Abstract— Words are the basic building blocks of a language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and the whole texts are formed. Vocabulary is central to language and language learning and vocabulary learning is vital to the language learners. One subcategory of language learning strategies is vocabulary learning strategies and defined as what the learners do to reach the meaning of new words, hold these words in long-term memory, recall them when comprehension is used and use them in producing language. The aim of this study was to find out to what extent poor Iranian high school students use metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective vocabulary learning strategies and which vocabulary learning strategies have the highest and lowest use among the participants. To conduct the study, a total of 45 high school female students in a high-school in Tabriz, Iran, participated in this survey. A vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire was administrated to the participants. The results of the descriptive statistics revealed that among the four categories investigated, cognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategy, followed by social, affective and metacognitive, strategies, respectively. The implications and recommendations are also presented.

Keywords— poor language learner, Vocabulary Learning Strategies, metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies, cognitive vocabulary learning strategies, social vocabulary learning strategies, affective vocabulary learning strategies.

1. Introduction

It’s a crucial issue to know what exactly the term "word" means. Linguists such as Carter (1987) and Jackson (1991) believe that words are ambiguous and difficult to define. According to Moon (1997), a word is “a string of characters, or a sequence of one or more morphemes, which is bounded at either end by a space or by punctuation (p. 40). Bloomfield (1933, as cited in Jackson & Ze Amvela (2007 p. 58)) defines a word as “a form which can occur in isolation and have meaning but which cannot be analysed into elements which can all occur alone and also have meaning.” Considering these definitions, vocabulary learning seems to be an integral and important area of language teaching as Read (2000) defines “words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed” (p. 1). Because of the importance of vocabulary in language learning, there are many studies that deal with vocabulary learning strategies.

According to (Ruutmets, 2005), one subcategory of language learning strategies is vocabulary learning strategies and defined as what the learners do to reach the meaning of new words, hold these words in long-term memory, recall them when comprehension is used and use them in producing language. Several experts such as (Oxford 1990, O’Malley and Chamot 1990) believe, that vocabulary learning strategies should be taught to foreign language learners as tools to help them to become independent and efficient language learners.

According to Richards and Lockhart (1995), language learners have their own beliefs, goals, attitudes and decisions, which influence the way language is learnt (p. 52). Some researchers such as (Ellis, 1995; Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1987) believe that foreign language learners develop some beliefs about language learning in the process of experiencing and using a new language. Research done by Peacock (2001) proves that the quality of the learning is influenced by students’ beliefs about language learning. Rubín (1975), studied what it was that “good” language learners do to be successful in language learning that poor language learners does not do.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to find out what vocabulary learning strategies are used by poor Iranian high school students. In this regard, the following research questions were posed:

1. To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies (MVLS)?
2. To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Cognitive vocabulary learning strategies (CVLS)?
3. To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Social vocabulary learning strategies (SVLS)?
4. To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Affective vocabulary learning strategies (AVLS)?
2. Literature Review

Gu (1994) believes that the whole language ability of a learner is predicted by the size of the vocabularies one knows. According to Ahmed (1989), the learners' success in learning a foreign language and his flexibility in using language is determined, to a large extent, by the ways a learner learns vocabulary. Conventionally, when we talk about knowing a word, we mean knowing its definition (Cook, 2001, pp.60-61). However, knowing a word by sight and sound and knowing a word’s definition are not the same as knowing how to use the word correctly, as well as being able to use that word in speech and writing, and understanding it when it is heard or seen in various contexts (Miller & Gildea, 1987). It also involves teachers’ helping them to model how to use a variety of strategies. There are two types of knowledge that become convenient when discussing how a language learner understands the meaning of words and their use and how one is able to manipulate this knowledge. The two sets of knowledge are called the receptive or passive knowledge and the productive or active knowledge. Knowing a word, then, depends on what kind of knowledge is meant and what kind of knowing is considered to be adequate for the learning purpose (Nation 1990, p. 31).

