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A STUDY ON VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS AT TRA VINH UNIVERSITY

Trinh Thi Mong Ngoc[1], Trinh Boi Ngoc[2]

Abstract – *Vocabulary is very essential to language learners. If their vocabulary knowledge is insufficient, they will encounter challenges in learning a foreign language. The purpose of this study is to investigate which vocabulary learning strategies were employed most by the third-year English majored students and if genders had an effect on the choice of vocabulary learning strategies. The participants are 40 English majored students at Tra Vinh University including 31 females and 09 males. The questionnaire is the instrument of this research which consists of five different categories: dictionary, guessing, memory, autonomy, and social strategies. The results show that autonomy and dictionary were preferred most by the participants whereas the least popular strategies were guessing and social ones. In addition, genders had no significant impacts on the choice of vocabulary learning strategies.*

Keywords: English majored students, Tra Vinh University, vocabulary learning strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in foreign language acquisition. According to Nation [1], vocabulary is the foundation to develop four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, McCathy as cited by Astika [2] states that meaningful communication cannot take place without sufficient knowledge of vocabulary. Indeed, acquiring vocabulary can help learners to understand what other people say as well as express themselves to others by using words in spoken and written forms. Therefore, if language learners have limited vocabulary, they are unable to use the foreign language effectively.

It is undeniable that improving vocabulary is significantly necessary for language learners in general and English majors at Tra Vinh University in particular. In order to enhance vocabulary build-up, learners need to apply suitable learning strategies. Identifying appropriate vocabulary strategies is even more significant for third-year English majors in order to learn some specialised subjects such as academic writing, translation, interpretation, and research methodology. In some recent years, there have been many researchers conducting surveys on vocabulary learning strategies. In this study, we want to investigate which vocabulary learning strategies are preferred by language learners and how genders affect their choices of those strategies.

The following research questions have been developed to enable the researchers to achieve the objectives of the study:

1. What are the preferred vocabulary learning strategies used by the third year English majored students at Tra Vinh University?

2. How do genders affect the choice of vocabulary learning strategies of the third year English majored students at Tra Vinh University?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definitions of learning strategies

Learning strategies have been defined by some authors as follows:

[1,2]English Department, School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh University

Email: trinhthimongngoc92@gmail.com

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Chamot [3] says that learning strategies consist of approaches, techniques and actions taken by students to encourage the learning and acquiring the linguistic information.

According to Rubin [4], learning strategies are those developed by learners and those strategies affect their learning directly while Oxford [5] claims that learning strategies are behaviors used by learners to help their language learning become more successful, self-directed and enjoyable.

B. Classifications of vocabulary learning strategies

Oxford [6] classifies vocabulary learning strategies into two types: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are memory, cognitive and compensation strategies while indirect strategies include metacognitive, social and affective strategies.

Sharing Oxford's ideas, Schmitt [7] adds the discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies include determination strategies and social strategies. Consolidation strategies comprise memory strategies, cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies.

There are some authors giving a detailed explanation for those strategies. According to Schmitt & McCarthy [8], determination strategies are techniques employed by learners in discovering a new word's meaning without asking another person for help. Kramsch [9] indicates that social strategies show learners' interactions with others for discovering a new word. With these strategies, students can learn and practice vocabulary in groups, then ask teachers to check their work for accuracy. Schmitt [10] emphasizes the role of teachers because they can give the L1 translation to students regarding new words, use synonyms, definitions by paraphrasing or use new words in a sentence, or any combination of these.

Schmitt and McCarthy [8] affirm that memory strategies focus on some previously learned knowledge. This means that learners try to remember words by imagining or grouping words and consolidate them for later use. Oxford [6] suggests that cognitive strategies are techniques assisting learners in linking new information with existing knowledge, as well as analyzing and classifying it. With these strategies, teachers can use word lists, flash cards, notes and labels to help students learn new words. Oxford [6] also explains that metacognitive strategies involve a conscious overview of the learning process. These strategies help learners manage their learning by making decisions, arranging time, concentrating on what they need to learn and self-evaluating their learning.

