

How do Lithuanian EFL students learn vocabulary?

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Abstract

Vocabulary is an essential part of any language. The study discussed in this article intended to explore how Lithuanian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students studying English at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, learn English vocabulary. To achieve the set aim, the following research questions were raised to answer: 1) Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) do the students use the most while studying English as a foreign language? 2) Which VLS do the students use the least while studying English as a foreign language? The study was carried out in 2023 using 31 open and closed questions in an online questionnaire that the students were asked to voluntarily fill in. The questions were based on the earlier done literature review distinguishing cognitive, social, and metacognitive vocabulary learning strategies. The students were not familiarised with the terminology of the strategies, but it was hoped that the described strategies in the given questions would also serve as useful information that the students could use while learning vocabulary in the future (if they had never used them before). As the study was both quantitative and qualitative, the latter data was processed using thematic grouping, content and descriptive analysis. The findings reveal interesting vocabulary learning preferences. Some of the VLS are used incidentally and occasionally (e.g., paraphrasing and placing words in sentences) while some others intentionally and frequently (e.g., guessing from the context or oral and written repetition).

Keywords: EFL, university students, vocabulary learning strategies

1 Introduction

An essential part of any language is its vocabulary. Native speakers are exposed to new vocabulary their whole lives and thus learn it effortlessly, while foreign language learners do not have the same exposure and thus often struggle to learn it (Karbalaei & Kord Afshari, 2019). Yet, vocabulary is the most important aspect for successful and effective communication, so knowledge of many words is key (Aktekin & Güven, 2013; Sarani and Shirzaei, 2016). Vocabulary should not be understood in a narrow sense related only to word meanings, since learning a word also means learning its “pronunciation, spelling, grammatical properties, connotations, morphological options, as well as semantic associates of the words” (Ghalebi et al., 2020, p. 2). However, a lack of vocabulary may lead to demotivation not only in communication (Ghalebi et al., 2020; Kesmez, 2021), but also in reading and listening (Ghalebi et al., 2020) in a foreign language, such as English.

The study discussed in this paper intended to explore how Lithuanian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students studying English at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, learn English vocabulary. To achieve the set aim, the following *research questions* were raised to answer:

1. Which vocabulary learning strategies do the students use the most while studying English as a foreign language?
2. Which vocabulary learning strategies do the students use the least while studying English as a foreign language?

2 Learning foreign language vocabulary: strategies and previous studies

In order to facilitate vocabulary learning, the so-called language learning strategies (LLS) or vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) are helpful. Scholars have been interested in them since the 1970s (Ghalebi et al., 2020). Some studies on the topic suggest that if students receive training in these strategies, they may learn vocabulary more efficiently (Aktekin & Güven, 2013). This is the reason why numerous research that have been carried out in the field of foreign language teaching and learning have intended to learn if and how particular strategies affect vocabulary learning. Often the strategies are divided into two categories that are further subdivided into subcategories, as in the following example:

- a. Direct strategies include *memory strategies* (remembering and retrieving vocabulary), *cognitive strategies* (comprehending and producing text), and *compensation strategies* (compensating for the lack of knowledge by guessing the meaning through gestures or contexts)

- b. Indirect strategies include *meta-cognitive strategies* (manipulating learning processes), *affective strategies* (regulating affective state), and *social strategies* (learning with others). (Alshammari, 2020, p. 30, italics in original)

Some other classifications and terminology exist as well.

Quite some studies have focused on compensation strategies related to guessing word meanings (Ali, 2020; Ebrahimi et al., 2015; Kesmez, 2021; Wahyudin, 2021), cognitive strategies of the use of dictionaries (Aktekin & Güven, 2013; Kesmez, 2021; Sarani & Shirzaei, 2016), note-taking (Aktekin & Güven, 2013), and others. According to Wahyudin (2021), in comparison to other strategies, cognitive strategies are seen as mechanical, as they do not require mental processing.