Schmitt (1997) define different strategies as following: Cognitive strategies are the strategies which accomplish the process of using or converting the language material. Social strategies develop interaction either amongst students or teacher and students. Memory strategies are recalling the meaning word based on its decoding and connection with the student’s background knowledge. Metacognitive strategies help students to monitor and evaluate their process of learning and to use consciously certain techniques that improve performance in the target language.

Alhaisoni (2012) used SILL with 701 Saudi EFL undergraduates to examine the relationship between type and frequency of language learning strategies and gender and proficiency level. The results showed that cognitive and metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used and affective strategies and memory strategies were the least frequently used. Bialystok (1978) provides a foreign language learning model which put an emphasis on the learners' beliefs as a complementary component of language learning. Oxford (1990) suggests specifically eight factors influencing VLSs use of language learners: (1) motivation; (2) gender; (3) culture background; (4) attitudes and beliefs; (5) types of task; (6) age and L2 stage; (7) learning style; and (8) tolerance of ambiguity. Definitely, the present study is also connecting with the above mentioned factors and As Wenden (1987) suggests, “there is almost no mention in the literature of second language learners’ reflections on the assumptions or beliefs underlying their choice of strategies” (p. 103) This study considers what vocabulary learning strategies are used by poor Iranian high school students.

The similar weakness is also stressed by Horwitz (1987) by highlighting the relationship between the beliefs that students hold, and their language learning strategies. It is recognized by (Rubin, 1975) and Stern (1975) that the good language learner differs in his/her approach, study habits, preference, persistence and language behavior from the poor learner. However, Oxford has a different opinion (1992, p. 126). She claims that many of the poor L2 learners are indeed 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.

3. Method

3.1 Design

As the present study aimed to determine the use of vocabulary learning strategies used by poor Iranian high school students using a questionnaire, the descriptive survey research was selected as the most appropriate design.

3.2 Participants

The participants of the study were 45 female high school students in Tabriz, Iran. The students of four classes whose English grades were less than 15 which considered as poor language learners participated in this study. Their age range was 15-17. All of the students were required to pass the English course as one of their main courses in school. The required book for them to study in school is the one designed by Iran educational system. Their books are divided into four parts including: reading, vocabulary and grammar, and pronunciation. Their teachers taught them new vocabularies through reading. The lessons started by explaining the topic and continued the process of teaching by reading the text. Once she wrote new words on the board, she explained them and wrote English meaning of the words next to them. Then, it was the time the students were required to read the text one more time. In the end, students did the exercises of the related reading (or text). In addition to English, students also studied Arabic as a foreign language; the latter reflected the Islamic curriculum in the school. The participants’ first language is either Persian or Turkish. They study English for about 4 hours per week in school. Teachers in schools teach vocabularies by translating words, and some students attend English classes out of school in institutes 3 days a week (6 hours per week).

3.3 Instruments

A questionnaire taken from Gue and Johnson (1996) was employed in the study included a vocabulary learning strategy. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section one involved the instructions on the questionnaire and the required demographic information including the class, name and age. The participants were required to respond truthfully since their answers would not influence their course grade. Section two which is the main body of the questionnaire consisted of 49 items with 4 categories including Metacognitive VLS, cognitive VLS, social VLS, Affective VLS. This questionnaire is a likert-type scale with five responses, from 1 to 5 (1= never, 2= seldom, 3= sometimes, 4= often, and 5= always) for each item. The participants were asked to choose the number that indicates how often they use the given strategy.

The items of each strategy category are grouped as: Metacognitive vocabulary learning strategy (MVLS): items 1-8.
Cognitive vocabulary learning strategy (CVLS): items 9-44
Social vocabulary learning strategy (SVLS): items 45-47
Affective vocabulary learning strategy (AVLS): items 48-49

The questionnaire was translated into the Persian and the Persian version was used in the data collection to avoid misunderstanding that the English version might cause. This version was also piloted for any ambiguous items before the actual data collection.

