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The Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies by Pre-Diploma Students in UITM

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Abstract

The study investigates the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) used by *Mengubah Destini Anak Bangsa* (MDAB) pre-diploma students at the Machang Campus of Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan (UiTMCK). For this purpose, a Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) based on Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Taxonomy was administered to 76 MDAB pre-diploma students. The findings revealed that the students were medium users of VLS who used metacognitive strategies most frequently and cognitive strategies least frequently. The findings also revealed that there was no significant difference in the use of VLS among the male and female students. However, the results of Independent Samples T-test in the use of individual items for all VLS categories revealed significant difference in the mean scores of several strategies.

Keywords: vocabulary learning strategies, pre-diploma students, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies

Introduction

Vocabulary is a term used to define words, which is an essential base of any language. It is a list of words a person must know in order to communicate effectively (Neuman and Dwyer, 2009). For successful second language use, extensive vocabulary mastery is important, as without sufficient vocabulary, individuals are not able to use the structures and functions they have learned for comprehensible communication (Nunan, 1991). Nation (2006) states that a person needs to know 8000 word families to easily understand spoken and written text. In the scope of second language learning, vocabulary plays a significant role in developing language proficiency of all language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, developing vocabulary size and knowledge deserves special attention from second language learners and also teachers.

However, despite playing a key role in the development of language proficiency, in most language classrooms including in Malaysia, the teaching and learning of vocabulary is not given much emphasis. Instead, the focus is placed heavier on grammar, reading and writing skills (Bastanfar and Hashemi, 2010). Vocabulary, on the other hand, is not explicitly taught (Oxford, 1990). Among the excuses given by teachers is they believe students' vocabulary can develop on its own with time, through exposure to written and spoken English. Besides, according to Berne and Blachowicz (2008), most teachers are actually uncertain about the best approach to teach vocabulary in order to gain satisfying results.

The beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning that most language teachers firmly hold are not giving much positive impact on the students' vocabulary size and knowledge. It is evident that when vocabulary is undervalued, neither teachers nor students have the inclination to explore and expand it. As a result, the students have limited vocabulary size which would later deteriorate their language proficiency. Many Malaysian ESL students including MDAB students have problem in learning vocabulary and this can be clearly seen when they cannot successfully communicate both in verbal and written discourse (Wan Norliza Wan Bakar, Moniza Abdullah & Rozana Raoh, 2012). These students are aware that they need to increase their vocabulary size. However, they do not have enough knowledge and strategies that can facilitate them to be successful vocabulary learners and consequently successful English language learners.

Moreover, they expand their vocabulary by using strategies which require only a low level mental processing. According to Mofareh (2015), students spend a great deal of time on memorising lists of English words and rely on their dictionary as a basic communicative resource. It is undeniably true that there is nothing wrong of using these strategies. Unfortunately, they cognitively require low level mental processing. Therefore, the vocabulary is not meaningfully stick on students' mind and they waste longer hours and extra energy to remember new English words. In addition, Asgari and Ghazali (2011) point out that these students are not aware of the existence of various strategies that they can use to improve their English vocabulary.

In recent years, linguists, researchers and language educators mutually agree on the importance of strategies in vocabulary learning. Asgari and Ghazali (2011) point out that the learning process will become more efficient and effective when learners use strategies, enabling them to become more proficient language users. Nation (2001), Schmitt (2000) and Thornbury (2002) believe that strategies in vocabulary learning enable learners to take a more responsible and independent role in their language learning. In other words, they become autonomous learners. According to Nation (2001), when learners have a good knowledge of VLS and the ability to use them, they can acquire a great amount of vocabulary. In addition, VLS are proven to be useful for students of different language proficiency levels (Nation, 2001).

As such, this study is undertaken to investigate the extent MDAB Pre-diploma students at the Machang Campus of UiTMCK use VLS. It also seeks to identify the most and least frequently used VLS by these students and whether there is a significant difference in the use of VLS by male and female students. According to the above objectives, the following research questions are addressed:

- i. Are MDAB pre-diploma students high, medium, or low VLS users?
- ii. What are the most and least frequently used VLS by MDAB pre-diploma students?
- iii. Is there any significant difference in the use of VLS among male and female students?

