The relationship between the anxiety level of Iranian elementary EFL learners and their vocabulary learning strategies

Ghasem Tayyebi*, Islamic Azad University of Kazeron, Kazeron, Iran

Abstract

The current study aimed at examining the relationship between anxiety level of Iranian elementary English as a foreign language learners and the strategies that they adopt for learning English vocabulary. To this end, based on the performance of the participants on the Quick Placement Test, the researcher recruited 100 participants through availability sampling. To determine the strategies that the participants employ for learning English vocabulary, Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning (VL) strategies questionnaire was administered. Also, the Spearman correlation was run to determine the correlation between various levels of anxiety and different VL strategies. The findings of the current study indicated that the effects of anxiety can adversely affect a person's use of VL strategies. Likewise, when there is an increase in anxiety, VL strategy use decreases to a significant extent.

Keywords: Vocabulary learning, strategies, foreign language, classroom, anxiety scale.

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* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Ghasem Tayyebi**,** Islamic Azad university of Kazeron, Kazeron, Iran.
E-mail address: ghasem_tayyebi@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

English is the prevailing language of knowledge, trade, politics, banking, entertainment and the Internet, which makes it the current lingua franca. English is also the language of computing that is why it is a global language. Foreign language learners may face different challenges during the process of learning a language, one of which is vocabulary learning (VL) (Ghazal, 2007). Nunan (1991) stated that the acquisition of a sufficient vocabulary is absolutely necessary for using the second language successfully because, without sufficient vocabulary, we will be unable to use the structures and functions we have learned for comprehensible communication. So, an increase in vocabulary knowledge is required for learning another language, throughout all levels of proficiency.

English as a foreign language (EFL) learners always have difficulties with forgetting the vocabularies they have memorised. In order to suggest solutions to this problem or even present some useful guidelines for both learners and teachers in this regard, many studies have been conducted in the field of VL. EFL learners use a number of strategies to learn new vocabularies without any distinguishing criteria about which strategy to choose and which one to exclude. Having knowledge about the diverse types of choices in VLSs will help teachers, researchers and curriculum developers to design appropriate materials for classroom purposes. VLSs are intuitively appealing to teachers and learners. It has also become a popular research topic among researchers in the last two decades (Young, 1999).

In addition, VLSs create knowledge that enables learners to find out the meaning of new vocabulary and keep them in their long-term memory. Most of the undertakings in an EFL context, such as guessing the meaning of the unfamiliar word from context, using a dictionary, or keeping the information in the memory, entail knowledge of vocabulary strategies. VL is a critical process of language learning, and as Yaacob (2018) puts it, it is at the heart of mastering a foreign language. Therefore, knowledge about VLSs will lead to successful communication, as well as skilled and effective learning of other aspects of the target language.

Besides these strategies due to the importance of VL, foreign language researchers and educators have always tried to find out the factors that might affect VL. According to Brown (2007) and Siriwan (2007), studies on language learning and teaching indicate that research have taken into account a vast range of influential variables from various domains such as psychology, neurology, affective and cognition. They include language aptitude, language learning styles and strategies, social, economic and political contexts, efficacy, empathy, self-esteem, critical thinking, motivation and anxiety.

As an affective variable, anxiety is believed to affect second/foreign language acquisition. Although all aspects of using and learning a foreign language can cause anxiety, both listening and speaking are usually declared as the most anxiety arousing of foreign language activities. Foreign language anxiety is usually studied and seen in a language classroom situation. It has been explained that language learning is a deeply disturbing psychological proposition as it imperils an individual's self-understanding and perspective. Many studies (e.g., Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Young, 1999) have been conducted to find the correlation between anxiety and achievement in learning a second language and most have presented a negative correlation between anxiety and language learning. Psychologically, the concept of anxiety is seen, according to Scovel (1978, p.34), as an emotional state of 'apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object', and in Horwitz et al. (1986, p.125) as 'subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system'. Investigators, recognising the distinction between language anxiety and other forms of anxiety, have suggested that the anxiety experienced in the

course of learning a foreign language is specific and unique (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989).

