



Research Article

Learners' Academic Self-Concept and Their Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Seyyed Reza Mousavinia¹, Amin Karimnia^{2*} 

^{1,2}Department of English Language, CT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

*Corresponding author: aminkarimnia@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between students' vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) and their academic self-concept. Participants included 108 Iranian EFL students who completed two standardized instruments: Liu and Wang's academic self-concept questionnaire and Gu and Johnson's VLS questionnaire. The latter aimed to identify the specific types of strategies learners employed when acquiring English lexical items. Data analysis revealed that the most frequently utilized strategy was paying close attention to a new word's usage and meaning. Conversely, the least frequent strategy involved consulting dictionaries for specific collocation patterns. Statistical results indicated no significant relationship between the participants' academic self-concept and their choice of vocabulary learning strategies. Consequently, the null hypothesis, asserting no correlation between these two psychological and linguistic variables, was validated. These findings suggest that in the Iranian EFL context, a student's perception of their general academic ability does not necessarily dictate the specific strategic approaches they adopt for vocabulary acquisition and mastery.

Keywords: EFL Pedagogy; Individual Differences; Learner Autonomy; SLA (Second Language Acquisition)

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1. Introduction

While demographic factors such as age, native language, and educational background have been extensively examined in second language acquisition (SLA) research, educators have recognized that addressing learners' psychological and stylistic needs is crucial for optimizing the instructional environment (Reid, 1987; Grabe et al., 2018; Karimnia, 2003; Lotfi et al., 2026). Consequently, this pedagogical awareness has brought affective variables—including attitudes, motivation, language anxiety, and individual learning preferences—to the forefront of scholarly inquiry (Gardner & MacIntyre,

1993; Karimnia & Salehi Zadeh, 2007; Kayi-Aydar, 2018). Such variables are now widely considered pivotal in determining the ultimate success of second/foreign language learning. This heightened recognition of affect is evident across diverse sociocultural contexts. For instance, Karimnia (2007) examined how cultural conventions and social amenities intersect with affective factors in English and Persian teaching contexts. Extending this line of inquiry, the present study specifically investigates the relationship between one key affective construct—academic self-concept—and a fundamental linguistic skill, namely vocabulary acquisition. Within the broader spectrum of affective

factors, self-concept holds a particularly significant position in SLA theory. Broadly defined, self-concept encompasses an individual's perceptions, evaluations, and beliefs about their own attributes and identity (Baumeister, 1999). When narrowed to the academic sphere, this construct refers to how learners evaluate their abilities within specific educational domains. Crucially, academic self-concept is understood as multidimensional; global academic self-perceptions are composed of distinct sub-components related to individual subjects such as mathematics, science, history, and language (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Empirical evidence consistently indicates a reciprocal relationship between academic self-concept and actual performance (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003). More specifically, Trautwein et al. (2006) characterize it as "a person's self-evaluation regarding a specific academic domain or ability" (p. 28), a definition that directly informs the focus of the current investigation.

The significance of individual difference variables in language learning has been extensively documented. Karimnia (2013) demonstrated that personality-based individual differences significantly affect performance in language-related tasks, suggesting that learner characteristics beyond cognitive ability play a crucial role in determining success in second language acquisition. This line of research has paved the way for examining how other individual difference variables—such as academic self-concept—might influence specific aspects of language learning, including vocabulary acquisition.

It is assumed by many scholars that self-concept leads to better learning outcomes. Language learning consists of different facets, one of which is to learn lexical forms within a given language. Vocabulary learning is considered to be an integral part of learning languages. ELT researchers are working to improve the standard of language learning in general and vocabulary learning in particulars. Considering that, they have introduced many strategies to go about the arduous task of learning new words. Since learners have different preferences and cognitive styles, they might prefer to use different strategies to learn new words. Having different personality traits, language learners differ in their degree of self-concept and therefore, the type of strategies they might use to learn new words, are different. That said, this study aims to investigate if students' self-concept would have an impact on the type of vocabulary learning strategies they use.

2. Literature Review

Based on the current research, it is believed that as students grow older their academic self-concept becomes more developed (Guay et al., 2003; Rogers, 2018). Liu and Wang (2005) believed that academic self-concept

