An Analysis of the Relationship among EFL Learners' Autonomy, Self-esteem, and Choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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Abstract—This study seeks to determine whether any significant relationship exists among EFL learners' autonomy (LA), self-esteem (SE), and choice of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) as well as whether LA and SE are predictors of these strategies. To achieve these aims, this study employed a descriptive research design. Participants included 157 male and female undergraduate EFL learners, all within the age range of 17 to 25 years. They were studying English within the sub-disciplines of English Literature, Linguistics, and General English. Participants were administered the following three types of questionnaires adapted by the researcher: a) a 30-item VLS questionnaire based on that of Schmitt taxonomy (1997); b) a 30-item LA questionnaire developed by Sakai, et al. (2008); c) and a 30-item SE questionnaire based on Coopersmith's SE inventory (1967). Upon conducting preliminary analyses of this study's assumptions, the characteristics of the data were proven legitimate via correlation and regression analyses. Correlation analysis demonstrated that a statistically significant relationship existed between EFL learners' autonomy and VLS, with (r = .555, p < .05), and SE and VLS, with (r = .678 p < .05). Furthermore, regression analysis revealed LA and SE to be significant predictors of VLS. LA predicted 30.7% of scores in the choice of VLS (R = .555, R2 = .307), and SE predicted 45.9% of scores in the choice of VLS (R = .678, R2 = .456). These findings demonstrate that both LA and SE make strong contributions to VLS.

Index Terms—EFL learners, autonomy, self-esteem, vocabulary learning strategies, academic achievement

I. Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the fundamental elements of language acquisition. Vocabulary is understood as a core unit of language proficiency which determines how well a student communicates via the target language (Teng, 2015). As stated by M. McCarthy (1990), "good and perfect communication is not determined by how well the communicator can use the grammar of a language or how well he/she can properly arrange the sounds of a language; however, it is determined by how well the communicator integrates the written and spoken vocabulary". Thus, vocabulary is more significant than grammar for determining the effectiveness of communication in a foreign language. Indeed, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners often complain that their communication is inadequate due to the fact that they lack necessary vocabulary. Similarly, Ellis (1994) supported the idea that lexical errors could hamper comprehension more so than grammatical errors.

Vocabulary learning involves various fundamental aspects of language development. Learning and retaining the vocabulary of a language is one of the most challenging tasks in language acquisition. However, foreign language acquisition is not only challenging at a basic level of education; rather, some scholars argue that difficulty persists even at tertiary levels. As learners are expected to familiarize themselves with new words and store in them in long-term memory for later retrieval, successful acquisition depends largely upon the vocabulary input strategies employed by learners. Research indicates that foreign language acquisition is affected by various factors, for instance a learner's internal factors or VLS methods employed (Tsuchida, 2002). However, other factors related to psychological needs and personal peculiarities are also important to the learning process.

Learners should feel comfortable while learning; therefore, teachers should strive to eliminate factors hindering this possibility and promote factors enhancing the learning process. LA is believed to be one of the most fundamental internal factors affecting learner's vocabulary acquisition process (Littlewoods, 1999). Autonomy is understood as the willingness of the learner to participate in the study independently (Samaie et al., 2015).It enables learners to take control of the learning process. It also provides them with the competence and confidence that they need to learn. The effectiveness of the language-learning process depends greatly on the ability of learners to control this process. Little (1995) explained that knowledge is built by the learner rather than solely by the teacher. Therefore, the teacher should facilitate the learning process, while the learner should direct his/her learning. Promoting LA in the classroom is advantageous to both the teacher and the learner. However, it is more advantageous to the learner, as it provides him/her

with extensive opportunities to perform his/her chosen skills and take full control of the learning process. In other words, it promotes a learner-centered learning approach which psychologists have identified as an effective pedagogical method (Spratt et al., 2002).Self-esteem is another important aspect of language acquisition, as it affects both the cognitive and affective actions of learners (Springer, 2010). Consequently, it also influences learners' self-confidence, self-knowledge, and capabilities. It is understood as the ability of one to make a judgment of his/her values and worth based on the feeling of efficacy as one interacts with the environment. Students should be able to have the internal confidence that they can successfully employ the content of their learning. In the context of foreign language learning, it is crucial to promote learners' SE so that they may perform well in the foreign language. Learners with high SE are believed to perform well, while their counterparts with low SE are known to underperform (Springer, 2010). According to Brown (2000), SE influences every aspect of human actions; therefore, there can never be a successful activity without the occurrence of some degree of self-esteem (p. 145). SE is a significant affective aspect in the procedure for achieving success in education. However, lack of self-esteem causes mistrust of the individual student's capability that causes poor performance due to the absence of confidence (Ebert et al. 2012).

Effective VLS are critical for language learners, as their absence could be a stumbling block to the successful acquisition of a new language. It is expected that EFL learners should acquire a complex lexical range that will aid them in combating language acquisition challenges (Brown, 2000). SE is believed to directly affect LA in language learning. Both factors are equally important in language learning; therefore, one cannot separate one from the other. Improving SE enhances the learning process, and vice versa. Therefore, the teacher should ensure that both factors are strengthened equally. Learners who take responsibility for their learning have a higher probability of achieving their learning objectives. In an EFL context, the lack of these factors prevent learners from acquiring new vocabularies; nevertheless, most EFL learners are unaware of how these factors affect them. Indeed, no studies have examined the relationship among these aforementioned variables. Thus, this study attempts to fill this gap by investigating the relationship among the VLS, LA and SE of EFL learners at Soran University.

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research questions were proposed.

Research Question 1: Does there exist a statistically significant relationship between autonomy and choice of VLS among Iraqi EFL students?

Research Question 2: Does there exist a statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and choice of VLS among these students?

Research Question 3: Does there exist a statistically significant relationship between autonomy and self-esteem among students?

Research Question 4: Does there exist a statistically significant relationship between learners' self-esteem as well as autonomy and the ability to predict the choice of VLS?

II. THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Self-esteem

The theory of self-esteem is closely associated with motivation and perception, and that is to mean individual assessment carried out by the learner about the essential learning or language of interest (Thanasoulas, 2000). Self-esteem, therefore, as defined by Coopersmith (1967, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000), is a self-judgment of valuableness that is shown in the perspective that the person considers to themselves. In other words, Coopersmith (1967) indicates that if a learner has a healthy regard for self, his/her association with themselves as learners is improbable to be wrecked by any different evaluations from the teacher. In contrast, the absence of self-esteem will probably cause a negative opinion towards a student's capability as well as a degradation in cognitive implementation. Therefore, revealing how the learner perceives him/herself as incompetent to learn (Thanasoulas, 2000). According to Rosa (1999), the acquisition of a second language is affected by intrinsic and extrinsic aspects that lead to effectiveness in language learning. Research has shown that fundamental element of self-esteem is a key individual component that is active during any affective tasks or cognitive learning of the second language. She explains that additional intrinsic components are motivation, concern, self-consciousness, and ability to take risks. Likewise, external components affecting self-esteem are comprised of sociocultural conditions which result from the experiences of a learner of both two languages and cultures. That is, both aspects of socio-cultural and individualism have a potential of providing success in learning of language (Rosa, 1999).In language education, the focus on self-esteem assists the students to channel their energy, which in most cases were diverted from study tasks and concentrate on nonconstructive personal beliefs, formerly to a state appropriate for language gain. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to address explicitly that tasks with self-esteem are free from the unjustified acknowledgement that may cause wrong prediction as well as an incorrect perception of real life matters (Rubio, 2007). Indeed, the outcome of skillfulness is confidence. Therefore, the focus on the self-esteem of the learner in a language classroom is not established an untrue faith about of an active state to substitute the negative. But comparatively, the subject matter is ensuring that learners have the techniques to excel in the learning second language and parallel with minimizing any incorrect beliefs about the students' worth or skills, that may prevent them from realizing their full potential. Self-esteem in learning advocates for competence and that learner should be able to feel they are skillful. On the same note, teachers cannot guide learners to ignore the obstacles during language learning, because the existence of these challenges make students adjust and develop ways to overcome.

B. Learner Autonomy

The idea of learner autonomy (LA) is a critical theoretical establishment in language acquisition. Also, it remains a significant component as referenced in the teaching of English language (Feng, 2015). Apparently, many instructors consider LA as a framework that has beneficial implications for learners, particularly EFL students. Furthermore, as supported by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), autonomous students are associated with a high ability in decision making about their studies. Tuan (2011) suggests that scholars and researchers have done great effort toexplain learner autonomy and its values. For example, David Little (1991) sees LA as "the potential for objectivity, making a decision, analytical reflection, and independent work". He proposes that LA provides development of some mental link to the learning process and context of the learner. However, Holec (1981) demonstrated the idea of LA as "the capability to be responsible for individual learning" (p.3). Being a founder in LA of teaching second and foreign languages, he identifies that "it can acquire and control the power of every learning decision made". Moreover, Feng (2015) indicates that between the late 1980s and the beginning of the 2000s, the popularity of learner autonomy has increasingly led to a creation of new definitions such as intrinsic inducement, learner-oriented and self-led learner. According to Feng (2015), learner autonomy has rapidly shifted into a newstage that is different from the notion that learners need to manage the responsibility pertaining their decisions. However, instructors are also encouraged to evolve capabilities and ideas of LA because their roles are mainly supportive. Accordingly, an independent learner can be described as perceived by Scharle and Szabo (2000) that it is one with adequate preparation to undertake a significant amount of control for his/her personal learning. And by so doing, the learner is required to engage in decision making concerning his/her individual studies, be in a position to establish goals, plan for work schedules, create new approaches for adjustments, make assessments of his/her outcome in learning (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012). For better results in learning, learners should be motivated to be more autonomous by initiating appropriate action plans. Likewise, independent learners would collaborate, learn and reflect with peers on their studies. Feng (2015) agrees that LA is increasingly attracting much attention from learners of English language especially in studying vocabulary. This is mainly because of the significant of LA in evolving successful acquisition of language by learners. Besides, the current tendency in education implies that much focus is needed in motivation and learners' needs, merely because they are associated with the learner's language gain (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Due to the different learning success and experiential history of students and thus, have reduced autonomous placements. Usually, there are poor skills in cultivating autonomy, and that requires guidance and support from their instructors or teachers. Therefore, to improve LA in mastering vocabulary is an essential cause in the learning undertakings (Little, 1991).

C. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The strategies of vocabulary studies have a general definition that is activitiespursued by students of language so as to facilitate learning of lexicon items in a particular language of concern. Nevertheless, there is room to modify the definition above that it becomes comprehensive as a significance of the present research. Furthermore, a general description from the previous literature shows that VLS can be understood for various aspects, for example, VLS can be regarded as any undertaking operated by the learner to support the progress in their studies. Secondly, a concept of vocabulary action plans could be associated with specific deeds that enhance the expertise of studying vocabularies. Thirdly, a vocabulary learning concept might be linked to rational activities undergone by the student so as to allow the learning of vocabularies. Therefore, to verify the learners' activities as VLS, these activities should meet the standards of the general standards. According to Nation (2001), VLS can be evaluated as worth teachable if they meet the outlined list as follows:
 • VLS students should exercise choice considering the fact that there are many concepts to select from
 • The strategies are also compound including more stages of learning
 • The students applying any concept need to be knowledgeable and with a reward
 •The strategies should also accelerate the learning process as well as its use.
In essence, the literature review shows that the efforts to categorize VLS and other groups have been an ongoing effort, but although, these concepts have different developers, there are some similarities of the elements. In literal, Schmitt's (1997) uses two classifications for grouping concepts as VLS. These include: Discovery concept which is concerned with revealing the meaning of new words, whereas, consolidation action plan, assists learners of the language to memorize and recall the explanation of different words, including their spellings. Other more approaches include: Cognitive, memory, social concept and metacognitive. It was observed that psycholinguistic and metacognitive action plans have been in play to most learners with high vocabulary mastery (Celik & Toptas, 2010).It is important then to establish strategies for vocabulary learning (VLS) that are components of the general language learning concepts, and they have a positive impact on learning the language successfully (Schmitt, 2010)

