

## Exploring Vocabulary Learning Strategies across ESL/EFL Contexts: Juggling Between Experiential and Traditional Modes of Learning

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### Abstract

*Though vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) have drawn continuous attention in SLA research in the past three decades, there remain many unanswered questions, many unknown caveats and many unexplored regions. Quite a few historical reviews of vocabulary learning strategies have been undertaken by researchers over the past years, tracing its growth over the years. However, no research until now has captured the VLS profile of learners from diverse ESL/EFL backgrounds and presented an analysis from a geographical point of view. This study aims to capture the VLS profile of the diverse learners and takes up the task of the geographical review of vocabulary learning strategies landscaping the VLS research over many countries. For this purpose, the researcher has chosen specifically the research happening in the backdrop of ESL/EFL contexts. Fourteen papers have been selected for review belonging to Philippine, Turkey, Algeria, Iran, Malaysia, Congo, China, India, Sudan, Libya and The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A detailed analysis reveals not only the juggling between the experiential and traditional modes of vocabulary learning but also the reasons behind the insufficient vocabulary size of the learners in myriad contexts.*

**Keywords:** ESL/EFL background, experiential and traditional methods, strategy research, vocabulary learning.

### Introduction

Vocabulary learning is considered to be one of the most effective ways to access the target language for most of the second/foreign language learners; however,

after being researched for more than thirty years, there remain many unanswered questions. Some of these questions relate, in general, to the basic concerns about which and how many words to be targeted for learning; how much time and attention should be devoted to strategic vocabulary learning in ESL/EFL curricula across the globe; which strategy or method, that is, experiential or traditional, is more effective when acquiring the depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge; does a particular strategy reveal the personality traits, cultural, social, academic and political bent of learners belonging to a particular context; is the choice of a particular strategy affected by the cultural background and in particular, to what extent learners are aware of and trained strategically to plan, monitor and carry on their vocabulary development endeavors outside the classroom. A comprehensive analysis of the VLS research happening in different countries may help to provide initial answers to some of these questions. This paper aims to shed light not only on the most and the least frequently used strategies, but also on the most effective and the least effective strategies of English vocabulary learning used across different countries, highlighting the interplay of the contexts and the preferred strategies and the resulting tug of war between the experiential and traditional modes and methods of learning.

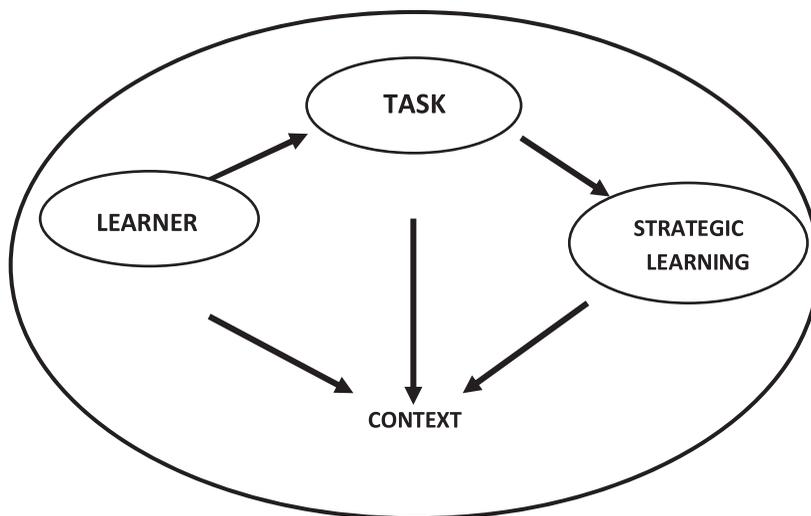
### **Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

The term strategy has military background and means “The implementation of a set of procedures (tactics) for accomplishing something” (Schmeck, 1998, p. 3-19). Language learning strategies (LLSs) are a set of specific techniques employed by the learner to facilitate learning (Rubin, 1987). According to early definitions, VLSs subsumed within LLSs (Oxford, 1990; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Utilizing Rubin’s (1987) early broad definition of LLSs, Schmitt (1997) defines VLS as the process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved and used. This definition of VLSs touches the heart of the matter and is used as the ultimate guiding reference in many researches since then.