tends to decline from early to mid-adolescence and also extends to adulthood. Marsh (1989) clarified that academic self-concept reaches its lowest point in mid adolescence, but also, he found out that academic self-concept increases through early adulthood. Academic self-concept varies as students move through grades in which their academic self-concept tends to rise in the direction of their academic achievement (Liu & Wang, 2005), whereas other studies highlight that it tends to become weaker (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008; Marsh & Yeung, 1997). It has been founded that academic self-concept has a relationship with academic achievement (Akramy et al., 2022; Awad, 2007). Few studies have examined whether there are differences in the subscales of academic self-concept on academic achievement across gender, levels of study, and faculties in which the students study at the universities, despite the fact that many researchers agree that the two variables are correlated with one another. In some studies on gender differences in academic self-concept it has been reported that males and females have different beliefs about their academic competencies (Marsh, 1989), with males showing higher academic self-concept than females (Liu, 2008). Different studies have also posited that males tend to have higher academic self-perceptions in science courses while females have higher academic self-perceptions in non-science courses (Harter, 1989; Marsh, 1989). Harter (1989) highlighted that gender differences in academic self-perceptions start as early as elementary school and remain stable through adolescence to adulthood. Because the majority of university students in this situation are adults, it is possible to emphasize their academic self-concept in a similar manner. In a survey by Marsh (2006), he highlighted that small stereotype gender differences linearly decline in mean levels of academic self-concept with age and modest differentiation between academic competencies (Marsh & Martin, 2011).

2.1. Academic Achievement Theories and Self-Concept

It has not yet been established whether prior academic achievement causes subsequent academic self-concept or whether prior academic achievement influences prior academic self-concept. Academic success is the result of an academically positive self-concept, according to the self-enhancement model. The skill-development model highlights that academic achievement influences academic self-concept (Marsh, 2006; Marsh & Retali, 2010). Finally, Guay et al. (2003) believed that both academic self-concept and academic achievement directly influence each other, that is, they are reciprocal. It has been referred to as an "egg chicken" question by researchers whether prior academic self-concept

influences academic achievement or whether prior academic achievement leads to subsequent academic self-concept. Historically, self-concept research has been dominated by a unidimensional perspective in which self-conceptions were considered to be relatively consistent and undifferentiated across social, academic, physical, and other domains (Byrne, 1984; Marsh & Retali, 2010). Total self-concept was measured as a single score because these researchers were adamant that self-concept was the culmination of a person's self-perceptions. Shavelson et al., however, found that the research on self-concept was not well-researched (1976) and combined a number of definitions of self-concept. Their integrated definition states that a person's self-perceptions are created through experience with—and interpretations of their environment. Main influences on these self-perceptions include reinforcements, attributions for one's own behavior, and assessments by important others.

Shavelson et al. (1976) highlighted that self-concept is both evaluative and descriptive and has a multifaceted, hierarchical organization. Perceptions of one's behavior in particular circumstances are located at the bottom of the hierarchy, inferences about one's self in more general domains (such as social, physical, and academic) are located in the middle, and a general self-concept is located at the top.

Today, it is widely acknowledged that self-concept operates in distinct domains, i.e. according to a particular field, self-beliefs are categorized. Academic self-concept, for example, is an individual's self-perception of competence and his/her evaluative judgments in the academic domain (Mercer, 2011; Moller, Pohlmann, Koller, Marsh, 2009). Self-concept affects behavior, and this is sufficiently supported by the evidence.

2.1.1. Studies done on self-concept in Iran

Saadat, Ghasemzadeh and Soleimani (2012) looked at university students' self-esteem and how it relates to their academic success. Results from a study of 370 students revealed significant differences between male and female students' self-esteem. In contrast, male students outperformed female students in terms of family self-esteem. Students from the faculties of basic sciences, psychology, and educational sciences, as well as electrical and computer engineering, displayed a noticeable disparity in self-esteem. Last but not least, the academic success of students was directly and favorably correlated with both family and academic self-esteem.

Arefi and Naghebzadeh (2014) examined the relationships between academic self-concept, academic motivation and students' academic achievement among

300 first grade male and female high-school students. The findings revealed no relationship between academic motivation and academic achievement, but there was a positive and significant correlation between students' academic self-concept and their academic motivation and academic achievement. Furthermore, although academic motivation did not differ significantly between male and female students, there were significant differences in academic self-concept.

Multiple regression analysis results also showed that academic self-concept was a potent predictor of academic success.

Meshkat and Hosseini's (2015) carried out a study to determine the correlation between the academic self-concept and the academic achievement of students in English as a foreign language. The participants in their study were 320 students. The research's conclusions demonstrated a strong correlation between academic self-concept and measures of academic achievement in both English and Grade Point Average.

Yengimolki, Kalantarkousheh, and Malekitabar (2015) examined the correlation between self-concept and social adjustment with academic achievement of students.

A significant relationship between self-concept and adjustment was found. Additionally, while self-concept and academic achievement did not correlate significantly, academic achievement correlated significantly with social adjustment.

In general, the findings showed that people are more capable of moving forward in life the better adjusted they are.

Lastly, Visi (2015) explored the relationship that between students' academic self-concept, motivation and academic achievement. Two hundred Kermanshah Payame Noor University students participated in his study. As a result of the research, it was discovered that academic success and achievement motivation are significantly correlated. Academic achievement and academic self-concept also showed a strong correlation.