Besides, although there are many reasons to regard anxiety as influential variables, which may extremely anticipate EFL learners' choice of VLSs, a little extraordinary attempt has been made to investigate this variable as related to VLSs of Iranian EFL learners and the issue is still unknown in Iran EFL context, where a large number of individuals are learning EFL, and this number is increasing day by day.

Considering the importance of vocabulary and VLSs, as well as the role of anxiety in learning, to the researcher's best knowledge, the type of VLSs employed by Iranian elementary EFL learners at various levels of anxiety have not been addressed. In other words, the relationship between these variables has not been examined and the type of VLSs that Iranian EFL learners with different anxiety levels adopt has not been reported. Also, with regard to the significant role of the variables of the current study and in light of the findings of studies related to the objectives of the present study, the researcher realised that the findings of the current study can provide a better insight into the area. With regard to VLSs, most of the previous studies have been conducted to examine various aspects of VLSs and their relationship with attitude, language proficiency, gender and tasks; however, the area mentioned in the objectives of the present study has remained untouched. Hence, the findings can be of immense importance for EFL teachers and learners as well as the materials developers who are interested in getting a more comprehensive picture of VLSs and the anxiety of Iranian EFL learners and the relationship between these variables.

1.1. Objectives of the study

As Sy (1994) argues, in guiding students to become efficient in English, EFL teachers may need to explore further the influence of different learner variables on the use of vocabulary strategies by learners. Additionally, as it was reported in the statement of the problem section, the researcher strongly felt that there is a gap in the literature that needs to be investigated. In this connection, the current study intended to address the gap and it follows the following objectives:

1. The researcher first intended to identify the VLSs adopted by Iranian elementary EFL learners for learning English vocabulary. In this phase, Schmitt's (1997) VLSs questionnaire was employed.

2. The researcher also intended to investigate the anxiety level of Iranian elementary EFL learners through foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986). In this phase, the anxiety level (high, mid and low) of EFL learners was examined.

3. Finally, the researcher was to determine if there is a significant relationship between the anxiety level of Iranian elementary EFL learners and the strategies they adopt for learning English vocabulary. In line with the objectives of this study, the following research questions were posed:

Q1. What strategies are adopted by Iranian elementary EFL learners for learning English vocabulary?

Q2. What is the anxiety level of Iranian elementary EFL learners?

Q3. Is there any significant relationship between the anxiety level of Iranian elementary EFL learners and the strategies they employ for learning English vocabulary?

1.2. Background

Vocabulary knowledge is often considered as a critical factor for second-language learners because a deficiency in vocabulary knowledge prevents effective communication. According to the importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (2000, p. 55) emphasises that 'lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language'. Nation (2001) further states vocabulary knowledge is a supplementary factor for language use. In fact, there is a significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge of learners and their language use. That is, increasing vocabulary knowledge leads to improving language use.

Needless to say, vocabulary is a vital part of language learning and teaching. In this regard, VLSs research has increased in the last 20 years. Laufer (1999) pointed out that language acquisition cannot take place without learning and mastery of words or vocabulary. In order to learn vocabulary efficiently, the utilisation of learning strategies is very important and surely it depends on learners' attempts. So, researchers have mentioned a large number of VLSs used by the learners.

1.2.1. Taxonomy of VLSs

Many scholars and researchers have attempted to define and proposed various classifications of VLSs (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford1990; Schmitt, 1997, 2000; Takač & Singleton, 2008). One of the most important classifications of these strategies is Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of learning strategies. This taxonomy involves two types of strategies: Direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies include metacognitive, social strategies and affective strategies. However, for the purpose of this study, the taxonomy developed by Schmitt (1997) has been used. Schmitt's taxonomy classifies VLSs into two main types of strategy: discovery and consolidation strategies.