### **Role of the Learning Context**

The socio-cultural-political environment where learning takes place can be defined as the learning context (Gu, 2003). It can include the social, cultural values and tradition of learning and teaching in a particular region, the role of teachers, the fellows, the academic ethos, the family’s attitude and the curriculum. It can further

include the availability of input and output opportunities. Arabski and Wojtaszek (2011) argue that “Language learning is in fact a social-psychological process, in which the role of a wider socio-cultural context should not be marginalized” (p. 2). Considering the fact that all learning is learner driven, task dependent, contextually bound and has to be essentially strategic to be effective and successful, this paper proposes the framework given in Figure 1. The framework essentializes the learning context and asserts that all learning is context dependent.



*Figure 1.* A conceptual framework to display the interplay of learner, task, strategic learning and context

Learning contexts lay the roads and punctuate the ways in which learners approach learning tasks. The socio-cultural environment of any region works as the backdrop against which all learning takes place. Chamot (2008) asserts that the learner’s goals, the context of the learning situation, and cultural values of the learner’s society can be expected to have a strong influence on choice and acceptability of language learning strategies. For example, in a culture that prizes individual competition and has organized its educational system around competitive tasks, successful language learners may prefer strategies that allow them to work alone rather than social strategies that call for collaboration with others (p. 272).

## **Geographical Review**

Most researchers consider the learning context and cultural background as critical factors for vocabulary learning. Gu (2003) argues that “Strategies that work in one educational, cultural and linguistic context might not work in another” (p.18). Schmitt and Schmitt (1995), and Schmitt (1997) found that learners from different social and cultural groups have diverse approaches and perceptions about the employability and usefulness of different kinds of vocabulary learning strategies. Therefore, the knowledge of students’ socio-cultural background is very important for effective language teaching-learning and curriculum development. It is necessary to know how vocabulary learning strategies vary across different cultural backgrounds. An understanding of the cross-cultural use of these learning strategies would benefit language teachers and researchers while providing a greater understanding and comprehension of the cultural dynamics of strategy use (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Gu, 2003).

## **Methodology**

This study is the detailed review of fourteen studies selected randomly and majorly from four different databases (ELSEVIER -5, TESOL -1, PROQUEST -2 and RESEARCHGATE -1 and some authentic journals). The selected studies stretched over a period of ten years, that is, from 2009 to 2018. The main aim of the paper is to explore and observe the more recent studies in the area of vocabulary research, geographical point of view. It compiles classifies and examines research conducted in the current decade on this topic, placing a special emphasis on the efficacy of various strategies and their specific relation with the geographical, cultural and linguistic background. Ten countries (Table 1) have been covered, as the researcher could not locate any research capturing the VLS profile of the learners belonging to Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, UAE and other such countries. Turkey, Malaysia and Iran have been given an accentuated representation in this review because the researcher, while searching for papers from diverse countries along the selected timeline repeatedly came across a number of studies belonging to these three countries, helping her assume that a lot of VLS research is happening in these countries. Interestingly, the fact that the researchers belonging to the same country did not arrive on the identical or similar results, helped conclude that a lot of inconsistency and diversity of choice or preference can be expected to exist within a particular context.

Table 1

*List of the Countries Selected for the Geographical Review*

<b>Context</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
EFL	Philippine	(2009)
EFL	Turkey	(2010)
EFL	Algeria	(2010)
EFL	Turkey	(2011)
EFL	Malaysia	(2012)
EFL	Iran	(2013)
EFL	Malaysia	(2014)
EFL	Congo	(2014)
EFL	China	(2015)
ESL	India	(2016)
EFL	Libya	(2016)
EFL	Iran	(2017)
EFL	Sudan	(2017)
EFL	KSA	(2018)

Details regarding each study have been presented in Table 2 covering many important aspects of the research. For example, the table categorically states the title of the study, the name of the researchers, country, journal, sample size, instrument and briefly states results to be followed by a detailed analysis of all the studies and their findings. Such a comprehensive review of the vocabulary learning strategies and approaches of language learners of various cultural backgrounds has the potential to provide a broader picture of how vocabulary learning strategies vary from one group to another.

