

**Investigating Jazan University EFL Students' Beliefs on and Actual  
Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

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**Date of Receiving the Research:** 6/3/2024

**Research Acceptance Date:** 21/3/2024

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**Abstract:**

The current study was conducted to investigate the beliefs of EFL Saudi students and their actual use of vocabulary learning strategies. It addresses the need of a concrete understanding of the extent to which students value and apply strategies to learn vocabulary. The sample consisted of 196 female students from the University College of Aldayer - Jazan University - who responded to the questionnaire. The data for the study was obtained through the use of virtual questionnaire comprised of two sections of 28 items which were sent to the students via internet. Items of the questionnaire were adapted and modified from relevant literature (Oxford, 1990: 277-300; Li, X., 2005: 315-324; Sinhaneti and Kyaw, 2012: 1002-1003; Gu & Johnson, 1996:674-679). The findings pointed out that "Applying Images & Sounds" (AIS) and "Reviewing" (RW) strategies were reported the most preferable by the subjects of study. "Rote Learning" (RL) and "Creating Mental Linkage" (CML) strategies, respectively, were given less value in the vocabulary learning process. Although not selected as the best strategy, students believe that rote learning is still an effective way of learning vocabulary. This study also revealed a positive relationship between beliefs and strategy use. A study like this is very helpful for all those who are interested in EFL Saudi students' beliefs and their real use of language learning strategies.

**Keywords:** Creating Mental Linkage, English as a foreign language, Rote Learning, Images and Sounds, Reviewing, Vocabulary Learning Strategies.

آراء طالبات اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة جازان حول استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات واستخدامها

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تاريخ قبول البحث: ٢٠٢٤/٣/٢١ م

تاريخ تسلم البحث: ٢٠٢٤/٣/٦ م

### الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على آراء واعتقادات الطالبات السعوديات الدارسات للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات واستخدامهم الفعلي لها. وتناولت الدراسة الحاجة إلى فهم ملموس لمدى تقدير الطالبات لأهمية هذه الاستراتيجيات والاستخدام العملي لهذه الاستراتيجيات في تعلم المفردات. وتكونت العينة من (١٩٦) طالبة من طالبات الكلية الجامعية بالدايير التابعة لجامعة جازان واللاتي أجبن على اسئلة الاستبيان. وقد جمعت بيانات الدراسة من خلال استبيان مكون من ٢٨ فقرة - موزعة على جزئين - أرسل إلى الطالبات عبر الإنترنت. تم تطوير عناصر الاستبيان من عدة مصادر ذات صلة بالموضوع Oxford, 1990: 277-300; Li, X., 2005: 315-324; Sinhaneti and Kyaw, 2012: 1002-1003; Gu & Johnson, 1996:674-679 وأشارت النتائج إلى أن استراتيجيات "تطبيق الصور والأصوات" (AIS) و"المراجعة" (RW) كانت الأكثر تفضيلاً من قبل الطالبات اللاتي خضعن للدراسة. وقد أعطيت استراتيجيات "التعلم عن طريق الحفظ عن ظهر قلب" (RL) و"إنشاء الروابط العقلية" (CML)، على التوالي، قيمة أقل في عملية تعلم المفردات. على الرغم من عدم اختيارها كأفضل استراتيجية، تعتقد الطالبات أن التعلم عن طريق الحفظ لا تزال وسيلة فعالة لتعلم المفردات. وكشفت هذه الدراسة أيضاً عن وجود علاقة إيجابية بين آراء الطالبات والاستخدام الفعلي للاستراتيجيات. وتشكل دراسة كهذه فائدة كبيرة لجميع المهتمين بآراء الطلاب السعوديين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية واستخدامهم لاستراتيجيات تعلم اللغة في الواقع العملي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إنشاء الروابط العقلية، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التعلم بطريقة

الحفظ عن ظهر قلب، الصور والأصوات، المراجعة، استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات.