MDAB programme

Mengubah Destini Anak Bangsa (MDAB) or 'Changing the Destiny of our People' programme is a special pre-diploma programme introduced in June 2010 at selected UiTM campuses. This program, which was initiated by the former Vice Chancellor of UiTM, Tan Sri Dato' Sri Prof Ir Dr Sahol Hamid Abu Bakar enables underprivileged *bumiputera* students who did not perform well in the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) examination pursue their tertiary education at UiTM. The selected students receive privileges such as waived course fees, free accommodation and a monthly allowance. The minimum entry requirements of this programme are a pass in SPM with three credits including *Bahasa Melayu* and pass in English and Mathematics. Most students selected for MDAB program have poor academic background. With regard to their English language proficiency, majority of the MDAB students generally have low level of English language proficiency (Kamisah & Norzie Diana, 2012; Wan Norliza et al., 2012; Metom, Tom & Joe, 2013; Haryati Ahmad, Melor Md. Yunus & Nor Haniza Hasan, 2016).

Related studies on vocabulary learning strategies

A number of studies have been conducted in the past to investigate the use of VLS by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Riankamol (2008) explored the use of VLS by 27 students at Triam Udomsuksa School in Thailand by using a 25-item questionnaire based on Schmitt's (1997) Taxonomy of VLS. The results revealed that the respondents most frequently used metacognitive strategies (mean=2.61) and social strategies the least (mean= 1.82).

Soureshjani (2011) sought to find out whether there was any significant difference by gender in the use of VLS. A questionnaire adapted from Schmitt (2000) was employed and distributed to 110 Iranian students consisting of 50 males and 60 females. The independent t-test results indicated that there was a significant difference between the male and female students in using VLS since the p-value was $p=0.01 < .05$.

Behbahani (2016) investigated the use of VLS by 76 international students at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), North Cyprus. The findings revealed that the students were medium strategy users. It was also found that the most common strategies were metacognitive strategies (MET) such as "Continue to study word over time" and "Use English-language media". Meanwhile, the least common strategies were social strategies (SOC) such as "Peg Method" and "Underline initial letter of the word". Regarding gender, t-test results showed that there were significant differences between male and female students in the use of VLS. Male students favoured determination strategies (DET) whereas female students preferred metacognitive strategies (MET).

Manuel (2016) conducted a study to investigate the use of VLS by 60 Angolan EFL university students at Agostinho Neto University. The results showed that the most frequently used VLS was "I analyse any available pictures or gestures accompanying the new word" (DET) while the least frequently used VLS was "I skip or pass new words when I read" (MET). The results also indicated that there was no significant difference in the overall use of VLS between male and female students. However, it was found that male and female students differed significantly in the individual use of metacognitive strategies (MET) "I skip or pass new words when I read" and memory strategies (MEM) "I connect the new word to its synonym". The results also revealed that male students received higher mean scores than female students.

Another VLS study was conducted by Asgari and Ghazali (2011) who explored the use of VLS by ESL students in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). They found that the students were medium or low strategy users. The findings of their study also revealed that the most common strategies used by ESL students in UPM were guessing from textual context (DET), using a monolingual dictionary (DET), applying new English words in their daily conversation (SOC) and using the English-language media such as songs, movies, the Internet and computer games (MET).

Subon (2013) investigated the use of VLS among 88 Form Six students comprising of 36 male students and 52 female students in a secondary school in Samarahan. By using a questionnaire the respondents were required to rate how frequent they used eight VLS categories, namely dictionary use (DIC), rehearsal (REH), management (MAN), sources (SOU), guessing (GUE), encoding (ENC), activation (ACT) and vocabulary perceptions (PER). The findings revealed that the students were medium users of VLS who frequently used guessing strategy the most and management strategy the least. "I guess the meaning of the words I don't know" had the highest frequency of use and the least was "I carry a pocket dictionary to look up the words I don't know". The findings also revealed that there were significant differences in VLS use by gender as female students used VLS more frequently than male students since they had higher mean scores in almost all the VLS categories.

