INVESTIGATING THE IMPORTANCE LEVEL AND UTILIZATION OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AMONG TURKISH EFL LEARNERS

Melek Yolcu Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University, School of Foreign Langusages, Adana, Turkey
*Meryem Mirioglu, Corresponding Author
Cukurova University, Education Faculty, ELT Department, Adana, TURKEY
tmeryem@cu.edu.tr

*This paper constitutes a part of MA study supervised by Dr. Meryem Mirioglu in 2019.

Abstract: This study aims to investigate (a) the perceptions of 8th grade Turkish EFL learners regarding the importance and use of L2 vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), (b) to find out the relationship between perceived importance level and application level of VLS and (c) to unearth the most and the least frequently applied VLS by EFL learners in their learning processes. A mixed-method sequential explanatory design was adopted in this study. The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire based on Schmitt's taxonomy of VLS from 398 participants and analyzed via SPSS; qualitative data were obtained from focus group interviews conducted with 45 volunteer participants and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings indicated that EFL learners attribute a great level of significance to vocabulary learning. It also revealed that there is a significant relationship between importance and application level of VLS, which demonstrates that the strategies that were given most importance were applied on a larger scale by learners.

Keywords: English Language Learning, Learner Perceptions, Vocabulary Learning, Vocabulary Learning Strategies.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary forms the core element of language proficiency and without it, meaningful communication cannot be provided and the intended meaning cannot be conveyed (Ghazal, 2007; Schmitt, 2010). Until 1980s, vocabulary acquisition was given little attention to and thought secondary to grammar. Denker (1998, p.1, cited in Hancıoğlu, 2004, p.2) asserts “Although researchers into the field of language learning strategies often mention vocabulary learning strategies, these are rarely explored in any depth”. However, language researchers have recently highlighted the significance of vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary has become popular in the field of language learning since it provides the basis of communicative competence, comprehension, writing and reading skills.

According to Umarova (2018), there is a strong relationship between the number of vocabulary learned by language learners and their level of communicative competence. Schmitt (2000) pointed out that "second language students need approximately 2000 words to maintain conversations, 3000 words families to read authentic texts, and as many as 10,000 words to comprehend challenging academic texts". Alqahtani (2015) also emphasizes how critical vocabulary knowledge is in the language learning process stating that poor vocabulary knowledge reduces the quality of communication in the target language. Many other researchers found out that a rich lexical knowledge improves writing and reading skills (Chou, 2011; Viera, 2017; Karakoç & Köse, 2017). The structures, forms, and functions that a person need to use in a language cannot come to life in healthy communication without sufficient vocabulary knowledge (Nunan, 1991). It can be concluded that vocabulary knowledge makes it easy to promote communicative competence and all language skills including listening, speaking, reading, writing and also grammar knowledge.

Vocabulary learning is a multi-dimensional issue. To master the foreign or second language, extensive knowledge about lexical items which includes the word form, meaning and the basic use in context receptively and productively is required (Ellis, 1994). However, this process could be

challenging for language learners. Hence, vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) to manage this challenging process can be needed. With the application of suitable strategies, learners are expected to promote their independence, autonomy, and self-determination, so that they can take control of their learning and become lifelong learners (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

The present study, therefore, attempts to explore the perceptions of 8th grade Turkish EFL learners concerning the importance and use of vocabulary learning strategies. Besides, the study aims to find out how frequently 8th grade EFL students apply vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) in their vocabulary learning process and to examine what the relationship is between perceived importance level and perceived application level of VLS regarding EFL learners. In line with the purpose, the study was conducted to seek answers the following three research questions:

1. What is the relationship between perceived importance level and perceived application level of second language (L2) Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) concerning 8th grade EFL learners?
2. What are the most and least frequently used vocabulary learning strategies among the 8th grade EFL learners?
3. What are the experiences and views of 8th grade EFL learners exposed to L2 VLS?

Since the 1970s, there has been a significant movement in language learning and language teaching. Accordingly, great importance was attached to the process of learning L2 and the learning strategies that individual learners utilize (Hismanoglu, 2000). As a consequence of the growing number of studies on cognitive psychology which pertain to *mental processes*, learning strategies came into prominence (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In the light of cognitive theories, how language learners control their learning with deliberate efforts, how they employ the learning strategies to manage and improve their language learning were focused on (Griffiths, 2004). According to the studies on language learning strategies, successful language learners are those who take advantage of learning strategies. Vocabulary learning strategies which are the focal point of the current study is the sub-group of language learning strategies (LLSs) and this topic has drawn considerable interest in second language acquisition (SLA) since the seventies (Khair, 2017). Therefore, the effects of learners' behaviors on language acquisition/learning have been investigated since then. According to Oxford (1990), self-sufficient learners are autonomous and responsible for their self-learning, so they can utilize the most suitable LLSs for their learning. As a result, they become self-confident and proficient in language learning. In a similar vein, many researchers underscored the importance of VLSs use. Accordingly, using a diverse range of vocabulary learning strategies was asserted to enhance vocabulary acquisition (Gu & Johnson, 1996; Schmitt, 1997; Li, 2009; Goundar, 2015).

