EFFECTIVE VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES IN EFL SITUATION: EVIDENCE FROM SSM MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT*: Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) represent those learning strategies that enable learners to acquire the knowledge of the vocabulary of a target language. However, the definition of VLS has not been clear in spite of various studies that have addressed this topic over the past few years. A particular mention is often made of the five main stages of vocabulary learning as recommended by Brown and Payne (1984) comprising VLS such as obtaining resources for new words, understanding meanings, understanding new word forms through visual and/or auditory methods, using oral and repetition practices, and having concise knowledge in relating forms and word meaning and their application. This paper sets out to examine the vocabulary learning strategies as recommended under Brown and Payne's 5 stage model. It first reviews the contemporary studies on this model and then analyses this model in the current context of Saudi students in Saudi School Malaysia (SSM) who encounter difficulties in vocabulary learning. The study applies the five-stage model of Brown and Payne (1984) in order to analyse the VLSs adopted by the participants of the study. The findings of this research show that students at SSM prefer the use of very effective VLSs such as guessing meaning, using pictures, memorization techniques and monolingual/ bilingual dictionaries as a few preferred strategies to learn new words. The results also reveal that the five-stage model proves very effective in learning new vocabulary in an EFL situation.*

Key words: memorization, new words, EFL, Saudi students

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is considered as a major process in acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL). During the process, a learner manages to develop a few vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), A majority of EFL learners, who have realized the importance of vocabulary in their language learning, also understand that knowledge of the English diction can enhance their overall linguistic skills, facilitating their communication with people and expressing their ideas. [1] and [2] report that many EFL learners have developed vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) which have been replicated and shared so extensively that even when teachers encounter challenges in teaching vocabulary, they recommend students to pursue their VLS, pertinent to their learning style, context and necessity. Several scholars [3-6] too have suggested to evolve VLS and use them as crucial tools for developing communicative competence.

[5] explains VLSs as "specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations". [7] however, relates VLSs with second language (L2) learning and emphasizes on making learners become independent by maintaining their own VLS.

[8] defines VLS as the understanding of mechanisms (practices and strategies) applied in vocabulary learning and insists earners to follow best practices such as discovering the meaning of new words, memorizing them and applying them in written or oral language. [8] also recommends learners to use VLSs especially in the integrated tasks such as listening and speaking.

The focus of the present study is to examine VLSs employed by secondary students at Saudi School Malaysia (SSM) where several critical issues are being addressed to by Saudi learners in the acquisition of English as a foreign language, vocabulary being one such issue. Vocabulary learning has encountered a paradigm shift in a foreign environment i.e. Malaysia where unlike in Saudi Arabia, English is already a language of day to day communication. This study

investigates such VLSs that learners develops while living and studying on a foreign soil, a place outside their country. VLSs have rendered several benefits to EFL learners including strategies that contribute and facilitate learners building in gap a vocabulary pertinent to a foreign language.

This study is based on [9] 5-stage model comprising (1) Encountering new words, (2) Getting the word form (3) Getting the word meaning, (4) Consolidating word form and meaning in memory and (5) Using the word. This model is considered to be the clearest and the most extensively discussed model in literature. For the purposes of this study, it is crucial to have a model that clearly identifies the aspects of vocabulary learning that are addressed by the various learning strategies under investigation. Evidence was collected from SSM, Kualalumpur and to determine the extent to which Brown and Payne's 5-stage model is applied in order to learn vocabulary.

Brown and Payne's 5-stage model
Brown's Stages were identified by Roger Brown (1925-1997) and first appeared in his classic book [10] and later in [11] and [9]. The stages offer a framework of vocabulary learning in terms of morphology and syntax structures. The construction of effective vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) is crucial in a foreign language environment for a learner to acquire new words. The model offered by [9] classifies the learning process of vocabulary learning in a foreign language into five critical steps. For step 1, learners have a number of choices for encountering new words namely to find out new words through various

techniques including audio or visual materials, dictionaries and the contexts. After encountering and identifying new words, learners usually either consciously or subconsciously make efforts to recognize them, in step 2. Forms or meanings of the words are in general identified. Learners may use guessing or analyze meanings of the words through pictures or morphological elements that they may be familiar with or associate or create an image of the new words from sound or form. They may also try to retrieve words from memory in

step 3. The learners may also search for other aids, like using a dictionary, though they may choose to neglect the new words, and if the new words are not met frequently, then the subsequent steps of vocabulary learning may not always take place, shown by a line between Steps 3 and 4. This line of active use can be used to divide learners' receptive and productive knowledge. However, such a division may not be always stable; some words can be learned from Step 1 and then the learner can jump to Step 5 directly. All L2 vocabulary-learning strategies are related to these five steps. These strategies are often known as cognitive strategies as they are linked with the learning process, monitoring of learners' comprehension and production of cognitive understanding of vocabulary [12].

