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Relationship Between Filipino ESL Learners' Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Vocabulary Ability

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This study focuses on the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) as perceived to be used by the ESL learners and their vocabulary ability. The assumption is that learners can build their vocabulary of the target language by applying certain vocabulary learning strategies. The study has recognized learning habits of lexis acquisition among Filipino learners through their perceived use of VLS. Participants of this study were forty students enrolled in freshman English in the university level. Findings revealed no significant relationship between the learners' vocabulary ability and their perceived use of VLS. This supports the notion that both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning are critical in acquiring vocabulary, accentuating that there is no absolute way for learning vocabulary since it depends upon many varying factors (de Groot, 2006; Brown, 1987). Thus, it is prudent that different approaches of vocabulary instruction be applied in different stages in the language acquisition as with the different contexts in vocabulary learning (Schmitt, 2008). As exhibited by the chosen group in this current study, learners who aim to expand their vocabulary knowledge could increase their acquisition of the target language from the habit of using certain VLS. While language practitioners continue to argue the best ways to improve vocabulary acquisition in the target language, this study confirms that regular revisiting of the lexis is part of a language course.

Keywords: Lexical acquisition, vocabulary learning strategies, vocabulary ability, word power workout.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary ability plays a critical role in learning a target language; its acquisition is regarded to be of great importance, yet it is one of the most elusive aspects of learning a new language. For decades, the transformation and continuous reshaping of vocabulary learning has led language practitioners to investigate and search for the students' best method to acquire vocabulary (Karami & Bowles, 2019). Not surprisingly, lexical acquisition is among the major research topics in language learning and teaching. Second language learners, teachers, and researchers have equally acknowledged that vocabulary increases the language proficiency of the learners. "Lexis is the basis for language" (Lewis, 1993); it is, in fact, the core of language comprehension and use (Hunt & Belglar, 2005). The need to acquire a large and sufficient vocabulary seems to be one of the most important language learners' tasks (Lewis, 2000). Schmitt (2008) stated that "a large vocabulary is necessary to function in English: 8000–9000-word families for reading, and perhaps as many as 5000–7000 families for oral discourse (p. 329)." Richards and Renandya (2002) view vocabulary ability as a major component of language proficiency, i.e., vocabulary knowledge enables learners to speak, listen, read, and write well.

Conversely, inadequate vocabulary repertoire and poor vocabulary learning strategies for acquiring new vocabulary curtail opportunities for learners to learn the target language. Several studies also show that limited vocabulary and vocabulary errors could interfere with communication and could potentially be a significant obstacle that intimidates students from learning the target language (Zhihong, 2000).

Even in the English for Second Language (ESL) context, learners view lexical acquisition as one of the problematic language learning areas (Lewis, 1993; Mc Carthy, 2004; Read, 2000; Subekti & Lawson, 2007). Problems occur when students' vocabulary knowledge is insufficient; this impedes comprehensible communication as they cannot articulate their ideas, comprehend text content, or accomplish written tasks (Schmitt & Mc Carthy, 1997). In this present study, the ESL students found communication classes challenging and laborious. The majority could communicate in English relatively easily; however, quite a number also lacked sufficient vocabulary knowledge and skills appropriate for academic and professional purposes reading and writing tasks at the university level. Thus, learning became more

complicated for these students. Nonetheless, despite recognizing vocabulary as vital for successful language learning and communication, researchers are not in general agreement about the best way to teach the vocabulary of a target language. To date, most of the studies have focused on vocabulary learning for English for Foreign Language (EFL) learners; to bridge this gap, the researchers aimed to investigate the VLS used by ESL learners.

The theoretical background of this study is divided into five sections. In the first section, cognitive theory is the basis of the following sections and the starting point of this investigation. A review of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and the importance of vocabulary in language learning; intentional and incidental learning; then the importance of VLS and the vocabulary acquisition strategies adopted in this current study are discussed. In the last section are some previous studies on vocabulary learning strategies.

The nature of vocabulary is complex, that despite years of numerous research, the mechanics of vocabulary learning is still a mystery (Schmitt, 2000). Experts view vocabulary over the ages has led to its current practices and its significance within applied linguistics. "Focused on the ability to analyze language, and not the ability to use it," earlier theories in second language acquisition such as the Grammar-Translation method "became increasingly pedantic" (Schmitt, 2000, p.12). These theories received severe criticism from more recent theories, such as the interlanguage theory that views the learner as the creator of rules and errors as evidence of learners' positive efforts to learn (Selinker, 1972). This incited two general directions in second language acquisition (SLA) research: the awareness of learner strategies on learning, responsible for language learning success (Rubin, 1975), and the influential theory wherein learners need natural, authentic communication for language acquisition to occur, instead of direct instruction (Krashen, 1981). Thus, cognitive theory of learning influenced the concept of language learning strategy or learner strategy, referring to what learners do to make their learning manageable and efficient (Takac, 2008). This cognitive orientation describes SLA as a cognitive skill so complex as it engages cognitive systems such as perception and information processing to overcome human mental capacity limitations, which may inhibit performance (Ellis 2000, as cited by Višnja, 2008). One of the essential cognitive theory concepts that influence vocabulary learning strategies is learning strategies (Asgari & Mustapha, 2011).