There have been a wide range of studies conducted on different aspects of VLSs including the usefulness and frequency of employed VLSs, effects of strategy instruction, teaching of VLSs, VLSs applied by good and poor learners, the relationship between strategy use and vocabulary mastery etc (Schmitt, 1997; Catalan, 2003; Siriwan, 2007; Zhang, 2011; Ta'amneh, 2014; Ölmez, 2014; Aparı, 2016; Asyiah, 2017; Noprianto and Purnawarman, 2019). Schmitt (1997) investigated the most commonly utilized VLSs and the tendency of "good" and "poor" learners toward vocabulary learning including 600 EFL learners including junior high school students, high school students, college students, and adult learners. He found out that the most frequently used strategies were *using a bilingual dictionary*, *verbal and written repetition* and *guessing from context* while the least commonly used strategies were *semantic map, keyword method* and *L1 cognates of the words*. In another study, Ölmez (2014) compared high school students' and their teachers' perceptions on VLSs in terms of the use and importance level. According to the results, teachers and students attached great importance to the use and instruction of VLS. The VLSs that were attributed great importance by the students and by the teachers were employed in large measure. Aparı (2016) examined types and frequency of VLS used by preparatory school students and she found out that *social (discovery) strategies* were reported to be the most frequently used strategies while *memory strategies* were the least popular strategies. In his experimental research study, Khair (2017) investigated VLSs employed by English major university students. It was found out that the most frequently used strategy was *the metacognitive strategy*, however, the *social strategy* was reported to be the least used strategy. A recent study carried out by Noprianto and Purnawarman (2019) to reveal the frequency of VLS use of high school students and to examine the relationship between the use of VLS and their affixes

knowledge. The results showed the use of VLSs considerably contributed to students' knowledge of affixes and the most popular strategy was *determination strategy*.

The vast majority of the studies on VLSs were carried out with university students or high school students (Karakoç, 2011; Easterbrook, 2013; Ölmez, 2014; Ta'amneh, 2014; Kulikova, 2015; Aparı, 2016; Khair, 2017; Noprianto and Purnawarman, 2019), however very few studies were conducted with secondary school students (Şerabatır, 2008; Asyiah, 2017). Therefore, this study could fill the gaps in the field revealing the perceptions of 8th-grade secondary school EFL learners on the importance and application of VLSs in a local context.

2.1. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Vocabulary learning strategies are considered to be a sub-category of language learning strategies (Nation, 2001) so the definition of VLS takes its source from the definition of LLSs (Catalan, 2003). The most extensive definition of VLSs is provided by Catalan (2003) as "knowledge about the mechanisms (processes, strategies) used in order to learn vocabulary as well as steps or actions taken by students (a) to find out the meaning of unknown words, (b) to retain them in long-term memory, (c) to recall them at will, and (d) to use them in oral or written mode" (p. 56). As can be seen in Catalan's definition, vocabulary learning strategies regard not only receptive but also productive vocabulary knowledge.

Many scholars have attempted to define and classify VLSs in recent years (Gu & Johnson,1996; Schmitt, 1997; Nation,2001). Schmitt's classification of VLS is regarded as the most extensive taxonomy among all the VLS taxonomies. What makes this classification comprehensive is that many sources, such as a wide range of reference books, students' self-reports on vocabulary learning, teachers' views and practice were consulted and those strategies were reviewed according to the feedback coming from these sources (Schmitt, 1997).). Schmitt's taxonomy which has a total of 58 individual items is divided into two major categories. *Discovery strategies* (14 items) refer to the strategies that are applied to find out the meaning of a new lexical item when it is first encountered while *consolidation strategies* (44 items) refer to the strategies that are utilized to remember and consolidate the meaning of these lexical items. Schmitt's taxonomy of VLS contains five strategies sub-groups: *determination strategies* (DET) (9 items), *social strategies* (SOC) (8 items), *memory strategies* (MEM) (27 items), *cognitive strategies* (COG) (9 items) and *metacognitive strategies* (MET) (5 items). *Determination strategies* regard those strategies utilized by the learners to discover what the new word means without consulting with anybody else. *Social strategies*, on the other hand, are applied either to discover or to consolidate a word by interacting with someone else, for example, teachers or classmates. Including a wide range of strategies (27 items) in Schmitt's taxonomy (1997), *memory strategies,* also known as mnemonics, comprise the techniques that are consulted to associate between the new lexical items and the previous lexical knowledge. *Cognitive strategies* focus more on repetition strategies and the mechanical aspects of learning vocabulary rather than mental processing in which point cognitive strategies differ from memory strategies. *Metacognitive strategies* deal with the strategies that help learners control their learning, evaluate or test themselves.

3. Methodology

The present study was conducted in a mixed-method sequential explanatory design. In the sequential explanatory design, quantitative research is conducted and analyzed in the first phase. Then, it is followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative and quantitative data are incorporated in the phase of interpretation of the study (Tashakkori, Teddlie & Teddlie, 2003). Thus, the quantitative data were gathered through a questionnaire and analyzed via SPSS; qualitative data were collected through focus-group interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis.

3.1. Participants

The quantitative phase of this study was carried out with 398 eighth grade EFL learners (n=182 male, n=216 female) and the qualitative phase was conducted with 45 of those volunteer

participants (n=26 female, n=19 male), studying at 15 different public secondary schools in Hatay in the Academic Year of 2018-2019. In each school, 8th graders had four hours of English lesson per week. To conduct the present research, special permission was requested from the provincial directorate of national education. Convenience sampling was employed to select the participants in this study since they were accessible and voluntary to participate in the study and attainable to allocate time for focus group interviews. Participation in the study was voluntary. All the participants were informed at the beginning about the purpose of the study, its voluntary basis, confidentiality, and ethical issues.