## 1. Introduction

Needless to mention the significance of teaching and learning methods and strategies to reach high standards of the output and make the learners achieve the required goals. As a concept, the process of strategy use is an attempt to learn the language better. There is a growing interest in identifying language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990; Gu & Johnson, 1996), which could help less successful learners become better language learners (Grenfell & Harris, 1999: 139). Learning strategies are defined by Chamot, (2005:112), as “procedures that facilitate a learning task”. Strategies are selected intentionally by the learners to enhance the learning and use of language (Cohen, 1998:47; Oxford, 1990:8; Pavičić Takač, 2008: 30). Thus, students are supposed to be aware of language learning strategies that work for them and exploit their abilities to store, recall and apply information in the language.

The job of EFL teachers is help students learn English more efficiently and this is the focus of the researcher in this study. A study in the area of language learning strategies can provide a better understanding of the students' preferences of strategy use. Students' implementation of appropriate learning strategies can promote their language learning (Du, Y. 2020: 53). It is easy to observe that some students are more successful at learning language than others. Part of this success rate, according to Griffiths (2001: 249), is attributed to the varying strategies which different students bring to the task. Griffiths goes on assuming that strategies are teachable and teachers can promote awareness of the learners and encourage them to use learning strategies in order to assist the language learning process. On the other hand, teachers need to recognize that particular strategies may be more suited to some learners than to others (Green & Oxford 1995).

Vocabulary is the foundation of any language. Language learners build their knowledge of words and phrases to improve all areas of communication – listening, speaking, reading and writing. The size of vocabulary predicts language achievement and without having a great deal of vocabulary, one could not communicate well with others. Therefore, students need to apply a number of vocabulary learning strategies to enhance their language achievement. Language teachers

could also help students use the vocabulary learning strategies that work with them. In this regard, as an English language teacher for a long time, the researcher sought to explore his learners' opinions on vocabulary learning strategies in order to help them use the most effective strategies that could enhance their language learning.

## **2. Research Objectives/Questions**

The main aim of this study is to examine the extent to which Jazan University EFL students rely much on "Rote Learning" strategies and their beliefs on a variety of vocabulary learning strategies. This research is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do Jazan University EFL students rely on "Rote Learning" strategies to gain English vocabulary?
2. What do Jazan University EFL students believe the best vocabulary learning strategies?
3. What are the actual vocabulary learning strategies Jazan University EFL students use?

## **3. Literature Review**

Vocabulary learning is a very big challenge learners encounter throughout their language learning. They need to apply fruitful strategies as actions to help them gain new words and become independent learners. Therefore, it is very important to train students in using the most efficient vocabulary learning strategies. Li (2005) confirms that rote learning (RL) plays an important role in vocabulary learning and defines this strategy as repetition, memorization, and practicing. Students commonly focus on the storage and retrieval of words. As teachers, we experience that students used to memorize vocabulary by rote at the time we usually ask them to understand and use the words they read. However, learning by rote may be considered negative to many. Rashidi & Omid, (2011: 140) claim that rote learning does not equip the learners with the ability to understand or interpret the information they learn. Vassall-Fall, D. (2011) focused on how strategies are effective to encourage understanding and retention of ideas, which can reduce the overdependence on memorization. In the context of Saudi setting,

students, according to Al-Mohanna (2010) and Al-Rashudi (2002), are taught to memorize information throughout their schooling, beginning in elementary school.

Al-Seghayer, K. (2021) adds that rote learning and silent learning largely characterize Saudi EFL learning style approaches. The long experience of the researcher of this study in the field of English language teaching supports the notion that most of the learners in Arab countries are still depending much on the traditional learning style of memorizing words by rote. Alrabai, F. (2016) relates low achievement of Saudi EFL learners to many factors and learning strategies is one of them. Alhammad, T. (2010) openly criticizes what teachers are practicing at Saudi schools and this extends far beyond high school to the college and university levels as teachers encourage a system of ineffective memorization and a superficial understanding of facts just to pass exams rather than mastering the language. Similarly, Al Alhareth and Al Dighrir's (2014: 883) support the idea that the Saudi education system focusses on subjects that do not appeal to students and the reliance on rote learning leads to memorization rather than understanding.