Hendrawaty (2015) carried out a study on the use of VLS by 137 EFL third semester undergraduate students at Indraprasta PGRI University. The data were collected using Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) adopted from Bennet (2006). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were employed to analyse the data. The findings showed that EFL third semester undergraduate students at Indraprasta PGRI University were medium users of VLS. With

regard to levels of use, metacognitive strategies were at a high level whereas determination, memory, social and cognitive strategies were at a medium level. The findings also revealed that metacognitive strategies were used most frequently while cognitive strategies were used the least by the students.

A more recent study by Haryati Ahmad, Melor Md Yunus and Nor Haniza Hasan (2016) explored the English vocabulary size and VLS of MDAB pre-diploma students at the Segamat Campus of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor. A total of 31 respondents consisting of 10 males (32.3%) and 21 females (67.7%) participated in the study. The findings revealed that the students with a vocabulary size of 8,000 word families and above, and the students with a vocabulary size of below 8,000 word families were both medium users of VLS. It was also found that the most frequently used strategy by the students with a vocabulary size of 8,000 word families and above was "I study the sound of a word" whereas the most frequently used strategy by the students with a vocabulary size of below 8,000 word families was "I watch English movies". Five strategies were identified among the top ten most used VLS by both groups of students, namely "I watch English movies", "I listen to English songs", "I use a bilingual dictionary to find the translation of a new English word", "I watch English TV programmes" and "I visualise the spelling of words". Finally, the least used strategies by both groups of the students were "I keep flash cards" and "I put English labels on physical objects".

Methodology

A total of 76 MDAB pre-diploma students at the Machang Campus of UiTMCK participated in the survey. The students comprised of 32 (42.1%) male students and 44 (57.9%) female students whose ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old.

The main instrument used for data collection in the present study was a Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) based on Schmitt's (1997) Taxonomy of VLS. This study adapted Schmitt's Taxonomy because it is one of the most comprehensive lists of strategies available. Also, a number of past studies have employed Schmitt's Taxonomy (e.g. Riankamol, 2008; Asgari & Ghazali, 2011; Soureshjani, 2011; Manuel, 2016; Haryati Ahmad et al., 2016; Behbahani, 2016). The VLSQ was divided into two parts. The first part aims at collecting participants' background information such as gender, age, and SPM English Language grade. The second part aims at measuring the frequency of use of the VLS and it contains two sections. Section A includes 14 strategies for the discovery of new word's meaning and Section B includes 34 strategies for retaining a word once it has been encountered. These 48 strategies are grouped under 5 main categories: items 1-9 are determination strategies (DET), items 10-17 are social strategies (SOC), items 18-32 are memory strategies (MEM), items 33-40 are cognitive strategies (COG) and items 41-48 are metacognitive strategies (MET). To measure the frequency of use, the study employed a five-point Likert scale as follows: 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always.

Following past studies such as Riankamol (2008) and Haryati Ahmad et al. (2016) which did not include a few strategies that were considered unsuitable for the students' background knowledge, proficiency level and learning environment, this study did not include all the 58 strategies in Schmitt's (1997) Taxonomy of VLS in the VLSQ. Some of the strategies that were excluded were "I check for L1 cognate" (DET), "I use semantic map" (MEM), "I use Peg method" (MEM), "I use Loci method" (MEM), "I learn the words of an idiom together" (MEM), "I listen to recorded wordlists" (COG) and "I use spaced word practice" (MET). However, the VLSQ includes two technologically driven strategies which were not originally in Schmitt's (1997) Taxonomy of VLS. These strategies were taken from Haryati Ahmad et al.'s questionnaire (2016). The strategies were "I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word" (MET) and "I use a mobile dictionary to search for meaning of a new English word" (MET). They were included in the VLSQ because these strategies are becoming more common now (Haryati Ahmad et al., 2016).