3.2. Data Collection

The data were collected through a structured questionnaire and focus group interviews in order to find out EFL students' perceptions about vocabulary learning strategies. The questionnaire used in this study is a validated questionnaire adapted from Ölmez (2014) study which was formed according to Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of VLSs with a total of 58 items. The first 14 items on VLS are used to discover the meanings of the new words, the other 44 items on VLS are used to reinforce the learning of the words. The Cronbach's Alpha score of the final version of the questionnaire was 0.96 after the piloting and necessary amendments in wording. The questionnaire was applied in Turkish language, which is the mother tongue of the participants and it had two main parts. The first part was designed to get information about participants. The second part included two kinds of five-point Likert scales located at the right and left sides of the items. One of the scales shows the level of importance of VLSs (1: not important at all, 2: somewhat important, 3: important, 4: quite important, 5: extremely important) and the other scale indicates the level of application of VLSs (1: never apply it, 2: rarely apply it, 3: sometimes apply it, 4: usually apply it, 5: always apply it).

As a second phase of the study, focus group interviews were carried out with 45 volunteer participants. The rationale for adopting focus group interviews as a research method, as mentioned by Morgan and Krueger (1993) was due to the "synergy" that makes the interview fertile and as Carey (1994) points out "the group effect" providing valuable insights and in-depth data to the research. 12 focus groups were formed consisting of 3 to 5 participants. Five groups of students included three participants, five groups consisted of four participants and two groups involved five participants. In the focus group interviews, five main questions that were piloted and adjusted were directed to the students in Turkish. The researcher informed the participants about the issue and the process of focus group interviews in advance, so that the participants were able to think about the topic. In the beginning, the researcher reminded the participants that the interviews would be audio-recorded to analyze the data and the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants would be ensured. The focus group interviews were conducted at appropriate places at schools and at a convenient time for the researcher and participants.

3.3. Data Analysis

The quantitative data gained from the questionnaires were analyzed via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) edition 22. While analysing the quantitative data, descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, correlational statistics were benefited from in an attempt to describe and understand the features of the data. To analyze the qualitative data obtained from focus group interviews, thematic analysis was utilized. Firstly, the focus group interviews were recorded verbatim by the researcher. Then, all transcribed data were revised so as to check if there was any inaccuracy. To ensure validity, the researcher utilized member checking and colleague support which helps reduce misunderstanding caused by the researcher (Creswell, 2007).

4. Findings

In this section, the quantitative and qualitative data results are presented sequentially. Firstly, the importance and application level of VLS are illustrated and the correlation between the importance and application level is given based on the quantitative data. Next, the data derived from focus group interviews are discussed under themes.

4.1. Quantitative Data Analysis Findings

In this section, the findings of the importance and the application level of five categories of VLS were compared. Figure 1 shows the distribution of VLS importance level for learners.

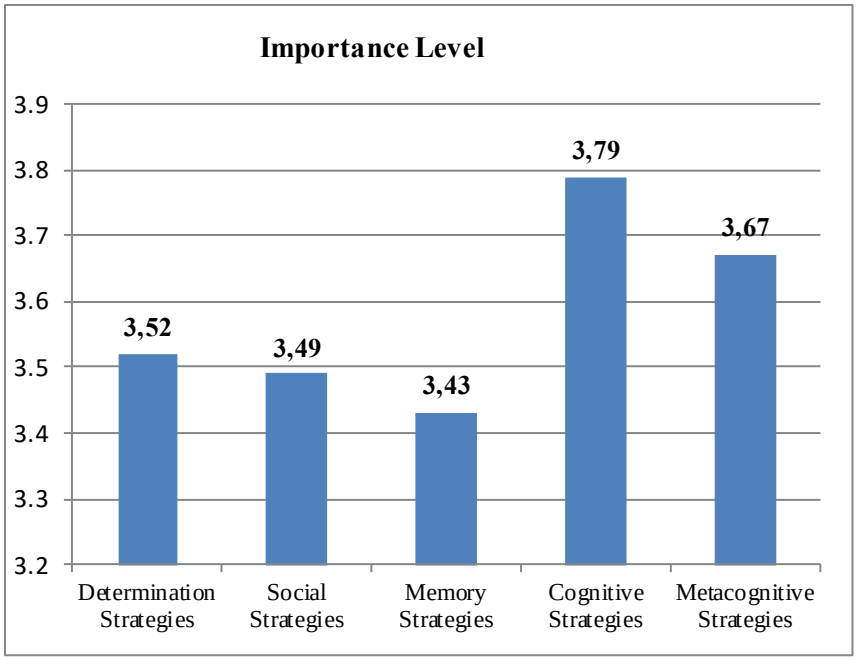


Figure 1. The distribution of VLS importance level for learners

According to the results, the perceived most important strategy among all the strategies was cognitive strategies (M=3.79). Metacognitive strategies were ranked the second most important strategy group (M=3.67) which was followed by determination strategies (M=3.52). Social strategies were perceived as the fourth most important strategy group.

The least important strategy group was identified to be memory strategies (M=3.43) (Figure 1).