Schmitt's taxonomy is also based on a distinction between vocabulary activities suggested by Cook and Mayer (1983) and Nation (1990). They divide vocabulary activities into a) the initial discovery of a word's meaning and b) remembering that word once it has been introduced (Schmitt, 1997). Schmitt labels the strategies that serve the first function 'Discovery Strategies' and those that serve the second 'Consolidating Strategies'. They are divided into four main categories: social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

1.2.2. Anxiety

As Brown (1994) stated, anxiety is one of the causes of language failure. In fact, anxiety is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon (Scovel, 1991). In fact, anxiety is the feeling of apprehension involving and affecting both the physical condition and the nervous system. However, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) state that there is not a standard definition of anxiety. Young (1990) points out that the definition of anxiety is ,unfixed and it depends on the research purpose. Having a standard definition is not necessary because the definition of language anxiety should cover the scope of what is being studied. Therefore, the definition of anxiety for this research is the feeling of apprehension, nervousness or worry that interrupts students' performance of VL.

1.2.3. Types of anxiety

Alpert and Haper (1960) and Spielmann and Raddnofsky (2001) classify anxiety into three types as:

1. Helpful anxiety or facilitating anxiety: helpful anxiety or facilitating anxiety is positive feelings in keeping students doing something intently.

2. Harmful anxiety or debilitating anxiety: harmful anxiety or debilitating anxiety is negative feelings that can harm learners' performance, both indirectly through worry and directly by reducing involvement and making avoidance (Oxford, 1999).

3. Neutral anxiety: neutral anxiety has no effect on the language learning process (Phillips, 2005)

1.2.4. Causes of anxiety

In different studies, researchers have presented a variety of factors making anxiety in language learning classrooms. According to Bailey and Ochsner (1983), anxiety in class can be made by competitiveness, tests and learners' relationship with their teachers. Besides, Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that several factors such as communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation arouse the feeling of anxiety and according to them they developed a FLCAS. This scale includes 33 items. In addition, Price (1991) names the following as the causes of anxiety: (a) the difficulty level of foreign language classes, (b) personal perception of language aptitude, (c) certain personality variables (e.g., perfectionism and fear of public speaking) and (d) stressful classroom experiences. Finally, Young (1991) refers to the following as the possible causes of anxiety: a. personal and interpersonal, b. learner beliefs about language learning, c. instructor beliefs about language teaching, d. instructor–learner interactions, e. classroom procedures and f. language tests.

2. Methods and Materials

A descriptive design was employed to address the first and the second research question. According to Borg and Gall (1989), descriptive studies are aimed at finding out 'what is', so observational and survey methods are frequently used to collect descriptive data. Moreover, to answer the third research question, a correlational design was adopted. In general, a correlational study is a quantitative method of research in which you have two or more quantitative variables from the same group of participants, and you are trying to determine if there is a relationship between the two variables (i.e., a similarity in the pattern of scores between the two variables, not a difference between their means). On the whole, the current study is quantitative in nature.

2.1. Participants

In fact, proficiency level may influence the anxiety level of EFL learners as well as the strategies they use to learn English vocabulary. As a result, to control the variable of proficiency level, only elementary EFL learners were selected for the current study. This was carried out through the administration of the Quick Placement Test (QPT). The researcher personally attended four classes of two high schools in Kazeroun and administered the tests to them. In fact, the researcher did not have access to all Iranian EFL learners; as a result, she recruited the participants through convenient sampling. In other words, only those participants who were appropriate and available for this study were selected. The sample included 100 females and the age of participants was 17–18 years old. Also, all these four classes had the same English teacher.

2.2. Instruments

To answer the research questions of the study, three instruments were employed, namely QPT, the VLSs questionnaire by Schmitt (1997) and the FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986). Each of these instruments is elaborated separately below.

2.2.1. QPT

QPT is a flexible test of English language proficiency developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL (2007) to give teachers a reliable and time-saving method of finding a student's level of English. It is quick and easy to administer and is ideal for placement testing and examination screening. All students who take the paper and pen version should complete Part One. Part Two should only be completed by those students who have scored more than a predetermined score in Part One.