3.4 Procedure
The study was conducted in 2014 within a week. The aim of the study was clarified to the students and they agreed to participate in the study. The Persian version of the questionnaire was used and it was handed out during the participants’ normal class times under the permission of their respective teachers. To make sure that each participant will get a question sheet, the questionnaires were first numbered before distribution. At the beginning of each questionnaire, there was an instruction in Persian, which gave students enough information about how to answer the items. Instruction was repeated orally and two points were stressed: (1) their performance on the questionnaires would not have any influence on their course grade. So, they were required to offer their responses as truly as possible, (2) the participants were told not to discuss with others when filling in the questionnaire. They were allowed to ask any questions concerning the questionnaire. The collected data were entered into the SPSS 16.0 for further analysis. For each research question, descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations for main categories of the questionnaire and each item were obtained.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations are used to find out vocabulary learning strategies preferred by the participants.

4.1 Results of the research question one:
To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies?
To answer the first research question and determine to what extent learners use the Metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies, the mean score and standard deviation for MVLS were calculated (see Table 4.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive VLS</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results shown in Table 4.1 among four Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Metacognitive strategy has with M=1.79 and SD=1.02 is the least used strategy among the participants.

4.2 Results of the research question two:

To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Cognitive vocabulary learning strategies?
To answer the second research question and determine to what extent learners use the Cognitive vocabulary learning strategies, the mean score and standard deviation for CVLS was calculated (see Table 4.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive VLS</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results shown in Table 4.2 among four Vocabulary Learning Strategies, cognitive strategy with M=3.76 and SD=1.36 is the least used strategy among the participant.

4.3 Results of the research question three:
To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Social vocabulary learning strategies?
To answer the third research question and determine to what extent learners use the social vocabulary learning strategies, the mean score and standard deviation for SVLS was calculated (see Table 4.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social VLS</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results shown in Table 4.3 among four Vocabulary Learning Strategies, social strategy with M=2.88 and SD=1.25 is the least used strategy among the participants.

4.4 Results of the research question four:
To what extent poor Iranian high school students use Affective vocabulary learning strategies?
To answer the fourth research question and determine to what extent learners use the affective vocabulary learning strategies, the mean score and standard deviation for AVLS was calculated (see Table 4.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective VLS</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the results shown in Table 4.2 among four Vocabulary Learning Strategies, Affective strategy with M=2.88 and SD=1.25 is the least used strategy among the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive VLS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive VLS</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social VLS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective VLS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. VLS=vocabulary learning strategy

It can be seen from the above table that the category of Cognitive strategies receives the highest mean score (M=3.76, SD=1.36) among all the categories, which implies that it is the most frequently used category among four categories. The second highest mean score is the category of Affective strategies (M=2.88, SD=1.25), followed by the category of Social Strategies (M=2.59, SD=1.21) and finally Metacognitive strategies (M=1.79, SD=1.02), respectively.

In other words, the participants adopted more Cognitive strategies than other strategies. According to O’malley and Chamot (1990), it means that they directly focus on the material to be learned and also Oxford (1990) believed it makes language learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to find out the vocabulary learning strategies used by poor Iranian high school students including metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies. The results of the survey revealed that cognitive strategy is the most frequently used strategy among participants. Social strategy is the second frequently used strategies. The third frequently used strategy is affective strategy and the least frequently used strategy is metacognitive strategy it means that metacognitive strategy is not actively used by the participants.

Regarding the result of this study, teachers can take into account the most and least frequently used strategies by poor students. The results can help the teachers to find ways of increasing the least used strategy which is metacognitive strategy. This means help students to monitor and evaluate their process of learning and to use consciously certain techniques that improve performance in the target language and also to be aware of their own learning process (Flavell, 1970).

This study focused on the vls used by poor female Iranian high school students. Therefore, the results may not be generalized to the whole community of EFL or ESL students at different levels or in different countries. Further research is recommended in the case of finding about the vls used by other EFL and ESL settings and comparing the findings with the results of the present study.