1. Self-esteem and VLS

Koosha et al. (2016) have identified that self-esteem as a significant variable in learning skills, has a lot of influence towards the acquisition of vocabulary. Regarding the self-concept of the learner, it is essential to acknowledge how students consider themselves as learners and the vocabulary. Koosha et al. (2016) indicate that in the relationship between learning lexical items and self-esteem, there will be no progress in the absence of some level of self-concept. Likewise, Asadifard and Biria (2013) have confirmed from their research, which affects as an integral component of

language learning strategies has been so popular thanks to its related constituent such as self-esteem that has proved useful in strategic learning of vocabulary. Asadifard and Biria seem to agree with Koosha et al. (2016) that as a universal human attribute self-concept facilitates adequate cognitive and activities of affect in vocabulary learning are the outcome of certain degrees of knowledge of oneself including the skills to undertake tasks, self-confidence and selfconcept. For example, situational self-concept and task self-esteem have been investigating in consideration to vocabulary acquisition, whereby learners have diverse skills and perceptions towards different activities (Asadifard & Biria, 2013).

2. Learner Autonomy and VLS

It is evident that autonomy in vocabulary learning is necessary. Blachowics & Fisher (2000) puts a lot of emphasis on the necessity of autonomy. They indicated that a student should be willing and have confidence in their learning ability so as to achieve good vocabularies.LA is very important in the employment of VLS since it offers learners numerous privileges including enhancing their motivation and thus realizing vocabulary acquisition. According to Tuan (2011), the study of lexical items is indeed fundamental in the acquisition of English language. It is thus, improbable for a learner to interact effectively when there is the absence of vocabulary. Besides, it is highly unlikely that a student would be able to acquire all necessary new words while in school, and therefore, he/she is must invent ways to gain more vocabulary. In this regard, Tuna (2011) suggests that learner autonomy is now a huge benefit for learners of vocabulary just because it ensures that the student has the following privileges:

a) Methodology Autonomous studies improve the student's motivation and increase effectiveness in learning vocabulary.

b) Learner autonomy creates adequate opportunities to the students regarding English interaction as a foreign language.

c) The personal desires of the learner are fully met thanks to learner autonomy

d) Learner autonomy has a long-term affective ability

e) The acceptance of the learner to engage in active learning is reinforced by learner autonomy.

f) Learner autonomy assists the learner in developing the general skills needed for lasting vocabulary learning.

Therefore, Tuan (2011) concludes that when students achieve autonomy in vocabulary learning, it means that they will benefit from a long-term learning capacity and character of independent decision making as well as the study that will guarantee success in the classroom. Additionally, the ability to apply the strategies effectively can also help the learner deal with the new vocabularies without necessarily involving the instructor or the teacher (Rabadi, 2016).

3. Learner Autonomy and Self-esteem

A topic of increasing interest among EFL researchers has been the identification of factors impacting the VLS utilized by learners. Learners' SE and LA are two of the main factors affecting VLS acquisition as well as language acquisition, in general. Numerous research has been conducted to assess how self-esteem relates tolearner's autonomy, as there is a general conviction that students with increased self-esteem are deemed successful and efficient in their progress in learning. Joseph Seabi (2011) points out that learners who have a positive regard of oneself, usually are more resilient to challenging tasks, are satisfied and tend to excel in their studies. Also, autonomous learners with high self-concept carry out riskier goals and endure to overcome obstacles more than low self-esteem learners. Indeed, the understanding that learners are performing well contributes to increased self-esteem. However, autonomous learners are not able to control their tasks until there is clarity about their actions, and this calls for the self-examination by comparing the individual objectives with current progress in learning. Moreover, another component of autonomy is the self-reaction which is an attribute of self-concept, which entails evaluating oneself. Therefore, the link between autonomy and self-esteem in learners of language acquisition involves self-assessment activities that eventually result into increased self-efficacy to fulfill individual tasks, engage more often, intensify own studies without relenting upon encounter with obstacles (Cubukcu, 2009) Kooshi et al. (2016) mention that the fact that autonomy is a fundamental issuein learning of a second language, both self-concept and self-reliance are interactive factors. Furthermore, researchers acknowledge that autonomous students have the skills to modify and control learning activities, and assess their studies as well as comparing it with objectives and aims of education. Self-esteem is also very critical when it comes to vocabulary building. Self-esteem impacts learners' cognitive as well as affective actions. This impacts their capabilities, self-confidence and knowledge of themselves.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

Participants included 157 male and female EFL learners between the ages of 17 and 25, though most were 20-22 years of age. Since more females than male participated in the study, a gender imbalance was expected. Participants were undergraduate students majoring in General English, English Literature, and Linguistics at Soran University in northern Iraq. They were enrolled in four different levels of study. First- and second-stage participants were majoring in General English, while third- and fourth-stage students were majoring in English Literature and Linguistics.

B. Instruments

Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ)

A 30-item VLS questionnaire adapted from Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of VLS was utilized in this study. Schmitt's taxonomy of VLS is one of the most practical and comprehensive taxonomies in the domain of second-language VLS. Moreover, in several other studies, Schmitt's taxonomy has been cited as a credible inventory of second-language learning strategies. It contains the following five categories of strategies: determination, memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social. Schmitt's original instrument included 58 items asking the subject to indicate category by using a 5-point scale ranging from "never" to "always". The researcher adapted a 30-item VLS questionnaire from Schmitt's taxonomy (1997) and then translated this questionnaire from English to the participants' mother tongue in order to ensure full comprehension. It was observed that the process of adaptation made the questionnaire seem shorter; moreover, the adapted questionnaire correlated better with the other two questionnaires employed in this study. The 30-item VLSQ was utilized to investigate the VLS of participants. The subjects were asked to rate the frequency of strategy categories they practice on a 5-point Liker-type scale including the options of "never" (one point), "seldom" (two points), "sometimes" (three points), "often" (four points), and "always" (five points). Thus, the participants' scores ranged between 30 to 150. The time allocated for the completion of the 30-item questionnaire was 15 minutes. The reliability of the VLS questionnaires in the current study was .859, which was determined by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This score indicated a high degree of reliability.