2.2.2. VLSs by Schmitt (1997)

The researcher adopted a questionnaire as a major research method to elicit participants' VLSs. In this regard, the current study made use of the questionnaire adapted from Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of VLSs (see Appendix A). In total, the questionnaire consisted of 41 items of VLSs. All 41 items in the questionnaire are classified under 5 different groups of strategies. The first 11 statements entail memory strategies (items 1–11). These 11 statements are based on linking the words to be learned with some previously learned knowledge. The nine following statements consist of determination strategies. These strategies are used by an individual when faced with discovering a new word's meaning without recourse to another person's expertise (item 12–20). The other six statements entail social strategies (items 21–26). These items contain questioning, cooperating with peers and developing empathy. Items 27–35 are based on cognitive strategies and the following six statements on metacognitive strategies (items 36–41). In fact, this questionnaire was chosen to measure the range and the frequency of VLSs EFL learners use. The inventory can be viewed as a quantitative questionnaire because the frequency of use was measured by a 5-point Likert scale. It consists of never = 1, seldom = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4 and always = 5. Possible scores range from 41 to 205. The mean score of each category was calculated and the sum of the means of all categories showed the overall score of the participant. The mean score ranges from 1 to 5.

The evidence of construct-related, content-related and criterion-related validity was originally provided (Schmitt, 1997), respectively, using factor analysis, consultation with experts and correlating with Oxford's SILL. For the current study, the supervisor and two other experts confirmed the validity of the questionnaire for the Iranian EFL context with minor changes. Also, through piloting (as reported below in the procedure section), the researcher determined the reliability index of the questionnaire (r = 0.81)

2.2.3. FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986)

To determine the anxiety level of the participants, the FLCAS was employed. Horwitz designed the scale , Horwitz et al. (1986) and it consists of 33 questions. All the items of this instrument are based on student self-reports, clinical experience and a review of related instruments (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.560). FLCAS items were formulated taking into account: (a) comments made by anxious students who took part in a 'Support Group for Foreign Language Learning' at the University of Texas at Austin, who described their problems when learning English in the classroom; (b) experiences recounted by counsellors/tutors at the Learning Skills Centre at the same University; (c) Horwitz's personal experience as a language teacher of anxious students; and (d) surveys of other instruments used in the evaluation of anxiety. These were 'measures of test anxiety (Sarason, 1978), speech anxiety (Paul, 1966) and communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1970)' (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 560); five items from the French Class Anxiety Scale (Gardner, Clément, Smythe & Smythe, 1979), which were 'made generic and added to the item pool' (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 560).

FLCAS has 33 items with which respondents express the extent of their agreement or of their disagreement with statements about how they experience learning a foreign language in the classroom, and 'are reflective of communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation' (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.129). As regards communication apprehension, several items are about nervousness felt when speaking and others are about tension experienced when listening. Two examples are item 9: 'I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class', and item 4: 'It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language' (p. 129). Item 21 is an example of a statement concerning test-anxiety: 'The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get' (p. 130), and item 13 is illustrative of fear of negative evaluation: 'It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class' (p. 129).

Certain items express a lack of anxiety in the language learning situation, such as item 18: 'I feel confident when I speak in a foreign language class' (p. 129). The inventory can be viewed as a quantitative questionnaire because it consists of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from each item offers 5-point Likert-type responses, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree': Strongly agree (SA) = 5; Agree (A) = 4; Neither agree nor disagree (N) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; Strongly disagree (SD) = 1. Possible scores range from 33 to 165; the sum of the answers will show the participant score; according to the FLCAS there are three levels of anxiety among learners: less than 76 points – low anxiety, 76–119 points – moderate anxiety and more than 119 points – high anxiety.

The reliability and validity of the test have also been reported by the test developers. The main test was given to 573 EFL learners from fourth grades to sixth grades in eight different schools in order to confirm the validity and reliability of the FLCAS. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modelling demonstrated that the FLCAS is a valid (TLI, AGFI, CFI> 0.94, RMSEA = 0.049) and reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.891) instrument. Similar to the previous section, the validity of the questionnaire for the Iranian EFL context was approved by the thesis supervisor as well as two other experts in this field. Also, in the piloting phase (as reported in Section 2.3) the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach's α as well ($r = 0.73$).