Problem Statement
It has often been found that L2 teachers have a very limited range of methods to teach vocabulary in many ELT classrooms. They tend to use de-contextual methods to teach words which come from contexts, methods such as decoding the word meaning, or providing synonyms. There is also a lack of proper instruction for learners who resort to memorization (or rote learning) making vocabulary teaching strategies as inappropriate. A few teachers may have been aware of the importance of vocabulary, still the VLSs are not meaning-focused. This means that teachers must first focus on semantic aspects of lexical items and their use in specific contexts.

Thus there exists a gap between the cognitive aspect of vocabulary learning and vocabulary learning strategies to see how learners' cognitive requirements affect the choice of vocabulary learning strategies. There is a need to investigate the VLSs in the context of EFL learning in order to determine the most effective strategies in a given situation. In the context of the current study, the study would examine the issue of vocabulary learning at Saudi School, Malaysia (SSM).

Research Questions
1- How do secondary students at Saudi School Malaysia (SSM) construct their strategies (VLSs) in all 5-stages of vocabulary learning?
2- What are the particular factors that affect the use of VLSs among secondary students at Saudi School Malaysia (SSM)?

LITERATURE REVIEW
The domain of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) has been considered by several researchers in previous studies [13; 14;15]. These studies have identified various strategies for vocabulary building and reveal that an effective application of these strategies not only leads to the development of learners' vocabulary but also strengthen their critical thinking ability and improve their learning capacity. For this review, these studies could be divided into five section, each corresponding to the five stages of Brown and Payne's model.

Right at the outset, the first stage of VLS examines the sources of encountering new words which are often known as 'guessing strategies,' established by researchers as effective and helpful to develop learners' vocabulary. These strategies could be divided into three major types: guessing from the context, guessing from picture and guessing from word

morphology. Guessing from the context helps learners think logically by looking around the words to find clues [15; 16;17] to acquire new vocabulary items and to learn and read faster [13] and to improve overall vocabulary growth [14;15;16]. Guessing through pictures also prove an effective VLS [18] and [19] and highly motivating to draw learners' attention [20]. Guessing from morphology of a word, through roots, prefixes, and suffixes, is the most utilised method or combination, producing up to 50 per cent of the English language words [21].

The second stage of getting the word form, particularly of new words, recommend going beyond dictionaries and suggests using strategies such as spoken and written repetition of words through pronunciation and spelling exercises of new words [22; 23,24]. These studies emphasize that knowing the word from a new word is much effective and easier by knowing their pronunciation, spelling, inflections, derivations, and other structural knowledge. [25] further emphasizes that EFL learners therefore can learn a wide range of words by focusing on strategies such as adoption of spoken and written repetition exercises. Evidences reveal that using a dictionary should help students only to learn aspects related to the form of the new word such as its spelling, syllables, stress, pronunciation, part of speech, meanings of important prefixes and suffixes, etymology, other words derived from the main word, whether or not the word is capitalised or abbreviated, and if there is any special plural form [26; 27; 28,29] affirms that learning the form of the new word includes "following spelling rules, recognizing word parts, and building word family tables".Some other studies have suggested the use of an electronic dictionary as more convenient strategy to learn new words [17,30-37].

The third stage of developing vocabulary is getting its meaning, which also emphasizes the use of a dictionary strategy and asserts the importance of using dictionary as a method of instruction in both first- and second-language learning [17,31;38;39;40], for instance, voiced that learners should be encouraged to use dictionary especially when guessing or getting the meaning of new words during the earlier stages had failed. This view is also shared by other studies [26; 28 29; 41]. Authors in [41] studied the effects of using dictionary on comprehension and vocabulary acquisition while reading and he found that the students who used a dictionary and guessed through context not only learned more vocabulary immediately after reading, but also remembered more after a couple of weeks. [42] too recommend the use of a dictionary while reading in order to get better results in learning new words, particularly 'monolingual dictionaries' and 'picture dictionaries'. Using monolingual dictionaries assist learners to deal with different meanings new words and learn about their synonyms, antonyms, collocations; on the other hand, picture dictionaries make use of icons and pictures to learn the meaning of new words easily and quickly.

