The Way of the Word

Vocabulary learning strategies in an upper secondary school in Sweden

Degree project in English studies, ENA308
Mats Svensson
Supervisor: Olcay Sert
Examiner: Thorsten Schröter
Autumn 2017
Abstract
One of the hardest challenges that learners may face during the process of acquiring a second language is learning vocabulary. Knowledge of vocabulary is an important factor when achieving the competence to communicate in a foreign language. There are multiple strategies available when it comes to learning new words, depending on factors such as the learner, the environment, and the context. Essentially, as Nation (2001) maintains, there are two ways of learning vocabulary: "incidental learning" and "direct intentional learning". Although there is a growing body of research on vocabulary learning strategies employed by students, studies in the Swedish context that take into consideration both students’ and teachers’ perspectives are scarce.

Against this background, this mixed methods study examines on the one hand which strategies to learn and remember new words are preferable from the students' perspective and on the other hand it also investigates what strategies the teachers are actually using and encouraging in the English subject in a Swedish upper secondary school.

The reported preferences of the students indicate that they do not explicitly use vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) to any great extent at all, while their teachers' view is that the students should largely be responsible enough to care for their own vocabulary acquisition. However, the students suggest one VLS to be of great advantage to themselves: to use their teacher as help rather than for example dictionaries or textbooks. This is, however, something that the teachers do not encourage in their classrooms, although previous research has shown the benefits of using source language translations in second language learning.

Keywords: Vocabulary, learning strategies, EFL, upper secondary school, Sweden.
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

2. Background ............................................................................................................................................... 2
   2.1 Strategies for learning and remembering vocabulary ............................................................ 3
   2.2 Teaching learning strategies ....................................................................................................... 6

3. Method and material ............................................................................................................................. 7
   3.1 Research context .......................................................................................................................... 7
   3.2 Participants ........................................................................................................................................ 8
   3.3 Instruments ...................................................................................................................................... 8
   3.4 Data analysis .................................................................................................................................... 9
   3.5 Ethical aspects ................................................................................................................................ 10

4. Results .................................................................................................................................................. 10
   4.1 Least favored learning strategies ............................................................................................... 11
   4.2 Less favored learning strategies ................................................................................................. 12
   4.3 Favored learning strategies ........................................................................................................ 13
   4.4 Less favored remembering strategies ........................................................................................ 14
   4.5 Favored remembering strategies ............................................................................................... 16
   4.6 Findings from interviews with the teachers ............................................................................... 17
       4.6.1 Student responsibility ........................................................................................................... 17
       4.6.2 Student motivation .............................................................................................................. 18
       4.6.3 Teaching strategies ............................................................................................................. 19

5. Discussion and conclusion .................................................................................................................. 21

References ............................................................................................................................................... 24

Appendix ............................................................................................................................................... 27
1. Introduction

English has been a part of the Swedish educational system for over a century and Swedes are today generally renowned for their proficiency in the English language. The main aim of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in some way using that particular language. It might just be for one's own pleasure or it might be for other reasons, like business communication, getting work in a globalized world where English is the dominant language, or being able to study through another medium. Whichever reasons one has to acquire a new language, it is still essential to obtain a reasonable amount of vocabulary knowledge.

The Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school does not explicitly state that vocabulary learning should have any particular focus. However, the students should be taught to understand both spoken and written English as well as being able to interpret what is heard or read (Skolverket, 2011). Thus, vocabulary implicitly plays an important part in students' English education in upper secondary school.

Dwyer and Neuman describe vocabulary as "the words we must know to communicate effectively" (2009, p. 385). Vocabulary knowledge can also be viewed as the number of words a person knows, or how much information he or she has about a certain word, how it associates with other words and how fast he or she can retrieve a word (Bardel, Laufer & Lindqvist, 2013, p. 5). It is also a good predictor for how a student's proficiency in a second language develops. Research shows that students with lexical knowledge that includes 2000 of the most common word families were far superior when it comes to reading, listening and writing compared to those who had not mastered that number (Stæhr, 2008). Large vocabularies appear to be essential for developing language skills (Milton, 2013).