However, the role of memory is crucial in vocabulary learning. It is natural that learners forget knowledge, therefore, the learning and teaching of vocabulary needs to be planned following principles if it is to be efficient (Pavičić Takač, V., 2008: 10-11). Thornbury (2002: 24-26) has compiled a list of principles which comprises several encounters with words at spaced intervals, retrieval and actual use of such words, cognitive depth, affective depth, personalization, imaging, use of conscious attention that is necessary to remember words.

Research reveals that learning vocabulary is done through a number of strategies (Nakamura, 2000; Oxford, 1990; Schmitt, 1997). Students need larger vocabulary to reach higher levels of language fluency. Understanding more vocabulary enhances the ability to decipher the meaning of new words (Nation, 2008). On the other hand, not all people learn the same way or use the same strategies to learn language. Many studies deal with memory strategies to learn vocabulary. Ghazal, L. (2007) suggests groupings of vocabulary learning strategies and training students on strategies. Nation (2008) recommends the use of

word card, whereas, Fitzpatrick, Al-Qarni & Meara (2008) asserts that wordlist method should not be dismissed. Equipping students with learning strategies will encourage them expand their own vocabulary. Being capable of taking responsibility for their own learning, learners gradually gain confidence, involvement and proficiency (Oxford, 1990). According to Nation (2001:352), vocabulary learning strategies would need to involve choice among several strategies and that will increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use.

Literature also provides a wide range of strategies depending on the task, the learner, and the learning context. Gu and Johnson (1996: 673-679) developed a considerable list of strategies: metacognitive regulation, guessing strategies, dictionary strategies, note-taking strategies, memory strategies (encoding) and activation strategies. Cohen (1998:12) mentions the strategies of identifying the material to be learnt, grouping it and having repeated contact with the material. Another attempt to develop a taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies is done by Schmitt (1997: 205). This taxonomy is proposed by Oxford (1990) and is considered the best since it organizes a wide variety of vocabulary learning strategies. Oxford's study (1990:17-21) indicated two classes which break down into six groups (memory, cognitive and compensation for direct strategies, and metacognitive, affective and social for indirect strategies. Among others, Oxford's memory strategies served the goal of this research in which strategies fall into four sets: (1) creating mental linkages; (2) applying images and sounds; (3) reviewing well; (4) employing actions.

Several research studies have been carried out about language learning strategies. The present study will mention some studies which focused on the role of rote learning in language learning. Sinhaneti & Kyaw (2012) conducted a study to explore the role of rote learning in vocabulary learning strategies of Burmese EFL students using a questionnaire for students and an interview for teachers to collect data. The study revealed that rote learning strategies are used more than other memory strategies.

Another study by Li (2005) aimed to explore Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of rote learning in vocabulary learning

strategies. The findings of the study show that learners hold highly positive beliefs about rote learning in vocabulary learning because they believe that such strategies are consistent with Chinese culture and values.

Rashidi & Omid (2011) have conducted a similar study to explore the Iranian learners use of rote learning in vocabulary learning, and how it could affect their achievement. It was concluded that learners still depend on rote learning. Reviewing strategy was more effective for the students to learn more vocabularies.

A study by Al-Khresheh and Al-Ruwaili (2020) was carried out on a group of Saudi learners of English to determine their most preferable vocabulary learning strategies. The findings show that memory strategies were reported as most preferable by the respondents followed by determination, social, and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies were reported to be the least preferable ones.

Research on language learning strategies also prerequisites learners' belief as an important factor that affects the choice of learning strategies. Yang (1992) and Rashidi, & Omid (2011) confirmed that students' beliefs push them to use strategies in their language learning.