If what learners consciously or unconsciously do to make their learning manageable and efficient does not guarantee immediate success in vocabulary mastery by itself, then clearly cognitive theory is not self-sustained; it requires interconnection with other varying factors since language learning is concurrently highly influenced by society. To illustrate, “words are not instantaneously acquired...they are gradually learned over a period of time from numerous exposures... as there are different degrees of knowing a word” (Schmitt, 2000, p.4).

Benjamin Whorf’s theory on linguistic relativity –that language shapes thought and that culture and language are informed thinking—could have a similar effect on how learners deal with vocabulary learning. A commonly cited example of linguistic relativity is how Inuit Eskimos describe snow. There is only one word for snow in English, but in the Inuit language, because of their exposure to snow, many words are ascribed to snow: wet snow, clinging snow, frosty snow, and so on (Subbiondo, 2005). In a like manner, when learners are more actively involved in processing the language they meet—known as intentional learning—they are more likely to remember it. When learners are exposed to various strategies, they are actively involved in processing the language, which could further maximize their language learning capacity, e.g., lexical acquisition (Selivan, 2010).

Intentional vocabulary learning is defined as a way of learning in which the learner is informed and knows what is to be learned; it is intentional since direct attention is paid to vocabulary learning itself (Hulstijn, 2003; Hulstijn, 2001). Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis points out that input needs to be noticed and “consciously registered” so language learning could be said to take place (1990, p. 721); this way, noticing second language features and paying attention to them is crucial in language learning. The learner benefits from intentional vocabulary learning as he speeds up the lexical development due to focused repetition or memorization strategies (Hung, 2015). For instance, decontextualized language practice—the learning vocabulary and expressions without meeting them repeatedly in meaningful contexts—was frowned upon throughout the height of Communicative Language Teaching. However, more and more evidence suggest that decontextualized vocabulary learning could be practical and convenient (Laufer, 2006) in EFL and ESL students. They need to reach

a certain level of academic vocabulary ability to comprehend required readings and accomplish specific tasks efficiently (Nation, 2001), such as English for academic and professional purposes.

By contrast, incidental vocabulary learning is the process in which there is no intention or direct attention to the new words. Can one acquire vocabulary and grasp expressions without meeting them repeatedly in meaningful contexts? Vygotsky's sociocultural view (1978) emphasizes that learning cannot occur without social interaction and that acquisition of words takes place within meaningful contexts, i.e., learners are able to use words actively if they learn them incidentally. "It is a commonsense notion that the more a learner engages with a new word, the more likely they are to learn it" (Schmitt, 2008, p.338). This meaningful context stimulates longer retention of the words in the cognitive process, although Webb (2008) cautions that this must be selected carefully because of the possibility of misinterpretation. It may be easier for the second language learners to rely on context and overlook the individual word part or rely on the dictionary and overlook context. At times, even minimal context practically defines a strange word for the reader; at other times, it provides little or no help. However, the context will always let the reader know the part of speech, which helps build the groundwork for defined attention habits to whatever clues are present. Heightened awareness of word parts will prepare the reader even better to unravel word meanings; in this sense, fitting new words in context is beneficial for easy recall and comprehension.

Both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning are critical in the acquisition of vocabulary, but the role of incidental learning has been deemphasized in that it occurs only in the presence of intentional learning (Choo, Lin, & Pandian, 2012). Various studies suggest that some language learners intentionally learn some vocabulary features while other features are learned incidentally (Karami & Bowles, 2019). Schmitt (2008, p. 352) highlighted the importance of both strategies suggesting that "perhaps the most effective way of improving incidental learning is by reinforcing it afterward with intentional learning tasks." A combination of both may make a perfect strategy (Karami & Bowles, 2019) although de Groot (2006) accentuates the fact that there is no absolute way for learning vocabulary since it depends upon many factors. Schmitt concurs that different approaches to vocabulary instruction must be applied in different stages (2008, in Karami & Bowles, 2019).

Even more importantly, teachers can create situations and provide meaningful contexts wherein learners can have the opportunity to recycle and reuse the language they have learned, i.e., maximizing the use of context, parts, the dictionary, and other devices (Brown, 1987). This way the learner is presented with a variety of specialized techniques in achieving academic success. The constant practice works. As a learner, the better one reads, the more confident one becomes. Traces of uncertainty or inferiority disappear and are replaced by self-reliance and assurance (Teng, 2015). This is important since the learning style and motivation are crucial in the learner's success in acquiring language. Learning style refers to approaches or various ways of learning; affective and physiology factor-related: a particular method of interacting with, taking in, and processing stimuli or information affected by one's personality and attitudes (Brown, 1987). It is the individual's cognitive style of learning across different educational contexts, according to his social and physiological background (Thu, 2009); thus, the way students process information from the teacher helps them understand the learning material.