Apart from that, some strategies from Schmitt's taxonomy that were considered as double-barelled were broken into several strategies. Double-barelled strategies refer to strategies that consist of two or more questions which would lead to more than one possible response and sometimes result in a non-

response (Haryati Ahmad et al., 2016). For example, “Use English language media” (MET) was broken into several strategies such as “I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by using the Internet” and “I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs”. According to Haryati Ahmad et al. (2016), by breaking double-barelled strategies into several strategies would avoid respondents from being undecided in giving responses. Finally, Cronbach Alpha formula was used in calculating the reliability coefficient of the VLSQ, which the reliability value was 0.945 ($\alpha = 0.945$). Hence, the VLSQ was a reliable instrument for this study.

Findings

Descriptive statistics was used to compute the mean and standard deviations for overall strategy use. According to Oxford's (1990) scoring system, mean score 1.00-2.49 shows low strategy use, mean score 2.50-3.49 shows medium strategy use, and mean score 3.50-5.00 shows high strategy use. As depicted in Table 1, the overall mean score was 3.45 and standard deviation was .9288. Hence, MDAB pre-diploma students were medium strategy users. The findings also revealed that among five categories, the students most frequently used metacognitive strategies (MET) at the highest mean score of 3.64. Determination strategies had the second highest mean score of 3.48, followed by memory strategies and social strategies with the mean scores of 3.44 and 3.42 respectively. The least used strategies were cognitive strategies (COG) with the lowest mean score of 3.28. Referring to levels of use, metacognitive strategies were at a high level while determination, memory, social and cognitive strategies were at a medium level.

Table 1: The Use of the Five Categories of VLS employed by MDAB Pre-diploma Students

<i>VLS Category</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation (SD)</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Strategy Use</i>
Metacognitive (MET)	3.64	.9507	1	High
Determination (DET)	3.48	.8982	2	Medium
Memory (MEM)	3.44	.8853	3	Medium
Social (SOC)	3.42	.9451	4	Medium
Cognitive (COG)	3.28	.9647	5	Medium
Overall strategies	3.45	.9288		Medium

With regard to the most frequently used by MDAB pre-diploma students, it is shown in Table 2 that the most frequently used VLS were in two categories, namely metacognitive strategies (MET) and determination strategies (DET). Three strategies were in the metacognitive category (Items 44, 42 and 45) and three strategies were in the determination category (Items 5, 3 and 6). Strategy item 44 “I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word” was used with the highest mean score of 3.89, followed by strategy item 42 “I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs” (mean= 3.87), strategy item 45 “I use a mobile dictionary to search for the meaning of a new English word” (mean= 3.86), strategy item 5 “I use a bilingual dictionary (English-Malay)” (mean= 3.78), strategy item 3 “I use a bilingual dictionary (English-Malay)” (mean= 3.71), and strategy item 6 “I use a bilingual dictionary (Malay-English)” (mean= 3.66).

Regarding the least frequently used VLS, two strategies were in the determination category (Items 7 and 9), two strategies were in the cognitive category (Items 35 and 36), one strategy was in the social category (Item 17) and one strategy was in the memory category (Item 21). Strategy item 36 “I keep flash cards” was used with the lowest mean score of 2.84. Other least frequently used strategies were strategy item 9 “I use flash cards to learn new English words” (mean= 2.98), strategy item 17 “I talk to native speakers (people whose first language is English)” (mean= 3.11), strategy item 35 “I make my own lists of new words” (mean= 3.12), strategy item 7 “I use a monolingual Dictionary (English-English)” (mean= 3.13) and strategy item 21 “I associate the new word with its coordinates” (mean= 3.22).

Table 2: The Most and Least Frequently used VLS by MDAB Pre-diploma Students

	<i>Item</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>VLS Category</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Rank</i>
The most	44	I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word.	MET	3.89	.9876	1
	42	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs.	MET	3.87	1.011	2
	45	I use a mobile dictionary to search for the meaning of a new English word.	MET	3.86	1.042	3
	5	I use a bilingual dictionary (English-Malay).	DET	3.78	.9879	4
	3	I analyse any available pictures or gestures (movements) to help me understand new words.	DET	3.71	.8613	5
	6	I use a bilingual dictionary (Malay-English).	DET	3.66	.9873	6
The least	36	I keep flash cards.	COG	2.84	1.034	1
	9	I use flash cards to learn new English words.	DET	2.98	.9930	2
	17	I talk to native speakers (people whose first language is English).	SOC	3.11	.9463	3
	35	I make my own lists of new words.	COG	3.12	.9929	4
	7	I use a monolingual Dictionary (English-English).	DET	3.13	.8846	5
	21	I associate the new word with its coordinates.	MEM	3.22	.8991	6