Learner's Autonomy Questionnaire (LAQ)

To assess participants' levels of autonomy, a questionnaire of LA including 30items (see Appendix III)) was administered. The original questionnaire developed by Sakai, et al. (2008), contained 48 items, but in order to fit the particular objectives of this study, the researcher adapted a 30-item AU questionnaire which was divided into three sections: responsibility, ability, and autonomous activities both within and outside the classroom. Students were asked to answer the item of the first and third section on a 5-point Likert scale (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=usually), and the item of the second section on a 2 scale "until now" and "from now on". The first section of the model contained 6 items focusing on learners' perceptions of responsibilities towards the learning process. The second section of the model contained 8 items focusing on learners' past views of responsibility towards learning in the past and future. Finally, the third section of the model contained 16 items focusing on students' autonomous activities both within and outside the classroom. By using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the LA questionnaire proved to have a high reliability of .818.

Self-esteem Questionnaire (SEQ)

Coopersmith's 1967 self-esteem inventory model was another instrument employed in this study. The original model contained 58 items. As was the case with the other two questionnaires in this study, the researcher adapted this model to form a 30-item questionnaire (see Appendix IV), three of which were placebo items (7, 15, and 18). If a participant marked "like me" for three of these items, it suggested that he/she was dedicated too much effort to presenting him/herself in a positive way. Thus, these participants were excluded from the analysis component. Each of the 30 items was scored on 2 points, ranging from 0 to 1, which represented the most negative attitudes and the most positive attitudes. High self-esteem items were (1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 16, and 29). They were awarded one point if they are answered by "like me"; however, the item received no point if they were marked by "unlike me". The rest of the items numbered (2, 5, 9, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30) were considered to represent low self-esteem and were awarded one point upon responding "unlike me" and no point upon responding "like me." The maximum score for the questionnaire was 27, and the minimum was 0. Scores between (14 and 27) were associated with high self-esteem, while lower scores indicated low self-esteem. The reliability of the SE questionnaire was determined to be .744 by using Cronbach alpha coefficient.

The three sets of questionnaires were gathered in one delivery package. The researcher translated the English version of these questionnaires into participants' native language to ensure full comprehension; moreover, the translation was validated by an English language professor at Soran University.

C. Data Collection

For this study, three main data collection instruments were together employed—a VLSQ, LAQ, and SEQ. The researcher visited the English Language Department at Soran University during the first week of the second semester of the 2016-17 school year and explained the aim of the study to participants as well as obtained their consent to participate. The quantitative data collection instruments—referred to as self-reported questionnaires—were jointly administrated at a particular time to the available classes. After explaining the purpose of the study, the researcher and English language professors cooperatively administered the packaged questionnaire to participants in one session for each class. The entire class duration of 45 minutes was dedicated to administrating the questionnaires. The researcher oversaw this process to ensure that students fully understood the questions and responses. Furthermore, sufficient instructions regarding the procedures of completing the instruments were given to participants. The researcher informed respondents that collected data would only be used for the research purpose and would not influence their grades. The students were also assured concerning the confidentiality of their responses.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Testing the assumptions

The assumptions of the present study were checked by calculating descriptive statistics of the scores for LA, SE, and VLS. The subjects of the study performed independently on the questionnaires, i.e. their performance on the test was not affected by that of other participants. Moreover, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the following assumptions should be checked when running correlations between variables:

1. Normality of the distribution of variables;
2. Linear relations between each pair of variables;
3. And homoscedasticity

These assumptions were checked respectively to see whether running correlation was legitimate or not.

Checking the Assumption of Normality of Distributions

In order to check the normality of distributions, descriptive statistics of the data were obtained and calculated separately for each variable. They are presented in the next three sections. The descriptive statistics of the VLS questionnaires and its subcategories are displayed in Table 4.1 below:

TABLE 4.1:
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SCORE OF VLS AND ITS SUBCATEGORIES

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
VLS	157	1.97	4.73	3.1773	.54383	.296
Determination	157	1.67	5.00	3.2357	.70561	.498
Social	157	1.33	4.83	3.1656	.79001	.624
Memory	157	1.50	5.00	3.2389	.70136	.492
Cognitive	157	1.33	5.00	2.9968	.67975	.462
Metacognitive	157	1.33	4.83	3.2495	.78958	.623
Valid N (list-wise)	157					

Table 4.1. shows the descriptive statistics for the VLSs and its subcategories scores. The distribution of the scores on VLSs is shown by Figure 1.
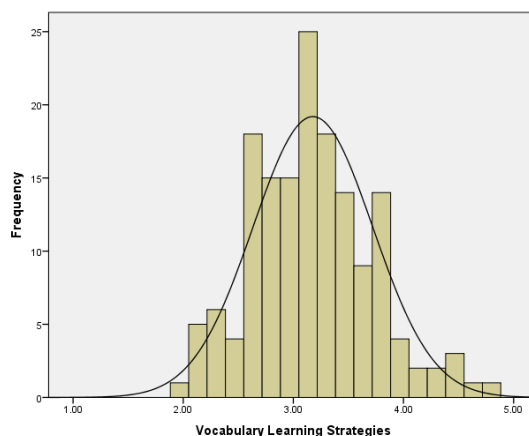

Figure 1: Distribution of Scores on the Vocabulary Learning Strategies

As displayed in Figure 1, the histogram of distribution shows that the scores on vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire are normally distributed.

A Descriptive Statistics review of learner autonomy questionnaires is presented in Table 4.2.