#### **4. Method**

##### ***Participants***

This study collected data from EFL Saudi students who are attending a bachelor degree at University College of Aldayer, Jazan University where the researcher has been teaching for almost ten years. The total number of the respondents is 196 female students. All of these students had learnt EFL from primary school to the university. Therefore, they have a good experience on the area of vocabulary learning.

##### ***Instrumentation***

To collect the required data, a questionnaire was developed by the help of relevant research (Oxford, 1990: 277-300; Li, 2005: 315-324; Sinhaneti, and Kyaw, 2012: 1002-1003; Gu & Johnson, 1996:674-679). It consists of two sections A and B, comprising 28 items. Section A focused on the

students' beliefs about memory strategies in vocabulary learning including 11 statements (1-11) representing 4 categories of vocabulary learning strategies (rote learning; creating mental linkages; applying images and sounds and reviewing well). Section B, on the other hand, focused on the students' preferred memory strategies they actually use in their vocabulary learning. This section includes 17 statements (12-28) representing the same categories in Section A. The students were asked to choose a response from a 5-point scale (Strongly agree, Agree, No opinion, Disagree, and Strongly disagree, which are numbered as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) to unfold their beliefs about what they actually do when learning English words. The actual strategies learners use in their learning, according to Cohen (2014:10), are expected to be detailed, specific, and combined in sequences with other strategies.

### ***Data Analysis***

A Likert scale was used so as the responses could readily be quantified and analyzed. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 16.0) was used to analyze the responses for the categories of statements in a statistical and descriptive manner. Using descriptive analysis method of SPSS software, according to (Gray, 1997), provides "a convenient way of summarizing and interpreting data results".

## **5. Analysis and Discussion**

As mentioned above, the questionnaire has two sections of 28 items. The answers of the questions 1-11 and questions 12-28 will be reported separately.

### **Section A: Students' beliefs on the Value of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

The items in Section A ask the students for their perspectives on vocabulary learning strategies. Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistic of responses such as Mean values, SD and Ranking. The mean values of the statements were ranked in a descending order. Each statement was given its original item number and its category in the next column. As for the scoring system (Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, No opinion = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly disagree = 1), the study was analyzed as



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follows: high agreement (mean value 3.5 and above), medium agreement (mean value between 2.5 and 3.5), and low agreement (mean value below 2.4), which was suggested by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) as a mean classification.

The questionnaire items	Category	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	Rank
Item 8	AIS	83	94	15	2	2	4.29	.74	1
		42.3%	48%	7.7%	1%	1%			
Item 10	RW	81	95	17	1	2	4.28	.73	2
		41.3%	48.5%	8.7%	.5%	1%			
Item 2	RL	83	91	17	3	2	4.27	.768	3
		42.3%	46.4%	8.7%	1.5%	1%			
Item 4	RL	85	84	24	1	2	4.27	.774	4
		43.4%	42.9%	12.2%	.5%	1%			
Item 6	CML	83	87	23	1	2	4.26	.765	5
		42.3%	44.4%	11.7%	.5%	1%			
Item 5	AIS	77	93	23	1	2	4.23	.755	6
		39.3%	47.4%	11.5%	.5%	1%			
Item 3	RL	82	86	21	3	4	4.22	.852	7
		41.8%	43.9%	10.7%	1.5%	2%			
Item 9	AIS	72	92	29	1	2	4.18	.773	8
		36.7%	46.9%	14.8%	.5%	1%			
Item 5	CML	76	84	32	2	2	4.17	.81	9
		38.8%	42.9%	16.3%	1%	1%			
Item 1	RL	65	88	33	6	4	4.04	.899	10
		33.2%	44.9%	16.8%	3.1%	2.1%			
Item 11	RW	54	84	24	24	10	3.75	1.14	11
		27.6%	42.9%	12.2%	12.2%	5.1%			
<b>4.18</b>									

Table 1: Students' perspectives on vocabulary learning strategies

Looking at table no.1, the average of the belief items ranged from a high of 4.29 to a low of 3.75, on a scale of 1 to 5. The responses indicated only one type - high. 6 of the 11 items had mean values exceeding 4.20 (strongly agree) and the other 5 items ranged between mean values 3.75 and 4.18 (agree).