Vocabulary learning strategies are identified as a sub-category under the Language Learning Strategies' umbrella (Gu, 2003; Nation, 2001). An overview of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) as defined by language practitioners presents how VLSs are directly hinged upon this set of operations and behaviors. LLS are established as follows: characteristics of approaches where learning techniques are consciously employed by the learner use to enhance L2 use (Stern, 1983); learning processes consciously used by learners resulting in improved learning of the target language through retention, recall, and application of the language (Cohen & Manion, 1994); "a choice that a learner makes while learning or using the L2 that affects learning" (Cook, 2001, p. 126); a practice of a range of strategies in a task (Macaro, 2001); "the conscious thoughts and actions that learners deal with to achieve a learning goal" (Chamot, 2004, p. 14); "specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 2003, p.8). Essentially, LLSs are "learning behaviors learners engage in" (Wenden, 1987, p.6) or activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning" of the target language (Griffiths, 2013, p. 15).

Several language experts indicate that using a variety of vocabulary learning strategies is crucial in acquiring the target language. ESL students

need tools, various strategies that could further maximize their language learning capacity, e.g., vocabulary learning strategies to equip themselves in successfully accomplishing their academic reading and writing tasks (Nation, 2003). Language authorities like Williams and Burden (1997), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), and Rubin (1987) likewise support that strategies are crucial tools for developing communicative competence.

Without an extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve less than their potential and may be discouraged for making use of language learning opportunities around them such as listening to the radio, listening to native speakers, using the language in different contexts, reading, or watching television (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 255).

In this regard, the use of VLS enables students to acquire and improve vocabulary skills more efficiently, for instance, in reading various media and textbooks, accomplishing written requirements, listening to the news or lectures, or using the language in different contexts such as conversing with native speakers or giving a class presentation. The assumption is that the VLS and exposure to tasks designed to further its application in various teaching-learning situations would facilitate a better vocabulary acquisition process.

Stoffer (1995, cited in Schmitt, 1997) maintains that the vocabulary learning strategies help learners learn. VLS can be viewed as a general pattern in the teaching-learning situation where its specific goal is to master vocabulary (Schmitt & Mc Carthy, 1997). "A process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved, and used" (Rubin, 1987, p. 29); these are various steps or actions preferred and taken by students to improve lexical knowledge and ability (Oxford, 1993); in effect, the practice of these strategies can be effective as it results in autonomous learners. A vital tool in the lexical acquisition, Catalan (2003) defines VLS as

knowledge about the mechanisms (processes, strategies) used in order to learn vocabulary as well as steps or actions taken by students (a) to find out the meaning of unknown words, (b) to retain them in long-term memory, (c) to recall them at will, and (d) to use them in oral or written mode (p. 56).

As presented by Asgari and Mustapha (2011), several recent studies have produced VLS taxonomies. Schmitt and Schmitt (1993) divided learning vocabulary into remembering a word and learning a new word. GU (2003) classified second language VLS as cognitive, metacognitive, memory and activation strategies. Schmitt (1997) improved VLS taxonomy based on Oxford (1990) into determination strategies, social, and remembering category which also comprises social, memorization, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies; and Fan (2003) refined Gu (2003)'s VLS classification into primary category covering dictionary and guessing strategies, and remembering category integrating repetition, association, grouping, analysis, and known words strategies.

While various VLS taxonomies are used in various studies, this study has applied the taxonomy suggested by Jeon (2007), who classified VLS into three main groups: discovery strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, in which each major category is further classified into ten sub-categories. Learners use Discovery Strategies (DS) to discover words (Schmitt, 2000). This includes the use of dictionaries; consulting others to get the meaning of words; asking a teacher for L1 translation or a paraphrase or synonyms of new words; guessing the meaning of a word from its word structure, sentence structures, textual development, from common sense, and from mental memory, and by skipping when meeting an unfamiliar sound.

Memory Strategies (MS) are those in which the learners link their learning of new words to mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new words (Schmitt, 1997). This includes remembering by reading or writing repeatedly, by creating a word's mental image, by connecting a word to personal experience; by memorizing word spelling; by remembering words that are spelled similarly or that sound similar together, by word-formation rules, remembering a word in meaningful groups, the words of an idiom together, and the sentence in which a new word is used.

Cognitive Strategies (CS) do not engage learners in mental processing but are more mechanical means (Schmitt, 1997). This includes making a note upon meeting a useful expression or phrase; listening to an audio recording of new words or expressions; making a vocabulary list of new words; using media such as songs or movies; analyzing words in terms of

prefixes, stems, suffixes; writing down the synonyms or antonyms of the word; making up sentences using the words just learned; associating the new word with a known English word, and using newly learned words in imaginary situations and real situations.