2.2. Students' strategies for learning vocabulary

Graves (1987) propounds that, in view of the fact that, the majority process of vocabulary learning is done independently by language learners, it is totally rational to give them right "to adopt personal plans to expand their vocabulary over time" (p. 177). In effect, theoreticians accentuate that students should find their own way to approach vocabulary learning; meaning that, students should be given autonomy to plan for their own learning (Rossini Faveretti, Silver, Gasser, & Tamburini, 1994). Moreover, they accentuate the importance of books which try to introduce some practical advice for teaching vocabulary, which in turn, increases the number of

language learning strategies that language learners utilize (Bai, 2018; Gu, 2018; McCarthy, 1990; Oxford, 1990). In addition, a group of theoreticians asserted that even in the very early stage of learning foreign languages, some high school students find some vocabulary learning techniques, which are considered as influential as the powerful mnemonic method in the worst situation, for example (Lawson & Hogben, 1996). In their study, Fuentes (1976) concluded that keyword method is somehow ineffective for high school language learners. Within the Iranian EFL context, research has similarly documented the strategic behaviors of language learners across different demographics. Narmani and Karimnia (2015) investigated learning strategies across four generations of Iranian EFL learners who had started learning English from 1973 onwards, revealing that strategy preferences varied across age cohorts while certain strategies remained consistently popular. This suggests that while strategy choice may be influenced by generational factors, the overall pattern of strategy use in Iran reflects broader patterns observed in other EFL contexts. Levin, Pressley, McCormick, Miller, & Shriberg (1979) claimed that around 50% of their high school students in their control group who were Spanish benefited from “strategies involving cognates, phoneme correspondences, and some other mnemonic tricks” (p. 587), although fewer than 10 % took advantage of a keyword strategy. This is in a sharp contrast with Fuente’s (1976) results which indicate 55% of his participants in control group benefitted from strategies which were very similar to the keyword technique. He further asserted that:

It appears that successful second-year foreign language students naturally employ mnemonic strategies very similar to the keyword. In addition, their learning repertoire includes other approaches such as the use of root words and occasionally rote. (Fuentes, cited in Nation, 1982). This capacity for strategic behavior extends to the Iranian context as well. Karimnia and Salehi Zadeh (2007) examined communication strategies used by Iranian EFL learners in English language departments, finding that learners employed a range of strategic behaviors—including avoidance, approximation, and code-switching—to manage communication difficulties. Their findings underscored Iranian learners are capable of exercising agency in their language learning, which aligns with the broader emphasis on learner autonomy in vocabulary acquisition. As mentioned in the above section, a plenty of studies have investigated the effectiveness different strategies which help teachers/ learners teach/learn new words. The aim of most of these studies is to find out which of these vocabulary learning /teaching strategies is more likely to contribute to long-term retention of new words. However, something which has been left out, to the best of researchers’ knowledge, is exploring if students’ self-

concept would have an effect on the type of vocabulary learning strategies they use.

3. Research Questions

1. What vocabulary strategies are advanced Iranian EFL learners using the most and the least?
2. Is there any correlation between self-concept and vocabulary learning strategies?

4. Methodology

4.1. Design of the Study

This study is considered as both correlational and survey in nature. It is correlational because it intends to investigate if there is any relationship between Iranian EFL learners’ academic self-concept and their use of vocabulary learning strategies. Secondly, this study is deemed as a survey study, since the only and main instruments of data collection were questionnaires.

4.2. Participants

The participants in the present study were 108 students who voluntarily took part in the study by responding to two questionnaires, one related to the academic self-concept and the other about vocabulary learning strategy use. The participants were enjoying advanced proficiency level. Students’ level of proficiency claimed by the institute they were studying in as advanced. All the students answered the questionnaires on the basis of the time limit in their language classes. The range of their age was from 20 to 57 years. Students could be classified as either male or female. Forty-eight male and 60 females, totaling 108 participants, were involved in the study. Convenience sampling was used to select the students.

4.3. Instruments

This study made use of two questionnaires. The first questionnaire aimed at determining students’ academic self-concept. This questionnaire had been devised by Liu and Wang (2005). The second questionnaire used, was the one constructed by Gu and Johnson (1996). This questionnaire aimed to elicit the type of vocabulary learning strategies learners utilize while learning English lexical items. The first questionnaire included 20 likert type items ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The second questionnaire consisted of 50 likert type items ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Before administering the questionnaires to the participants of the current study, the researcher piloted both of the instruments by giving them to a group of 20 students who were similar to the participants. In doing so,

the reliability of the self-concept questionnaire was found to be .73 and the reliability of the VLS questionnaire was found to be 0.82, both of which are good indexes of reliability.