The responses indicated only high usage type that had mean values above 3.50. There was no items had a mean value either in the medium or in the low usage category. The overall mean for the sample was 4.18 (indicating a strong belief in the use of the strategies listed). The mean value of "Applying Images & Sounds" learning strategy – AIS – is the highest of the 4 memory learning categories (Mean = 4.23),

followed by “Creating Mental Linkage” learning strategy – **CML** – (Mean = 4.21); then “Rote Learning” strategies – **RL** – (Mean = 4.20); “Reviewing” strategies – **RW** – were the least mean value (Mean = 4.00)

As for the “Rote Learning” category, it was evident that students still believe in the effectiveness of rote learning strategies to memorize new words and phrases. This is clear from the mean value of this item, 4.04, which shows that they still support the use of rote learning strategy. At the time, another rote learning item, “Charts/cards/note book with word lists are very helpful in memorizing words”, was given higher mean value, 4.22, which indicate students stronger support for this strategy in vocabulary learning. A higher mean value of 4.27 is given to the remaining two items of rote learning, “Vocabulary should be learnt through repetition” and “The translation method by using dictionary is helpful when new vocabularies appear”. This indicates a strong belief by the students that these two items are of higher value in the learning of English vocabulary. As shown earlier, these two items were ranked the third and fourth highest strategies that are believed by the students to be important in vocabulary learning. The overall mean value of this category was 4.20, which is ranked 3 as a category among other strategies ( $4.04+4.22+4.27+4.27= 16.8/4= 4.20$ ).

The items of “Applying Images and Sounds” learning strategy as a category were distributed as follows: the item “Connecting the word and its picture with meaning is valuable for remembering more words” was strongly agreed by students to be the highest item with mean value of 4.29 and ranked number 1 among the whole strategies. While the items “Words can be remembered very quickly by mentally picturing the situation” was given a strong agreement (Mean = 4.23) by the students and “Key word method should be used” was given an agree response (Mean = 4.18). The two items were ranked 6 and 8, respectively. In general, with an overall mean value of 4.23, this category is ranked the first among other strategies ( $4.29+4.23+4.18= 12.7/3 = 4.23$ )

Surprisingly, “Reviewing” strategies that are “Reviewing often is very helpful” and “Reviewing is only useful before exams” were ranked 2 and 11 respectively. Students strongly believe that reviewing is very helpful all the time (Mean = 4.28) but not useful if used only before

exams (Mean = 3.75). This category is ranked 4.02 with mean value 4.02 as the least ( $4.28 + 3.75 = 8.03 / 2 = 4.02$ )

As for the category, "Creating Mental Linkages" items, students strongly stand for "Organized material is easier to store in and retrieve from long-term memory" (Mean = 4.26) and ranked 5, whereas "Words should be acquired in context by guessing word meaning" (Mean = 4.17) was given an "agree" response and ranked 9. So, the former strategy was given higher value by the students. In general, this category was given 4.22 mean value which takes the second rank among other categories ( $4.26 + 4.17 = 8.43 / 2 = 4.22$ )

### **Section B: Students' Preferences for their Real Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

The statements in Section B ask the students about the memory strategies they prefer and actually use in vocabulary learning. This section included 17 statements (12-28). Table 2 below presents the results similar to that of Section A above.