There have been many researchers investigating the vocabulary learning strategies used by language learners. Dinh [11] surveys five groups of vocabulary learning strategies such as determination, memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Le [12] focuses on almost a similar set of strategies with the addition of device-assisted strategies instead of social strategies. Furthermore, Hashemi & Hadavi [13] mention eight vocabulary learning strategies including dictionary, guessing, study preferences, memory, autonomy, note-taking, selective attention, and social strategies. In the same vein, Manuel [14] and Aravind & Rajasekaran [15] investigate the same strategies: determination, memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Similarly, Astika [2] surveys only four strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, memory, and determination strategies.

In this current study, the five following strategies such as dictionaries, guessing, memory, autonomy and social strategies are thoroughly justified. Firstly, Carter [16] suggests that dictionaries provide students with detailed guidance related pronunciation, grammar and usage with explanations. They also give examples of words used in different contexts. In addition, according to Oxford [6], guessing strategies can be made by relying on a wide range of clues including linguistic and nonlinguistic ones. In terms of linguistic clues, learners apply their semantic or syntactic knowledge while for nonlinguistic clues, they use their topical knowledge to

decode the meaning of new words.

According to Oxford as cited by Benkhenafou [17], memory refers to the strategies through which the learners use some imagery or groupings in order to help the learners associate a new word with things already familiar to them. Regarding autonomy, Holec [18] claims that autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3).

Schmitt [10] states that social strategies involve learners' interaction with other people to explore the meaning of words.

The five strategies above were surveyed in order to find the preferred strategies employed by third-year English majors and if genders affect their choice of vocabulary learning strategies.

C. Related studies

With regard to vocabulary learning strategies, Dinh [11] identifies the vocabulary learning strategies commonly used by the students at Hung Vuong Gifted High School and the differences in vocabulary learning strategies by genders. The data showed that most of the strategies were not used with high frequency. The participants used determination strategies more frequently than memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Similarly, Astika [2] examines the vocabulary learning strategies used by students when they learned new words and finds out that determination strategies are employed more than others.

However, Hashemi & Hadavi [13] explore the use and preferences of vocabulary learning strategies among the students in an Iranian university. The findings revealed that social and guessing strategies obtained the highest mean scores whereas note-taking and autonomy were the least used strategies.

Le [12] investigates the vocabulary learning strategies preferred by university students. The results show that device-assisted strategies occupy the highest mean score while metacognitive strategies show the lowest mean score. Whereas, Aravind & Rajasekaran [15] discover that cognitive strategies were the most popularly used by research scholars at VIT Chennai, Tamil, Nadu, followed by determination strategies. Metacognitive strategies were the third most frequently used while memory and social strategies were the least popular.

Concerning the effect of genders on the choice of vocabulary learning strategies, Dinh [11] finds out that the difference between males and females in the use of vocabulary learning strategies was not significant. Likewise, Omaar [19] indicates that genders had no effect on students' choice of vocabulary learning strategies. By contrast, Hashemi & Hadavi [13] reveal that female students prefered social strategies while male students were in favor of autonomy and note-taking strategies.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research design

The descriptive survey method was used to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by the third-year English majors and the effect of genders on their choice of vocabulary learning strategies.

B. Participants of the study

Forty out of sixty-seven third-year English majored students of Tra Vinh University were included in this study, including 31 females and 09 males. The significant difference in the numbers of males and females is due to the dominance of female students over male students in English language learning.

C. Instrument

The research instrument employed to collect data for this study was the questionnaire adapted from Hashemi & Hadavi's questionnaire [13]. The questionnaire covered five different categories including Dictionary strategies (items 1-7), Guessing strategies (items 8-10), Memory strategies (items 11-19), Autonomy strategies (items 20-23), Social strategies (items 24-27). The statements were designed by using a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from never to always.

D. Procedures

The questionnaire was designed and distributed to the participants who were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously in their break time. The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed by using the software SPSS (Statistic Package for the Social Sciences) version 22.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The reliability of the questionnaire

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of the questionnaire

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.85	27

A group of 40 students completed the questionnaires. All the data collected from the questionnaire were computed to check the frequency and internal reliability coefficient. The results in Table 1 showed that the questionnaire used in this research was reliable with Cronbach Alpha's coefficient of .85 for 27 statements in total.

