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## ***On Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Students of Foreign Languages<sup>2</sup>***

### **Extended summary**

The development of lexical knowledge is among the most important aspects of the foreign language learning process, given that the development of linguistic competence is largely contingent upon its success. Vocabulary learning strategies, as a multifaceted array of techniques focused on overcoming different problems that surface during the learning process, can help students to realize this complex goal in the easiest way possible.

While there are strategies that students are able to implement spontaneously, the research shows that they can often be unaware of the myriad of strategies they have at their disposal. In order to utilize the strategies in the most effective, dynamic and purposeful way, the students may often require the teachers' help and guidance. If any form of strategy instruction were to be successful, it is, however, necessary to first be aware of the students' strategy choice and the ways they utilize them, as well as their attitudes towards them, which can be crucially influential on the patterns of strategy application in concrete learning situations.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to provide an insight into the aspects of strategy use and perceptions of university students enrolled in foreign language degree programs. The present study also examines the relationship between the two aforementioned factors. The study was conducted by means of an electronic questionnaire, modeled after the taxonomies and the categorizations presented in the works of Schmitt (1997) and Šikmanović (2013). It

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contained 64 vocabulary learning strategies that the students were asked to evaluate on the basis of the frequency of use and perception of usefulness, using a Likert scale with 6 values ranging from 1 – I completely disagree to 6 – I completely agree. The students were also given the opportunity to add strategies to both parts of the questionnaire.

The sample consisted of 47 students enrolled in Italian, German, English, French and Spanish languages degree programs at the Faculty of Philology and Arts in Kragujevac. Among them there were 15 first-year, 9 second-year, 14 third-year and 9 fourth-year students.

The results have shown that, when trying to understand new words, the students tended to use most the strategies that established a contrast with their first language, while, in order to consolidate their knowledge, they resorted to a mix of more complex cognitive strategies and relatively mechanical memory strategies, such as repetition. In doing so, they focused primarily on the orthographic and phonological aspects of words. As for the least used strategies, the students mainly avoided using any social strategies and those based on the analysis of semantic relations between foreign language words.

On the other hand, the study showed a markedly positive view of the vocabulary learning strategies' usefulness while also uncovering the existence of significant differences between the factors of the strategies' frequency of use and perceived usefulness. At the individual level, the students generally rated the strategies usefulness higher than their actual use, but the greatest differences were present when comparing the average results for different types of strategies. While the students were shown to use the determination and memory strategies most frequently, the usefulness scores for these groups put them only in the third and fourth place in the list. Instead, the first two places were occupied by cognitive and metacognitive strategies, implying that these two strategy types should be considered the primary target of any strategy instruction and that their actual use levels could be increased with very little effort through the teachers' encouragement and adequate instructional activities. The same could not be said of the social strategies which took the last place in both lists, and should therefore be focused on mostly in preparing the instructional activities.

Altogether, it could be concluded that the participants of this study used a mix of different types of strategies with varying levels of frequency, both in class and outside of it, which makes us believe that vocabulary learning strategies already represent a significant part of the students' learning process. However, it is also evident that in order to render the students' strategy use even more diversified and successful, some strategies should be focused on through instructional activities in the classroom.

**Keywords:** language learning strategies, vocabulary learning, students of foreign languages, attitudes, patterns of use.

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