Table 2  
*Geographical Review of the Selected Studies*

Title of the Paper	Author, Country & Year of publication	Journal	Sample size	Instrument	Results
1. "Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Filipino College Students across Five Disciplines"	Bernardo, A.S. Gonzales, H.T. Philippine (2009)	TESOL Journal Vol. 1, pp. 17-27 <a href="http://www.tesoljournal.com">http://www.tesoljournal.com</a>	202	Adapted from Schmitt (1997).	Learners displayed a significant variation in their process of acquiring English vocabulary across all disciplines. It emerged that Philippine learners demonstrate an overall preference for determination and social VLS.
2. "Vocabulary learning strategy use of Turkish EFL learners"	Çelik, S. Toptas, V. Turkey (2010)	Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences, 3, 62–71	95	Adapted from Schmitt (1997).	Frequency of the strategy use and the language levels were positively related. The most and the least frequently used strategies were respectively determination and cognitive strategies.
3. "Language learning strategies and the vocabulary size." doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.634	Nacera, A. Algeria (2010).	Procedia- Social and Behavioral Science, 2, 4021–4025	46	Adapted from Oxford (1990) and "The University Word Level Test" (UWLT) form B, adapted by Beglar, et al (2000).	Meta-cognitive strategies emerged as the most frequently used strategies. The researchers concluded that the most frequently employed strategies by students "with higher vocabulary size (such as using English in different ways and making summaries) are different from those used by students with lower vocabulary size (such as rote learning)."
4. "Vocabulary learning strategies: a case of Edirne Anatolian high school"	Cengizhan, L. Turkey (2011)	Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences, 15, 1870–1874	50	Adapted from Schmitt (1997).	The most and the least frequently used strategies were respectively metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Male students mostly preferred metacognitive while female students preferred determination strategies.
5. "Second Language Learners' Attitudes towards the Methods of Learning Vocabulary" doi:10.5539/elt.v5n4p24	Ali, Z., Mukundan, J., Baki, R., & Ayub, A. F. M. Malaysia (2012)	English Language Teaching Vol. 5(4) <a href="http://www.ccsenet.org/elt">www.ccsenet.org/elt</a>	123	Adapted from Iwanski (2000) Nah, White & Sussex (2008) Chen and Chun (2008) Kuen (2004) and several other researchers.	"Computers can promote positive learning attitudes compared to the conventional methods. Students who were exposed to CALL showed more positive attitudes in learning vocabulary because they considered technology to be 'part and parcel' of their lives."
6. "A Survey on Vocabulary Learning Strategies: A Case of Iranian EFL University Students"	Amirian S. M. R. & Heshmatifar Z. Iran (2013)	Journal of Language Teaching and Research	74	Adapted from Schmitt (1997).	From the most frequently used to the least frequently used strategies: determination, cognitive, memory, metacognitive and social strategies.
7. "Vocabulary learning strategies among Malaysian TEVT students in German-Malaysian Institute (GMI)"	Mutalib, A. H. A., Kadir, R. A., Robani, R. & Majid, F. A. Malaysia (2014)	Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 361– 368	31	a questionnaire (n=31) and a semi-structured interview (n=3), a replication of the survey (Muensorn & Tepsuriwong, 2009) based on Schmitt (1997).	Majority of the participants relied on determination strategies and were not familiar with cognitive or meta-cognitive strategies. Although students considered vocabulary learning to be very important, they did not work practically towards enrichment of vocabulary.