Over the years, several studies have been done on VLS and Vocabulary Knowledge and their impact on language learning. Among these are studies conducted by Asgari and Mustapha (2011), Zhang Yunhao (2011), and Hunt and Belglar (2005).

Asgari and Mustapha (2011) examined the type of vocabulary learning strategies used by Malaysian ESL students majoring in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). They share the same predicament with this current study that too little attention has been paid to vocabulary learning strategies used by ESL undergraduate students in the local context; thus, their study also aimed to determine what type of VLS is used by ESL students. Additionally, they stressed that students need to be educated with VLS. They adopted Schmitt's five major strategies, of which taxonomy application was established in an ESL-EFL environment using Japanese L2 learners (Schmitt, 2000). They confirmed that the use of VLS included factors such as proficiency, motivation, and culture since environment and culture can influence one's preference for exacting learning strategies. They concluded that strategies such as learning a word through reading, the use of a monolingual dictionary, the use of various English language media, and applying new English word in their daily conversation are related to memory, determination, and metacognitive strategies as popular strategies since their learners were keen in using them.

Zhang Yunhao's (2011) case study, *The use of vocabulary learning strategies by good and poor language learners: A case study of Chinese non-English major sophomores*, investigated a group of Chinese sophomores' employment of learning strategies in their learning process to investigate the following: (1) to identify the most frequently used strategies and the least frequently used strategies, and (2) to compare good language learners with poor learners. A 26-item five-scale point questionnaire was employed for data collection; this 5-scale point questionnaire is comparable to this current study and most investigations using VLS. Study results presented that both good and poor language learners used many effective VLS. This group of students was found to carry a pocket dictionary to look up new

words; although this strategy used is EFL in context, the conscious effort to vocabulary learning is comparable to the discussion of intentional learning in the current study. The same principle is established when the researchers pointed out that “good language learners were found to employ learning strategies more frequently than poor learners in 21 strategies”. The case study revealed that the use of VLS was positively related to learning outcomes.

Hunt and Belglar’s (2005) paper, *A framework for developing EFL reading vocabulary*, comprehensively reviewed and critiqued L2 reading vocabulary research. The study proposed a systematic framework incorporating two approaches to speed up lexical development: (1) promoting explicit lexical instruction and learning strategies; and (2) encouraging implicit lexical instruction and learning strategies. Hunt and Belglar’s proposed framework parallels this current study since the utilization of learning strategies promoting explicit and implicit instruction confirms the importance of intentional and incidental vocabulary learning, which is highlighted in the current study.

Hunt and Belglar presented the most crucial explicit lexical instruction and learning strategies: (1) acquiring decontextualized lexis, (2) using dictionaries, and (3) inferring from context. They emphasized implicit lexical instruction and learning to take many forms, including integrated task sets and narrow reading. They pointed out that the framework emphasizes extensive reading and further highlighted that the principal notion underlying their framework is that the most effective and efficient lexical development will occur in multifaceted curriculums that achieve a pedagogically sound balance between explicit and implicit activities L2 learners at all levels of their development. Again, this emphasis mirrors the current study’s stand that teachers as material designers would be keen on choosing materials for learning which accentuates both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning strategies.

The importance of vocabulary in language learning is emphasized in this investigation, thus the need to revisit the VLS used by learners. To date, no study has been conducted in Silliman on VLS. Hence, this current study investigated this topic to establish whether the VLSs perceived to be used by student learners determine their vocabulary ability. This is to validate the assumption that learners can build their vocabulary of the target language by applying specific vocabulary learning strategies. This inquiry is hinged

on the following theories presented above: cognitive theory, intentional and incidental learning, language learning strategies, vocabulary strategies, and the importance of vocabulary and VLS.

Schmitt (2000) points out that English courses typically include required explicit lessons on grammar, phonology and other language features, but “vocabulary is often dealt with only incidentally in the preparation of language teachers” (p. 13); thus, he reasserts the significance of vocabulary not only in research within applied linguistics but also the practical ways on how vocabulary learning is dealt within the classrooms. Studies on VLS, just like this current study, intend to respond to this need, where teachers and resource designers aim to “expose learners to a variety of strategies that could further maximize their capacity in language learning” (Nation, 2003, p.159). On a more local scale, this current investigation is further relevant due to the Philippine educational system’s changes from the K+10 to the K+12 curriculum that demands higher competency in the use of English that has affected various academic and technical fields of study. Hence, students of this chosen group are Filipinos, for whom English is their second language. GE-5 (Purposive Communication) develops students’ communicative competence, equipping them with the necessary skills to succeed in their academic life.

This study sought to answer the following:

1. What are the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) perceived to be used by the ESL learners?
2. What are the ESL learners’ levels of vocabulary ability?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students’ vocabulary ability and vocabulary learning strategy use?

Answers to these questions contribute several pedagogical implications that will enrich the vocabulary teaching and learning processes in Purposive Communication or GE 5 subject.