TABLE 4.2:
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SCORE OF LEARNER AUTONOMY

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learner Autonomy	157	1.97	3.97	3.0251	.39992
Valid N (listwise)	157				

Table 4.2. shows the descriptive statistics for autonomy scores. The distribution of scores on learner autonomy is displayed by Figure 2.
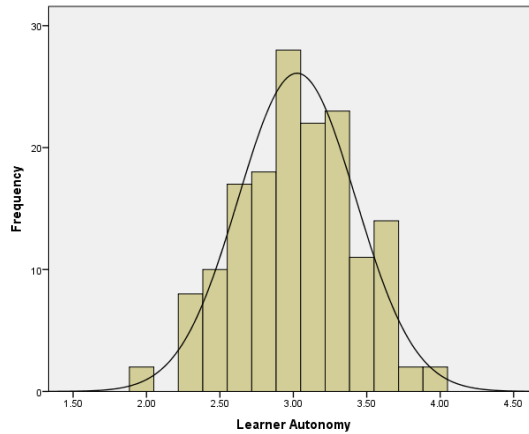
Figure 2: Distribution of Scores on Learner Autonomy

As displayed in Figure 2, the histogram of distribution shows that the scores on learner autonomy questionnaire are normally distributed.

A Descriptive Statistics review of self-esteem questionnaires is presented in Table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3:
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SCORE OF SELF-ESTEEM

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-esteem	157	.15	1.00	.6020	.17060
Valid N (listwise)	157				

Table 4.3. displays the descriptive statistics for the SE scores. The distribution of scores on self-esteem is displayed by Figure 3.
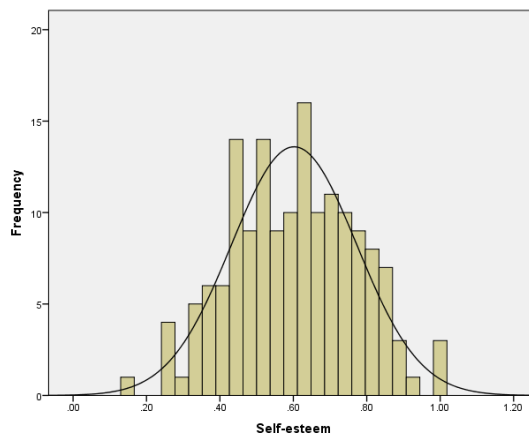

Figure 3: Distribution of Scores on Self-esteem

As displayed in Figure 3, the histogram of distribution shows that the scores on self-esteem questionnaire are normally distributed.

Descriptive statistics of the scores of both skewedness and kurtosis ratio for VLS, LA, and SE were obtained to check the normality assumption. These are presented in the table below:

TABLE 4.4:
NORMALITY ASSUMPTION; VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES, LEARNER AUTONOMY AND SELF-ESTEEM

	N	Skewedness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Vocabulary Learning Strategies	157	.344	.194	.090	.385
Determination	157	.139	.194	-.458	.385
Social	157	-.020	.194	-.649	.385
Memory	157	.019	.194	-.338	.385
Cognitive	157	.080	.194	-.101	.385
Metacognitive	157	-.184	.194	-.659	.385
Self-esteem	157	-.011	.194	-.436	.385
Learner Autonomy	157	-.135	.194	-.348	.385
Valid N (list-wise)	157				

As illustrated in Table 4.4, the distribution of the data for vocabulary learning strategies, learner autonomy, and self-esteem was normal, as both the skewedness for "standard error of skewness" (VLSs; .344/.194 =1.7, LA; -.135/.196 = -.68 and, SE; -.01/.196= -.05) and Kurtosis ratio were within the acceptable range of +1.96 and -1.96. This means the distribution did not determine a significant deviation from normality. Furthermore, the researcher checked the shapes of distributions for the three variables by visually inspecting the histograms of distributions which supported the normality of the distributions.

Checking the Assumption of Linear Relation Between Each Variable and Homoscedasticity

Descriptive statistics of the data were calculated to test the assumption of linear correlation. To check the linear relationship between each variable, the researcher created scatterplots in order to visually inspect the data. Since there were multiple variables, the researcher created multiple scatterplots for learner autonomy, self-esteem, and vocabulary learning strategies.
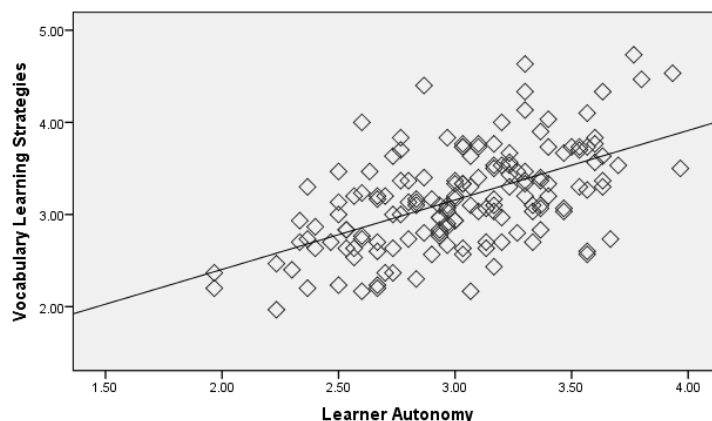

Figure 4: Testing Linearity Assumption; Linear Relation between Autonomy and Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Figure 4 displays the relationship between learner autonomy and vocabulary learning strategies. The dispersion of the dots represents a significant correlation between the two variables.
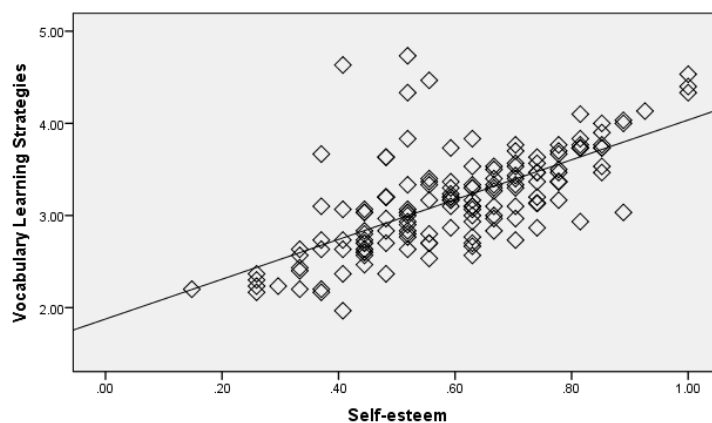