8. "Vocabulary Learning Strategies: A Study of Congolese English Language Learners"	Kaya, J. Congo (2014)	PROQUEST	43	A Likert scale and open-ended questionnaire developed by the researcher.	The most and the least frequently used strategies were respectively contextual guessing, dictionary use (determination) and pronunciation strategies.
9. "Assessing the Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategy Use and Vocabulary Knowledge"	Teng, F. China (2015)	PASAA Volume 49	155	Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT, Schmitt et al., 2001), the Word Associates Test (WAT) developed by Read (1993; 2004) and a questionnaire (Gu & Johnson, 1996; Netami, et al., 2011; Shimo, 2008).	Direct strategies were more frequently employed than indirect strategies. Strategy use significantly and positively correlated with breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. However, indirect strategy use had a higher level of correlation with two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge.
10. "Exploring the Vocabulary Learning Strategy Use of Teachers in Their Vocabulary Instruction"	Vasu S., Dhanavel S. P. India (2016)	Croatian Journal of Education Vol.18(1), 103-135	125	Based on Schmitt (1997), Lai (2005) and Kafipour and Naveh (2011) were adapted.	The teachers prefer strategies such as: guessing from the context, group work and using new words in sentences. The teachers do not prefer VLS, such as flashcards, L1 similarity and the keyword method.
11. "EFL Vocabulary Learning Strategies Among Tuareg People"	Omaar A. O. A. Libya (2016)	PROQUEST	126	Adapted from (Schmitt's (1997, 2000) VLSQ) Semi-structured interviews.	The participants used a wide range of vocabulary learning strategies to consolidate the meanings of English vocabulary, however, determination and social strategies were among the most preferred ones.
12. "A Meta-Analysis of Vocabulary Learning Strategies of EFL Learners" doi: 10.5539/elt.v10n5p1	Maghsoudi, N., Golshan, M. Iran (2017)	International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies. 5(3). 103-110.	90	Adapted from Oxford (1990) and Nation's Vocabulary Size Test.	The most frequently used vocabulary learning strategy was metacognitive and the least frequent one was social strategy. Besides, "no significant correlation was found between vocabulary size and vocabulary learning strategies except a small and reverse correlation between the vocabulary size and compensation strategy."
13. "The Use and Evaluation of Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Sudanese EFL Learners" DOI: <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no3.16">https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no3.16</a>	Hamza, F. S. A., Yasin, M. S. M., & Aladdin, A. Sudan (2017).	ELSEVIER-Arab World English Journal, 8 (3).	60	Adopted from Al-Fuhaid (2004) based on the VLS taxonomies of Schmitt (1997) and Nation (2001) and in-depth interviews.	Meta-cognitive strategies were the most frequently used VLS. Findings revealed that "respondents evaluated all three VLS (meta-cognitive, discovery, and consolidation) positively and considered them very useful in acquiring as well as understanding words."
14. "Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) through secondary students at Saudi school in Malaysia (SSM): A pilot study"	Yaacob, A., Shapii, A., Saad, A. A., Al-Rahmi, W. M., Alias, N. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2018).	ResearchGate, Journal of Research in International Education, 4(2).	58	A questionnaire comprising of five categories of VLS: Discovery, Vocabulary Use, Retrieval, Metacognitive, Storage. Source not clearly mentioned!	Three categories of VLSs identified (i.e. Vocabulary Use, Retrieval, Metacognitive) were found to be moderately used, while the Discovery strategy recorded the highest and the Storage strategy recorded the lowest score.

## Discussion

A careful analysis of the above mentioned studies reveals the differences and similarities in the vocabulary learning strategies, use and approaches among learners from different learning contexts and cultural backgrounds. While in Philippines, the students preferred determination and social VLS the most and meta-cognitive strategies were the least preferred by them (Bernardo & Gonzales, 2009), the Turkish used the determination strategies most frequently and the cognitive strategies were the least frequently employed strategies by them (Çelik & Toptas, 2010). Their findings regarding the least employed strategy are consistent with Cengizhan's (2011) research, who also found the cognitive strategies to be the least frequently used in the Turkish context. The meta-cognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies according to Cengizhan (2011). Sudanese and Algerian learners too used the meta-cognitive strategies most frequently (Hamza, Yasin, & Aladdin, 2017; Nacera, 2010). Amirian and Heshmatifar (2013) found the determination strategies to be the most frequently employed by Iranian learners, while social strategies took the last position. Kaya (2014) through a survey research came to the conclusion that contextual guessing and dictionary use (determination strategies) were the most frequently used strategies by Congolese learners, whereas pronunciation (meta-cognitive) was the least frequently used. All these findings converge towards the fact that strategies that work for learners in one learning context might not be appropriate for learners in other contexts (Gu, 2003).