METHODS

This study adopted an action research design wherein the data were collected towards the end of the second semester of the school year 2019-2020. Fee

(2012) describes action research as one conducted in classrooms adopted to solve an immediate problem that arises during a particular time. This type of research bridges the gap between educational theory and professional practice by improvising current practices, as it helps the researcher address practical problems, suggest appropriate lines of action, and generate knowledge to produce change. The positionality of the researchers as language teachers of the target respondents allowed them to have observed the learners in their language tasks in the classroom; this allowed them to shape informed opinion through their observations of the students' study habits in class and use of VLS in acquiring lexis in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to investigate whether the use of VLS improves vocabulary learning and retention. Based on the literature review, the efficacy of VLS has been researched. However, limited studies have investigated vocabulary learning effectiveness and vocabulary retention in the ESL context, as most studies on lexical acquisition are conducted in an EFL setting. This study aimed to investigate whether Discovery, Memory, or Context strategies best prepares university-level students for learning and retaining vocabulary in English as Second Language classrooms. The researchers aimed to identify the types of strategies perceived to be used by good language learners and poor language learners, and to assess how frequently they use these strategies.

Participants

As action research, this study based its sample on a group of first year students enrolled in an English class at the university level. This study's chosen respondents were forty (40) first year students enrolled in one section of General Education (GE-5) class at Silliman University. GE-5 (Purposive Communication) is the equivalent of English-1 mandated by CHED (Commission on Higher Education). All students chosen for this group are Filipinos for whom English is their second language. English is also the official medium of instruction from pre-school to college. All research participants identified Cebuano as their mother tongue; they came from Negros Island Region, Siquijor island, and parts of Mindanao.

Instrument

A quantitative research strategy was used to elicit answers to posited questions. The instrument used for the survey is adopted from Jeon's study (2007), mainly as this study is an adaptation of his study on *The Relationship between Korean EFL Learners' Vocabulary Ability and VLS*. In the current research setting, it is not uncommon to have many international students coming from an EFL background in the first year English classes; thus, the researchers intended to see if Jeon's EFL survey would apply to the ESL context. More importantly, Jeon's modified list of VLS categories (Discovery, Memory, and Cognitive strategies) and their sub-strategies, which he also narrowed from Gu (2003), covers a good range of strategies that are practicable and relevant even in the current study's ESL context compared to other, more recent research on vocabulary learning.

The data for this study were collected from two survey instruments: a Vocabulary Test tool and a VLS survey questionnaire. The first instrument is a 70-item test aimed to identify the students' vocabulary ability: this test is composed of two sections, in which both part 1 and part 2 consist of 35 items arranged according to their level of complexity. The second instrument is comprised of a 30-item survey which would identify the VLS perceived to be used by the respondents. Beforehand the class was informed that the scores they may garner from answering the vocabulary test and the VLS survey would have no bearing on their grade in GE-5. To further instill reliability and elicit honest answers in the survey, the class was likewise informed that the study results would help identify strategies that could benefit incoming first year students in accelerating in vocabulary learning and retention improvement.

Observational methods are often difficult to employ because many learning strategies are internal and invisible to observers. Learning-strategy research mostly depends on learners' willingness and ability to describe their internal behaviors, i.e., cognitive and affective (Brown, 1989; Harlow, 1988, cited by Oxford 1992). For the learners to clearly express how their learning is achieved, they must be explicitly aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and personal preference in individual and cultural learning styles (Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D., 1993). With this consideration, the questionnaire method is the most reliable method in that the learners give their data; thus, the questionnaire method was employed in this current study.

Procedure and Data Analysis

This study investigated the scores of students based on the Vocabulary Test (instrument-1) and the VLS they perceived to have used (instrument-2) to build up their English vocabulary. One of the researchers, who was also the teacher of the chosen respondents, asked the students to accomplish the vocabulary test, and after which, they were to rate each strategy statement in the VLS questionnaire. The whole procedure took about an hour of class time.

To provide a basis for comparison, the researchers divided the chosen participants into two groups according to their performance in the 70-item Vocabulary Test (instrument-1). From the test results, an upper group (UG) and a lower group (LG) were identified: the upper group consists of students whose score is above 35, and the lower group includes those with a score lower than 36.

Table 1
Vocabulary Ability Test Groupings

Score	Vocabulary Ability
36-70	Upper Group
35-1	Lower Group

A scale was used to determine the ESL students' perceived use of the VLS. Target participants responded on a 5-point interval Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD), in terms of their frequency of the VLS use. The said instrument contains 30 items in the three major categories: Discovery, Memory, and Cognitive strategies. The respondents then indicated their level of perceived use of VLS on a Likert scale: 5.00, indicating very low use, and 1.0 for very high use. Their responses were averaged and interpreted using this table: If the score ranges from 1-1.7, it indicates a *very high perceived use of the VLS*; 1.8-2.5 indicates *high use of VLS*; 2.6-3.3 indicates *moderate use of VLS*; 3.4-4.1 indicates low use, and if the score ranges from 4.2-5.0, it indicates a *very low perceived use of the VLS*.