B. The preferred vocabulary learning strategies employed by participants

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of five groups of vocabulary learning strategies

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Dictionary mean	40	3.74	.64	.10	3.53	3.94	2.00	4.86
Guessing mean	40	3.23	.51	.08	3.07	3.40	2.33	4.33
Memory mean	40	3.41	.53	.08	3.24	3.58	2.00	4.44
Autonomy mean	40	3.83	.73	.12	3.60	4.06	2.00	5.00
Social mean	40	3.29	.65	.10	3.09	3.50	2.00	4.50
Total	200	3.50	.66	.046	3.41	3.59	2.00	5.00

Table 2 indicates the mean score for "Autonomy" (M=3.83, SD=0.73), higher than the mean scores of the four other groups of vocabulary learning strategies: "Dictionary" (M=3.74, SD=0.64), "Memory" (M=3.41, SD=0.53), "Social strategies" (M=3.29, SD=0.65) and "Guessing" (M=3.23, SD=0.51).

Table 3: Differences between strategies

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11,47	4	2.87	7.56	.00
Within Groups	74.00	195	.38		
Total	85.47	199			

Table 4: Multiple Comparisons

Tukey HSD

(I) total mean	(J) total mean	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Dictionary mean	Guessing mean	.50*	.14	.00	.12	.88
	Memory mean	.32	.14	.13	-.05	.70
	Autonomy mean	-.10	.14	.96	-.47	.28
	Social mean	.44*	.14	.01	.06	.82
Guessing mean	Dictionary mean	-.50*	.14	.00	-.88	-.12
	Memory mean	-.18	.14	.70	-.56	.20
	Autonomy mean	-.60*	.14	.00	-.98	-.22
	Social mean	-.06	.14	.99	-.44	.32
Memory mean	Dictionary mean	-.32	.14	.13	-.70	.05
	Guessing mean	.18	.14	.70	-.20	.56
	Autonomy mean	-.42*	.14	.02	-.80	-.04
	Social mean	.12	.14	.91	-.26	.50
Autonomy mean	Dictionary mean	.10	.14	.96	-.28	.47
	Guessing mean	.60*	.14	.00	.22	.98
	Memory mean	.42*	.14	.02	.04	.80
	Social mean	.54*	.14	.00	.16	.92
Social mean	Dictionary mean	-.44*	.14	.013	-.82	-.06
	Guessing mean	.06	.14	.99	-.32	.44
	Memory mean	-.12	.14	.91	-.50	.26
	Autonomy mean	-.54*	.14	.00	-.92	-.16

(. The mean difference is significant at the 0,05 level.)*

As shown in Table 4, Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for "Autonomy" (M=3.83, SD=0.73) was significantly higher than the mean scores of "Guessing", p=0.00; "Memory", p=0.02 and "Social strategies", p=0.00. However, the mean score for "Autonomy" was insignificantly higher than the mean score of "Dictionary", p=0.96.

Table 4 shows that "Autonomy" and "Dictionary" are the most popular groups of strategies employed by the participants while "Social strategies" and "Guessing" are the least used strategies. The results of this study are different from those found in Hashemi & Hadavi's study [13]. In their study, social strategies and guessing strategies had the highest obtained scores whereas dictionary strategies obtained the moderate use

and autonomy strategies had the lowest mean scores.

C. The impact of genders on the choice of vocabulary learning strategies of English learners

Table 5: Group Statistics of genders towards dictionary strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Dictionary mean	male	9	3.67	.75	.25
	female	31	3.76	.62	.11

Table 6: Independent Samples Test of genders towards dictionary strategies

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Dictionary mean	Equal variances assumed	.02	.90	-.36	38	.72	-.09	.24	-.58	.41
	Equal variances not assumed			-.33	11.37	.75	-.09	.27	-.69	.51

The results from Table 5 show that the mean score of female students (M=3.76) is higher than that of male students (M=3.67). Then, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the effect of genders on the use of dictionary strategies. However, the result in Table 6 indicates that there are no significant differences in the mean scores for female students (M=3.76, SD=0.62) and male students (M=3.67, SD=0.75); t(38)= -0.36, p=0.72. These results suggest that genders did not really have an effect on the choice of dictionary strategies.