In determining whether there are differences between male and female students in terms of the use of VLS, an Independent Samples t-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test on the Use of the Five Categories of VLS by Gender

<i>VLS Category</i>	<i>Male students</i>			<i>Female students</i>			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Metacognitive (MET)	32	3.86	.8895	44	3.49	.9654	-1.73837	74	.142
Social (SOC)	32	3.66	.8796	44	3.25	.9460	-1.90425	74	.225
Determination (DET)	32	3.65	.9154	44	3.36	.8641	-1.4631	74	.352
Memory (MEM)	32	3.55	.8428	44	3.35	.9005	-0.9936	74	.298
Cognitive (COG)	32	3.36	.9775	44	3.22	.9482	-0.63275	74	.442

As indicated in Table 3, p values for all five categories of VLS were greater than .05 ($p > .05$): metacognitive strategies with $p = .142$, social strategies with $p = .225$, determination strategies with $p = .352$, memory strategies with $p = .298$ and cognitive strategies with $p = .442$. Hence, it can be assumed that there was no significant difference in the mean scores associated with the overall use of VLS between the male and female students. However, the results of Independent Samples t-test in the use of individual items for all VLS categories revealed significant difference in the mean scores as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Significant Difference in the Use of Individual Items by Gender

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig</i>
1. I analyse the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective, and adverb) to help me know its meaning (DET).	Male	32	4.00	.8424	-4.026	74	.001
	Female	44	3.27	.7270			
2. I analyse affixes and root words to guess the meanings of new words (e.g. replay: -re is a suffix which means do it again and play is the root word) (DET).	Male	32	3.69	.8590	-2.311	74	.024
	Female	44	3.25	.7813			
3. I analyse any available pictures or gestures (movements) to help me understand new words (DET).	Male	32	3.97	.8224	-2.291	74	.025
	Female	44	3.52	.8488			
11. I ask the teacher for a paraphrase or a synonym (similar meaning) of the new word (SOC)	Male	32	3.88	.8330	-3.698	74	.001
	Female	44	3.16	.8337			
12. I ask the teacher to make a sentence by using the new word (SOC).	Male	32	3.59	.9499	-2.317	74	.023
	Female	44	3.07	1.012			
26. I say the new word aloud (MEM)	Male	32	3.57	.8844	-2.433	74	.017
	Female	44	3.09	.7594			
28. I remember the word by underlining the first letter (MEM).	Male	32	3.78	.9042	-3.001	74	.004
	Female	44	3.20	.7064			
30. I study the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective and adverb) to remember it (MEM)	Male	32	3.84	.7233	-2.179	74	.033
	Female	44	3.43	.8733			
34. I write the new word many times (COG).	Male	32	3.69	.9980	-2.964	59.4	.004
	Female	44	3.05	.8340			
43. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by reading English newspaper, magazines and books (MET).	Male	32	3.81	.9136	-2.093	74	.040
	Female	44	3.36	.7378			
46. I try to test my vocabulary knowledge (e.g. with word tests) (MET)	Male	32	3.81	.9136	-2.404	74	.019
	Female	44	3.34	.7378			
48. I continue to study the word over time (MET).	Male	32	3.84	.8466	-2.428	74	.018
	Female	44	3.39	.7841			

From the table above, it can be observed that male students received significant higher main scores with p-value lower than .05 ($p < .05$) compared to female students in twelve strategies, namely Strategy item 1 (DET) "I analyse the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective, and adverb) to help me know its meaning", $t(74) = -4.026$, $p = .001$, Strategy item 2 (DET) "I analyse affixes and root words to guess the meanings of new words (e.g. replay: -re is a suffix which means do it again and play is the root word)", $t(74) = -2.311$, $p = .024$, Strategy item 3 (DET) "I analyse any available pictures or gestures (movements) to help me understand new words", $t(74) = -2.291$, $p = .025$, Strategy item 11 (SOC) "I ask the teacher for a paraphrase or a synonym (similar meaning) of the new word", $t(74) = -3.698$, $p = .001$, Strategy item 12 (SOC) "I ask the teacher to make a sentence by using the new word", t