Table 2*Mean Ranges and Descriptive Interpretation*

Mean Range	Interpretation	Perceived use of VLS
1.00-1.79	Strongly Agree	Very High
1.80-2.59	Agree	High
2.60-3.39	Neutral	Moderate
3.40-4.19	Disagree	Low
4.20-5.00	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

Pearson Product Moment was used to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between vocabulary test ability and perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies. For a relationship to be significant, the *p* value must be equal to or lesser than 0.05 which is the margin of error. Data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Vocabulary Learning Strategies Preferred by GE-5 Students

This section presents the top three strategies of the students' use of VLS under Discovery, Memory, and Cognitive.

Use of Discovery Strategies (DS)

Our investigation yielded interesting results. Table 3 shows the top-three used of discovery strategies in acquiring lexis: "Consulting a teacher or friends to get the meaning of words", followed by "Asking the teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new words" and a tie between "Guessing the meaning of a word from the textual development" and "Guessing the meaning of a word from mental memory."

Table 3*Students' Perceived Use of Discovery Strategies*

Item	Weight					WX	VD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Consult a teacher or friends to get the meaning of words	11(27.5)	7(17.5)	4(10.0)	12(30.0)	6(15.0)	2.88	N
Ask the teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new words	12(30.0)	9(22.5)	7(17.5)	7(17.5)	5(12.5)	2.60	N
Guess the meaning of a word from the textual development	13(32.5)	9(22.5)	8(20.0)	8(20.0)	2(5.0)	2.43	A
Guess the meaning of a word from mental memory	9(22.5)	14(35.0)	8(20.0)	9(22.5)	0(0.0)	2.43	A

WX = Weighted mean; VD = Verbal Description

A = Agree; N = Neutral

Numbers in parentheses are in percent

These results indicate that majority of the respondents would consult their teachers and friends for meaning. This can be linked to the students' desire or need for speed in acquiring meaning. However, this may not mean that ESL learners find it challenging to analyze the function of a word based on its placement within the sentence, or avoid exerting effort to see the relationship of its parts. Moreover, on guessing the meaning of a word from the textual development, Schmitt (2008) states that learning vocabulary through guessing is one of the preferred strategies among learners. Moreover, Fraser (1999) finds that for L2 learners, one of the favorite techniques is guessing words from the context.

Consequently, by guessing the meaning of words, learners would acquire a range of meanings for a single word from textual development and mental memory. On the other hand, in this current study, some students asked teachers outright either for the word definition or L1 translation. As observed in class, most students would ask for help from the teacher when their seatmates could not give them clear information or association of the word. Students could easily pick up the meaning of the target vocabulary

when a synonym, description, or definition in English was given instead of the (Cebuano) translation of the new word. Hence, data show that because the students are second language learners, deriving meaning from sentence structures possibly does not intimidate them since they are familiar with its language forms.

Use of Memory Strategies (MS)

Table 4 shows the three most frequently used memory strategies by the students. First is “Memorizing the spelling of a word letter by letter”, followed by “Remembering the word by creating its mental image”, and the third is, “Remembering the sentence in which a new word is used”.

Table 4
Students’ Perceived Use of Memory Strategies

Item	Weight					WX	VD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Memorize the spelling of a word letter by letter	12(30.0)	8(20.0)	7(17.5)	10(25.0)	3(7.5)	2.60	N
Remember the a word by creating its mental image	8(20.0)	12(30.0)	11(27.5)	9(22.5)	0(0.0)	2.53	A
Remember the sentence in which a new word is used	9(22.5)	12(30.0)	11(27.5)	7(17.5)	1(2.5)	2.48	A

That “memorizing the spelling of a word letter by letter” tops the list suggests that memorizing the spelling could be the fastest way to learn a new word. The second is “remembering the word by creating its mental image”; this is a technique that forms a mental image that gives another clue when recalling information. The image helps fix an item in the memory and gives the key word. With concrete words, learners often find it easier to use an image rather than words. Research shows that stimuli presented as pictures are better remembered than stimuli presented in words. Third to top the list is “remembering the sentence in which a new word is used.” This data reveals that these students can draw connections and see relationships

through similarities in sounds. This is a good technique many students use to learn a new word. This process of association or even scaffolding brings one to learn and remember more words. Possibly, students learn new words and remember their meanings based on similarity in structure. Laufer (2006) and Nation (2001) find this technique very helpful in improving memory. Students need to practice putting new words into writing and speaking so that they continue to remember them.

Use of Cognitive Strategies (CS)

Table 5 presents the top-three perceived use of CS in acquiring vocabulary: first is “trying to use newly learned words in imaginary situations,” followed by “making up one’s own sentences using the words just learned” and “making a note when one sees a useful expression or phrase,” third is “writing down the synonyms or antonyms of the word.”