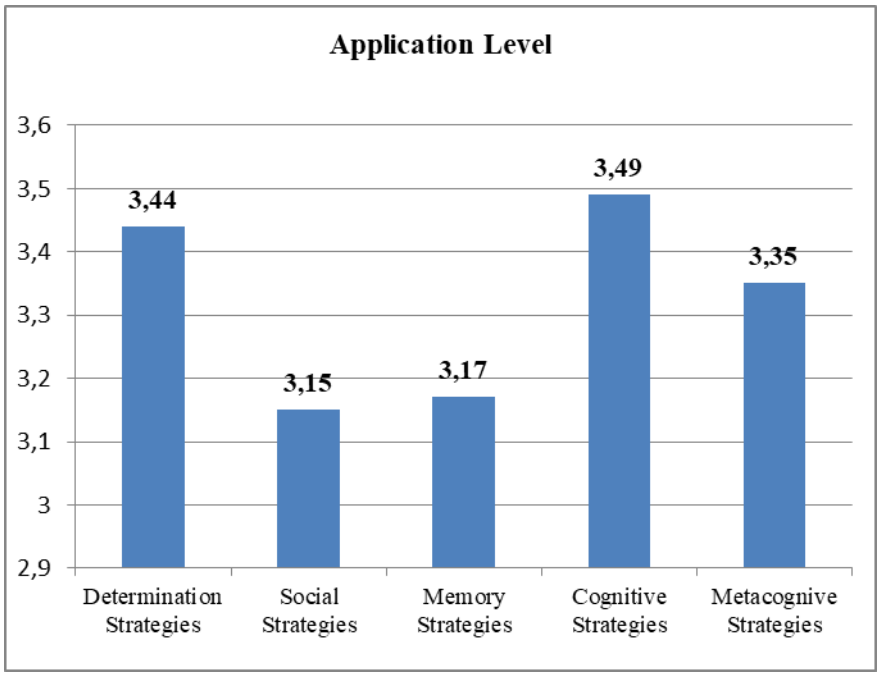


Figure 2. The distribution of VLS application level for learners

As for the application level of VLS, cognitive strategies turned out to be the most frequently employed strategy group (M=3.49). This result shows that the importance level of cognitive strategies is in line with the application level of strategies. The second most applied strategy group was found out to be the determination strategy (M=3.44). Metacognitive strategies were ranked third most commonly employed strategy group (M=3.35) which was followed by memory strategies (M=3.17). With an approximate mean value of (M=3.15) , social strategies were determined to be the least frequently applied strategy group. The mean value of determination strategy seems to be higher than the metacognitive strategy group at the application-level which reveals that determination strategies are applied more than the metacognitive strategy group (Figure 2).

Table 1 indicates the correlations between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of strategy groups.

Table 1. The Correlations between the perceived importance and application level of strategy groups

		App. DET	**App. SOC**	**App. MEM**	**App. COG**	**App. MET**
Imp. DET	Pearson Correlation	**,780**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**,0001**				
	N	**394**				
Imp. SOC	Pearson Correlation		**,724**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)		**,0001**			
	N		**395**			
Imp. MEM	Pearson Correlation			**,836**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			**,0001**		
	N			**372**		
Imp. COG	Pearson Correlation				**,762**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)				**,0001**	
	N				**394**	
Imp. MET	Pearson Correlation					**,715**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					**,0001**
	N					**392**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The results of correlations computed between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of Determination Strategies for 394 EFL students indicated a statistically significant relationship (r=,780, p<0,05). There was a strong positive linear relationship between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of Determination Strategies.

The correlations between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of Social Strategies for 395 EFL students were computed. According to the results, the correlation was statistically significant. It is remarkable to note that there is a strong positive linear relationship between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of Social Strategies (r=,724, p<0,05).

The perceived importance level and perceived application level of Memory Strategies for 394 EFL students were correlated. According to the results, the correlation between the variables was statistically significant (p< 0.01). Correlation statistics indicated that there was a strong, almost perfect, positive linear relationship between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of memory strategies regarding students (r=,836, p<0,05).

The perceived importance level and perceived application level of Cognitive Strategies for 394 EFL students were correlated. The results showed that the correlation between the variables was statistically significant (p< 0.01). According to the correlation statistics, there was a strong, positive

linear relationship between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of cognitive strategies regarding students (r=,762, p<0,05).

The correlation between perceived importance level and perceived application level of Metacognitive Strategies was computed for 392 EFL learners. According to the results, the correlation between those variables was statistically significant (p< 0.01). The correlation statistics indicated that there was a positive, strong linear relationship between the perceived importance level and perceived application level of metacognitive strategies (r=,715 p<0,05).

Table 2 illustrates the perceived most important and most frequently applied strategies.

Table 2. The perceived most important and most frequently applied strategies

The most important strategies	**M**	**SD**	**The most commonly applied strategies**	**M**	**SD**
DET: Looking up a bilingual dictionary	4.12	1.11	**DET:** Learning the word through English-Turkish word lists	3.92	1.20
DET: Learning the word through English-Turkish word lists	3.95	1.11	**DET:** Looking up a bilingual dictionary	3.91	1.21
SOC: Asking teacher for Turkish translation of English word	4.05	1.18	**SOC:** Asking teacher for Turkish translation of the English	3.95	1.20
MEM: Studying the spelling of the word carefully	4.25	1.07	**MEM**: Studying the sound of the word carefully	3.99	1.13
MEM: Studying the sound of the word carefully	4.24	1.02	**MEM:** Connecting the new word to cognates, words of similar form and meaning in Turkish (e.g. "sport-spor", "guitar-gitar")	3.97	1.26
COG: Using verbal repetition of the word	4.26	1.03	**COG:** Using verbal repetition of the word	4.08	1.22
COG: Keeping a vocabulary notebook	4.17	1.17	**COG:** Taking notes about the word in class	3.89	1.30
COG: Taking notes about the word in class	4.07	1.18	**COG:** Keeping a vocabulary notebook	3.82	1.35
MET: Continuing to study the word over time	4.11	1.09	**MET:** Continuing to study the word over time	3.93	1.13
MET: Testing themselves with word tests	4.088	1.11	**MET:** Testing themselves with word tests	3.88	1.25

