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## Investigation Of Vocabulary Learning Strategies Among EFL Iranian Medical Sciences Students

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### Abstract

Vocabulary learning strategies have dominated the subject of language learning for over two decades. This study aimed to investigate the use and preferences of these Strategies among the students at Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences. One hundred eighty five students with different majors participated in this study. The instrument utilized was a modified version of Gu and Johnson questionnaire which consisted of 45 items related to the students' approach to vocabulary learning. The data were analyzed using SPSS and ANOVA. Results indicated that 57.6% of the students used dictionary to learn vocabulary. Social strategies (2.15±0.66) and guessing (2.14±0.83) had the highest obtained scores while note taking (2.14±0.83) and autonomy (1.49± 0.89) were the least used strategies. Medical and dentistry students used selective attention, and study preference, while nursing and paramedical students used social strategies more. Also, female students used social strategies more, while male students preferred autonomy and note taking strategies. students use different strategies in learning vocabulary items, therefore identifying and teaching these strategies can help teachers and curriculum developers to develop better educational materials which not only teach the importance of VLS but motivate the students to use them more frequently.

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### 1. Introduction

Student centered approaches encourage the learners to take an active role in their own learning. They emphasize the use of strategies that give the students power and choice in learning the language and as Benson (2001) points out "take charge of their own learning." Strategies are said to foster autonomy, independence and self direction (Oxford & Nyikos 1989: 291).

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One of the greatest problems for the English as a foreign language (EFL) learners is learning the vocabulary as it is considered to be "the most pressing need of people learning another language" (Laufer and Sim 1985). Nyikos and Fan (2007) consider vocabulary as one of the most challenging tasks for learners. EFL learners in Iran are no exception; to meet the demands of the highly competitive world they are desperately searching for ways to find time-efficient ways to learn the language. Wilkins (1972) has acknowledged this fact significantly when he says "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." As Iranian educational system in teaching English puts more emphasize on the four language skills, vocabulary learning in many classrooms is largely incidental, and usually involves the teaching of the definition of the words in the texts. Therefore, students become dependent on the dictionary for the usage of the words. According to Kafipour et al (2011) this ad hoc approach to vocabulary learning has led to a general inadequacy in vocabulary knowledge among Iranian university students.

Khosravi Boroujeni et al (2013) point out that due to language deficiencies, Iranian EFL learners hesitate to participate in international conferences and have difficulties in getting information online or studying reference books. In order to be fluent in a language thousands of words are needed. Numerous investigation in this regard point to the effectiveness of individual language learning strategies (LLS). Alavi and Kaivanpanah (2006) summarizing the views of L2 researchers state that: "communicating adequately and efficiently in another language is strongly dependent on a good command of vocabulary items. According to the recent research appropriately applied language learning strategies has a great role in the learning process (Bremner 1998, Wharton 2000). Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) have been considered as an essential aspect of language learning (Khatib & Hassanzadeh 2011). Researchers believe that compare to other language learning strategies, learners employ vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) more than any other language learning activities (O'Malley, Chamot, et al 1985). L2 Researchers agree that vocabulary was marginalized because practitioners and teachers bestow more importance on syntax and phonology (Alavi and Kaivanpanah 2006). But, fortunately vocabulary instruction in recent years has become a pivotal part of ESL/EFL instruction. Based on the importance of VLS in the process of vocabulary learning and enhancement and to discover the types of strategies used by the students of medical sciences, the present study explores the use and preference of various vocabulary learning strategies employed by EFL students at Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences.

## 2. Review of Literature

Brown and Payne (1994) identified five steps for learning vocabulary in a foreign language:

- 1- Having sources of encountering new words
- 2- Getting a clear image, either visual or auditory or both of the forms of the new words
- 3- Learning the meaning of the words
- 4- Making a strong memory connection between the forms and the meanings of the words
- 5- Using the words

Brown (2007, p 132) describes strategies as "those specific attacks that we make on a given problem that vary considerably within each individual." Chamot (2005, p.112) defines strategies as procedures that facilitate a learning task." She believes that strategies are conscious and goal driven. According to Naveh et al., (2011), "A vocabulary strategy is a special instructional tool and way of going about directly or explicitly as well as the independent word learning skills required to learn words independently." VLS constitute knowledge about what students do to find out the meaning of new words, retain them in long-term memory, recall them when needed in comprehension, and use them in language production (Catalan 2003). It has been argued that all language learners consciously or unconsciously employ some form of strategies in learning the vocabulary, but successful L2 learners engage in more purposeful language learning and use more strategies than the unsuccessful learners (Hong-Nam Leavall 2006).

Cohen (1998) states that: "Strategies can be very different in nature, ranging from planning the organization of one's learning (a meta cognitive learning strategy) through using mnemonic devices (methods used to help one remember information that is otherwise difficult to recall) to learn vocabulary (cognitive learning strategies) and rehearsing what one expects to say (a performance strategy) to bolstering one's self-confidence for a language task by means of "self-talk" (an affective strategy). These strategies as Oxford and Scarcella (1994: 236) point out help

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