4.4. Data Collection Procedure

Two questionnaires were given to a total of 108 advanced learners of English who voluntarily took part in the study. The first questionnaire, academic self-concept questionnaire, had been devised by [Liu and Wang \(2005\)](#). The students were requested to answer the questions based on their learning performance. The second questionnaire, vocabulary learning strategy inventory, had been constructed by [Gu and Johnson \(1996\)](#). The students were asked to fill the items of both questionnaires under a certain time limit of 25 minutes.

4.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Two methods of statistics were used:

1. Descriptive statistics were used such as: mean, standard deviation to test the data.
2. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between self-concept and vocabulary learning strategy use.

5. Results

As mentioned in the previous sections, this study aimed to examine what vocabulary learning strategies Iranian EFL University students tended to use while encountering unknown words; as well as to investigate if there was any correlation between students' self-concept and the type of vocabulary learning strategies they use. That said, this section intends to provide the analysis as well as the interpretation of the data collected within 4 different sections.

5.1. The Data Analysis for the Self-Concept Questionnaire

As was mentioned earlier, the academic self-concept questionnaire used in the current study was constructed by [Liu and Wang \(2005\)](#). This questionnaire included 20 likert type items ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It consisted of 2 themes, namely academic confidence and academic effort.

5.1.1. Theme One: Academic Confidence

Table 1 shows the mean of each of the items related to the first theme of the questionnaire (academic confidence). As can be seen in Table 1, among all of the items related to academic confidence the most highly rated item was "If I work hard, I think I can get better grades" ($M=3.91$). This is the indicator of the fact that the majority of the participants believe in their abilities and potentials. They think that if they work hard, they would get the results they want. Moreover, the second most highly rated items was "I am able to help my course mates in their assignments" ($M=3.66$). This item shows the extent to which the EFL students could collaborate on a given project to get the job done. The third most highly rated items are as follows: "I can follow lectures easily" ($M=3.61$), "I am able to do better than my friends in most courses" ($M=3.61$), "I am good in most of my courses" ($M=3.61$). This shows that the majority of the students positively view themselves as successful language learners. This confidence would definitely make a positive impact on their quality of language learning. However, the lowest mean among these items belong to the item "I always do poorly in my English assignments and tests" ($M=2.50$). This shows that the majority of the participants tended to do well on their language tests and assignments.

5.1.2. Theme Two: Academic Effort

Table 2 shows the mean of the participants' responses to each of the items related to the second theme of the academic self-concept questionnaire, namely academic effort.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Theme Academic Confidence

Statements	Mean
1. I can follow lectures easily.	3.61
2. I am able to help my course mates in their assignments.	3.66
3. If I work hard, I think I can get better grades.	3.91
4. Most of my course mates are smarter than I am.	2.66
5. My lectures feel that my English is poor.	2.52
6. I often forget what I have learned.	2.91
7. I get frightened when I am asked a question by my language teachers.	2.77
8. I am good in most of my courses.	3.61
9. I always do poorly in my English assignments and tests.	2.50
10. I am able to do better than my friends in most courses.	3.61
Total Mean	3.17

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Theme Academic Effort

Statements	Mean
1. I day-dream a lot in my language classroom.	3.0
2. I often do my assignments without thinking.	2.47
3. I pay attention to the lectures during classroom lectures.	3.63
4. I study hard for my tests.	3.36
5. I am usually interested in my assignments.	3.52
6. I will do my best to pass my English class this semester.	3.55
7. I often feel like quitting learning English.	2.94
8. I am always waiting for my English class to finish and go home.	2.88
9. I do not give up easily when I am faced with a difficult question in my assignments.	2.8
10. I am not willing to put in more effort in my assignments.	2.94
Total Mean	3.20

Table 3. Total Mean of the Themes of the Academic Self-Concept Questionnaire

Themes	Mean
1. Academic confidence	3.17
2. Academic effort	3.20

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the first theme

Theme 1: Beliefs about vocabulary learning	Mean
1. The best way to remember new words is to memorize them using a word list.	3.11
2. Repetition is the best way to remember new words.	3.83
3. It is only necessary to remember one dictionary definition.	2.88
4. I can identify the meaning of most words through reading.	3.91
5. I can expand my vocabulary through reading a lot.	4.08
6. Guessing words in context is one of the best ways to learn new vocabulary.	3.91
7. I revise the new words I have learned.	3.94
8. I use the words that I have learned.	3.80
9. When I learn a new word, I pay close attention to its usage and meaning.	4.19
10. When I have learned a new word, I recall the meaning to help me understand the context.	3.91
Total Mean	3.75

As can be seen in Table 2, the most highly rated item was “I pay attention to the lectures during classroom lectures” ($M = 3.63$). This indicates that since the majority of the participants were interested in learning the language effectively, they tend to avoid any distractions during the class time. This, in turn, would improve the quality of learning a language. The second highly rated item was “I will do my best to pass my English class this semester” ($M = 3.55$). However, the least highly rated item among the item related to this theme was “I often do my assignments without thinking” ($M = 2.47$). This may be the indicator of the fact that the assignments given to the students in language classrooms mostly trigger their thinking ability and therefore requires their full attention in order to be completed.