According to [43], monolingual dictionaries are much more helpful than bilingual dictionaries in vocabulary learning, especially in learning the word meaning. Hence, the study recommends these dictionaries serve as learning tools and deserve a place in the EFL curriculum. [43] maintains that a monolingual dictionary not only demonstrates definitions as

alternative to the use of lexical items, but also provides the means to employ definitions. Baxter also asserts that the use of monolingual dictionaries should be given more encouragement as they endorse fluency by offering definitions in context; bilingual dictionaries, on the other hand, tend to channel learners towards single-word translation equivalents only.

In stage four of learning vocabulary, an emphasis is given to making use of memory strategies to consolidate word forms and their meaning. Studies suggest that memorization or mnemonics strategies help in connecting familiar words and images with the new word or knowledge [5;44,45]. These studies strongly recommend two methods: using memory strategies and using verbal/written repetition in varied circumstances. [44] assert that memory strategies include connecting the word to be recalled with previously learned knowledge such as forms of imagery or grouping. [45], too, affirms that memory strategies "help individuals learn faster and recall better because they aid the integration of new material into existing cognitive units and because they provide retrieval cues". Other studies [46,47] consider memory strategies essential to learn new vocabulary. The second method of using verbal/written repetition emphasizes that if learners do not repeat words they might lose it; hence a systematic repetition of new words is required to trigger learners' storage in long-term memory [23,34].

The finals stage of vocabulary learning requires that EFL learners should use new word with all its possible collocations as often as possible [48; 49;50,51]. These studies affirm that collocations should be taught from the very beginning, regardless of the learners' level or age for the reason that learning collocations will make their language sound much more natural. Moreover, repeating collocations is much more preferable to repeating an isolated and out-of-context word. This can be done by simply reading a text where the word appears in memorable contexts with various collocations [52;53;54]. It has also been stated that "the ability to deploy a wide range of lexical chunks both accurately and appropriately is probably what most distinguishes advanced learners from intermediate ones" [34]. Besides, collocation is an essential part of acquiring any language for the reason that the meaning of a word has much to do with the words with which it usually associates. "Not only do these associations assist the learner in committing these words to memory, they also aid in defining the semantic area of a word", and also "permit people to know what kind of words they can expect to find together" [55].

Hence the review of prior studies proves the significance of VLS through various phases and forms. The review has given a clear picture of the strategies that could be useful in L2 situation. The current study shall make use of these findings to judge the VLS adopted by the Saudi learners in the SSM, Kualalumpur.

Research Methodology
Sampling and Population
The current study has dealt with the secondary stage learners in the SSM, Malaysia. The rationale for selecting this stage was due to high level of vocabulary and advanced level of language proficiency found in the sample. This sample of participants (3-grade of secondary stage) for this study on VLs was selected purposefully because "it is believed to be a rich source of the data of interest" [53]. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participants.

Table 1 : Demographic Information of the Interview Participants

Name of Participants	Gender	Age	Level of Study	Place of Study	Years Studying English
Participant 1	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM*	5 years
Participant 2	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	6 years
Participant 3	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	10 years
Participant 4	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	6 years
Participant 5	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	10 year
Participant 6	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	5 years
Participant 7	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	10 years
Participant 8	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	5 years
Participant 9	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	6 years
Participant 10	Male	18	Third year secondary	SSM	6 years

* Saudi School Malaysia

Data Collection
The data was collected through interviews and FGD. Open ended questions were designed (Table 2) and responses were
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recorded on a voice recorder to be transcribed later. These questions focused on VLS s and the specific strategy used by participants

Table 2 Open ended questions used in FGD and Interviews

FGD and Interviews, SSM, Malaysia

1-   How do you see the relation between learning English and studying at Saudi School Malaysia (SSM)? Why?

2-   What do think about learning vocabulary? Why?

3-   What could be the aspect that helps you to learn and expand your vocabulary?

4-   When you encounter a new English word for the first time, do you guess the word? Why or why not?

5-   Do you think that the parts of speech/parts of the sentence and the grammatical features of the new word help you to guess its meaning? Why or why not?