Figure 5: Testing Linearity Assumption; Linear Relationship between Self-esteem and Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The relationship between self-esteem and vocabulary learning strategies, as displayed in Figure 5, was also linear. The dispersion of dots along the diagonals clarifies that the relationship between the two variables are linear.
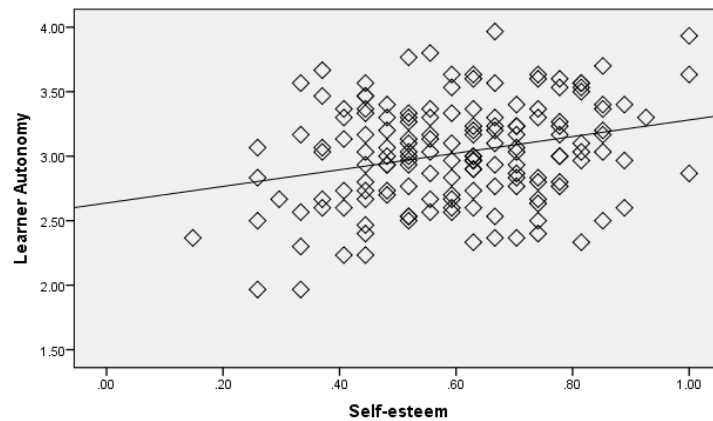
Figure 6: Testing Linearity Assumption; Linear Relationship between Self-esteem and Autonomy

As shown in Figure 6, the relationship between learner autonomy and self-esteem is linear. The spread of the scores displays a moderate to high correlation between the two variables.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there was no kind of non-linear relation between the overall scores on the three variables, such as a curvilinear or a U-shaped distribution. Moreover, the distribution of variables was not funnel shape, that is to say narrow at one end and wide at the other; thus, the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. The assumption of homoscedasticity is discussed more when presenting the results of regression and correlation.

Addressing the Research Questions

A. The First Research Question: Does there exist a statistically significant relationship between autonomy and choice of VLS among Iraqi EFL learners?

A Pearson's correlation was conducted to identify whether any statistically significant relationship existed between EFL learners' autonomy and VLS. Results are displayed in the table below:

TABLE 4.5:
PEARSON CORRELATION: AUTONOMY AND VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

		Learner Autonomy
Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.555**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157

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

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that there existed a statistically significant relationship between EFL learners' autonomy and VLS (*r = .555, p < .05*).

TABLE 4.6:
CORRELATION BETWEEN SUBCATEGORIES OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AND AUTONOMY

		Learner Autonomy
Learner Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1
	N	157
Determination	Pearson Correlation	.411
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Social	Pearson Correlation	.387
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Memory	Pearson Correlation	.351
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Cognitive	Pearson Correlation	.347
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Metacognitive	Pearson Correlation	.544
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157

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

As demonstrated by Table 4.6, the following statistically significant relationships existed between EFL learners' autonomy and subcategories of VLS:

A. Autonomy and determination (r = .411, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size
B. Autonomy and social (r = .387, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size
C. Autonomy and memory (r = .351, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size

D. Autonomy and cognitive (r = .347, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size
E. Autonomy and metacognitive (r = .544, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size

The results of the data analyses in this study indicate a large effect size for the correlation between each pair of variables. That is, a statistically significant relationship was observed between learner autonomy and subcategories of vocabulary learner strategies. The findings align with those of Mohammad Abad & Baradaran, 2013; Naraghi & Seyyedrezaei, 2015; Nosratinia & Zaker, 2013, 2015; Abassi, 2015, who similarly concluded that there existed a significant relationship between LA and VLS. They explain that learner has the responsibility of applying the different vocabulary learning strategies so as to improve his/her achievement. Additionally, the ability to apply the strategies effectively can also help the learner deal with the new vocabularies without necessarily involving the instructor or the teacher (Rabadi, 2016).

B. The Second Research Question: Does there exists a statistically significant relationship between EFL learners' self-esteem and choice of VLS?

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilized to determine whether any statistically significant relationship existed between EFL learners' self-esteem and VLS.

TABLE 4.7:
PEARSON'S CORRELATION; SELF-ESTEEM AND VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

		Self-esteem
Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.678[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157

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

The findings of the correlation analysis in Table 4.7 demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between EFL learners' self-esteem and vocabulary learning strategies (r = .678 $p < .05$).

Table 4.8 below reports the results of correlation between SE and subcategories of VLS:

TABLE 4.8:
PEARSON'S CORRELATION; SELF-ESTEEM AND SUBCATEGORIES OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES.

		Self-esteem
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	1
	N	157
Determination	Pearson Correlation	.385
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Social	Pearson Correlation	.543
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Memory	Pearson Correlation	.539
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Cognitive	Pearson Correlation	.516
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157
Metacognitive	Pearson Correlation	.523
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	157

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

Based on the findings displayed in Table 4.8, it can be concluded that self-esteem demonstrated the following statistically significant relationships with subcategories of VLS:

A. Self-esteem and Determination (r = .385, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size
B. Self-esteem and Social (r = .543, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size
C. Self-esteem and Memory (r = .539, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size
D. Self-esteem and Cognitive (r = .516, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size
E. Self-esteem and Metacognitive (r = 523, p < .05), which signifies a large effect size

The results of the data analyses yield a large effect size for the correlation between LA and subcategories of VLS, which was statistically significant. The findings of this study correspond with those of Nosratinia&Mohammadzamani's study (2014), which (to researcher's knowledge) is the only study conducted on this matter and suggested a statistically significant relationship to exist, with (r = .563). In their study they indicated that improving learners' self-esteem could be effective in the progression of their vocabulary learning strategies use.