A study by Kesmez (2021) indicates students' preference for determination VLS, which is under the term of cognitive strategy in some classifications, related to learning individually without the help of others rather than social strategies (which were preferred the least) in order to learn about a new word: students guess the meaning, look up the meaning in a bilingual dictionary and analyse its part of speech. The social strategies include asking the teacher or peers for the meaning of the new word (Kesmez, 2021). However, verbal or written repetition, in other words, a cognitive strategy, was opted for consolidation of vocabulary in the same study by Kesmez (2021). In contrast, in another study, memorization and repetition were identified as the best ways to learn EFL vocabulary, as 100% and 86% of the students respectively listed them as such (Rahmatika et al., 2017). Celik and Topaş (2010) revealed EFL students' preference for determination rather than cognitive vocabulary learning strategies when the strategies were divided into discovery and consolidation VLS.

In addition, there have been gender differences observed in terms of vocabulary learning strategy use, as female students used all types of strategies more than male students (Kesmez, 2021). On the other hand, Alshammari (2020) did not reveal any of such differences. This shows that sometimes the results in different studies are conflicting. Moreover, differences in strategy preference have been noticed among EFL students of different proficiency. For instance, intermediate level students used more memory strategies than elementary level students (Celik & Topaş, 2010). Furthermore, a difference in VLS use was noticed between undergraduate and postgraduate students (Ghalebi et al., 2020; Sarani & Shirzaei, 2016), as the latter ones were more conscious about such strategies and preferred to use monolingual dictionaries to learn word meanings (Sarani & Shirzaei, 2016). Undergraduate students preferred to use determination and memory strategies that were "simple with less need for mental activities and processing" (Ghalebi et al., 2020, p. 11). In comparison, not much difference in terms of vocabulary strategy use was noticed among graduate and postgraduate students (Ghalebi et al., 2020). In a study where tertiary level students were not grouped into undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate, the cognitive VLS seemed to be the most frequent, whereas the least popular one was the use of mental images in order to remember vocabulary (Wahyudin, 2021).

In some studies, highly-motivated students and low-motivated students also differed in the VLS that they employed (e.g., see Sarani & Shirzaei, 2016). High achievers perceived all VLS as important (Getachew & Getachew, 2014; Alshammari, 2020), whereas low achievers preferred only meta-cognitive and memory strategies (Alshammari, 2020). According to Ghalebi et al. (2020), the learning of foreign language vocabulary requires high learner motivation, so the chosen learning strategies depend on individual learners. The choice of strategies may also depend on the activities, in which students are involved (Rachmawati, 2017), for example, a preferred strategy for the understanding of the word meaning while reading may be guessing from the context (Ali, 2020).

Ebrahimi et al. (2015) investigated and found that it was effective to teach EFL students vocabulary through the context of short stories, as students learned vocabulary through contextual guessing and retained it better than the students who were taught in a traditional way. Yet, the study by Tanweer (2019) demonstrated that the use of visual technologies (e.g., pictures and videos) was more effective in teaching vocabulary than teaching through texts, as vocabulary is learned faster and retained longer that way. Even technologies that are not meant to teach vocabulary seem to be beneficial while learning it. For instance, Hasan et al. (2022) found that WhatsApp, an application used for communication purposes, helped the students to improve EFL vocabulary in the higher education setting. Of course, there are numerous applications created to teach vocabulary to English or other foreign language students. Al-Jarf (2022) provides a list of such useful applications.

Earlier studies reveal that EFL students who know VLS improve their knowledge of vocabulary, expand their vocabulary (Kesmez, 2021) and store vocabulary better (Aktekin & Güven, 2013). The higher the level of English the students studied, the more useful VLS seemed to be to the students (Celik & Topaş, 2010). Nevertheless, interesting findings were observed by Celik and Topaş (2010) whose research revealed that there was a discrepancy between EFL students' perceptions of VLS and the actual use of such strategies in practice.

Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) point out that the main difference in vocabulary learning in one's native and second or foreign language is the rate of its growth, as in L1 the input is immense in comparison to the context of second or foreign languages. In the EFL context, the main difficulty while learning vocabulary is its memorization due to a large number of words (Kesmez, 2021), as "there is simply too much to learn" (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016 p. 231), or because learners forget the words without seeing or using them (Aktekin & Güven, 2013). In the latter case, flashcards, pictures, posters, songs, computer games, and TV series are seen as helpful (Aktekin & Güven, 2013). This shows that in order to retain vocabulary EFL students may use various means both inside and outside the classroom. Yet, the amount of words learners need to learn may seem overwhelming: "An educated native speaker knows 20,000 word families, while an educated L2 speaker's vocabulary is 8000–9000 words – even the latter may be a life-long challenge for an EFL learner" (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016, p. 231). As a result, it is highly recommended to teach only high frequency words and encourage students to acquire vocabulary outside the classroom, e.g., through extensive reading or extensive viewing (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016). Such learning of vocabulary and other skills is often related to popular culture, which makes the learning effortless and interesting (Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė, 2020). On the other hand, it does not mean that EFL students avoid vocabulary learning activities that require effort. For instance, the study by Aclan and Aziz Noor (2015) showed that the students learned English vocabulary through participation in classroom debates for which they prepared, even if they were not required to, in order to make their speech effective, since they felt motivated to do so.

3 Methodology

Research participants: 56 Lithuanian undergraduate students (freshmen) involved in the study were about to start studying (in four randomly chosen classes of) general English at upper-intermediate level at Vytautas Magnus University at that time and were asked to voluntarily participate by filling in an anonymous online questionnaire (*research tool* created via Google Forms) about their learning of EFL vocabulary experience and habits. 69.9% of them were female students and the rest of the sample included male students. The age of the students varied from 18 to 22+ (18 old - 23.2%, 19 years old – 48.2%, 20 – 17.9%, 22 + - 10.7%), but almost a half of all the participants were 19.

Through the questionnaire, the study *aimed* to learn which VLS the students knew and used the most and the least while studying English as a foreign language, since not all the strategies may seem to be helpful. In order to answer the two research questions, indicated in the introduction, 31 open and closed questions were used to address the topic (and 2 additional demographic questions were included as well). It was hoped they would help to understand how Lithuanian EFL students learn English vocabulary. Question 14 was on compensation, 6-7 and 11-16 on cognitive, 8-9 on social, 17-22 on memory, and 23-30 on metacognitive VLS. Other questions intended to learn whether the students needed to be taught VLS, vocabulary learning challenges and other strategies they know and/or use that they were not enquired about. The students were not familiarised with the terminology of the strategies, but it was believed that the described strategies in the given questions would serve as useful information that the students could use while learning vocabulary in the future. Having received and processed the results, they were discussed with the study participants in class.

Methods for data analysis: The following methods for data analysis were chosen as the most convenient: thematic grouping, content and descriptive analysis were used to process qualitative data, while MS Excel was used for quantitative data.

Limitations: The study is limited in the number of its participants. In addition, the questionnaire included only a few compensation and social VLS in comparison to the other strategies. On the other hand, as noted in the previous section, social strategies are not common among EFL students (see, for example, Kesmez, 2021). Gender was not taken into account either, as the number of male and female students differed greatly in the sample. This is quite common in a Lithuanian university classroom but may vary based on the field of study or study programme. The students in the sample came from various study programmes but studied English as an obligatory study subject in their undergraduate studies. Furthermore, the results of previous studies are conflicting, as Kesmez (2021) noticed differences in VLS preference based on gender while Alshammari (2020) did not. It was decided not to focus on gender in the present study.

4 Results and discussion

The questionnaire included some general questions concerning VLS at first. The majority of the respondents (80.4%) believe that EFL students should be taught/ trained vocabulary learning strategies, whereas the rest of the sample are not sure (17.9%) or do not believe it to be necessary (1.8%). However, when asked if they have received any training about such strategies themselves, 46.4% admitted they had not and only 17.9% had been taught them.

Others did not know or could not remember. In other words, not even one fifth of all the students who took part in the study had been taught or introduced to VLS, even though they had studied English for many years at school and at the time of the study had just enrolled in the university. In Lithuania, English classes at school usually start in grade one or two but may start in grade four depending on the school. The low percentage of those who have been familiarised with VLS might indicate the need to inform students about VLS and research their use in the EFL classroom. Through the questionnaire, the study introduced various VLS to the students as new (or earlier learned but forgotten) information that they could use in their study process in the future.