The questionnaire items	Category	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	Rank
Item 26	AIS	73	97	22	2	2	4.21	.759	1
		37.2%	49.5%	11.2%	1%	1%			
Item 27	AIS	72	94	24	3	3	4.16	.815	2
		36.7%	48%	12.2%	1.5%	1.5%			
Item 15	RL	68	100	23	2	3	4.16	.787	3
		34.7%	51%	11.7%	1%	1.5%			
Item 28	RW	71	95	24	1	5	4.15	.845	4
		36.2%	48.5%	12.2%	.5%	2.6%			
Item 13	RL	67	96	28	3	2	4.14	.788	5
		34.2%	49%	14.3%	1.5%	1%			
Item 14	RL	68	93	31	2	2	4.14	.788	6
		34.7%	47.4%	15.8%	1%	1%			
Item 22	CML	66	100	21	6	3	4.12	.832	7
		33.7%	51%	10.7%	3.1%	1.5%			
Item 20	CML	61	107	21	5	2	4.12	.774	8
		31.1%	54.6%	10.7%	2.6%	1%			
Item 19	CML	63	101	25	4	3	4.10	.812	9
		32.1%	51.5%	12.8%	2%	1.5%			
Item 12	RL	67	91	30	4	4	4.08	.870	10
		34.2%	46.4%	15.3%	2%	2%			
Item 17	RL	60	101	30	2	3	4.08	.895	11
		30.6%	51.5%	15.3%	1%	1.5%			

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Item 23	CML	60	103	26	4	3	4.08	.808	12
		30.6%	52.6%	13.3%	2%	1.5%			
Item 21	CML	66	92	27	8	3	4.07	.88	13
		33.7%	46.9%	13.8%	4.1%	1.5%			
Item 25	CML	62	96	29	6	3	4.06	.851	14
		31.6%	49%	14.8%	3.1%	1.5%			
Item 16	RL	59	101	23	11	2	4.04	.860	15
		30.1%	51.5%	11.7%	5.6%	1%			
Item 24	CML	67	89	25	10	5	4.03	.952	16
		34.2%	45.4%	12.8%	5.1%	2.6%			
Item 18	CML	58	99	27	7	5	4.01	.90	17
		29.6%	50.5%	13.8%	3.6%	2.6%			
<b>4.10</b>									

Table 2: Students' preferences for their actual vocabulary learning strategies

As shown in table 2, the average of the strategies ranged from 4.21 to 4.01 on a scale of 1-5. The responses indicated only high usage type that had mean values exceeding 3.50. No single item had a mean value in the medium or low usage group. The overall mean of 4.10 for the sample indicates an overall high preference and actual use to the strategies listed. One of the strategies had a mean value of 4.21 exceeding 4.20, which indicates a strong agree choice to prefer a strategy belonging to **AIS** (I visualize the spelling of the word in my head). All the other 16 strategies had mean values ranged between 4.04 and 4.16 (high agreement).

The responses to the questions in section B point out that the students favored the **AIS** category items. They believed that they use the strategies of this category more than the other three categories. Table 2 demonstrate a different order of the rank of the strategy types. Category type **AIS** came as the top rank followed by **RL** with particular reference to Item 15 "I write new words and their Arabic equivalents." After that came **RW** strategies and finally **CML** strategies.

In a categorical analysis, the mean value of **AIS** learning strategy was the highest of the four memory strategy categories with a mean value of 4.19, followed by the Reviewing category with a mean value of 4.15. **RL** strategies occupied the third position among the preferred categories with a mean value of 4.11. Whereas, **CML** strategies was the last category to be actually used by the students with a mean value of 4.07.

Concerning the actual use of "Rote Learning" category, students show that they are still using rote learning as an effective way to learn

vocabulary. They gave “agree” response to all the RL items ranging between the highest mean value of 4.16 (I write English new words and their Arabic equivalents) and the lowest mean value 4.04 (I can use words correctly and efficiently after memorizing them). The former item is ranked 3 and the latter ranked 15. Two other items, “I write and memorize new words and compare them with explanations and usages” and “I go through my vocabulary list several times until I understand them all”, were given the same mean value 4.14 and took ranks 5 and 6 respectively among other strategies. This indicates students’ actual use of the two items with agree response. Similarly, the other two items, “I make vocabulary lists of new words that I meet” and “I pay attention to phrases and collocations that go with a word” recorded a mean value of 4.08 and ranks 10 and 11 respectively (actually used by the students). The overall mean value of this category was 4.11 which is ranked also 3 as a category among other strategies, similar to students beliefs towards this category in Section A. Hence, students’ beliefs about and their actual use of RL strategies were consistent in the two sections, A & B.