C. The Third Research Question: Does there exist a statistically significant relationship between EFL learners' autonomy and self-esteem?

In order to address this question, data was analyzed using a Pearson correlation coefficient to investigate any statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The results are presented in Table 4.9 below:

TABLE 4.9:
PEARSON'S CORRELATION; LEARNER AUTONOMY AND SELF-ESTEEM

		Learner Autonomy	Self-esteem
Learner Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	.275**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	157	157
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	.275**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	157	157

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

Based on the results demonstrated in Table 4.9, it can be concluded that there existed a statistically significant and positive relationship between learner autonomy and self-esteem (r = .275, < .05). These results are supported by those of Koosha, M., Abdollahi, A., Karimi, 2016, who similarly asserted to a significant relationship to exist between self-esteem and autonomy (r=.919).

D. The Fourth Research Question: Does there exist a statistically significant relationship between EFL learners' self-esteem as well as autonomy and the ability to predict the choice of VLS?

Since the main assumption of running regression—normality of distribution and correlation between each pair of variables—was observed to be significant, the researcher conducted a multiple regression analysis among three variables to answer the fourth research question. The researcher conducted regression analysis to determine the extent to which autonomy and self-esteem scores can predict EFL learners' choice of VLS. The regression model was implemented in two steps:

In the first step,multipleregression analysis was employed to probe the power of autonomy in predicting EFL learners' choice of VLS. Results are displayed below:

TABLE 4.10:
MODEL SUMMARY, REGRESSION ANALYSIS; PREDICTING CHOICE OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES BY USING LEARNER AUTONOMY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.555[a]	.307	.303	.45402

a. Predictors: (Constant), Learner Autonomy
b. Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Learning Strategies

As demonstrated in Table 4.10, LA predicted 30.7 percent of scores in the choice of VLS (R = .555, R^2 = .307).

TABLE 4.11:
ANOVA TEST OF SIGNIFICANCE OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS MODEL; PREDICTING CHOICE OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES BY USING LEARNER AUTONOMY

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.187	1	14.187	68.821	.000[b]
	Residual	31.951	155	.206		
	Total	46.138	156			

a. Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Learning Strategies
b. Predictors: (Constant), Learner Autonomy

As illustrated by Table 4.11, the results of an ANOVA test of significance of the regression model for the first step [F (1.155) = 68.821, p< .05] yielded the significance of the regression model.

TABLE 4.12:
REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.896	.277		3.232	.002
	Learner Autonomy	.754	.091	.555	8.296	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Learning Strategies

As demonstrated by the table above, LA signified a large standardized beta coefficient (B1 = .754, t = 8.296, p< .05). Standardized Beta Coefficient represents the degree to which predictor variables contribute to the prediction of the predicted variable. Thus, it can be concluded that LA makes a strong statistically significant contribution to VLS.

In the second step, a multiple regression model was utilized to probe the power of SE in predicting EFL learners' choice of VLS. Results are displayed below:

TABLE 4.13:
MODEL SUMMARY, REGRESSION ANALYSIS; PREDICTING CHOICE OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES BY USING SELF-ESTEEM

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.678[a]	.459	.456	.40122

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-esteem
b. Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Learning Strategies

As demonstrated by Table 4.13, self-esteem predicted 45.9 percent of scores in the choice of VLS (R = .678, R^2 = .456).

TABLE 4.14:
ANOVA TEST OF SIGNIFICANCE OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS MODEL; PREDICTING CHOICE OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES BY USING SELF-ESTEEM

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.187	1	21.187	131.614	.000[b]
	Residual	24.951	155	.161		
	Total	46.138	156			

a. Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Learning Strategies
b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-esteem

As illustrated above, the results of the ANOVA test of significance of the regression model for the second step [F (1,155) = 131.614, p < .05] indicated that SE significantly predicts VLS.

TABLE 4.15:
REGRESSION COEFFICIENT

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.877	.118		15.933	.000
	Self-esteem	2.160	.188	.678	11.472	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Learning Strategies

As demonstrated by the table above, SE signified a large standardized beta coefficient of (B1 = 2.160, t = 11.472, p< .05). Thus, it can be concluded that SE makes a strong significant contribution to VLS.

In order to inspect the homoscedasticity based on the regression model, the researcher created a simple scatter plot for all three variables to visually check how the residuals were distributed, as displayed by Figure 7 below:
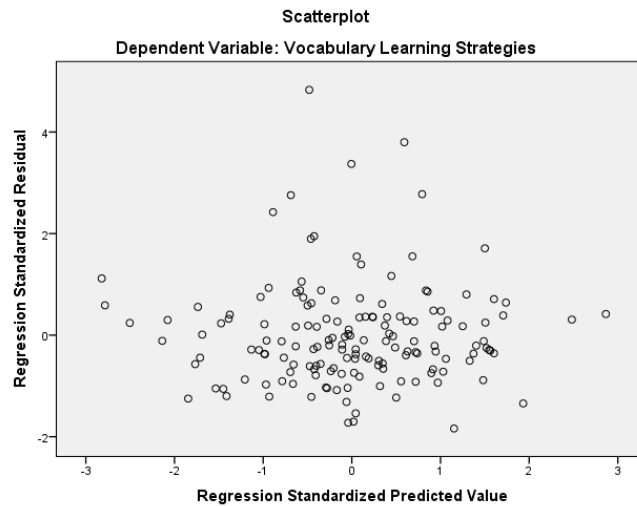

Figure 7: Plot of Standardized Residuals; Predicting Vocabulary Learning Strategies by Using Autonomy and Self-esteem

As displayed above, the data exhibited a great dispersion and scattered randomly across the plot. Thus, the variance seemed to be homogenous and the assumption of homoscedasticity was met.