2.3. Data collection procedure

After careful consideration and comparison of different data gathering methods, the current research employed questionnaires. The researcher concluded the best results could be achieved with this method. So, in order to choose the appropriate questionnaires to collect the data, first, the subject matter experts including the thesis supervisor of the current study were asked to comment on the validity of the questionnaires. The nature and objectives of the study were explained to them. This was done to make sure if appropriate instruments were selected for the study. Then, both of the questionnaires were translated by the researcher into Persian and their validities were checked through back-translation by two experts including the supervisor.

Next, the piloting phase was conducted. It aimed at testing the practicability of the instruments used by the researchers, including the clarity and comprehensibility of all items and instructions on the questionnaire and the reliability coefficients. The pilot study was conducted on 25 students with similar characteristics to those of the target population. The results were obtained for the reliability analysis through Cronbach's alpha ($r = 0.81$), which indicated an adequate estimate of reliability.

Having assured of the validity and reliability of the questionnaires, the researcher administered the QPT to 150 students in an online session. Only elementary students were recruited for the study based on the scoring procedure available for this standardised test. On the whole, 120 elementary students were selected. Then, the questionnaires were administered in separate online sessions

through WhatsApp because of school holidays through the outbreak of coronavirus. Unfortunately, some of the students did not answer the second test which was about the VLSs; so, they were excused from the study.

At last, 100 Iranian elementary EFL learners were selected for this study. They were encoded numerically for further analyses. The researcher assigned 30 minutes for each test. Also, the participants were given information concerning the purpose and content of the study. They were assured that the information would be kept confidential and answers would be used anonymously. In addition, the participants were free not to participate in the tests. Having collected the questionnaires, the scores obtained based on the performance of the participants on the tests were fed into SPSS software version (22) for analysis.

3. Results

Firstly, the researcher checked the normality of the distribution of each variable and provided the necessary graphs. Next, to answer the first research question, the frequency, mean and standard deviation (SD) of each category of VLS was computed and reported separately. The rank order of VLSs was reported. The total score on the questionnaire was also provided for further investigation.

Then, to answer the second research question, the same procedure was applied. Having scored the questionnaires, the researcher determined the anxiety level of the students in accordance with the criteria given in the FLCAS questionnaire as reported in the instrument section. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics for each level of anxiety were calculated. Also, the rank order of strategies adopted by each level of anxiety was reported separately.

And finally, depending on the normality status of the distributions, a Spearman correlation was run and the results with relevant tables and graphs were reported. These results indicated the relationship between the overall anxiety level of participants and the overall strategies they adopted for learning English vocabulary.

3.1. VLSs

According to Oxford's (1997) scoring system, score 1–2.4 showed low VLS use, 2.4–3.5 showed medium VLS use and 3.5–5 showed high VLS use. So, based on Table 1 and Oxford's (1997) scoring system, the respondents of the present study were found to be medium VLS users with a mean score of 3.01 and SD of 0.42 for overall VLS use. The descriptive statistics related to the participants' reported utilisation of VLSs, measured by the VLS questionnaire, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of overall VLSs

Mean	SD	Min	Max
3.01	0.42	2.26	4.14

Also, in order to determine the rank order of the VLSs adopted by the participants, the mean and SD for each category of the inventory were calculated separately and were analysed based on Oxford's (1997) scoring system. As depicted in Table 2, social strategies (*M* = 3.32) were determined as the most frequently used VLSs by the respondents, followed by memory (*M* = 3.05), determination (*M* = 2.98) and cognitive strategies (*M* = 2.92). Furthermore, the metacognitive strategy was determined as the least frequently used VLS with a mean score of 2.84. Also, as mentioned in the previous section, Oxford's (1997) scoring system was used to determine high, medium and low VLS users. Based on this scoring system, the mean score for overall VLS use and each category of strategies were calculated.

The results show that all categories of VLSs were used at the medium level which showed the learners were somehow familiar with all these VLSs.