5.1.3. The Data Analysis of the Two Main Themes of the Academic Self-Concept Questionnaire

Table 3 shows the mean of the two main themes of the academic self-concept questionnaire. As can be seen in Table 3, students had a more positive perception toward the second theme of the questionnaire ($M = 3.20$).

5.2. The Data Analysis for the Vocabulary Learning Strategy Use Questionnaire

The second instrument used in the current study was the vocabulary learning strategy use questionnaire constructed by Gu and Johnson (1996). It consisted of 50 likert type items ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This questionnaire consisted of 9 themes. The themes are as follows: beliefs about vocabulary learning, activation strategies, dictionary strategies, meta-cognitive regulation, memory strategies, guessing strategies, , note-taking strategies, source, and anxiety and motivation. The descriptive statistics for each of the themes of the questionnaire are provided in separate sections to facilitate the interpretation of data.

5.2.1. Theme One: Beliefs about Vocabulary Learning

Table 4 shows the mean of each of the items related to the first theme of the VLS questionnaire, namely beliefs about vocabulary learning. As can be noticed in Table 4, this theme consisted of 10 items. As can be seen in Table 4, the most highly rated item within this theme belonged to

the item “When I learn a new word, I pay close attention to its usage and meaning” ($M= 4.19$). This is the indicator of the fact that students tend to learn the vocabularies in context. The second highly rated item was “I can expand my vocabulary through reading a lot” ($M= 4.08$). This shows that EFL learners in Iran tend to expand their vocabulary knowledge through contextualizing new words while reading passages and articles. The third most highly rated items were “I can identify the meaning of most words through reading” ($M= 3.91$), “Guessing words in context is one of the best ways to learn new vocabulary” ($M= 3.91$), “When I have learned a new word, I recall the meaning to help me understand the context” ($M= 3.91$). The interesting point is that all of the three items indicate students’ preference for learning vocabulary within a sentence and a specific context. However, the least preferred item within this theme belonged to the item “It is only necessary to remember one dictionary definition” ($M= 2.88$). This is because words have different meaning in different contexts; therefore, only one meaning of a given word cannot be extended within other contexts.

5.2.2. Theme Two: Meta-Cognitive Regulation

Table 5 shows the mean of each of the items of the second theme, namely meta-cognitive regulation. As can be seen in the table below, this theme consisted of 7 items. As indicated in Table 5, the most highly rated item was “I know which words are important for me to learn” ($M= 4.11$). This is the indicator of the fact that learners tend to

monitor their own learning, and subsequently plan for what they need to do to enhance their learning quality. In addition, according to Table 5, the second most highly rated item within this theme was “I make a note of words that seem important to me” ($M=3.91$). This indicates the prominence of note-taking as an effective vocabulary learning strategy toward which the majority of the students have positive attitude. Moreover, the third most highly rated item was “I think about my progress in vocabulary learning” ($M= 3.80$). Checking one’s progress would give language learners some motivation to learn languages with more enthusiasm. Therefore, it can be mentioned that students would tend to monitor and plan for their own language learning and would consider it as a process rather than as a product. On the contrary, the least highly rated items within this theme was “I try to find out all I can about the new words I learn” ($M= 3.05$). Nearly half of the participants mentioned that they would obtain any information related to a given new word when they face it. This technique is a bit time consuming, but rather effective.

5.2.3. Theme Three: Guessing Strategies

The third theme of the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire intends to clarify the extent to which learners were inclined to use guessing strategies while learning new words. Table 6 shows the mean of students’ responses to the items of this theme of the questionnaire. This theme (guessing strategies) consisted of 7 items.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the Second Theme

Theme 2: Meta-cognitive regulation	Mean
1. I think about my progress in vocabulary learning.	3.80
2. I try to find out all I can about the new words I learn.	3.05
3. I only focus on things that are related to exams.	3.44
4. I know which words are important for me to learn.	4.11
5. I look up words that I am interested in.	3.91
6. I make a note of words that seem important to me.	3.58
7. I know what cues I should use in guessing the meaning of a particular word.	3.08
Total Mean	3.56

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for the Third Theme

Theme 3: Guessing strategies	Mean
1. I skip words I do not know.	3.83
2. I use my experience and common sense to guess.	4.0
3. I guess the meaning and then look at the dictionary (when I meet new words in reading).	3.66
4. I use alternative clues and try again if I fail to guess the meaning of a word.	4.0
5. I make use of my knowledge of the topic to guess the meaning of a word.	3.83
6. I look at the part of speech of the new word (to guess the meaning of a new word).	3.86
7. I analyze the word structure (prefix, root, suffix) when guessing the meaning of the word.	4.08
Total Mean	3.89

As can be noticed in Table 6, among the vocabulary learning strategies relating to guessing the meaning of the new words, the highest mean belonged to the item “I analyze the word structure (prefix, root, suffix) when guessing the meaning of the word” ($M=4.08$) while the lowest mean belonged to the item “I guess the meaning and then look at the dictionary (when I meet new words in reading)” ($M= 3.66$). The use of affixes to know the meaning of the new words is a very common way provided that it is done under accurate instruction.