Therefore it should be of great interest for teachers to know how students acquire their vocabulary as well what they need to succeed. Schmitt (2000) states that the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) gives the learners a greater chance of succeeding in their vocabulary learning. Vocabulary learning strategies can be taught and practiced in classrooms to help raise the students' awareness of the most effective way for each individual to achieve higher lexical knowledge. Moir and Nation (2002) explain that it is of great importance for the teachers to know what strategies their
students practice to become efficient learners, and that it is of even greater importance for the learners themselves to reflect on how they work to achieve the goals they have set. With this in mind, there might be a discrepancy between what the students perceive as the best strategies for learning, and what strategies their teachers are actually promoting – which is something the present study aims to look into.

Students in upper secondary school in Sweden are in the final years of their education before leaving school for either work or higher education. Many of them have studied English as a foreign language since they entered the lower level of compulsory school in Sweden. Thus, they have most likely encountered many different teachers and teaching strategies. But with a myriad of different strategies to pick between, the learners and the teachers might not agree on what they recognize as the most useful strategies.

Research on VLSs has been rather extensive since its start in the 1960s (see Gu, 1994; Schmitt, 2000), but rather scarce on upper secondary students learning English in a Swedish context. Against this background, the aim of this study is to focus on which strategies the students in a Swedish upper secondary school prefer when it comes to acquiring vocabulary and if the students' vocabulary learning strategies match with their teachers' methods in helping them acquire new words. If there is a discrepancy between these two aspects of teaching and learning, this study might help the teachers to adjust their teaching methods so as to further their students' abilities to acquire new vocabulary.

In line with the aims of this study, these are the research questions that have been posed:

- Which strategies do students in a Swedish upper secondary school prefer when it comes to acquiring and remembering new English vocabulary?
- To what extent do the students' vocabulary learning strategies align with their teachers' perceptions of teaching vocabulary?

2. Background

To become successful in second language acquisition the learners must be exposed to the target language to a large extent (Krashen, 1982). However, there is, according to Krashen, a difference between acquiring a language and learning a language. The
former refers to something that happens implicitly, for example when children subconsciously pick up their first language, in a process in which the focus is on the communicative aspect without any substantial weight being put on any explicit language rules. Learning, by contrast, is a more active way of gaining knowledge of a language. This includes explicit and formal instructions, which in turn result in explicit and formal knowledge about language rules, including grammar and vocabulary.

Since the current study simultaneously focuses both on the students' preferred strategies for learning and remembering as well as the teachers' perceptions of teaching vocabulary, some background of both aspects will be presented here.

2.1 Strategies for learning and remembering vocabulary

One way to acquire knowledge of a foreign language in an efficient way is to use vocabulary learning strategies. Cohen (1998) defines learning strategies as "learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner" (p. 1) and highlights the importance of choice since it is a necessity for the learner to in fact voluntarily make a decision to use a strategy for it to be called a strategy.

Nation (2001) describes two ways of learning vocabulary. One is the so-called incidental learning, which includes learning vocabulary from context. The other is the so-called direct intentional learning. According to Nation (ibid.), vocabulary growth stems to a great extent from reading and would thus mostly be learned incidentally.

When encountering a foreign language, one naturally encounters a large number of hitherto unknown words. The first strategy people use to learn a new language is, according to Gu (2003), to simply repeat the new words until they recognize them and can use them. But there are several other strategies that can come into play when learners are faced with new linguistic difficulties. Gu (2003) also lists factors that impact what affects the learner, including the learner him/herself, the task at hand and what environment the learner finds him/herself in.

Cohen and Weaver (1998) stress that second language learning strategies "encompass both second language learning and second language use strategies" (p. 3, original emphasis). Cohen and Weaver also mention four different subsets of learning strategies when it comes to second language acquisition: retrieval, cover, rehearsal, and communication strategies. The first type includes retrieving already
known information within a L2\(^1\) and using that to acquire knowledge of a new word. Cover strategies, on the other hand, are used when learners do not actually control the new language, but want to create the impression that they do. This could include memorizing words or phrases that they do not fully understand. A rehearsal strategy consists in rehearsing words or sentences to be able to for example either pass an exam or make a request in a foreign language setting. Finally, the communication strategy puts focus on conveying "meaningful information that is new to the recipient" (p. 5).