Table 3

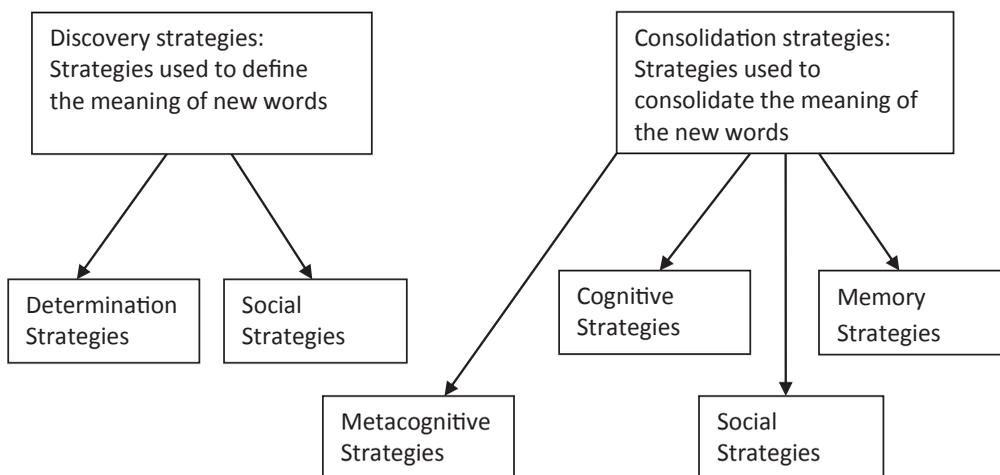
### *Countries with the Most Frequently Used Strategies*

<b>Background</b>	<b>Preferred Strategies</b>
Philippines (2009)	Determination and Social
Turkey (2010)	Determination
Algeria (2010)	Meta-cognitive
Turkey (2011)	Meta-cognitive
Malaysia (2012)	CALL
Iran (2013)	Determination
Malaysia (2014)	Discovery (Determination and social)
Congo (2014)	Determination
China (2015)	Direct (Determination)
India (2016)	Determination
Libya (2016)	Determination and Social
Iran (2017)	Meta-cognitive
Sudan (2017)	Meta-cognitive
KSA (2018)	Discovery

Almost all studies included in the geographical review turned out to be either survey based or mixed method studies (survey and interview) except two studies conducted by Ali, Mukundan, Baki, and Ayub (2012) and Teng (2015). Lack of experimental or action research explains for the repeatedly lamented fact that most of the benefits of VLS research have not made any major difference into the lives of its actual target audience.

The sample size of the studies included in the review, ranged from 202 to 31 (202, 95, 46, 50, 123, 74, 31, 43, 155, 125, 126, 90, 60, 58) with the mean size calculated to be 93.84. Eight out of fourteen studies used surveys based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. Schmitt (1997) proposed two broad categories of VLS: discovery and consolidation (see Figure 2). Discovery is further divided into determination and social strategies, while the consolidation strategies include social, memory, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies.

#### **Schmitt's Taxonomy (1997)**



*Figure 2.* Taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt, 1997)

Nine out of fourteen studies demonstrate learners' preference for determination strategies which imply a preference for traditional methods of vocabulary learning (Amirian & Heshmatifar, 2013; Bernardo & Gonzales, 2009; Celik & Toptas, 2010; Kaya, 2014; Mutalib, Kadir, Robani, & Majid, 2014; Omaar, 2016; Teng, 2015; Vasu, & Dhanavel, 2016; Yaacob, Shapii, Saad, Al-Rahmi & Alias, 2018). Mutalib, (2014) differentiated between rote and meaningful learning.