Moreover, the information above demonstrated that most students used their prior knowledge, including experiences and common sense, to infer the meaning of the words. (Item 2— $M= 4$). The vast majority of students also mentioned that they would skip unknown words when reading. (Item 1— $M=3.83$).

5.2.4. Theme Four: Dictionary Strategies

The fourth theme intends to provide information about students’ attitudes toward the use of dictionary while seeing the new words. As can be seen in Table 7, this theme (dictionary strategies) consists of 7 items. The mean of students’ responses to the items of the current theme is provided in Table 7.

As indicated in Table 7, the most highly rated item was “I use a bilingual dictionary” ($M= 4.25$). Using a bilingual dictionary is very common within EFL contexts. Moreover, according to Table 7, the second highest mean belonged to the item “I use the dictionary to find the appropriate usage (example sentence) of the word” ($M= 3.88$). It can be concluded that Iranian EFL students tend to learn new words through seeing how it works within a sentence. That is, learning new words is mostly done through contextualizing them within a sentence or

paragraph. On the contrary, it was intriguing to see that the majority of students said they were unsure of how to use the dictionary to look for collocation patterns (Item 6— $M= 2.37$). The study's findings, however, indicated that the students didn't fully understand the concept of collocation.

5.2.5. Theme Five: Note-taking Strategies

The fifth theme of the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire was concerned with note-taking strategies. Table 8 shows the participants’ responses to each of the items of this theme. As can be seen below, this theme consists of 5 items. Different note-taking strategies were used by the students. Comparing those who said they did not keep a vocabulary notebook to those who did, roughly slightly less than half of the participants ($M= 2.66$) reported having one. The Persian translation of an unidentified English word had the highest mean ($M=3.72$).

It was interesting to see that, when compared to those who stated they did not, only a small percentage of participants ($M=2.45$) reported noting the synonym or antonym of the word. This information may suggest that the students were not aware of the benefits of taking notes or maintaining a vocabulary notebook for the purpose of improving their vocabulary. Additionally, the techniques they used, such as writing the English words and their translations and noting the meaning of words, are insufficient for word memory improvement. To aid in the development of their vocabulary, these subjects would need to use other note-taking techniques.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for the Fourth Theme

Theme 4: Dictionary strategies	Mean
1. I use an English dictionary.	3.50
2. I use a bilingual dictionary.	4.25
3. I use the dictionary to find only the meaning of the word.	3.58
4. I use the dictionary to find out the pronunciation of the words.	3.08
5. I look in the dictionary for the grammatical patterns of the word.	3.69
6. I look in the dictionary for collocation patterns.	2.37
7. I use the dictionary to find the appropriate usage (example sentence) of the word.	3.88
Total Mean	3.87

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for the fifth theme

Theme 5: Note-taking strategies	Mean
1. I have a vocabulary notebook to list down new words.	2.66
2. I write down the English word and Persian translation of the word.	3.83
3. I only take note of the meaning of the word.	3.26
4. I take note of the usages of the word (example sentences, part of speech).	3.72
5. I take note of the synonym or antonym of the word.	2.45
Total Mean	3.18

5.2.6. Theme Six: Memory/Repetition Strategies

The sixth theme intends to provide information concerning participants' views toward the use of memory or repetition strategies while learning the new words. As can be seen in Table 9, this theme (memory and repetition strategies) includes 4 items. The mean of students' responses to the items of the current theme is provided in Table 9. In terms of memory strategies, the majority of the students were discovered to employ respectively, the strategy of oral repetition ($M= 4.10$) and creating mental images (mnemonic) most often ($M= 4.08$). Interestingly compared to other strategies within this theme, the least highly use strategy employed by the students was written repetition of a word whereas while the highest mean belonged to oral repetition to aid in memorizing of the word. Moreover, Students appeared to have no trouble analyzing words into their constituent parts ($M= 3.75$).

5.2.7. Theme Seven: Activation Strategies

Table 10 shows the mean of each of the items of the seventh theme, namely activation strategies. As can be seen in the table below, this theme consisted of 2 items. When asked about their activation strategies, the majority of students said they would use the new words

they had learned in their speech and writing ($M= 3.88$). Less students ($M= 3.13$) said they would use the new words they had learned in everyday situations. This result demonstrated that these students are confident and give their words their best effort.