Cohen and Weaver (1998) point out that it is not the strategies themselves that are either good or bad. Any strategy has the potential to be good for any given learner, if used effectively. Also, there can be different strategies that can be effective depending on the specific context. Students learning just for the sake of passing exams or having an intrinsic motivation to improve their proficiency in a L2, is one example of different circumstances that may affect strategy use.

Fan (2003) found, as expected, that learners to a greater extent preferred strategies they regarded as useful than those they perceived as less useful. Meanwhile, Zhang and Lu (2015) concluded that learning strategies play a significant role "in language learning in general and in vocabulary learning in particular" (p. 751), which further emphasizes the need for creating opportunities for the students to either find new options or enhance the strategies they already find stimulating. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) found that strategy training, if carried out effectively, could increase both the students' knowledge of strategies as well as their motivation and performance. Explicit teaching of VLSs resulted in both an improved score on vocabulary tests and an increased strategy use among learners who had not used strategies to any great extent before.

The strategy of guessing meaning from context has been studied before among advanced English learners (Eslami & Huang, 2013) and it was discovered that language learners have a greater chance of understanding unfamiliar words if they understand what the text is about.

Working with several peers in small groups when trying to acquire new vocabulary has shown to be effective, when compared to studying with just one additional peer (Dobao, 2014). Even though a discussion in pairs presents more

\(^1\) L2 is used as an umbrella term for second, foreign, and additional languages.
opportunities for each student to contribute, the advantage of having more group members and with that "a larger pool of knowledge and linguistic resources" (p. 516) makes this a more effective approach.

In a study carried out by Joyce (2015), looking into the effect of using L1 translations instead of defining the words in L2, the result show that the students recognized the L2 vocabulary significantly much more often when they were asked to match the target vocabulary to translations rather than L2 definitions.

When it comes to remembering newly acquired words, Nemati (2009) mentions the "Depth of Processing Hypothesis", according to which the more cognitive energy a learner exerts when thinking about a word, the more likely he or she is to recall it later. According to this, the strategy of learning is not essential, but rather how the learner processes the information about the new word.

Vocabulary instruction in a "de-contextualized" setting is, according to Nielson (as cited in Nemati, 2009), at the early stages of language development more beneficial than in contextual reading. However, the more advanced the learners get, and when applied to memorizing vocabulary, this previous study also indicates that it is more important to involve a "deep semantic processing of target word" (p. 15) than memorization techniques such as oral rote repetition.

An example of learning vocabulary more efficiently is looking at pictures, or using imagery more generally. It is a tool that has been shown to be an effective instrument in VLS settings. In an Iranian context (Abdi & Zahedi, 2012), the experimental group that was given imagery instruction outperformed the control group that was given direct L1 translations.

When it comes to remembering to words, writing the word many times and repeating it to oneself are strategies that have been proven efficient. In a study conducted by Crothers and Suppes (cited in Gu, 2003) it was discovered that almost all of the 108 participants knew the Russian-English word pairs being taught and tested after seven repetitions.

In Moir and Nation (2002), rote learning, or memorizing, was the by far most common strategy among students to remember new words. In their investigation nine out of ten informants used this repeatedly and spent a considerable time reading information about the new words in their vocabulary learning notebooks or copying them into other notebooks. Notable in this instance is also that the students were encouraged to use various other strategies for learning vocabulary at the beginning of
the study program, but the majority returned to the more tried and tested strategy that rote learning is (p. 24).

Empirical evidence suggests that students benefit far more from repeating words to themselves aloud rather than silently. Kelly argues that it is in fact also more effective than to write it repeatedly (as cited in Klapper, 2008).

And finally, to be able to master idiomatic expressions is seen as a sign of proficiency in EFL and is a strong indicator of how skilled a speaker is in the target language (Thyab, 2017).