In the questionnaire, at first the strategies themselves were not given, as the study intended to elicit this information from the study participants. When they were asked to indicate the ones they know and use, the respondents pointed out the following ones (12.5% could not name any): (oral and written) repetition, mental images, translation, reading in English, watching films, using flashcards or word cards. Thus, most of the students knew quite some VLS, even know they had not received any training on them. As they had been learning English for quite some years, they may have found independently what works and what does not. The respondents were also requested to shortly describe their vocabulary learning process, so that they could reveal (in their own words) the way it happens. It seems that listening, reading, (oral and written) repetition and translation help to learn, as the open-ended answers indicated. This is in line with the strategies they enlisted before, which means that they actually use the strategies they know in practice.

Moreover, the study participants were invited to list the difficulties they had faced while learning English vocabulary. The answers provided in their own words varied but certain recurrent difficulties were mentioned (they were processed by using thematic grouping): difficult spelling, pronunciation, the use of the learned words in real-life situations/ contexts, and memorization/ forgetting of words and their meanings. When the respondents were asked to indicate vocabulary *memorization* techniques that they know, the following themes dominated: over 14% admitted to not knowing any, but other students indicated flashcards, visualisation, (oral or written) repetition as helpful while trying to memorize vocabulary. That is, (oral or written) repetition seems to be a popular strategy as it is mentioned quite a lot in relation to different questions concerning VLS use.

Another open-ended question was provided to extract information from the respondents and learn whether they know how the use of a dictionary (*cognitive* strategy) could be helpful while learning English vocabulary. Through close reading, thematic grouping and content analysis of the provided answers, the following themes stood out: dictionaries provide pronunciation, spelling (these two were mentioned most frequently), definitions, synonyms, and usage in a sentence (examples). These are the same aspects that they found the most challenging while learning English vocabulary. Here are some examples of the provided answers on the usefulness of dictionaries (the language is not corrected): "It helps to better understand the unknown/ familiar word with its appropriate meaning" (student 2, subsequently S4); "Gives definition, spelling" (S5); "It can help remember the spelling" (S6); "You can read description of the words that you want to learn and that may help memorize them (S14)", etc. Yet, almost 11% did not know about the possible usefulness of dictionaries. Such students did not indicate how dictionaries could be useful while learning vocabulary or commented that "not much," meaning they are not very useful.

Furthermore, the students were given a closed-ended question about the kind(s) of dictionaries they use. A multiple choice was provided with a possibility to choose as many answers as needed. The findings revealed that online dictionaries are the most popular, as they are used by 87.5% of the study participants. The used dictionaries are often bilingual (Lithuanian-English; English-Lithuanian) (66.1%), while a third of all the participants prefers monolingual English dictionaries. In addition, 35.7% use synonym dictionaries, but antonym dictionaries are much less popular (19.6%).

In terms of *social* VLS, the respondents were enquired if they ask their EFL teachers to translate words into other languages they speak. 51.8% admitted to doing so rarely, 28.6% sometimes, 7.1% often, 1.8% very often, but 10.7% never do so. Then they were also asked if they request other students to translate words into other languages they speak. The same percentage - 51.8% - admitted to doing so rarely, 21.4% sometimes, 10.7% often, but 16.1% never use this strategy. These results suggest that the respondents do not rely on unknown word translation provided by others or translanguaging in the EFL classroom. This may be related to the previously discussed use of dictionaries, as the students can find the translation they need in the bilingual online dictionaries they use or get the necessary definitions in English from monolingual dictionaries. In this respect, it seems that cognitive VLS are preferred more than the social ones, even though both of them may involve translation.

There was quite a number of other *cognitive* VLS included in the questions of the questionnaire as well. The respondents were asked how they note down word meanings. Thematic grouping and content analysis of the provided answers to this open-ended question showed that usually students write down a word and its meaning in Lithuanian on paper (sometimes they do not write it down but hope to remember). This once again is related to translation of vocabulary, but this time we learn that the students write down the meanings of the words they study

and learn, not only look them up in an online dictionary. However, having and using a special notebook to write down words and their meanings was not a popular cognitive VLS, since 76.8% of the students do not use it, and only 23.2% employ it. Thus, it is possible to assume that the word meanings are taken down somewhere else: in the textbook, handouts, anywhere else where the new words are encountered, or in their notebook(s) not dedicated specifically for word writing but rather meant for notes in their English class or any other notebook that serves a variety of purposes.