5.2.8. Theme Eight: Source

The eighth theme of the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire was concerned with the source that students' tend to use to enhance their knowledge of vocabulary. Table 11 shows the participants' responses to each of the items of this theme. As can be seen below, this theme consists of 2 items.

According to the aforementioned data, reading English-language materials is the primary way that students learn new words, as opposed to hearing new words from their teachers in class ($M= 2.86$).

5.2.9. Theme Nine: Anxiety and Motivation

Table 12 shows the mean of each of the items related to the ninth theme of the VLS questionnaire, namely anxiety and motivation. As can be noticed in Table 12, this theme consisted of 3 items. The results for this theme are provided below.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for the Sixth Theme

Theme 6: Memory/Repetition Strategies	Mean
1. To remember a word, I repeat it aloud to myself.	4.10
2. To remember a word, I write it repeatedly.	3.2
3. I create a mental image of the new word to help me remember the word.	4.08
4. To remember a word, I analyze the word by breaking it into different part (prefix, root, suffix).	3.75
Total Mean	3.78

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for the Seventh Theme

Theme 7: Activation Strategies	Mean
1. I make use of the words I learned in speaking and writing.	3.88
2. I make use of the words I learned in everyday situations.	3.13
Total Mean	3.50

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics for the Eighth Theme

Theme 8: Sources	Mean
1. I learn new words only in my class from my teacher.	2.86
2. I learn new words from reading English materials (newspapers, novels).	3.52
Total Mean	3.19

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics for the Ninth Theme

Theme 8: Anxiety and motivation	Mean
1. I feel anxious about reading in English.	2.63
2. I skip words I do not understand when I read English.	2.44
3. I do not know how to learn new vocabularies.	3.52
Total Mean	2.86

Table 13. The Total Mean of each of the Themes of the Vocabulary Strategy Questionnaire

Themes	Mean
1. Beliefs about vocabulary learning	3.75
2. Meta-cognitive regulation	3.56
3. Guessing strategies	3.89
4. Dictionary strategies	3.87
5. Note-taking strategies	3.18
6. Memory strategies	3.78
7. Activation strategies	3.50
8. Source	3.19
9. Anxiety and motivation	2.86

Table 14. Correlation between Academic Self-concept and Vocabulary Strategy Use

	Vocabulary strategy use	Academic self-concept
Vocabulary strategy use	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.186
	N	120
Academic self-concept	Pearson Correlation	0.186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.279
	N	120

Less than half of the participants reported feeling anxious about learning English, according to the results. This demonstrated that the English language is used in their studies only sporadically. Some students, though, admitted that they still don't know how to pick up new words ($M = 3.52$).

5.2.10. The Overall mean of each of the Themes of the Vocabulary Learning Strategy Questionnaire

Table 13 shows the overall mean of each of the themes of the vocabulary learning strategy (VLS) questionnaire. As mentioned previously, the VLS questionnaire consisted of nine themes. As indicated in Table 13, the highest mean belonged to the themes “guessing strategies” ($M = 3.89$) and “dictionary strategies” ($M = 3.87$) respectively. While the lowest mean belonged to the themes “anxiety and motivation” ($M = 2.86$) and “note-taking strategies” ($M = 3.19$) respectively.

5.3. The relationship between the students' use of vocabulary learning strategies and their perceptions of their academic self-concept.

To investigate if there is any correlation between the two variables, namely students' academic self-concept and their vocabulary learning strategy use, Pearson Product Moment correlation was run as the appropriate statistical technique. Table 14 shows the results of Pearson correlation. According to Table 14, it was found that the sig value was [0.279], which was not less than [0.05]. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was no correlation between the two variables.

6. Discussion

The objectives of the current study were twofold. First, the researcher aimed at determining what strategies were considered by the students as the least highly used and which ones were deemed as the most highly used. Secondly, it was within the scope of this study to find out if there was any correlation between students' self-concept and their vocabulary learning strategy use. To this end, a total of 108 Iranian EFL students took part in the study by filling out 2 questionnaires. It was found that the least highly used strategy among the EFL students was “I look in the dictionary for collocation patterns”, while the most highly used item was “When I learn a new word, I pay close attention to its usage and meaning”. This finding is in line with that of [Noorizah and Zaini \(2015\)](#) in which they found that Iranian EFL students are not good at learning vocabularies through learning the collocation patterns. Moreover, no correlation was found between Iranian EFL students' self-concept and their vocabulary learning strategy use. These findings are in contrast with those of [Reynolds \(1988\)](#) who found in his research that academic self-concept was correlated in a positive and significant manner to grade point average in college students.