.According to them discovery techniques were among the most popular strategy, which included extensive usage of dictionaries, guessing and asking teachers and friends. The findings of Vasu, and Dhanavel (2016) revealed that guessing the meaning from the context was the most dominant VLS in the teachers' instruction to find the meaning of new words. Amirian and Heshmatifar (2013) also stated that guessing from context (M=4.21) and dictionary strategies (M=3.98), were the most preferred ones. Their findings echo the results of some classic studies by Ahmed (1989) and Schmitt (1997). The use of determination strategies helps the learners in getting familiar with the meanings of the words which leads to shallow and passive knowledge of words. It does not provide the learners with any help in converting this passive knowledge into an active one leading to the ultimate fluency, which is every learner's ultimate target. The study of Yaacob et al. (2018) also reports a scanty use of storage strategies.

The findings provide an explanation for the ongoing struggle of English language learners and account for the low proficiency level of the learners belonging to the respective countries. These studies reveal that students make a cursory effort to know the meaning of the words, but fail to plan and execute enough to consolidate these words in their working memory.

In this regard, findings from the study of Ali, Mukundan, Baki, and Ayub, (2012) are important as they compared three vocabulary learning techniques: Contextual Clues, Dictionary Strategy and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and concluded that CALL promotes a structured, interesting, autonomous and interactive learning of vocabulary. Their findings converge towards Nakata's (2008) study, who found that the students enjoyed CALL-led vocabulary learning because it kept them engaged and transformed learning into a fast-paced and fun activity.

Participants belonging to Algeria, Turkey, Iran and Sudan clearly preferred meta-cognitive strategies to others (Cengizhan, 2011; Hamza, Yasin, & Aladdin, 2017; Maghsoudi & Golshan, 2017; Nacera, 2010). Nacera's (2010) paper revealed that students with higher vocabulary size use different strategies. The ones that require more effort, time and planning, leading to an efficient learning process; while the hallmark of the students with lower vocabulary size is less effort and use of surface strategies. Her findings are consistent with Teng's (2015) study who found

a correlation between strategy use and breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. This analysis reveals the inconsistency of the choice and preference for a particular strategy within one country as well, as the research conducted in Turkey (2010) & Turkey (2011) (i.e. Celik & Toptas, 2010; Cengizhan, 2011) and Iran (2013) & Iran (2017) (i.e. Amirian & Heshmatifar, 2013; Maghsoudi & Golshan, 2017) yielded completely different results.

Meta-cognitive strategies involve decision-making about planning, monitoring, or evaluating the best techniques to study (Schmitt, 1997). Meta-cognitive strategies lead to the development of active vocabulary and help the learners to be in command of the learning process. A person with an impoverished vocabulary can never be able to express himself with ease and confidence. One has to have a command over passive as well as active vocabulary. Passive vocabulary helps the learners to comprehend the written and spoken input while the active vocabulary helps them to express their thoughts and ideas in written or verbal form. Most often, due to their use of determination strategies only, learners are unable to consolidate the sufficient number of words (Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995). If learners are taught how to plan an autonomous and strategic vocabulary enhancement process for themselves, it will be easier for them to follow a passive to active stair-step progressive vocabulary learning continuum (see Figure 3 for details).