2.2 Teaching learning strategies

Many learners of a foreign language are unable to acquire the necessary knowledge to discover which strategy is the most efficient for them. If they become aware of both their capacities and limitations and are provided with tools necessary to develop and refine strategies they can improve their learning and language skills (Cohen & Weaver 1998). Since schools nowadays often put more focus on individual learners and their needs than before, this is something that can be implemented in the teaching as well. Oxford and Scarcella (1994) suggest instruction with that in mind, and thus to personalize the teaching of VLSs. The importance of explicitly teaching vocabulary strategies to students is well-echoed (Cornell et al, 2016) and there are also findings that show a correlation between instructive learning strategies and benefits for the learners' use of mnemonic strategies (Zhang & Lu, 2015).

In a study in a Saudi Arabian context an experimental group was taught vocabulary and reading texts both explicitly and implicitly during one term. Compared with the control group, who did not receive these instructions, the results favored the experimental group when analyzing the vocabulary tests after the term and comparing them with the tests handed out before the study started (Al-Darayseh, 2014). The results also reflected positively upon the participants' skills in reading comprehension. A conclusion drawn from the study was that teachers should try hard to vary their vocabulary teaching techniques and strategies. Another recommendation is that teachers should be given time and opportunities to utilize explicit vocabulary learning strategies.

In research carried out by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) in two Japanese universities, the students were divided into two groups based on the result from a
vocabulary test and a questionnaire. One experimental group and one control group were created and only the first one was given explicit instruction on VLSs. The result showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group when the same tests and questionnaires were administered, suggesting that explicit instructions would actually help students – in this particular case university students – to improve their vocabulary acquisition. However, the study also suggests that learners who already were avid users of VLSs might not be affected positively by an increase in explicit teaching.

There will be similarities with preceding research in this present paper, in the sense of a questionnaire having been distributed to students. However, there was no testing of the participating students' skills before and after a certain kind of activity was carried out. This is due to the fact that the current study focuses on the students' perception of preferred strategies and is not trying to determine which strategies are proven to be the most efficient.

3. Method and material

In this study mixed methods were used. The first part consisted of a quantitative approach, based on a questionnaire (see Appendix) handed out to 28 students in a Swedish upper secondary school (a more detailed account of the different classes will be presented in section 3.1). In the second part, semi-structured interviews with two teachers were carried out and analysed using qualitative content analysis.

3.1 Research context

The study was carried out in the autumn of 2017 in two classes in an upper secondary school in Sweden. The students were enrolled in the second year of the Building and Construction program, corresponding to grade 11. Since that is a vocational education the students take the first upper-secondary English course, English 5, in two years instead of one, as is the custom in many of the theoretical study programs.

The two interviewed teachers work with the participating students but were not privy to the results gathered from the quantitative study before the interviews.
3.2 Participants

The aim was to find out which strategies the learners preferred in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes to both acquire and remember new words. 28 students, aged 16-18, answered the questionnaire during an English lesson. There were 25 male and 3 female respondents in total.

The participants were made aware of their upcoming involvement two weeks beforehand. The questions were all read out loud to them, and they were given the opportunity to ask questions, to make sure that everyone understood every part of the survey. Some expressions had to be explained and this was done partly by me and partly by asking their fellow students in those cases they knew. The participants were asked to try to reflect on their learning behavior and not get influenced by either their fellow students or what answers they might think were more ‘suitable’ to the researcher and the teachers.

They were then handed the questions on paper and instructed on how to mark their answers, as well as informed that only one answer per horizontal line was required to avoid having to treat their replies as if they had not been given (Bryman, 2004). The participants were given as much time as they needed since the whole lesson – approximately an hour – had been devoted to the study.

The two teachers teach in both Swedish and English and were interviewed a few weeks after the data from the questionnaire had been collected and analysed. The interviews lasted approximately half an hour and both teachers were present at the same time. They were not given the results on the questionnaire.