Table 7: Group Statistics of genders towards guessing strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Guessing mean	male	9	3.04	.48	.16
	female	31	3.29	.51	.09

Table 8: Independent Samples Test of genders towards guessing strategies

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Guessing mean	Equal variances assumed	.03	.88	-1.33	38	.19	-.25	.19	-.64	.13
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.37	13.54	.19	-.25	.19	-.65	.15

It is clear from Table 7 that the mean score of female students (M=3.29) is higher than that of male students (M=3.04). Then, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the effect of genders on the use of guessing strategies. However, the result in Table 8 indicates that there are no significant differences in the mean scores for female students (M=3.29, SD=0.51) and male students (M=3.04, SD=0.48); t(38)= -1.33, p=0.19. These results suggested that genders did not affect the choice of guessing strategies.

Table 9: Group Statistics of genders towards memory strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Memory mean	male	9	3.26	.70	.23
	female	31	3.46	.47	.08

Table 10: Independent Samples Test of genders towards memory strategies

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Memory mean	Equal variances assumed	.47	.50	-.98	38	.33	-.20	.20	-.60	.21
	Equal variances not assumed			-.79	10.21	.45	-.20	.25	-.74	.35

The data from Table 9 indicates that the mean score of female students (M=3.46) is

higher than that of male students (M=3.26). Then, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the effect of genders on the use of memory strategies. However, the result in Table 10 indicates that there were no significant differences in the mean scores for female students (M=3.46, SD=0.47) and male students (M=3.26, SD=0.70); t(38)= -0.98, p=0.33. These results suggest that genders did not influence the choice of memory strategies.

Table 11: Group Statistics of genders towards social strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Social mean	male	9	3.08	.81	.27
	female	31	3.35	.60	.11

Table 12: Independent Samples Test of genders towards social strategies

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Social mean	Equal variances assumed	2.24	.14	-1.10	38	.28	-.27	.25	-.77	.23
	Equal variances not assumed			-.93	10.70	.37	-.27	.29	-.91	.37

Table 11 reveals that the mean score of female students (M=3.35) was higher than that of male students (M=3.08). Then, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the effect of genders on the use of social strategies. However, the result in Table 12 indicates that there was no significant difference in the mean scores for female students (M=3.35, SD=0.60) and male students (M=3.08, SD=0.81); t(38)= -1.10, p=0.28. These results suggested that genders did not influence the choice of social strategies.

Table 13 presents that the mean score of female students (M=3.94) was higher than that of male students (M=3.44). Then, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to

Table 13: Group Statistics of genders towards autonomy strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Autonomy mean	Male	9	3.44	.89	.30
	Female	31	3.94	.65	.12

Table 14: Independent Samples Test of genders towards autonomy strategies

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Autonomymean	Equal variances assumed	.91	.35	-1.87	38	.07	-.50	.27	-1.04	.042
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.57	10.58	.15	-.50	.32	-1.20	.21

compare the effect of genders on the use of autonomy strategies. However, the result in Table 14 indicates that there was no significant difference in the mean scores for female students (M=3.94, SD=0.65) and male students (M=3.44, SD=0.89); t(38)= -1.87, p=0.70. These results suggested that genders did not influence the choice of social strategies.

It was concluded that genders had no effects on the use of vocabulary learning strategies. By comparison, Hashemi & Hadavi [13] find that female students used social strategies more while male students preferred autonomy strategies. However, the results of this study were in line with the study results conducted by Dinh [11] and Manuel [14] who conclude that there was no statistically significant difference in the use of vocabulary learning strategies and between genders.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This present study aimed to identify the use of vocabulary learning strategies by English learners at Tra Vinh University. The results indicated that autonomy and dictionary were the most popular strategies amongst the participants while social and guessing

strategies were the least popular ones. In terms of the effects of genders on the use of vocabulary learning strategies, it was found that genders had no impact on the choice of vocabulary learning strategies. The findings if this study will contribute to enhancing the awareness of the importance of vocabulary learning strategies in language learning and teaching. Thereby, teachers will diversify their teaching methods by introducing these vocabulary learning strategies and techniques to their students. For students, they are enabled to get access to a variety of vocabulary learning strategies to broaden their vocabulary sources.

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