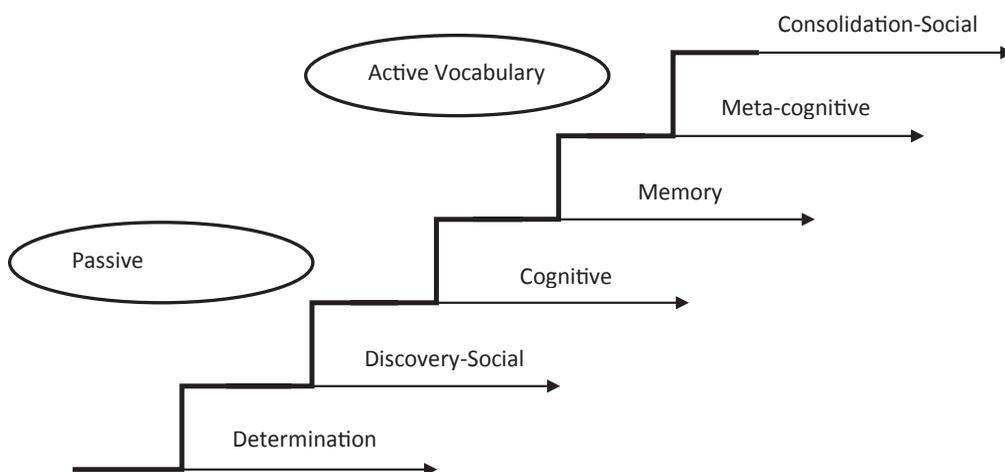


Figure 3. A passive to active stair-step progressive vocabulary learning continuum

Three studies report the frequent use of social strategies (Bernardo & Gonzales, 2009; Mutalib, Kadir, Robani, & Majid, 2014; Omaar, 2016). Omaar (2016) quoted one of the Tuareg participants while explaining their preference for social strategy, “*There is a proverb in our language, which says a person who asks others for help will never be lost*”. He asserted that Tuareg EFL learners’ affinity for social strategies is stimulated by the sociocultural beliefs, norms and traditions of collaboration in all aspects of the lives of the Tuareg people. When compared with EFL/ESL learners in other learning contexts, the learners in Asian countries do not prefer to use social strategies that involve cooperative learning. They prefer vocabulary strategies that involve traditional methods of learning new vocabulary, such as rote learning, contextual guessing of new words or using a bilingual dictionary (Amirian & Heshmatifar, 2013; Celik & Toptas, 2010; Kaya, 2014; Teng, 2015; Vasu, & Dhanavel, 2016).

The finding resonates with the beliefs of a number of distinguished scholars in both language learning strategies and vocabulary learning strategies (e.g., Chamot, 2008; Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Griffiths, 2013, 2015; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Gu, 2003; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Schmitt, 1997, 2000), who earlier confirmed that learning strategies vary across learners from different cultural and educational backgrounds. O’Malley and Chamot (1990), for example, found that Spanish learners who had vocabulary strategy training improved their vocabulary scores and performed better on vocabulary exams than Asian learners who resisted the training and preferred to use their familiar rote repetition strategy. Along the same lines, Chamot (2008) acknowledges that cultural beliefs and the learning society of a learner exert a huge influence on the strategies that learners’ utilized to learn a language or the vocabulary of the target language.

Vocabulary development techniques employed by teachers and learners both vary enormously across the globe. Celik and Toptas (2010) suggest that language learners did not frequently use strategies. They stressed on awareness of individual differences in learning. Mutalib et al. (2014) also reported, “A majority of student exhibit a lack of strategies altogether” (p.5). In the same vein, the study by Bernardo and Gonzales (2009) revealed, “Lack of awareness of the different word learning strategies” (p.4). They found that students should be taught strategic activities to help promote autonomous, ongoing learning.

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## **Juggling Between Experiential and Traditional Methods of Learning Vocabulary**

With learners taking the centre of stage, all lenses have turned in their direction. Nowadays, it is more about how learners learn rather than about how teachers teach. Such a learner-centric approach is at the heart of the philosophy of experiential learning. Experiential learning is defined as learning through experience. It involves action, discovery and exploration. Autonomous strategic learning is the natural outcome of such an approach. A lot of research is happening around the globe exploring how motivated and strategic learners are to take charge of their own learning. Rasekh and Ranjbary (2003) stated that effective language learners have their own special way of doing it. These special ways might differ from one country to another because of the manner in which the socio-cultural values of a particular region engrave themselves on the ways individuals conduct their learning process. Schmitt (1997) states that “Strategies may be culture-specific; the same findings may not be observed with people from different L1 backgrounds.”