Similar to section A, the items of “Applying Images and Sounds” learning strategy as a category were given the highest mean values compared to other categories in section B. The item “I visualize the spelling of the word in my head” was strongly agreed by students to be the highest item with mean value 4.21 and ranked number 1 among other strategies. Whereas, the item “I associate new words with words that sound similar in Arabic” received a strong agreement (Mean = 4.16) by the students but took rank 2. In general, an overall mean value of 4.19, this category is ranked the first among other strategies.

As a category, the reviewing strategy “I recall words by pair checking with someone else” was ranked 2 with a mean value of 4.15. This indicates that students agree with this category as an important one in the process of learning vocabulary.

Regarding “Creating Mental Linkages” items, students agree that they are essential to be used in learning vocabulary. As a category, however, these strategies were given the least mean value 4.07 and the fourth rank, the last. Three items “I go through my vocabulary list several times until I understand them all” (Mean = 4.12), “I break up the word

into its components” (Mean = 4.12) and “I memorize word with examples in some context” (Mean = 4.10), were ranked 7,8 and 9 respectively. Similarly, other three items “I group words into categories” (Mean = 4.08), “I read a series of texts on a related topic to be exposed to vocabulary” (Mean = 4.07) and “I compose sentences with the words I am studying” (Mean = 4.06), were ranked 12, 13 and 14. This category included the last two items in the table, “When I see a new word, I search for synonyms and antonyms” and “I group words by parts of speech” with a mean value of 4.03 and 4.01 respectively. In general, this category was given 4.07 as a mean value to be the last one, though still important to be used by students in vocabulary learning.

### *Discussion*

The results of the two sections A and B are consistent as **AIS** was ranked first and the second rank was **reviewing**. Two strategies of **AIS**, “I visualize the spelling of the word in my head” and “I associate new words with words that sound similar in Arabic” came first in table 2. However, only one item of **AIS**, “Connecting the word and its picture with meaning is valuable for remembering more words” came first in table 1. One item of the **RL** strategies “I write English new words and their Arabic equivalents” in section B took the second category rank, whereas the reviewing item “Reviewing often is very helpful” was the one which took second. In table 1, section A, the students put two items of the **RL** number 2 and 4, “Vocabulary should be learnt through repetition” and “The translation method by using dictionary is helpful when new vocabularies appear” respectively, both ranked three. The reviewing item “I recall words by pair checking with someone else” was the third preference used by the students.

The last two items of the valuable strategies according to the students in section A were item 1 of the **RL** category, “Rote learning is an effective way to memorize new words and expressions” and then item 2 of the reviewing category “Reviewing is only useful before exams”. Whereas in section B, two item of the **CML** category, “When I see a new word, I search for synonyms and antonyms” and “I group words by parts

of speech (verbs, nouns, adjectives etc.)” were preferred as the last strategies in vocabulary learning.

### *Discussion on Research Question 1*

- Do Jazan University students rely very much on “Rote Learning” strategies to gain vocabulary?

This study does not support the results of some studies (Mohanna, 2010; Al-Rashudi, 2002; Al-Seghayer, K. 2021; Alrabai, F. 2016) that EFL Saudi students highly use RL strategies in their vocabulary learning. Many researchers claim that EFL Saudi students mainly use the traditional learning style of memorizing words by rote. However, Jazan University students in this study provide positive belief about RL but was not the most preferable strategies to them. The students did not opt for **RL** as the first strategies they rely on in their vocabulary learning. Instead, students have ranked **AIS** first and **RW** second in both section A and section B of the questionnaire.

### *Discussion on Research Question 2*

- What are the vocabulary learning strategies do Jazan University students believe better?

