparing with their counterparts (Turkish and students from other nationalities). Besides, Turkish students seemed to use VLS items (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25), more frequently than students from other nationalities.

Table 12. Kruskal Wallis results of overall VLS use regarding proficiency level variable

VLS Items	Proficiency Level	N	Mean Rank	df	X ²	P	Difference
1. I use a bilingual dictionary to translate English words.	A. pre-intermediate	10	97,18	2	2,616	.000*	A-C, B-C
	B. intermediate	54	93,58				
	C. advanced	86	61,80				
2. I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find word meanings.	A. pre-intermediate	10	102,55	2	19,408	.000*	A-C, B-C
	B. intermediate	54	90,87				
	C. advanced	86	62,70				
3. I learn meaning of words by identifying its part of speech.	A. pre-intermediate	10	77,40	2	4,842	.000*	
	B. intermediate	54	85,53				
	C. advanced	86	69,45				
4. I ask the teacher to translate the words into my mother tongue.	A. pre-intermediate	10	91,55	2	0,226	.016*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	82,48				
	C. advanced	86	67,37				
5. I ask the teacher to put an unknown word into a sentence.	A. pre-intermediate	10	88,20	2	10,700	.000*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	88,27				
	C. advanced	86	66,01				
6. I ask my classroom for meaning.	A. pre-intermediate	10	89,50	2	0,344	.069	
	B. intermediate	54	83,77				
	C. advanced	86	68,08				
7. I know some new words when working in group works.	A. pre-intermediate	10	87,05	2	1,205	.548	
	B. intermediate	54	77,81				
	C. advanced	86	72,00				
8. I practice English in group work activities.	A. pre-intermediate	10	94,75	2	2,215	.327	
	B. intermediate	54	79,02				
	C. advanced	86	73,66				
9. I ask native speakers for help.	A. pre-intermediate	10	76,35	2	2,323	.113	
	B. intermediate	54	82,14				
	C. advanced	86	71,10				
10. I learn words about the culture of English speaking countries.	A. pre-intermediate	10	94,30	2	3,864	.087	
	B. intermediate	54	76,04				
	C. advanced	86	72,21				
11. I write a new word in a sentence so I can remember it.	A. pre-intermediate	10	77,65	2	0,646	.039	
	B. intermediate	54	86,10				
	C. advanced	86	69,59				
12. I study a spelling of new words.	A. pre-intermediate	10	68,78	2	0,667	.036*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	87,84				
	C. advanced	86	68,78				

13. I use physical actions when learning words.	A. pre-intermediate	10	96,60	2	7,718	.021*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	83,46				
	C. advanced	86	67,81				
14. I speak words out loud when studying.	A. pre-intermediate	10	90,50	2	2,497	.287	
	B. intermediate	54	81,05				
	C. advanced	86	71,00				
15. I frequently practice new words.	A. pre-intermediate	10	68,30	2	4,486	.065	
	B. intermediate	54	86,37				
	C. advanced	86	69,76				
16. I write a new word on a flash card so I can remember it.	A. pre-intermediate	10	76,60	2	7,939	.019*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	87,82				
	C. advanced	86	67,70				
17. I learn words by listening to vocabulary CDs.	A. pre-intermediate	10	98,20	2	0,992	.011*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	84,51				
	C. advanced	86	67,70				
18. I record vocabulary from English soundtrack movies in my notebook.	A. pre-intermediate	10	86,80	2	14,214	.000*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	92,12				
	C. advanced	86	63,84				
19. When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly.	A. pre-intermediate	10	82,30	2	0,638	.036*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	87,19				
	C. advanced	86	69,70				
20. I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go.	A. pre-intermediate	10	90,05	2	24,415	.000*	A-C, B-C
	B. intermediate	54	94,73				
	C. advanced	86	61,15				
21. I listen to English songs and news.	A. pre-intermediate	10	58,60	2	0,015	.981	
	B. intermediate	54	69,86				
	C. advanced	86	81,51				
22. I memorize word from English magazines.	A. pre-intermediate	10	68,00	2	8,51	.054	
	B. intermediate	54	79,50				
	C. advanced	86	73,69				
23. I review my own English vocabulary cards before the next lesson.	A. pre-intermediate	10	81,80	2	7,741	.021*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	87,12				
	C. advanced	86	67,47				
24. I do not worry about the difficult words, I pass them.	A. pre-intermediate	10	83,00	2	3,096	.013	
	B. intermediate	54	67,45				
	C. advanced	86	79,68				
25. I use on-line exercise to test my vocabulary knowledge.	A. pre-intermediate	10	79,15	2	0,012	.018*	B-C
	B. intermediate	54	87,66				
	C. advanced	86	67,66				