Table 5

Students’ Perceived Use of Cognitive Strategies

Item	Weight					WX	VD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Try to use the newly learned words in imaginary situations	10(25.0)	13(32.5)	8(20.0)	5(12.5)	4(10.0)	2.50	A
Make up my own sentences using the words I just learned	11(27.5)	11(27.5)	9(22.5)	7(17.5)	2(5.0)	2.45	A
Make a note when I see a useful expression or phrase	8(20.0)	13(32.5)	12(30.0)	7(17.5)	0(0.0)	2.45	A
Write down the synonyms or antonyms of the word	12(30.0)	12(30.0)	5(12.5)	9(22.5)	2(5.0)	2.43	A

Cognitive strategies refer to a variety of actions to manipulate or coordinate learners’ learning process. Therefore, they are deeply involved in arranging and conceptualizing the lexical knowledge, allowing students to acquire L2 vocabulary more efficiently and use it more effectively as defined by Jeon (2007). “Trying to use the newly learned words in imaginary

situations” ranked first. This skill helps students imagine real situations that would help them apply the context of a word; applying context is imperative to activate the full resources of word meaning.

Ranked equally second are “making a note when coming across a useful expression or phrase” and “making up one’s own sentences using words just learned.” This result shows that majority of the respondents used taking notes as effective means to negotiate word meaning effectively. Interestingly, the most defining step in acquiring lexis in the target language is the actual use of the new word. According to our former linguistics professor Dr. I.Y. Flores, “language is a physical thing.” Language is not abstract; instead, it is an occurrence or phenomenon that is observable. When learners eventually use it in context, they acquire the new vocabulary, mostly when done habitually through practice, in meaningful actual or non-contrived situations; then the target word becomes his. Not only is context necessary to activate the full resources of word meaning, but exposure rates matter as well. Schmitt (2000) asserts that students need to be exposed to the vocabulary repeatedly they are to understand and use the words effortlessly.

The third strategy, “writing down synonyms or antonyms of a target word,” could be another practice learned and carried over from Basic Education. Based on observation, it is common for Filipino college students to write down a list of vocabulary for the very purpose of rote memory. They usually make notes in the hope of using the vocabulary when the need arises. In other words, findings further verify that the target participants’ skill in acquiring lexis is through related meanings and associations or links.

Overall, the data revealed that students’ use of VLS is equal across all categories: DS (2.39 A), MS (2.39 A), and CS (2.39 A). This means that learners used the vocabulary strategies equally in acquiring vocabulary. They also indicated a high perceived use of these strategies. One probable reason could be because the instrument used depends on self-rating. It could be likely that the participants rated their use of vocabulary strategies equally to present themselves better. It must be noted that these students come from collectivist cultures in which the concept of the face is very fundamental. Another explanation could be that they are familiar with the strategies listed in the questionnaire because they come from an ESL setting.

Level of Vocabulary Ability among ESL learners

The Vocabulary Ability Test scored determined the level of vocabulary ability among the ESL learners. Students' vocabulary ability was obtained using an adapted version of Jeon's Vocabulary Ability Test. Table 6 presents the ESL learners scores: Lowest score obtained: 41; Highest score obtained: 60. All respondents belonged to the upper group.

Table 6

Distribution of Participants in Terms of Vocabulary Ability

Score	<i>f</i>	%
1-35	0	0.00
36-70	40	100.00
Total	40	
Mean: 48		

Lowest score obtained: 41; Highest score obtained: 60

These are L2 learners who are exposed to the target language. It could also be that students from the private university have high socioeconomic status; hence, they have accessibility to resources at home. Binti-Abdul-Razak's (2014) study reveals that students who have higher levels of social and economic status are more likely to obtain higher scores on the proficiency test and higher grades in English. SES background is related to achievement and proficiency level. It is also a fundamental factor that may contribute to English language learning outcomes. The findings reveal that ESL learners are accustomed to acquiring vocabulary based on meaning discovery, memorization-related strategies, and cognitive strategy. ESL students of English for the academic need to reach a certain level of academic vocabulary ability to comprehend required readings and accomplish tasks efficiently (Nation, 2001).

Relationship between Students' Vocabulary Test Ability and Vocabulary Learning Strategy Use

The third research question was answered using Pearson Product Moment to determine the relationship between vocabulary test ability and perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies. Table 7 indicates no significant

relationship between the respondents' vocabulary test ability and perceived use of VLS. For a relationship to be significant, the p-value must be equal to or lesser than 0.05, which is the margin of error. In this case, the relationship is not significant.