The most important determination strategies were reported to be *looking up a bilingual dictionary(M=4.12)* and *learning the word through English-Turkish word lists (M=3.95).* As for social strategies *asking the teacher for Turkish translation of the English word* was stated to be the most important strategy (M=4.05). *Studying the spelling of the word carefully* (M=4.25) and *studying the sound of the word carefully* (M=4.24) were found out to be the most important memory strategies. *Using verbal repetition of the word (M=4.26), keeping a vocabulary notebook (M=4.17) and taking notes about the word in class (M=4.07)* were perceived as the most important cognitive strategies. As for metacognitive strategies, *continuing to study the word over time* (M=4.11) and *testing themselves with word tests* (M=4.08) were the most important strategies.

The most frequently applied determination strategies were reported to be in line with the most important determination strategies which are *learning the word through English-Turkish word lists* (M=3.92) and looking up a bilingual dictionary (M=3.91). *Asking the teacher for Turkish translation of the English word* (M=3.95) was the most frequently used social strategy. *Studying the sound of the*

word carefully (M=3.99) and *connecting the new word to cognates, words of similar form and meaning in Turkish (e.g. "sport-spor", "guitar-gitar")* (M=3.97) were found out to be the most commonly applied memory strategies. As for the most frequently used cognitive strategies, *using verbal repetition of the word (M=4.08), taking notes about the word in class (M=3.89)* and *keeping a vocabulary notebook (M=3.82)* were ranked the most. *Continuing to study the word over time* (M=3.93) and *testing themselves with word tests* (M=3.88) were the most commonly applied metacognitive strategies (Table 2).

As illustrated Table 3, the perceived least important strategies were found out to be the same as the least frequently applied strategies. *Looking up a monolingual dictionary to find out the word's meaning* is the perceived least important and least commonly applied determination strategy. *Studying and practicing the meaning of the word in pairs/groups in class and outside class* was turned out to be the least important and least commonly applied social strategy. As for memory strategies, *underlining the initial letter of the word;* for cognitive strategies *listening to recordings and CDs of word list;* for metacognitive strategies *skipping or passing the new word and ignoring it* were reported to be the least important strategies (Table 3).

Table 3. The perceived least important and least commonly applied strategies

The least important strategies for learners	M	**SD**	**The least commonly applied strategies for learners**	**M**	**SD**
DET: Looking up a monolingual dictionary to find out the word's meaning	3.12	1.47	**DET:** Looking up a monolingual dictionary to find out the word's meaning	2.75	1.55
SOC: Studying and practicing the meaning of the word in pairs/groups in class and outside class	3.06	1.27	**SOC:** Studying and practicing the meaning of the word in pairs/groups in class and outside class	2.63	1.32
MEM: Underlining the initial letter of the word	2.26	1.37	**MEM:** Underlining the initial letter of the word	2.06	1.28
COG: Listening to recordings and CDs of word lists	2.98	1.42	**COG:** Listening to recordings and CDs of word lists	2.49	1.44
MET: Skipping or passing the new word and ignoring it	2.58	1.64	**MET:** Skipping or passing the new word and ignoring it	2.07	1.37

4.1. Qualitative Data Analysis Findings

In this part, the qualitative data obtained from 45 EFL learners through focus group interviews are demonstrated. The findings are presented under the different themes.

4.1.1. The Views about the Significance of Vocabulary Learning

With the help of thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, it was found that all the EFL learners who participated in the focus group interviews placed great importance on vocabulary learning in the language learning process. Besides, the participants mentioned about the reasons why they find it significant to learn vocabulary. It can be concluded that they specified a good deal of reasons to learn English vocabulary. Most of the participants reported that vocabulary learning is

significant in order to communicate with tourists in our country and with others abroad, to do English tests, to find a better job, to improve speaking ability, to understand the meaning of a sentence, to have command of the language and to better understand loanwords in Turkish from English.

4.1.2. The Awareness of VLS

The majority of the participants reported that they are most familiar with repetition strategies such as writing the word several times, repeating the words verbally or memorizing from the wordlists. Some of the learners pointed out that they are not aware of any vocabulary learning strategies. The participants stated that they know such VLSs as *writing the word several times, repeating the word verbally, using wordlists (English-Turkish), using flashcards with the representation of the word/ Inferring the meaning from flashcards, keeping a vocabulary notebook, hanging up the word cards on the real objects, using the word in a sentence, learning words from songs, films or social media, using a pocket or online dictionary, using the word in a sentence, asking teacher or classmates, connecting/ matching the word to its synonyms and antonyms.* It is clear that VLS that known by the learners are principally those basic strategies. However, some of the students aware of different strategies such as *connecting the word to a familiar place (Loci Method), using a Turkish keyword with a similar sound in order to learn the new word, and connect the English word to this Turkish word* and *using social media ,phone, tablet computer in English.*