(74)= -2.317, $p = .023$, Strategy item 26 (MEM) "I say the new word aloud", $t(74) = -2.433$, $p = .017$, Strategy item 28 (MEM) "I remember the word by underlining the first letter", $t(74) = -3.001$, $p = .004$, Strategy item 30 (MEM) "I study the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective and adverb) to remember it", $t(74) = -2.179$, $p = .033$, and Strategy item 34 (COG) "I write the new word many times", $t(59.434) = -2.964$, $p = .004$, Strategy item 43 (MET) "I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by reading English newspaper, magazines and books", $t(74) = -2.093$, $p = .040$, Strategy item 46 (MET) "I try to test my vocabulary knowledge (e.g. with word tests)", $t(74) = -2.404$, $p = .019$ and Strategy item 48 (MET) "I continue to study the word over time", $t(74) = -2.428$, $p = .018$. Meanwhile, Table 5 below shows the use of VLS in all five categories by male and female students which were ranked in the descending order.

Table 5: The Use of the Five Categories of VLS by Gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>VLS Category</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Male	Metacognitive (MET)	32	3.86	.8895	1
	Social (SOC)	32	3.66	.8796	2
	Determination (DET)	32	3.65	.9154	3
	Memory (MEM)	32	3.55	.8428	4
	Cognitive (COG)	32	3.36	.9775	5
	Total	32	3.62	.9009	
Female	Metacognitive (MET)	44	3.49	.9654	1
	Determination (DET)	44	3.36	.8641	2
	Memory (MEM)	44	3.35	.9005	3
	Social (SOC)	44	3.25	.9460	4
	Cognitive (COG)	44	3.22	.9482	5
	Total	44	3.33	.9248	

As indicated in Table 5, both male and female students favoured the use of metacognitive strategies the most (mean= 3.86 and mean= 3.49, respectively) and cognitive strategies the least (mean= 3.36 and mean= 3.22, respectively). The table also shows that male students received higher mean scores for all five categories of VLS with total mean scores of 3.62 in comparison to 3.33 gained by female students. This indicates that male students used more VLS than female students. Meanwhile, Tables 6 and 7 show the most and least frequently used VLS in all five categories by male and female students.

Table 6: The Most and Least Frequently used VLS by Male Students

	<i>Item</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>VLS Category</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Rank</i>
The most	42	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs.	MET	4.13	.8707	1
	44	I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word.	MET	4.13	.9070	2
	45	I use a mobile dictionary to search for the meaning of a new English word.	MET	4.06	.8776	3
	1	I analyse the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective, and adverb) to help me know its meaning.	DET	4.00	.8424	4
	3	I analyse any available pictures or gestures (movements) to help me understand new words.	DET	3.97	.8224	5
	14	I discover the meaning of the new word through group work activities	SOC	3.88	.8328	6
	36	I keep flash cards.	COG	2.81	1.12	1
The	17	I talk to native speakers (people whose first language is English).	SOC	3.09	.8175	2

least	7	I use a monolingual Dictionary (English-English).	DET	3.16	1.019	3
	35	I make my own lists of new words.	COG	3.19	.9651	4
	39	I put English labels on physical objects.	COG	3.19	.9980	5
	9	I use flash cards to learn new English words.	DET	3.22	.9064	6
	18	I study the words with pictures.	MEM	3.25	1.047	7
	32	I use physical action when learning a word (e.g. You will dance to remember the meaning of the word "dance").	MEM	3.25	1.107	8
	40	I keep a vocabulary notebook.	COG	3.28	1.023	9

As shown in Table 6, male students preferred using metacognitive strategies the most, namely strategy item 42 "I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs" (mean= 4.13), strategy item 44 "I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word" (mean= 4.13) and strategy item 45 "I use a mobile dictionary to search for the meaning of a new English word" (mean= 4.06). Other most used strategies were strategy item 1 "I analyse the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective, and adverb) to help me know its meaning" (DET) with the mean score of 4.00, strategy item 3 "I analyse any available pictures or gestures (movements) to help me understand new words" (DET) with the mean score of 3.97 and strategy item 14 "I discover the meaning of the new word through group work activities" (SOC) with the mean score of 3.88.