The opinions differed greatly on the use of vocabulary revision exercises as a *cognitive* vocabulary learning strategy: 10.7% never use such exercises, 28.6% use rarely, 33.9% sometimes, 16.6% often, 7.1% very often, and 3.6% always. On the other hand, in general, it is possible to claim that over 61% of the respondents use such exercises to a greater or lesser extent. Yet, the use of (mental) images, another *cognitive* vocabulary learning strategy, seems to be less liked by the students, just as in the study by Wahyudin (2021). In the present study, 16.1% never use it, 19.6% rarely use it, and 26.8% use it sometimes. However, 17.9% use it often, 14.3% very often, and 5.4% always. Thus, the parts of those who do use it and those that do not are almost equally distributed.

The last *cognitive* strategy that was included in the questionnaire was oral or written repetition. The findings show it is employed by the students but at different frequencies: 26.8% use it sometimes, 21.4% often, and 16.1% very often and the same amount always. Only 12.5% use it rarely or never (7.1%). That is, over 80% find it useful for vocabulary learning. This finding is also in line with the obtained results concerning specific VLS they employ, as one of the mentioned strategies was (oral or written) repetition, even though the list of strategies was not provided to the students. Guessing (from the context) as a *compensation* vocabulary learning strategy is a very popular one, as 96.5% use it, although the frequency of use varies, too: 37.5% use it very often, 25% often, 28.6% sometimes, 5.4% always, and only 3.6% never rely on it.

Memory strategies do not seem to have a high frequency of use. For instance, the answers about the students' attempt to connect a new word with personal experience were divided into almost equal parts: 33.9% do connect the words with their own experience, 30.4% do not, while 35.7% "maybe" use this strategy. Similarly, connecting a new word with an already known antonym/synonym of that word is used as a strategy but at different frequencies: rarely - 28.6%, sometimes 26.8%, often - 17.9%, very often 16.1%, always 7.1%, and only 3.6% never use it in order to learn new vocabulary. Therefore, it appears that roughly 40% of all the respondents use it (very) often or always while occasional use accounts for almost a third of the students.

Studying the spelling of a new word in order to remember (*memory* strategy) that word is employed at different frequencies as well: sometimes - 35.7%, often - 30.4%, rarely - 12.5%, always - 10.7%, very often - 5.4% and the same amount never use this strategy. That is, 46.5% use it (very) often or always, which may be seen as neither high nor low frequency.

Using a new word in a sentence as a (*memory*) strategy to learn the meaning of a new word is sometimes (25%), rarely (23.2%) or never 5.4% relied on, which means that over 53% are not very keen to use it, and the use itself is occasional, not preferred. On the other hand, 10.7% always use it, 17.9% often and the same number very often use it. Thus, the numbers of proponents and opponents of this memory strategy do not differ greatly.

One of the least popular means of memorising English vocabulary (*memory* strategies) is rhyming, as some students prefer it rarely (30.4%) or never (28.6%) use it, which indicates that almost 60% may not find it useful. However, 21.4% use it sometimes, 12.5% often, 3.6% very often and the same amount always learn vocabulary this way.

In terms of other *memory* VLS, paraphrasing of a word meaning to learn the meaning of a new word is employed rarely (37.5%) or sometimes (28.6%), which means that over 66% employ it occasionally and incidentally. In addition, 7.1% never use it. Only 17.9% use it very often and 8.9% often.

The most used *metacognitive* strategies are related to popular culture in English (as it was the case in some other prior studies, e.g., by Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016, or by Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė, 2020). Watching films and TV series seems to be (one of) the most frequently employed VLS, as 89.3% use it to learn vocabulary. This may prove the effectiveness of extensive viewing. In the present study, only 7.1% do not use and 3.6% were not sure about this strategy. Another popular one is reading books and/ or magazines, as 67.9% use it, but 17.9% do not and 14.3% were not sure about it. Listening to podcasts (a metacognitive strategy) is done with the aim to learn English vocabulary by 60.7%, while 19.6% do not use it and the same amount of students believe that "maybe" they do it. Listening to songs is also seen as useful, since 76.8% employ this strategy for vocabulary learning purposes, while only 12.5% do not and others are not sure. Thus, extensive listening and reading are also effective VLS (just as noted in the study by Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb (2016)). In contrast to all the other metacognitive strategies discussed here, learning vocabulary by surfing the internet is applied occasionally rather than intentionally, as the surfing happens without the aim to learn (just like while listening to songs or podcasts, watching films/ TV shows, readings books, etc.) but some or much of the learning happens at the same time: always - 10.7%, sometimes 28%, often - 28.6%, very often

– 28.6%. However, only 3.6% rarely learn vocabulary this way, and there were no students indicating they never learn English vocabulary this way.