4.1.3. The Application of VLS

According to the statements verbalized by learners, a vast majority of them made use of verbal or written repetition of words from the wordlists given beforehand by the teacher. Some of the students pointed out that they write the new word many times until they memorize them. However, while learning from the wordlist, some learners noted not to give much attention to the pronunciation of the word, that is, the pronunciation stays in the background. Besides, more learners reflected to apply the "*encoding word*" technique which refers to use a Turkish keyword with a similar sound in an attempt to connect the English word to this Turkish word, which was claimed to be very efficient and fun in vocabulary learning. Besides, *using a vocabulary box* was also reported to be commonly used. While some of the learners stated to have a common vocabulary box in the classroom, which was also used for vocabulary contest, some others create their own vocabulary box at home. *Taking notes about the words on the coursebook* was mostly suggested by their teachers. *Solving English questions* oriented to the exam and *looking up the unknown words in the pocket or online dictionary* was among mainly applied techniques. There are more techniques uttered by the learners. These are *guessing from pictures/ flashcards, keeping a vocabulary notebook, using the new word in sentences,listening to songs, watching movies/film series/ cartoons/interviews (on EBA (Education Information Network) etc.) asking teacher/classmates the meaning of a word, hanging up sticky notes on different places, matching pictures with word, connecting the word to a familiar place (Loci Method), reading short stories, using applications* and *using social media, phone, tablet computer in English.*

It can be concluded that most of the participants used the strategies they had already known. Even though they claimed that they knew different strategies which require deep cognitive engagement- integrating prior knowledge with the new information to create more complex structures-, they still use more primary strategies such as wordlists, repetition strategies, keeping a vocabulary notebook, looking up dictionary, etc. Although the majority of the learners articulated that they most often apply simple strategies, a good number of learners stated to use some distinctive strategies which need deeper level of processing such as *encoding words or connecting the new word to a Turkish word, connecting the word to a familiar place (Loci Method), creating sentences and using them in an imaginary dialogue, watching the same movie with a foreign friend and have a talk on it, watching videos or interviews, drawing caricature,* which were found out to be high level of commonly employed for personal preferences. Those learners using such notable strategies even asserted to use the basic strategies, as well, especially for the course success and for

the exam. It was also found out that the participants learned about those distinctive strategies mostly from social media, a friend or a relative studying English.

5. Discussion

When all findings are taken into account, it may be concluded that EFL learners attach high importance to the use of vocabulary learning strategies. In line with these findings, their application level of VLS was identified high, as well. It was found out that there is a significant relationship between application level and importance level of VLS. The students generally apply the strategies that they find important to use. It goes along with Ölmez's (2014) study in which both teachers and students considered the use and instruction of VLS highly important and Asyiah's (2017) study in which students perceived learning vocabulary influential in order to improve language skills.

It was found out that learners attributed great importance to vocabulary learning in that vocabulary knowledge is essential to communicate with others, to achieve in English exams and tests, to have a better opportunity in business life and to improve in language skills. This finding is in line with Zhang's (2011) study in which vocabulary learning was found to be the most important thing that constitutes the basis of second language acquisition and with Easterbrook's (2013) study in which vocabulary learning was stated to be necessary for having a good job in the future. This finding affirms Richard and Renandya (2002) who point out that learning vocabulary is pivotal in that it fosters language proficiency and language skills.

According to the findings elicited from questionnaires, cognitive strategies have the highest importance level just as in application level. This result coincides with O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) study in which cognitive strategies were also identified as the most popular strategy. The most important techniques among cognitive strategies were also determined to be the most commonly used strategies. These strategies are "using verbal repetition of the word" "keeping a vocabulary notebook" and taking notes in class". The quantitative findings correspond to the qualitative finding, as most of the learners stated to use these techniques frequently. The indication about verbal repetition approves Nation (2001) who pointed out that in order to attain lexical items fluently, they must be learned well enough, that's why repetition is found to be vital. The students even who verbalized to use the strategies that need deep-level cognitive involvement stated to use repetition techniques or take notes about new words, especially on coursebooks. Moreover, from the interview findings, the majority of students were found out to have a vocabulary notebook which was strongly recommended by Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) and Allen (1983). The least important cognitive strategy was reported to be *listening to the recording and CD of the word*, which was also indicated as the least employed cognitive strategy. Findings from questionnaires also identified that although metacognitive strategies were ranked second most important strategy, in the application level, determination strategies were found to precede metacognitive strategies. This indication reveals that students are aware of the significance of the elaborate strategies which need deeper processing, but they are in a tendency to apply more basic strategies. This result is echoed with Schmitt (1997) who states that shallow strategies are tended to be used more than elaborated ones. Accordingly, *continuing to study the word overtime* was perceived as the most important and the most popular metacognitive strategy, which also indicates that the importance level and application level of this strategy is coherent. This finding confirms the explanation of Zhang (2011) who points out that learners should keep permanence in repeating because using vocabularies repeatedly makes it easy to learn. The least commonly used strategy was *skipping or passing the new word* which was also perceived as the least important. This finding is in line with Aparı's (2016) study.

As for the determination strategies, the most important strategies were stated as "using *bilingual dictionary*", "*learning the word through English –Turkish word lists*" and "*guessing the word's meaning from the context*" and the least important determination strategy was identified to be "using monolingual dictionary". Correspondingly, these strategies were reported to be the most frequently applied among determination strategies. In several studies on VLS (Gu & Johnson,1996; Zhang, 2009; Kulikova, 2015), using dictionaries and guessing from context were also stated as one of the most common strategies. Marckwardt (1973) asserts that "Dictionaries often supply information about language not found elsewhere" (p.369). The qualitative data yields consistent results with these findings. In the interviews, the majority of the students uttered that they generally

use wordlists to learn the meaning of the word, as well. However, the finding regarding dictionary use contradicts Sa'd and Rajabi's (2018) study in which *using dictionaries* was stated as one of the least unpopular strategies and it was asserted that the students could be deprived of "dictionary awareness" (Linares, 2002).