The least used strategy with the lowest mean score by male students was strategy item 36 "I keep flash cards" (COG) with the mean score of 2.81. Other least used strategies were strategy item 17 "I talk to native speakers (people whose first language is English)" (SOC), mean= 3.09, strategy item 7 "I use a monolingual Dictionary (English-English)" (DET), mean= 3.16, strategy item 35 "I make my own lists of new words" (COG), mean= 3.19, strategy item 39 "I put English labels on physical objects" (COG), mean= 3.19, strategy item 9 "I use flash cards to learn new English words" (DET), mean= 3.22, strategy item 18 "I study the words with pictures" (MEM), mean= 3.25, strategy item 32 "I use physical action when learning a word (e.g. You will dance to remember the meaning of the word "dance" (MEM), mean= 3.25 and strategy item 40 "I keep a vocabulary notebook" (MEM), mean= 3.28.

Table 7: The Most and Least Frequently used VLS by Female Students

	<i>Item</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>VLS Category</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Rank</i>
The most	5	I use a bilingual dictionary (English-Malay).	DET	3.75	.9912	1
	44	I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word.	MET	3.73	1.02	2
	45	I use a mobile dictionary to search for the meaning of a new English word.	MET	3.70	1.133	3
	42	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs.	MET	3.68	1.073	4
	19	I imagine the word's meaning.	MEM	3.66	.9631	5
	6	I use a bilingual dictionary (Malay-English).	DET	3.59	.8441	6
	41	I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by using the Internet.	MET	3.59	.8975	7
	29	I study the affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and roots of the new word to remember it (e.g. prefixes: re- recycle, un-unhappy, suffixes: ment- assignment, ness- sadness).	MEM	3.57	.8183	8
	36	I keep flash cards.	COG	2.86	.9786	1
	34	I write the new word many times.	COG	3.05	.8340	2

The least	12	I ask the teacher to make a sentence by using the new word.	SOC	3.07	.9499	3
	21	I associate the new word with its coordinates (apples with oranges, peaches and etc.).	MEM	3.09	.9104	4
	26	I say the new word aloud.	MEM	3.09	.8844	5
	47	I skip the new word.	MET	3.09	.9356	6
	7	I use a monolingual Dictionary (English-English).	DET	3.11	.7840	7
	17	I talk to native speakers (people whose first language is English).	SOC	3.11	1.039	8
	11	I ask the teacher for a paraphrase or a synonym (similar meaning) of the new word.	SOC	3.16	.8337	9

For female students, they frequently used VLS in three categories, namely metacognitive strategies (MET), determination strategies (DET) and memory strategies. Four strategies were in the metacognitive strategies (Items 41, 42, 44 and 45) while two strategies were in the determination category (Items 5 and 6) and two strategies were in the memory category (Items 19 and 29). Strategy item 5 “I use a bilingual dictionary (English-Malay)” was used with the highest mean score of 3.75

The least frequently used VLS were in all five categories. Two strategies were in the cognitive category (Items 34 and 36), two strategies were in the memory category (Items 21 and 26), one strategy from the metacognitive strategy (Item 47), one strategy from the determination category (Item 7) and three strategies from the social category (Items 11, 12 and 17). The female students most infrequently used Strategy item 36 “I keep flash cards” with the lowest mean score of 2.86.