The findings of this study show that Jazan University students believe in the usefulness of strategies from all the four categories. They gave preference to a variety of strategies that help them learn vocabulary. The results indicate that they have a strong belief in the value of **AIS** learning strategies, followed by **CML**, **RW** and then **RL** strategies.

### *Discussion on Research Question 3*

- What are the vocabulary learning strategies do Jazan University students prefer to use more?

The findings show that students make greater use of **AIS** strategies in their vocabulary learning. They gave **AIS** learning strategies the highest preference to use in vocabulary learning and gave **CML** strategies the least preference. Though **RL** strategies are still important to the students to learn vocabulary, they are not the best among other strategies. Reviewing strategy was given its due importance in learning vocabulary.

Students agreed with the use of **CML** items. However, this category was given the least option. In general, students' responses indicate that they are actually use **AIS** learning strategy, followed by **RW**, **RL** strategies and finally **CML** strategies.

## 6. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to explore the strategies students of Jazan University believe more valuable for them and the strategies they actually use in their vocabulary learning. The analysis of the collected data addresses the research questions. This study has provided a better understanding of Saudi EFL students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies. Previous studies show that students rely too much on using the rote learning strategies. This was not the case for the current study. It was evident that rote learning was not their highest choice any more.

Majority of Jazan University students favoured **AIS** learning strategy; followed by **CML**; then **RL** strategies; and **RW** strategies came last. Most of the students make greater use of **AIS** learning strategy than the other three categories of vocabulary learning strategies. Therefore, what students believe about vocabulary learning strategies is applied in their actual use of such strategies in their learning.

Research show that in many Asian countries, **RL** is accepted as an effective learning strategy in vocabulary learning (Li, 2005, Sinhaneti & Kyaw, 2012), and continue to be widely used even though received criticisms in western countries. However, the present study which was conducted in an Asian country, Saudi Arabia, does not support much the results of these studies. This study goes along with Gu and Johnson (1996) which adopts a negative view about the use of **RL** as a mere rote memorization. The participants of this study prefer to use more meaning-oriented strategies than rote strategies in learning vocabulary and use words in context.

## Recommendations for future research

The researcher suggests additions that would be beneficial for further research. These include: (1) to identify the reasons that make Saudi EFL students prefer the strategies they actually use to learn English



vocabulary; (2) to find out the effect of gender in the use of vocabulary learning strategies by including male Saudi students in the study.

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### Appendix Students Questionnaire

1. Rote learning is an effective way to memorize new words and expressions.
2. Vocabulary should be learnt through repetition.
3. Charts/cards/note book with word lists are very helpful in memorizing words.
4. The translation method by using dictionary is helpful when new vocabularies appear.
5. Words should be acquired in context by guessing word meaning.
6. Organizing materials is easier to store in and retrieve from long-term memory.
7. Words can be remembered very quickly by mentally picturing the situation.
8. Connecting the word and its picture with meaning is valuable for remembering more words.
9. Key word method should be used.
10. Reviewing often is very helpful.
11. Reviewing is only useful before exams.
12. I make vocabulary lists of new words that I meet.
13. I write and memorize new words and compare them with explanations and usages.
14. I go through my vocabulary list several times until I understand them all.
15. I write new words and their Arabic equivalents.
16. I can use words correctly and efficiently after memorizing them.
17. I pay attention to phrases and collocations that go with a word.
18. I group words by parts of speech (verbs, nouns, adjectives etc.).
19. I memorize word with examples in context.
20. I remember a group of new words that share similar letters in spelling.
21. I read a series of texts on a related topic to be exposed to vocabulary.
22. I break up the word into its components.
23. I group words into categories (e.g., animals, vegetables, sports, and clothes).
24. When I see a new word, I search for synonyms and antonyms.
25. I compose sentences with the words I am studying.
26. I visualize the spelling of the word in my head.
27. I associate new words with words that sound similar in Arabic.
28. I recall words by pair checking with someone else.