Some of the *metacognitive* strategies in the questionnaire seem to be unfrequently or never employed while learning English vocabulary. Vocabulary tests and quizzes are not used by 66.1% of the study participants, but over a third likes them. Putting sticky notes on objects is not frequently used by the students about to start a course of upper-intermediate English either, as 92.9% do not employ this strategy. It may be seen as useful in lower levels when the studied vocabulary is related to objects at home and the vocabulary itself is very limited, but more advanced vocabulary refers to entities further from home and abstract notions as well, which would be difficult to learn using sticky notes. Therefore, the students may have used this strategy in the past but not anymore, as they enrolled in a course of general English at B2 level. Keeping a learning journal (*metacognitive* strategy) is not a popular vocabulary learning strategy either, as 76.8% of the students who participated in the study do not use it (and only 23.2% do).

The findings of this study should be considered with caution, since, as mentioned above, the study is limited in the number of its participants, one level of English classes that they came from, and the VLS it included in the questionnaire. However, as the questionnaire included open-ended questions as well, the opportunity to include missing/ not given strategies was provided. For instance, other strategies that the respondents used even though they were not indicated in the questionnaire in terms of questions are the following: speaking or chatting with friends/ people from other countries in English and playing video games. Future studies could focus on the actual application of VLS, as the preference of certain strategies and the general idea or opinion of what one uses may differ in practice, as the study by Celik and Topaş (2010) has shown.

5 Conclusions

The discussion above cannot state that only direct (e.g., memory or cognitive) or indirect (e.g., metacognitive or social) VLS dominate when Lithuanian EFL students learn English vocabulary, as various strategies are preferred at different times and in different contexts. The metacognitive strategies involving Internet-surfing, film-watching and listening to podcasts and songs are used often by the majority of the study participants but are related to occasional application that is usually not directed at learning as a primary aim. Meanwhile some other strategies of the same type, such as vocabulary tests and quizzes, sticky notes or keeping a learning journal, which directly aim at learning, are almost not used and can be seen as the least popular.

In terms of social (indirect) VLS, more than a half of all respondents rarely ask their EFL teachers and peers to translate words into other languages they speak. Thus, translanguaging practices relying on translation provided by others are not frequently employed.

Of all the strategies in the study, the compensation (direct) vocabulary learning strategy of guessing (from the context) is the most frequent. Oral or written repetition (direct cognitive) is also very often used, but the use of vocabulary revision exercises does not have a similar popularity, even though it is employed by the students to a greater or lesser extent occasionally.

The least frequently employed cognitive strategy is the use of a special notebook to write words and their meanings. Even though the open-ended answers revealed that the students do note down word meanings, they may be doing this in other or any notebooks, handouts, computers or elsewhere where it is convenient at the time of learning.

One of the least frequently used direct memory strategies is rhyming, while paraphrasing and placing words in sentences (direct memory strategies) are rather occasionally used. However, Lithuanian EFL students like using bilingual (English-Lithuanian or Lithuanian-English) online dictionaries to retrieve word meanings (cognitive strategy).

Knowledge about VLS is useful for Lithuanian EFL students, and eight of out ten agree that students should be taught them, but almost a half of them have not received any training like this. This is in line in the study carried out by Celik and Topaş (2010) who concluded that VLS instruction in the EFL context should be improved. On the other hand, the research participants were able to list some of such strategies, as they may have found this information by themselves and are already using the strategies that work for them. Thus, they may have gained some knowledge about VLS independently. Moreover, knowledge about their students' VLS is useful to their teachers, as they may direct their students' attention to certain activities and materials that could be helpful and facilitate the vocabulary learning process. It is also important to consider individual preferences for VLS as well, as every student may choose what is helpful for him/ her in particular.

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