Table 2. Rank order of VLSs

Strategy	Mean	SD	Rank	Strategy use
Social strategy	3.32	0.56	1	Medium
Memory strategy	3.05	0.45	2	Medium
Determination strategy	2.98	58	3	Medium
Cognitive strategy	2.92	0.62	4	Medium
Metacognitive strategy	2.84	0.53	5	Medium

3.2. Anxiety

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics on the second variable of the study, i.e., anxiety. This construct was measured by administering the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986) to answer research question number two. As given in Table 3, the mean of the distribution is 82.36 with the SD of 26.20. According to the FLCAS, there are three levels of anxiety among learners: less than 76 points – low anxiety, 76–119 points – moderate anxiety and more than 119 points – high anxiety. So, according to the above-mentioned scores and the results of Table 3, it could be concluded that the participants were moderately anxious. Minimum and maximum scores of the distribution are also given in this table.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of overall anxiety

Mean	SD	Minutes	Max
82.36	26.20	45.00	149

Also**,** Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics on the different anxiety levels of participants. As given below, the mean of the distribution for low anxiety level is 61.39 with a SD of 9.38. The next level is moderate anxiety with a mean score of 89.56 and a SD of 11.08. Also, the mean score of the participants on the high anxiety level is 133.15 with a SD of 9.59. Minimum and maximum scores of the distribution of each level of anxiety are also given in this table.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the different anxiety levels of participants

Level of anxiety	*N*	Mean	SD	Minutes	Max
Low anxiety	48	61.39	9.38	45	75
Moderate anxiety	39	89.56	11.08	76.00	117.00
High anxiety	13	133.15	9.59	122.00	149.00

3.3. The relationship between anxiety and VLSs

The distribution of the score in both questionnaires failed to meet the assumption of normality and our data were nonparametric. So, the Spearman correlation was run to determine the relationship between overall VLS use of participants and their anxiety level answering research question number three. The following results were obtained. Based on the data given in Table 5, we can conclude that there is a significant correlation between the anxiety level of participants and the overall strategies they use for VL (p = 0.000). The correlation coefficient score of −0.522 shows a moderate negative linear relationship between these variables.

Also, the point of determination was used to determine what percent of the variation in VLSs can be explained by anxiety level. The determination coefficient score of −0.27 (equals to square of the correlation coefficient) shows that only 27% of the variation in VLSs can be explained by anxiety and the remaining 73% of the variation in VLSs may be due to the other factors.

Table 5. Correlation between the overall VLS use and the overall anxiety

		Correlation coefficient	**VLSs**	**Anxiety**
Spearman's rho	VLSs	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	−0.522a
		N		0.000
			100	100

ᵃCorrelation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion

The results of the research question number one showed that Iranian elementary EFL students were medium VLS users, with an overall strategy mean score of 3.01. It can be concluded that the use of various VLSs was not quite common among students. The results of the current study were congruent with the results of Sarani and Kafipour (2008). According to their findings, medium use of strategies by Iranian students was due to their slight awareness of the VLSs.

The social strategy was found as the most frequently used category of strategies, with a mean score of 3.32. This can be because English VL tended not to be carried out as an individual process. Thus, when students were faced with unfamiliar words, they preferred to seek other's help. The findings were different from the researches carried out by Liao (2002) and Sahbazian (2004).

Memory strategy was found as the second frequently used strategy. The results were the same as the research carried out by Sahbazian (2004). She explored VLSs of 934 Turkish EFL students through interview and questionnaire; students were studying at different universities in Istanbul. The findings showed that the situation in Iran and Turkey seemed to be the same. Sahbazian (2004) pointed out that VL for most Turkish learners followed a more traditional rote memorisation pattern that involved many mnemonic techniques.

Also, the determination strategy was found as the third frequently used strategy that stood in the middle of the other four categories of strategies. Thus, it was less frequently used than social and memory strategies but more frequently used than cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The results were the same as the research carried out by Sahbazian (2004). In her research, students mostly preferred to use determination and memory strategies to get the meaning. Conversely, the results of the current study were different from the research carried out by Bennett (2006). He investigated VLSs of the students through the questionnaire. In his research, the metacognitive strategy stood in the middle of other categories of strategies, while in this study, determination strategy stood in the middle of other categories of strategies.