3.3 Instruments

The questionnaire was adapted from an earlier study in the same field of research, but in a Chinese context, conducted by Zhang and Lu in China in 2015 (Appendix). Some changes were made to accommodate questions to fit in a Swedish context. For example, the comparison between Chinese and English were switched to compare Swedish with English. Another adjustment made was to adapt the questionnaire to fit students in an upper secondary school, since the original questionnaire was handed out to university students, who had to pass two national English proficiency exams in
order to graduate (Lu & Zhang, 2015) and thus had different incentives than the present study's participants to improve their English. For instance, the original question "Think about cognate words (words in different languages which come from the same "parent" word and may have a similar meaning and form)" was completely excluded because of its quite challenging composition.

The survey consisted of 11 questions concerning the students' techniques for learning the meaning of new words and 20 questions concerning their techniques for studying and remembering new words. All responses for each item were rated on a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree). When compiled, answers ranging from 1 to 3 and from 4 to 6 were categorized as "negative" and "positive" preferences respectively.

The participating teachers were interviewed a few weeks after the data from the questionnaire had been collected and analysed. The interviews lasted approximately half an hour and both teachers were present at the same time. They were not given the results on the questionnaire.

In the interviews with the teachers they were asked structured and open questions at the beginning, before the semi-structured part began. The interviews were conducted in English and designed to elicit information about the teachers’ current focus on VLSs and their views on their students' current learning behavior. During the interviews both note-taking and a recorder were used.

3.4 Data analysis

The data from the questionnaire was compiled, sorted and put in contingency tables to enable the search for patterns (Bryman, 2004). These tables will be presented in section 4.

With regard to the interviews of the teachers the analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis with grounded theory as the framework (Bryman, 2004), to see what themes would emerge from the data. The whole interview was transcribed with the intention of coding all relevant information and creating domains. The process was conducted with the purpose of narrowing down the teachers' views into themes.

To illustrate how the analysis process progressed, one example from one of the teachers was coded as "student responsibilities", since it is a significant part of an educational environment in upper secondary school:
Usually I expect them to learn the words on their own. To be responsible enough to learn words they didn't know before.

Since an extract like this shows what expectations the teachers have regarding the responsibilities on their students' part when it comes to VLSs, it was categorized as an important factor. The number of references in Table 6 indicates how many times the theme was found in extracts from the transcriptions.

### 3.5 Ethical aspects

The study was carried out with the ethical principles outlined by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2004) in mind. All participants were informed that their participation in this study was based on their voluntary consent and that their answers would remain anonymous. They were also notified that they could cancel their participation at any given moment without any negative consequences. The survey answers and the identities of the informants remain confidential in accordance with the Research Council's guidelines.

### 4. Results

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that when asking students – or any other persons for that matter – to rank their own learning behavior, there is a risk of unreliability attached to it. Perhaps they are not aware of what strategies they use, or potentially prefer to answer in a way that they think will satisfy the researcher. However, as mentioned before, the latter aspect was something that was highlighted for them before the questionnaires were handed out, to encourage the informants to reflect on their actual behavior.

The results from the surveys will be presented and analysed followed by the findings in the semi-structured interviews with the teachers. Sections 4.1-3 cover which strategies the students do or do not prefer to use to learn new words, and 4.4-5 concern what strategies they adopt (or not) when it comes to remembering them. Each subsection comprises both the results and a discussion part.
Answers where 60 percent or more of the students commented on either the positive or the negative side are analysed. Positive is here applied to a strategy they prefer while negative is the opposite. Furthermore, there are two examples in which an overwhelming majority of the participants were in agreement. These examples are seen as "extremes" and are the ones that will be addressed first in the following section.

4.1 Least favored learning strategies

In this section, findings on two strategies which very few of the students use to assist them in their vocabulary learning will be reported. These are labelled the least favored strategies.

Table 1: Least favored learning strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1-3 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use an English dictionary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check prefixes, suffixes, and word</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roots to discover meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conclusion is that neither using an English dictionary nor using prefixes, suffixes or word roots to discover meaning is seen as useful by the large majority of the students. There could be several possible reasons for this, for example a lack of available dictionaries and a lack of sufficient knowledge in semantics as well. When the questionnaire was introduced, many of the students asked specifically for an explanation regarding prefixes, suffixes and word roots, which suggest that this is not something they have experience of. Since the terms are almost identical in Swedish it would also indicate that they have not experienced them in the Swedish subject either.