*P<0,050

A meaningful difference has been shown in the above table between VLS use and students' English proficiency level (pre-intermediate, intermediate, advanced). Students with

intermediate proficiency level seemed to use VLS items (1, 2, 3, 5, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25) more frequently than advanced English level students.

* Discussion

The study was carried out to investigate the patterns of vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL/ESL students at Fatih University. Additionally, it aimed to explore whether there were any significant differences in the utilization of VLS regarding demographic variables or not.

This research found that EFL/ESL learners at Faith University used VLS item 21 (I listen to English songs and news.), which is a part of metacognitive strategies, more frequently than other VLS items. In other words, EFL/ESL learners used metacognitive strategies more frequently than other types of strategies, which means that students tend to learn English from real experience by listening to music, watching films and so on. Though, it can be stated that students tended to be responsible for their learning. This was consistent with Riankamol's (2008) study which revealed that English gifted students at Triam Udomsuksa school use metacognitive strategies for learning vocabulary most frequently and it was also

consistent with another study by Alkatib (2013) who investigated the use of learning strategies among Emirati EFL learners and it was revealed that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used among them. However, the results of this study were inconsistent with Zarrin & Khan's study (2014) which revealed that metacognitive strategies were the least frequently used strategies among undergraduate learners at A. M. U. (Aligarh Muslim University) in India. Whereas, the results of this study showed that the participants seemed to use VLS item 4 (I ask the teacher to translate the words into my mother tongue.), a part from social discovery strategies, least frequently which was in agreement with Riankamol's study (2008).

The study revealed significant findings regarding the influence of demographic variables, namely gender, nationality (Arabs, Turkish, Other nationalities) and English proficiency level (intermediate, pre-intermediate, advanced), on VLS use among EFL/ESL learners.

According to the results of the relevant analyses, it was found that female students use VLS more frequently than their male counterparts, the difference was meaningfully significant regarding the use of VLS items 1, 2, 6, 12, 19,

20, 23. Whereas a study by Alkatib (2013) revealed that there were no significant difference between female and male students in the use of English learning strategies.

Furthermore, the research demonstrated that Arab and Turkish students were more strategic users than students from other nationalities, especially in using VLS items 1 (I use a bilingual dictionary.), 2 (I use pictures illustrated in textbooks.), 20 (I make vocabulary cards.).

The study also investigated the effect of students' English proficiency level on their use of VLS. The analysis showed that intermediate level students seemed to use VLS more frequently than students from other levels. The difference was significant among intermediate and advanced levels students, it showed that intermediate level students tended to use VLS items as using bilingual dictionary, using pictures illustrated in the textbooks, identifying words' parts of speech and other items "5, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25" more commonly than advanced level students. However, a study by Alkatib (2013) showed that there were no significant difference in the use of learning strategies regarding students' proficiency level.

*** Conclusion**

Vocabulary learning plays an important role in language acquisition. One is unable to acquire and master all language skills namely, listening, reading, speaking and writing, without having enough vocabulary storage. Teachers are not able to teach all vocabulary to their students, for this reason, teachers should focus more on teaching vocabulary strategies, which encourage students' learning autonomy. This study revealed that not all students seemed to use the same patterns of VLS, but they have things in common and teachers should focus more on these things and bear in mind the individual differences among students, that is what suits for a students may not suit for another.

This research is exclusive to the sample participated in this study, hence any generalization cannot be made. It is limited to 150 students studying in different faculties at Fatih university, Turkey. The researcher recommended that a further research would be carried taking into account the limitations mentioned.

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