Although, in the previous sections, the normality of distributions was examined for correlation, the residuals statistics of the data were checked to determine whether there existed any statistically significant outliers, as demonstrated below:

TABLE 4.16:
RESIDUALS STATISTICS; COOK'S DISTANCE

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Cook's Distance	.000	.183	.008	.023	157

a. Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Learning Strategies

As demonstrated by the residuals table above, the results also displayed the absence of significant outliers, as the Cook's distance values did not surpass 1 (Tabachnick&Fidell, 2007).

Therefore, with reference to the correlation and regression analyses of the data, it can be concluded that the researcher was able to prove that there does exist a statistically significant relationship between EFL learners' self-esteem and LA in predicting the choice of VLS. On the one hand, a significant correlation was found to exist among participants' LA, SE, and VLS, but on the other hand, the regression analysis indicated that LA and SE make strong significant contributions to VLS and were also a significant predictor of VLS.A number of studies have also revealed links between LA and VLS. For example, a study conducted in an Iranian EFL context by Zaker (2013) concluded that LA was an eligible predicator of VLS (R = .24, R2 = .068). Another study conducted by Abbasi (2015) observed that LA is a significant predictor of VLS (R = .448, R2 = .20). Moreover, another study between the two variables, but reversely—i.e., LA as a dependent variable and VLS as a predictor—concluded that VLS is a strong significant predictor for LA (Nosratinia&Zaker, 2015). Regarding the results of this study on SE as a predictor of VLS, the findings aligned with those of Nosratinia&Mohammadzamani, 2014. As mentionedpreviously, to the researcher's knowledge, this has been the only other study exploring the relationship between SE and VLS. In their study, they found SE to be a significant predictor of VLS, with 31.7% of scores for VLS (R = .563, R2 = .317).

V. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the abovementioned findings, it can be concluded that there exists a statistically significant relationship among the LA, SE, and VLS of Iraqi EFL students at Soran University. These findings also confirm that LA and SE contribute to effective vocabulary acquisition, while they also contribute significantly to VLS. The results of this study have also proven a significant difference to exist between learners' self-esteem and autonomy in the prediction of their vocabulary learning strategies. Moreover, they have demonstrated that such strategies may be improved by enabling a greater degree of student autonomy. The higher the autonomy, the more likely a student is to grasp learning strategies. Learners who are autonomous and have a high self-esteem have tools to make learning new vocabularies easier and more practical. They observe their own learning and determine solutions for overcoming problems associated with vocabulary acquisition. Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as a student's ability to take charge and responsibility of his/her own learning. Similarly, in elaborating the concept of self-directed learning, Zhe (2009) described a process in which an individual accepts responsibility for most decisions related to his/her learning. Zhe explains that learners who have the willingness and ability to take responsibility for their learning also have the ability to improve their learning strategies; hence, they are more likely to be successful in achieving their language-learning goals. Alongside increased independence in the learning process is a greater level of self-esteem on behalf of students. As they realize the potential to direct their learning independent of a teacher figure, thus they become more confident in creating new strategies for acquiring the foreign language.

In light of the above findings, it is recommended that EFL teachers promote means of authentic engagement on behalf of learners. This means that learners are able to recognize immediate value in their language-learning tasks with clear purposes and outcomes; thus, they are more likely to participate in learning activities. A few practical ways that EFL teachers might stimulate such engagement in their classrooms is by providing frequent and effective feedback to students regarding their language performance, whether it be verbal or written; incorporating movement into their lessons on the part of both students and teachers; providing opportunities for students to facilitate lesson components themselves, where appropriate; and creating opportunities for students to converse regarding course content, especially in the context of reading activities and personal application. In terms of vocabulary learning, it is especially important for teachers to facilitate activities in which students may utilize newly acquired vocabulary terms in sentences while at the same time explaining the contingency of these terms' uses and sometimes meanings based on context. Some studies which support these recommendations are those of Nematipour (2012), who emphasizes visual and auditory learning as a means of increasing learner autonomy; and SheikhiBehdani (2011), who demonstrates the relationship between EFL learners' autonomy and critical thinking ability. Future research in terms of particular learning strategies that are more or less effective in increasing learner autonomy is necessary, as are more context-specific studies on how student demographics change the nature of learner autonomy itself and related learning strategies in the EFL classroom. One study that asserts the necessity of examining particular student characteristics is that of Koosha, Ketabi, and Kassaian, Z. (2001), who revealed that professional and marital status impacts learner autonomy. Depending on the cultural norms and ages of students, such studies may influence the methods employed by EFL teachers.

In its demonstration of the influence of self-esteem on students' employment of vocabulary learning strategies and inextricable relationship to learner autonomy, this study has further contributed to research concerning psychological constructs influencing learners' strategies for acquiring a new language. Studies such as that of Jackson (2002) have examined constructs such as learner disposition, "know-how," and behavioral as well as attitudinal predisposition, all of which affect students' aptitude. A fundamental issue with generalizing these studies is that they have focused exclusively on learners themselves; thus, it is necessary that future studies broaden their perspectives to include teachers and related factors such as course materials, institutional policies (e.g. attendance), and time constraints in order to determine how these play a role in shaping learner attitudes regarding the classroom environment, their abilities to acquire the target language, and the necessity of acquiring target language in the first place. For example, one study

might examine how an EFL teacher's self-presentation style among learners affects their willingness to participate in class activities. Another might extend further and examine teachers' own experience in the target language, e.g. his/her purpose for acquiring the language, experience in the target language culture, and frequency of utilizing the language in daily life. All of these factors, and more, crucially shape learners' ability to develop autonomy in the classroom, confidence in language use, and overall success in language acquisition. A final and more direct recommendation to the English department involved in this study is to provide extended opportunities for its teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and subsequent student attitudes/behaviors. Such reflections might take place via departmental trainings, informal discussion groups, or peer-review. Not only is this important for sharing success and failures in promoting autonomous learning environments but also is it significant for comparing how similar methods among teachers produce different student attitudes and behaviors. This comparison might illuminate how more particular circumstances beyond the teaching methods themselves (e.g. teacher attitudes, demographics, and presentation style) impact the effectiveness of given methods.

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