Although social strategies were reflected as more important than memory strategies in questionnaire findings, memory strategies were found to be employed more frequently than social strategies. This indication contradicts Aparı's findings in which social strategies were identified as the most frequently used strategy group, however, it is in accordance with Asyiah's (2017) study in which social strategies were the least frequently used strategy. In this study, *asking teacher for Turkish translation of the English word* was found to be the most popular and important technique among social strategies, while *discovering the meaning of the new word through group work* was determined to be the least frequently applied technique and *studying and practising the word in groups was the least important technique*. It could be concluded that learners don't prefer group works in finding out and practicing the meaning of the lexical items. As for memory strategies, it was considered the least important strategy group but used more frequently than stated. The results indicated that *studying the spelling and the sound of the word* was perceived as the most important technique among memory strategy groups whereas studying *the sound of the word carefully* was reported to be the most frequently used strategy. The least commonly utilized technique among social strategies was found to *be underlying the initial letter of the word* which goes along with Aparı's (2016) finding. At this point, interview findings supplied complementary results. It was notified that a good number of students consolidate the word's meaning by writing it several times or study the words by repeating verbally, however, the correct pronunciation of the word is neglected or pushed into the background. This could result from the wordlists which are presented by the teachers who may not focus on the sound of the word but the spelling and meaning of the word. Taking all these frequently used strategies into account, it can be determined that these findings are consonant with Easterbrook's (2013) finding. In addition to this, interview findings reveal that *connecting the new word to a Turkish word's sound (encoding words)* and *using a vocabulary box*, are very commonly used elaborative, effective techniques. In accordance with this finding, Ceyhan-Bingöl and Özkan (2018) identified that the implementation of the vocabulary box has a pivotal effect in promoting vocabulary recognition. Additionally, the learners that benefited from technology were found out to employ different strategies not only in class but also out of the classroom. The use of EBA (Education Information Network) which is provided by the Ministry of Education as an educational website was found out to be effective in vocabulary learning and also in enhancing language skills. This indication contradicts Ta'amneh (2014) who claimed that in language learning, the use of technology like educational websites, computers, mobiles, and electronic dictionaries might be difficult since students require to practice a lot in order to know how it works.

When the questionnaire and interview findings are evaluated, it can be deduced that the students generally attach great importance to learning vocabulary. They apply the strategies they have already known and they find significant. That is, their knowledge and their perception about VLS affect the use of strategies. It was also identified that although some of the learners stated to know and apply some different strategies that require deep level of cognitive involvement such as *connecting the new word to a Turkish word(encoding words), connecting the word to a familiar place (Loci Method), making sentences and using them in an imaginary dialogue, solving English tests to practice words they learned, watching videos or interviews and drawing caricature*, almost all the learners reflected to implement mostly the basic strategies. This confirms Schmitt (1997) who emphasized "mechanical strategies are often favored over more complex one" (p.132) and signified that there is a "propensity toward a more basic type of strategy". Those elaborate strategies were found out to become familiar to learners mostly from social media, friends or relatives and utilized for personal preferences. It can be concluded that EFL teachers need to allocate more time to develop learners' repertoire of VLS so that the learners themselves can implement the VLS according to their personal preference and their interests.

6. Conclusion

As Klapper (2008) emphasizes, language learners apply learning strategies mostly to learn vocabulary as a consequence of attaching high level of importance to vocabulary learning. Supporting this idea, the findings of the current research showed that learning vocabulary and using VLS were given great importance and Turkish EFL learners utilize a variety of vocabulary learning strategies. In this study, *Cognitive Strategies* were found to be the most important and mostly applied strategies. Moreover, a significant relationship was found between importance level and application level of VLS. The result of the study showed that EFL learners apply the strategies that they have already known and considered as significant. The finding of the study implies that the perception and awareness about VLS can influence the implementation of VLS. If EFL learners gain awareness and get an influencial instruction about how to make use of different kinds of strategies, they can take control of their own learning and employ VLS according to their learning style and personal preference. Hence, introducing the VLS to learners and incorporating them into the language teaching curricula are regarded necessary. Irrefutably, teachers have a crucial role in this process. Therefore, they should enlighten learners about the effectiveness of different strategies and promote learners' autonomy and self awareness in order to help make the right decision on the strategy use.

In the current study, questionnaires and focus group interviews were utilized. Some instruments other than self-report measures like observations, journals or dairies can be implemented for future studies.

References

Allen, V. (1983). *Techniques in teaching vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alqahtani, M. (2015). The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. *International Journal of Teaching and Education, 3*(3), 21-34. Doi: 10.20472/TE.2015.3.3.002

Aparı, E. (2016). *Vocabulary learning strategies of preparatory school students at Ufuk University.* Unpublished masters' thesis, Ufuk University, Turkey.

Asyiah, D. N. (2017). The vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning: Perception, strategies, and influences on students' vocabulary mastery. *Jurnal Bahasa Lingua Scientia, 9*(2), 293-318.

Carey, M. A. (1994). The group effect in focus groups: planning, implementing and interpreting focus group research. In. J Morse (Eds.), *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Method* (pp. 225–241). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Catalán, R. M. J. (2003). Sex differences in L2 vocabulary learning strategies. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 13*(1), 54-77.

Ceyhan-Bingöl, Z., & Özkan. Y. (2018). *Utilization of vocabulary box in English language teaching at tertiary level*. Paper presented at The 3rd Çukurova International ELT Teachers Conference: Reshaping Teaching and Learning English for the 21st Century, Adana, Turkey.