Moreover, the findings are opposite to [Smith, Sapp, Farrel and Johnson's \(1998\)](#) research on the relationship among locus of control, academic achievement and academic self-esteem which observed a positive relationship between academic self-esteem and academic achievement. The study results also in some ways reject the findings of [Bankston & Zhou \(2002\)](#); [Lockett & Harrell \(2003\)](#); and [Schmidt & Padilla \(2003\)](#) who all cited a positive correlation between self-esteem and academic performance. The results, however,

support [Van Laar's \(2000\)](#) study, which found little to no relationship between African American students' academic success and their self-concept. Nevertheless, the results supported the null hypothesis, according to which there was no relationship between the two variables.

The cultural context of language learning in Iran may also influence the relationship between self-concept and strategy use. [Karimnia and Afghari \(2012\)](#) demonstrated that Persian speakers employ culturally specific patterns of communication that reflect particular sociocultural norms rooted in Persian culture, including norms related to politeness, face-saving, and self-presentation. These cultural norms may shape how Iranian EFL learners perceive themselves as language learners and, consequently, how they approach vocabulary learning tasks. The absence of a correlation between self-concept and strategy use in the present study may therefore reflect the influence of these broader sociocultural factors that mediate the relationship between self-perception and strategic behavior.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the findings revealed that the strategies most often utilized by the EFL learners in the current research were guessing strategies, dictionary strategies and memorization strategies. Nonetheless, the least utilized strategy was found to be note taking strategies. The results show that EFL students should use more strategies to encourage their learning and retention of the vocabulary. Although it was discovered that the research participants knew about specific strategies, they did not put what they had learned to use.

Students must understand that learning is enhanced when we put our knowledge of a particular strategy into practice (performance), not just when we know about it (competence). [Ediger \(1999\)](#) maintains that building students' vocabulary knowledge should be a main objective in each academic discipline. Vocabulary development accentuates that students are in search of purpose in learning. Therefore, goal-oriented learning in vocabulary development means that students conceive reasons for achieving good vocabulary knowledge. As educators and teachers, we should understand that learners build up their vocabulary over time. Knowing plenty of words does not guarantee that the learner is capable of reading effectively. [Anderson \(2004\)](#) maintains that there should be a steady study of vocabulary within a reading improvement program.

Through this exposure, students will be able to deepen and expand their understanding of words and the ways in which they function. The findings of this study can help language teachers by providing them with

some insights concerning whether or not students' self-concept determine the learning trajectories they tend to adopt to go about learning of languages, specifically learning of new vocabularies. Moreover, the findings can be helpful to language learners in that they help the learners grasp the importance of how they feel about themselves in language classrooms on the learning quality as well as strategies of they use to learn new words. In addition, the current study found that the least highly used vocabulary learning strategy was learning new words by studying collocation patterns. That said, teachers are advised to encourage students to study collocation patterns more frequently by providing them with appropriate instruction. Students' lack of tendency to learn vocabularies through studying their collocation patterns can be attributed to the textbooks they tend to use for learning languages. That said, material developers within the context of our country are advised to create materials in a way that collocation patterns be highlighted within the textbooks.

This study had several limitations. This study's first shortcoming had to do with the research tool. Despite all the benefits of questionnaires, it must be acknowledged that they are self-reports and that participants may provide inaccurate information out of laziness, exhaustion, the desire to preserve their reputation, etc. Second, convenience sampling was used in this study. Due to the absence of randomization in the sampling and selection process, the data collected in the current study cannot be generalized to the entire population. The third limitation of the study had to do with the research paradigm used in the study, namely quantitative research. Although the questionnaire used in the study enjoyed high degree of reliability and validity, it could not elicit in-depth data concerning teachers' perceptions of effective language teaching, since questionnaires are self-report after all. The data obtained from such self-reports can only tap into the surface of the issue being investigated. Thus, using a questionnaire to elicit the data needed to answer the research questions this study was merely a quantitative one. Future research should employ qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into the relationship between academic self-concept and vocabulary learning strategy use. [Karimnia \(2024\)](#) demonstrated the value of qualitative content analysis in understanding Iranian EFL students' perceptions of their learning experiences, revealing nuanced insights that quantitative surveys alone could not capture. Similar qualitative approaches—such as semi-structured interviews or think-aloud protocols—could illuminate how students perceive the connection between their self-concept and their strategic choices in vocabulary learning, and whether they consciously consider this relationship in their learning behaviors. To delve into the issue more deeply, mixed methods research paradigm should be used.

The following suggestions can be made for those interested in the current topic:

1. Use of cluster sampling, which enjoys some randomization, will allow those with an interest in this subject to replicate the same study. As long as a larger sample size is used when administering the questionnaire, their data can be generalized this way.

2. As an alternative to using questionnaires, which are thought to elicit quantitative data, interviews, which produce qualitative data, should be used in the investigation to produce more in-depth data for the topic being studied. Therefore, those interested in this area of research can do this piece of research using mixed methods research paradigm.

Authors' Contribution

All the authors have participated sufficiently in the intellectual content, conception, and design of this work or the analysis and interpretation of the data (when applicable), as well as the writing of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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