Most ESL/EFL contexts follow traditional methods of teaching learning in which the teacher is the sole authority and the source of all knowledge and learners are the passive recipients. Instruction is mostly structured and has no room for flexibility and innovation. In these contexts, learners are mostly not empowered enough to decide their path and parameters of learning. Teng (2015) asserts that rote learning might be “A reflection of the fact that in the Chinese context, teachers often teach vocabulary to the learners. Consequently, they resort to memory strategies for learning and retaining words” (p.5). Hamza, Yasin, and Aladdin (2017) stress that “Vocabulary learning in Sudan relies on teachers as the primary source... The result is the absence of independent vocabulary learning” (p, 2). Such a teaching-learning environment does not support and encourages the use of experiential strategies of learning vocabulary. Vasu and Dhanavel (2016) report, “Teachers, as once learners of ESL, may be inclined to teach vocabulary through the methods in which they were taught” (p.6).

In such traditional, teacher-centric classrooms, students are neither encouraged nor trained to use strategies with more experiential orientation. Teng (2015) asserts, “EFL students spend a lot of time in intentionally memorizing words” (p.5). This is in line with Gu’s (2005) study that Chinese EFL learners’

rely on “Memorization and regurgitation of knowledge, rather than application, which are stimulated by Chinese cultural beliefs and traditions of learning” (p. 83). Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) claim that “Some cultures favor certain strategies, perhaps because those strategies are stressed in the culture’s school systems” (p.32).

However, Cengizhan (2011); Hamza, Yasin, and Aladdin (2017); Maghsoudi and Golshan (2017) and Nacera (2010), report a preference for meta-cognitive strategies in their respective countries, while Bernardo and Gonzales (2009); Mutalib, Kadir, Robani, and Majid (2014) report the frequent use of social strategies in their countries. The use of these strategies brings to light the juggling between traditional and experiential methods of learning vocabulary across ESL/EFL contexts as these strategies are mainly the result of experiential orientation of learning and lead to self-empowerment, deep processing of learning and a productive cycle of vocabulary growth.

### **Implications and Caveats**

A lot of variation in vocabulary handling strategies is notable across the globe largely because of the influence of contrasting cultural values on educational systems. As obvious from the reviews, learners across ESL/EFL contexts tend to resort to shallow and traditional methods of vocabulary development; preferring them over experiential modes of learning. Omaar (2016) asserts, “Learners’ mental and cognitive processes are shaped by their social behaviors and cultural beliefs about learning” (p.20). However, as obvious from the analysis of the studies included in this review, the tug of war between the experiential and traditional methods of vocabulary learning is still ongoing; with none losing the grip.

So far, studies in Vocabulary Learning Strategies in ESL/EFL settings have generally focused on Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Spanish, Persian, Hindi and English language learners (Amirian & Heshmatifar, 2013; Catalán, 2003; Celik & Toptas, 2010; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Kaya, 2014; Omaar, 2016; Teng, 2015; Vasu, & Dhanavel, 2016; Wang, 2012). In this respect, new insights need to be provided by more studies happening in diverse settings like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, UAE and more.

Furthermore, there seems to be a dearth of more relevant, up-to-date and comprehensive inventories of VLS strategies after Schmitt (1997). Eight out of

fourteen of the above studies used the survey based on Schmitt's taxonomy (1997). On the one hand, it implies the reliability of the tool developed by him and on the other hand the same fact implies that there is a need for more and diverse convincing models of L2 vocabulary acquisition as well. These models should be reliable, user-friendly and relevant to portray the behavior, skills and strategies of the ESL/EFL learners in the current digitally advanced age.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

*I hear; I know.*

*I see; I remember.*

*I do; I understand.*

*\_ Confucius, 551-479 BC*

Nothing can explain better the transition from traditional to experiential modes of learning than the above maxim. In the lecture-based classrooms of most ESL/EFL contexts, learners are stuck on the first tier of the learning framework of Confucius. To make a leap from the first to the second and then to the third tier of this framework, there is a dire need of a state-of-the-art vocabulary pedagogy across all ESL/EFL contexts. A generally agreed definition and a new and more relevant classification system need to be developed. A series of standardized tasks, or benchmarks should be developed to assess the growth of the learners' vocabulary over extended periods. These benchmarks would need to be technologically simple; catering to different L1 backgrounds and different levels of proficiency. In short, to upscale the proficiency level of the ESL/EFL learners, there should be a challenging combination of real world pedagogical constraints, rich traditional theory and modern experiential approach to learning.

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