Discussion

The results of this study showed that MDAB pre-diploma students were medium users of VLS for overall strategy with overall mean score of 3.45. This finding was in line with the findings of previous studies. Subon (2013), Hendrawaty (2015), Haryati Ahmad et al. (2016) and Behbahani (2016) also found that the students in their studies were medium VLS users. With regard to the use of each VLS category, it was revealed that the students were high strategy users for metacognitive strategies and medium strategy users of determination, memory, social and cognitive strategies. Similar findings were reported by Hendrawaty (2015) in her study on the use of VLS among EFL undergraduate students at Indraprasta PGRI University. However, Haryati Ahmad et al. (2016) observed that MDAB pre-diploma students at the Segamat Campus of UiTM Johor were medium strategy users for metacognitive, determination, memory and social strategies and low strategy users for cognitive strategies.

The findings also revealed that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used VLS, similar to the findings of past studies (e.g. Riankamol, 2008; Hendrawaty, 2016; Behbahani, 2016; Haryati et al., 2016). “I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word” and “I use a mobile dictionary to search for the meaning of a new English word” were the top two most frequently used VLS which indicates that MDAB pre-diploma students favoured technologically driven strategies and frequently used them to learn new words. This is congruent with Haryati Ahmad et al.’s (2016) belief that technologically driven strategies are becoming more common among learners. This is possibly because these strategies are the easiest and quickest ways to learn new words. Another major finding of the study is that the students favoured bilingual dictionaries over monolingual dictionaries as the use of a bilingual dictionary was among the most frequently used VLS in contrast to the use of a monolingual dictionary which was among the least frequently used VLS. A possible explanation why these students preferred bilingual dictionaries than monolingual dictionaries is because of their low English proficiency level. Although monolingual dictionaries provide detailed definitions, lower proficiency learners may not be able to understand them, unlike bilingual dictionaries that provide definitions or descriptions in their first language. Meanwhile, the top two least frequently used VLS

were “I keep flash cards” and “I use flash cards to learn new English words”. This finding was in line with the findings from Haryati et al.’s (2016) study which revealed that both strategies were among the least frequently used VLS by MDAB pre-diploma students at the Segamat Campus of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor.

Another major finding of the study is that there was no significant difference in the use of VLS by male and female students. This finding was similar to the findings of a study conducted by Manuel (2016) who found that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores associated with the overall use of VLS between male and female students. The study also found that the male students outperformed the female students as they had higher mean scores in all VLS categories. This finding was unlike the findings of Subon’s (2008) study that reported female students used more VLS than male students. The current study also discovered that the male students significantly outperformed the female students in twelve individual items, involving three strategies in the determination category (DET), two strategies in the social category (SOC), three strategies in the memory category (MEM), one strategy in the cognitive category (COG) and three strategies in metacognitive category (MET). This finding was in line with Manuel’s (2016) study which found that there was statistically significant difference in mean scores of the individual use of metacognitive strategies “I skip or pass a new word” and memory strategies “I connect the new word to its synonyms”.

Finally, pertaining to VLS categories, interestingly, both male and female students employed metacognitive strategies the most while cognitive strategies the least. Both male and female students frequently used metacognitive strategies such as “I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English songs”, “I use an online translation (e.g. Google Translate) to translate a new English word” and “I use a mobile dictionary to search for the meaning of a new English word”. Meanwhile, “I keep flash cards” was the least frequently used strategy with the lowest mean score for both males and females. A possible justification is that these students have an easy access to the Internet, allowing them to use technology driven strategies more frequently than traditional strategies such as using and keeping flash cards.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the use of VLS by MDAB pre-diploma students comprising of 44 females and 32 males at the Machang Campus of UiTMCK. Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the students were medium strategy users. Second, the students frequently used metacognitive strategies the most and cognitive strategies the least. Finally, male and female students did not differ significantly in the use of VLS. However, it was revealed that male students received higher mean scores for all VLS categories than female students and they significantly outperformed female students in several individual strategy items. Overall, it can be concluded that MDAB pre-diploma students employ a variety of VLS in learning new words, despite their low English proficiency level.

Recommendations for further research

The current study only involved MDAB pre-diploma students at the Machang Campus of UiTMCK. For future research, it is recommended that MDAB pre-diploma students from other campuses should be involved. Furthermore, using a larger group of students can provide more accurate results. In addition, other research instruments can be employed such as classroom observation, semi-structured interviews and journal writing in order to obtain more in-depth and reliable data concerning the students’ use of VLS.

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