6-   As a student, do you make use of the pictures that come with vocabulary lessons to guess the meaning of the new vocabulary in those lessons? Why or why not?

7-   Do you think that knowing roots, prefixes and suffixes can help you to guess the meaning of many words? Why or why not?

8-   Do you prefer using a dictionary to get the form of a new word? Why or why not?

9-   Do you do spoken/written repetition to practice pronunciation and spelling of the new word? Why?

10-   Do you prefer using an English-English dictionary to get the meaning of a new word? Why, or why not?

11-   From your opinion, what are the benefits you get when use English-English dictionaries?

12-   If you use English-English dictionaries, do you make use of the icons and pictures in those dictionaries to learn the meaning of the new word?

13-   Do you make use of 'grouping words strategy' to consolidate the form and meaning of the new word in your memory?

14-   Some students believe that 'imaging or drawing' the meaning of the new word is a helpful way to consolidate the meaning in their memories, do you agree? Why or why not?

15-   Do you apply verbal/written repetition? Why or why not?

16-   What do you think of connecting new words to already known words by using them in chunks and collocations? Why or why not?

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The general views and opinions of the participant were collected within the framework of this study, that is, according to the 5-stage Brown and Payne model. The findings have been discussed therefore within the same five stages including encountering new words, using a dictionary or employing spoken and written repetition drills, getting the word form through visual or auditory methods, learning the meaning of words through mnemonics, and using the words.

Talking of the first stage of encountering new words, almost all participants admitted that they used the context to guess the meaning of new vocabulary items as it helped them to understand new words and use in a sentence. They believed that the guessing strategy was good in every type of context. However, a few of the participants employed guessing strategies with slightly different variations. For instance, when they were asked to guess the meaning of the word 'Nicotine' used in their text book, they tried to explain its meaning from its context saying that it is "a colourless and oily drug in tobacco that stains the teeth of chain smoker". When asked how they guessed the meaning, they said that they did so with the help of "words between the commas immediately after the word, nicotine. Similarly, when asked about guessing from the picture, the participants revealed that visual images helped them strongly in understanding the meaning of a word either through cartoons or picture images that helped them guess meaning. One of the participants admitted that only pays 20% of attention is given to the sentence whereas 80% goes to the picture. Another strategy was found popular was guessing from the morphology of the word. The participants revealed that knowing the roots, prefixes and suffixes assisted them in recognizing the meaning of new words and helped them overcome the difficulty of understanding the meaning of new vocabulary items. For instance, one of the participants explained that he could guess the meaning of the word 'homeless' from the

suffix 'less" or of 'irregular' from the prefix 'ir.' It was also deducted from the findings that participants used the part of speech to which the word belongs to in order to guess its meaning.

Guessing the meaning of new words through different strategies is consistent with a number of studies in the literature. For instance, guessing from the context, there are studies like [13-17]; guessing from the pictures are discussed in studies [18;56]. Somewhere else [56], even suggested a unanimous application of the strategy of guessing through picture as it motivated learners to a great extent, particularly the lower-level students [57]. Guessing through morphology was evident in studies like [23] where he found that students used prefixes, roots and suffixes to guess the meaning of new words. It was quite pertinent to note that the use of guessing strategies was befitting the Saudi Schools due to the limited amount of time allocated to vocabulary learning [13; 58;59]. Hence, a great number of students employed guessing strategies while learning new vocabulary items.

In the stage-2, the participants adopted various strategies such as using a dictionary or employing spoken and written repetition drills to practice pronunciation and spelling of new words. The participants admitted that they used a dictionary in finding the meaning of new words preferably an electronic dictionary. Similarly it was also evident from the findings that learners used repetition in trying to learn the correct spellings of new words and tried not to forget its meaning or pronunciation after checking a dictionary. A lot of participants revealed that they found repetition a very helpful strategy to learn new words. The responses generated from the interview also revealed that all informants employed both forms of repetitions in learning new vocabulary. The findings of this research revealed that participants employed both verbal and written repetitions in learning new vocabulary. However, some participants preferred to use verbal repetition and vice versa. This finding has also been further

consolidated by the observation of the researcher in which he found that the participants used grouping word strategy, imaging, drawing and use of verbal and written repetition.

This is consistent with the findings of the study carried out by [23] who asserted that there is always a likelihood of forgetting immediately after the initial encounter with a new word. Therefore, students must repeat new words immediately after their first encounter and use a dictionary frequently to learn their correct spelling, pronunciation and other structures. Similarly there are studies consistent with the VLS of spoken and written repetition to practice the pronunciation and spelling of new words [35-37].