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies were the last strategies in the current study. Such a position of cognitive and metacognitive strategies showed that the least of the learners were taking control of their own learning. This is the same as the results of most studies on Iranian learners' learning strategies. Such studies showed that Iranian learners mostly preferred simple and direct strategies (Kafipour, 2010). However, the results of the current study were unlike the research carried out by Law Bik Yuk (2003) .He investigated VLSs of 80 Chinese EFL students through interviews, a survey and think-aloud tasks. In this study, the metacognitive strategy was chosen as one of the most frequently used strategies. Also, according to Gu and Johnson (1996), the cognitive strategy is a positive predictor

of general proficiency, so the reason that cognitive strategy was used less frequently by Iranian elementary EFL students could be that their level of general English proficiency was almost low.

Moreover, this study intended to examine the anxiety level of Iranian elementary EFL learners. According to Woodrow (2006), anxiety could negatively affect language learning. The findings of the research question number two showed that the participants were moderately anxious, with a mean score of 82.36. The reason for such a result might refer to students themselves or classroom activities that they perform in their language classes. Na (2007) believes that this issue can be attributed to students' English proficiency, which might not be high enough to permit them to communicate with others freely, express themselves adequately in class and answer teachers' questions properly .On the other hand, Young (1991) and Wang (2003) believe that the classroom atmosphere and some classroom activities can be perceived as anxiety-provoking by students. Fear of negative evaluation could be the other reason.

Furthermore, Na (2007) claims 'teachers should avoid negative evaluation of students in classrooms and comment on students' behaviours with more encouragement'. He continues to claim that teachers can take some measures in relaxing students' attention on exams, like eliminating the ranking of students by their test scores. To achieve this end, teachers can talk about the inevitability of the existence of anxiety in learning and let their students know that their anxiety can be reduced by the self-regulation of their thinking and study.

Also, the relationship between anxiety level of participants and the strategies they use for learning English vocabulary was investigated to answer the third research question. The results of descriptive and inferential statistics indicated that the participants with low anxiety levels used more strategies (*M* = 64.69) and high anxious participants with VLS mean score of 19.92 was the fewer strategy users. That is, a negative and significant relationship was found between the anxiety level of participants and the strategies they use for learning English vocabulary. There are a lot of studies regarding the correlation between foreign language learning and the anxiety level of learners. According to Woodrow (2006), Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999) and Aida (1994), anxiety could negatively affect language learning. Also, MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) indicated that anxiety leads to insufficiencies in both learning and performance.

The level of anxiety decreases significantly at high speaking grades and the EFL learners who have a better performance are less anxious than the ones who have lower scores. With respect to the relationship between classroom anxiety and general strategy use, it also supports the findings of Sioson (2011) and Lu and Liu (2011). Sioson (2011) stated that 'because LLSs are specific techniques that enable learners to cope and manage their learning, there might have been an increase in their self-confidence, thus lowering their anxiety' .Also, the findings are in line with the findings of the studies conducted by Chang (2008) and Gonen (2009). Gonen (2009) found that when there is an increase in FL anxiety, FL strategy use decreases.

5. Conclusion

In addition, the results of the current study showed that low and moderate anxious students used mostly social and memory strategies and the high anxious students used social and metacognitive strategies. In order to better understand the combined role of strategies adopted for learning English vocabulary and factors influencing them, additional research efforts are required. Some suggestions are as follows: employing questionnaires has limitations with regard to the generalisation of the findings. In order to add to or support the data obtained via this procedure of data collection, other

researchers are suggested to adopt triangulated procedures, such as classroom observation, think-aloud protocols or interviews to collect data .The data obtained via these procedures would provide a more insightful understanding of how language learners manipulate their VLSs with their learning preferences.

In the current study, only the anxiety level was taken into account. It is a good idea for future research to take into account the effect of other variables such as gender, age, discipline, motivation and attitude. Also, in this study, the findings regarding VLS use partially confirmed and partially ran contrary to the results obtained in the other studies. This inconsistency should be an area of further research to be able to draw more valid and more generalisable conclusions. As for discipline, lager samples and subsamples (different proficiency levels) of learners from among a wider variety of fields of study should be employed in future research. Finally, further investigations into Iranian English could precisely focus on the effects of anxiety on each of the language skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening).

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