Chou, P. T. (2011). The effects of vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge on reading comprehension of Taiwanese EFL Students. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 8*(1), 108-115.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Easterbrook, R. M. (2013). *The process of vocabulary learning: Vocabulary learning strategies and beliefs about language and language learning.* Unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Canberra, Australia.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ghazal, L. (2007). Learning vocabulary in EFL context through vocabulary learning strategies, *NOVITAS-ROYAL, 1(*2), 1307-4733.

Goundar, P. R. (2015). Vocabulary learning strategies of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners: a literature review. *International Journal of Humanities and cultural studies, 2*(2), 292-301.

Griffiths, C. (2004). *Language learning strategies theory and research.* Crie.org.nzlresearch_paper/c_griffths.

Gu, Y., & Johnson, R. K. (1996). Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Language Learning Outcomes. *Language Learning, 46*(4), 643-679.

Gu, Y., & Johnson, R. K. (1996). Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Language Learning Outcomes. *Language Learning, 46*(4), 643-679.

Hancıoğlu, S. (2004). Vocabulary learning strategies employed by preparatory class students at Adana Anatolian Teacher Training High School. Unpublished master's thesis, Çukurova University, Turkey.

Hismanoglu, M. (2000). Language Learning Strategies in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching. *The Internet TESL Journal, VI*(8). Retrieved from: http://iteslj.org/Articles/Hismanoglu-Strategies.html

Hulstijin, J. H. (1993). When do foreign-language readers look up the meaning of unfamiliar words? The influence of task and learner variables. *The Modern Language Journal, 77*(2), *139–147.* DOI:10.1111/j.1540-4781.1993.tb01957.

Karakoç, D., & Durmuşoğlu-Köse, G. (2017). The impact of vocabulary knowledge on reading, writing and proficiency scores of EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 13*(1), 352-378.

Karakoç, E. (2011). *An experimental study on the effects of instruction on vocabulary learning strategies.* Unpublished master's thesis, Abant İzzet Baysal University, Turkey.

Khair, S. A. M. (2017). *Investigating the use of vocabulary learning strategies among English major students.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Sudan University of Science and Technology College of Graduate Studies College of Education, Sudan.

Kulikova, O. (2015). *Vocabulary learning strategies and beliefs about vocabulary learning: a study of beginning university students of Russian in the United States.* Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Iowa.

Li, J. (2009). The evolution of vocabulary learning strategies in a computer-mediated reading environment. *CALICO Journal, 27*(1), 118-146.

Linares, C. F. M. (2002). Dictionary awareness. In W. Gewehr (Ed.), *Aspects of modern language teaching in Europe* (pp. 161-175). New York, NY: Routledge.

Marckwardt (1973). The dictionary as an English teaching resource. *TESOL Quarterly. 7*: 369-79.

Morgan, D. L. & Krueger, R. (1993). When to use focus groups and why. In D. Morgan (Ed.), *Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art* (pp. 3-20). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Noprianto, E., & Purnawarman, P. (2019). EFL students' vocabulary learning strategies and their affixes knowledge. *Journal of Language and Linguistics, 15*(1), 262-275.

Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers.* Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall International.

Ölmez, F. (2014). *A Comparison of Students' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Use and Instruction of Vocabulary Learning Strategies.* Unpublished Master's Thesis, Akdeniz University, Turkey.

O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press, 1-88. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524490.

Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know.* New York: Newbury House/Harper & Row.

Oxford, R. L., & Nyikos, M. (1989). Variables affecting the choice of language learning strategies by university students. *The Modern Language Journal, 73*(3), 291- 300.

Richard, J.C., & Renandya, W.A. (2002). Methodology in Language Teaching an Anthology of Current Practice. Cambridge University Press.

Sa'd, S. H. T., & Rajabi, F. (2018). Teaching and Learning vocabulary: What English language learners perceive to be effective and ineffective strategies. *CEPS Journal, 8*(1), 139-163.

Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D. (1995). Vocabulary notebooks: Theoretical underpinnings and practical suggestions. *ELT Journal*, *49*(2), 133–143.

Schmitt, N. (1997). Vocabulary learning strategies. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition and pedagogy* (pp. 199-227). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schmitt, N. (2010). *Researching vocabulary: A vocabulary research manual*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Şerebatır, S. (2008). *İlköğretim 6. ve 7. sınıf öğrencilerinin İngilizce dersinde kullandıkları kelime öğrenme stratejileri.* Unpublished master's thesis, Abant İzzet Baysal University, Turkey.

Siriwan, M. (2007). *English vocabulary learning strategies employed by Rajabhat University students.* Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand.

Ta'amneh, M. (2014). Investigating vocabulary learning strategies used by pre-service teachers at Taibah University in learning English vocabulary items. *International Interdisciplinary Journal of Education, 3*(3), 153-158.

Tashakkori, A., Teddlie, C., & Teddlie, C. B. (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Umurova, I. S. Q. (2018). Vocabulary and language teaching methods. *English Language, Literature & Culture, 3*(4), 42-47.

Viera, R. T. (2017). Vocabulary knowledge in the production of written texts: A case study on EFL language learners. *Revista Tecnologica ESPOL, 30*(3), 89-105.

Zhang, B. (2009). FL vocabulary learning of undergraduate English majors in Western China: Perspective, strategy use, and vocabulary size. *English Language Teaching, 2*, 178–185.

Zhang, B. (2011). *A study of the vocabulary learning strategies used by Chinese students*, Kristianstad University, Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YNZ9VJVbO9Stg0E4YpmbfMkqWZc_dy3i/view