In the third stage of vocabulary learning, participants of this study admitted that pictures helped their imagination and assisted in learning new vocabulary items, particularly by the use of monolingual dictionaries. They opined that an English-English dictionary was more beneficial than using a bilingual or multilingual dictionary. However, a few showed their preference for using a bilingual dictionary as it helped them understand the meaning of English words in Arabic, their own language. The use of picture dictionaries was also considered very helpful by a majority of participants.

This is consistent with the findings of [56] who emphasised that foreign language learners are highly motivated to participate and communicate their thoughts when visuals are used during the teaching process. Visuals can make the learning experience of the target language more significant and meaningful, according to [60], who also asserted that pictures provided "interest and motivation; a sense of the context of the language and a specific reference point or stimulus". Other studies such as [5;61,62] recommended creating classroom activities using picture dictionaries as it can improve English vocabulary knowledge efficiently. [63] presented more than 60 effective activities using images and pictures that teachers can use in their EFL classes.

This finding was further supported by the observation of the researcher during FGD when many of the participants use a monolingual dictionary not to learn the new encountered word but also to search synonyms and other meanings of a few words. This result suggests that teachers should strive to encourage the students in getting used to using a monolingual dictionary right from the beginning when they start learning vocabulary and English language as a whole.

The next stage of VLS was to use mnemonics or memorization. The participants revealed that they would often connect a new word to a past event or a memory that will help them to remember its meaning. This helped them to cconsolidate a word from or its meaning in memory for a long time. This stage was found to be the centre of vocabulary learning where many effective VLSs could be applied such as grouping words, encoding, connecting new words with personal experiences and using both verbal and written repetition strategies. The findings of this study revealed that participants employed different forms of memory strategies such as pictures, linking the new word with a group of other words which relates to it, therefore consolidating the newly learned word. As examples, some participants revealed that they often connected a new word

they have learnt to a picture to remember it. Others linked a new word with a group of such words which were related to it in order to assist them in consolidating the word form and meaning in their memory.

This is consistent with the findings of [46] cited in [64], who affirmed that memorization strategies "helped individuals learn faster and recall better because they aid the integration of new material into existing cognitive units and because they provide retrieval cues." According to [65], this strategy helped in recalling new words and retaining them for a long term. Apart from that, [40] affirm that "meeting words in context provides opportunities for developing knowledge of the form, meaning and use of words. Meeting words in a variety of contexts enriches and strengthens learning".

The last stage of vocabulary learning, using the new word with all its possible collocations, was found to be employed by many participants of this study. For example participants would use readymade words and catchy phrases such as 'save-time', 'catch the bus' etc. to connect themselves to new words. This strategy was very helpful to learn new words faster and easier manner. The participants felt that using collocations was much more preferable to using an isolated and out-of-context word. This can be done by simply reading a text where the word appears in memorable contexts with various collocations. Collocation was thus admitted as one of the VLSs for the reason that the meaning of a word has much to do with the words with which it usually associates.

This is consistent with the findings of [46;49-51], who asserted that collocations should be taught from the very beginning, regardless of the learners' level or age for the reason that learning collocations will make their language sound much more natural.

These findings are an evidence of the qualitative attributes associated with VLs at SSM during all the five stages of vocabulary learning. The ongoing discussions and findings have also suggested that there exist salient themes that are helpful to understand each stage of vocabulary learning among secondary school learners.

CONCLUSION
This study was set in the background of Saudi School Malaysia (SSM) at Kuala Lumpur, one of the Saudi Schools Abroad (SSsA) in Asia. In all, there are four SSsA in different countries across Asia, such as in Malaysia, Indonesia, China and India. This study has focused on VLSs employed by secondary students at SSM. Several critical issues related to learning a foreign language are being faced by L2 learners but vocabulary is recognized as one of the salient issues that students at SSM encounter and challenge in their language learning. Vocabulary is also great importance to them due to the environment they live in; students learn a language in an environment where it is the language of daily survival and communication. The study was based on [9] 5-stage model of vocabulary learning. Evidence of this study reveals that participants of SSM employ the VLSs as recommended in this model. It is recommended that the model be applied in schools where L2 acquisition is a challenge and students are following conventional practices like rote learning and memorization techniques.

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