Table 7

Relationship between Vocabulary Test Ability and Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Score	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Test I and Perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies	-0.16	0.33
Test II and perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies	-0.09	0.59
Overall and perceived use of vocabulary learning strategies	-0.12	0.45

r = Pearson Product Moment *r*; *p* = Probability Value

The findings of non-significance between overall strategy use and vocabulary knowledge indicate that strategy might not influence their vocabulary knowledge. This finding contradicts some existing studies e.g., Teng (2015), Jeon (2007), Wei (2007) but corroborates with Amirian et al. (2015). Amirian, Mallahi, and Zaghi (2015) explored self-regulation and vocabulary size. Their results revealed no significant relationship between the two variables except multiple regressions which indicated that the metacognitive control compared to the other subscales might predict learners' vocabulary size. These studies did not find any significant correlations between strategy use and vocabulary. However, their study also compared the self-regulatory strategy use of learners in different experience groups and found the first year students had a higher mean score in their self-regulation capacity, which could explain the strategies they had learnt in their Study Skills courses.

However, some individual memory strategies and some cognitive strategies in the present study predicted the learners' vocabulary knowledge. Unlike this study, Gu and Johnson's study (1996) showed a negative relation of some memory strategies with their vocabulary knowledge. Students'

use of new words in a sentence and connecting a new word to an image helped them remember and learn new vocabulary. The use of synonyms or antonyms also predicted their vocabulary knowledge. Teng (1998) also did not find any positive correlation between affective strategies and vocabulary knowledge in his study.

Overall, in the present study, although there is no significant relationship between the vocabulary strategies and vocabulary ability test, the ESL learners still need to use some vocabulary strategies to vocabulary learning and to performance in receptive skills of language learning strategies for positive L2 learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers conclude that the results contradict Jeon's study that there is a close relationship between Vocabulary Ability and the use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies. The present study revealed that there is no significant relationship between vocabulary strategy use and vocabulary test ability. ESL learners practice reading comprehension process, although with reading comprehension process applies basic aspects of word recognition, phonetics, repetition, experience, etc., that are also connected to vocabulary strategies. Building up a vocabulary is a complicated process. Thus, teachers should regularly revisit the lexis part of a language course and design vocabulary activities informed by the dominant strategies. Oxford (1992) claims that many poor L2 learners are aware of the strategies they use, can clearly describe them, and employ just as many strategies as good L2 learners. However, "poor learners apply these strategies in a random, even desperate manner, without careful organization and without assigning specific strategies to specific tasks" (p. 126). Teachers should, therefore, be able to spot when learners are trying to retrieve a partially learned item and help them by eliciting it. The teacher may aid the students with prompts and questions or, in other words, explicitly apply VLS in teaching-learning situations. Teachers should also help students have a more positive attitude toward using VLS in and out of the classroom. Rodgers (2018) emphasized that what learners need during language development is to be directed and guided by their teachers to maximize learning both inside and outside the classroom.

With special attention to certain clues, one can raise vocabulary power by applying Vocabulary Learning Strategies. A word-power workout is a challenge worthy of one's best efforts: this is achieved by using a contextual approach in teaching-learning situations, requiring the learner's conscious involvement in vocabulary learning through the context of high-quality texts to unlock, power-up, charge, and recharge language learning. In the school setting, a requisite program for vocabulary growth is needed to develop that skill most worth having, plus an increased awareness for a better perspective. Teachers can make a good habit of finishing lessons with a review of the language they have collected on the board during the lesson and starting every new lesson with a quick revision of the language covered earlier on the course.

Although the teaching of idioms did not top the results under memory strategy, it would be worth noting that the need to focus more on language at a phraseological level instead of at the word level requires integration of grammar and lexis teaching. Thus, words should not be presented in lists of separate decontextualized items but as parts of phrases commonly occur. By adhering to Sinclair's idiom principle and phraseology, when designing tasks, teachers could focus on phrases that most commonly realize functions frequently needed in a particular register or field relevant to the learners (Sinclair, 1991).

Teachers, as materials designers, can make use of the advances in computer-based studies of language (Moudraia, 2001). Databases of language corpora, for instance, include a list of terminologies that are conventions of specific technical writing genres. For example, the COBUILD project aims to produce an accurate description of the English language to form the basis for the design of a lexical syllabus (Sinclair, 1987).

While there is no best strategy in lexical acquisition as language is dynamic, and learners' L2 acquisition varies according to variables affecting vocabulary learning, the current study has established that teachers as facilitators of learning recognize the importance of intentional and incidental vocabulary learning in designing tasks and choosing materials. While researchers continue to argue the best ways to improve the acquisition of vocabulary in the target language, this study presents our responsibility as teachers to make sure that regular revisiting of the lexis is part of a language course.

This current study could serve as a pilot survey to a more comprehensive study on Learners' Vocabulary Ability and Vocabulary Learning Strategies. The researchers suggest that triangulation could be employed through FGD and interviews. Likewise, the questionnaire items adapted from the study conducted by Jeon (2007) be modified for clarity, comprehension, and complexity to suit the target participants. Regarding reliability in data gathering, a moderator who would explain the VLS list in the questionnaire to the survey respondents is recommended to generate more reliable responses.

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