Access to dictionaries could be beneficial to learners, especially to become more autonomous since they will not have to depend on their teacher to explain unfamiliar words to them (Gu, 2003). The question above concerns the use of a monolingual dictionary, in which words are usually more comprehensively explained. When we consider that dictionaries today also are available online it perhaps comes a surprise to find that the students rarely use them. One may also argue that the
participants perceived the question as only being in regard to paperback or hardcover editions.

4.2 Less favored learning strategies

As to strategies the majority of the students did not prefer, though to a lesser degree than the examples above, they are named less favored strategies.

Table 2: Less favored learning strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1-3%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skip or pass new word</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guess meaning from context</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a Swedish-English dictionary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at pictures</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask teacher for a sentence using the new word</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A possible reason for 75 percent of the students in the current study answering that they scarcely use the strategy of guessing meaning from context might be the fact that they do not understand the main ideas of the texts they are reading. Eslami and Huang (2013) highlight the significance of knowing what the text is about to be more successful in guessing the meaning of the new word. As will be discussed below, context is important for the teachers’ strategies when teaching new vocabulary to their students. The fact that the student participants do not generally prefer this will also be discussed further.

Two-thirds of the participants in the current study answered that they do not prefer looking at pictures to figure out word meanings, which could suggest that they are not used to that option in an upper secondary school context, since looking at pictures to learn words might be related to earlier steps of education. Another possible explanation could be that they do not see the use of the strategy or have not thought about taking advantage of it. Previous research has shown the benefits of giving instructions using imagery (Abdi and Zahedi, 2012).
Asking the teacher for a sentence using the new word is seemingly a less favored strategy among the participants. The difference between asking for an L1 translation (see Table 3) and asking for a sentence using the new word could seem subtle, but using this strategy is actually noticeable since it involves not asking for a direct translation but rather getting assistance in figuring the word out in context.

Consulting a bilingual dictionary is something that is used scarcely more by the students. 71 percent of them answered on the negative side. As suggested by Baxter (cited in Huang, 2013), Japanese learners rely heavily on bilingual dictionaries, which may have a negative influence on their learning acquisition. The reason for this would be that the bilingual dictionary could discourage learners from using other communication strategies during oral activities.

Finally, the "Skip or pass new word" answers show that almost 8 out of 10 chose not to take that route. Instead, one may assume, the majority want to know what the new word means.

4.3 Favored learning strategies

This section will present the strategy that the students in general indicated was their most preferred one when it comes to acquiring new vocabulary.

Table 3: Favored learning strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>4-6%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask teacher for a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish translation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overwhelmingly most preferred strategy – in fact the only one to see a majority lean towards the "positive side" – is to ask the teacher for a Swedish translation of a new word (Table 3). This is in fact the only alternative where more than 60 percent of the students marked the 4-6 categories, which makes it the most notable result in the positive category. The results strongly indicate that the students see great benefits in using their teacher as a translator, which would also go hand in hand with earlier research (Joyce, 2015). Even though this current study did not test the students' knowledge of words per se, it could indicate that the students in a Swedish context also see the benefits of this strategy.
However, the results could also direct attention towards the learning culture at the school. If the students are used to getting answers handed to them on a plate, in this case when it comes to learning new words, this preferred strategy could perhaps not be a strategy after all. When asking the teacher for a L1 translation the learning experience depends partly on how the student handles the answer and partly on how the teacher answers. If the student uses the cover strategy and for example just stores the word for a particular situation, e.g. a vocabulary test, he or she risks not really learning the word. Furthermore, if the teacher just answers with a direct translation, this could also "aggravate" the situation and make learning that singular vocabulary learning case an isolated incident without it being placed in a contextual setting. The latter is something that the teachers in the current investigation fear, which will be discussed in section 4.6.

4.4 Less favored remembering strategies

In this section the students' less favored remembering strategies will be addressed.

Table 4: Less favored remembering strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1-3%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have your teacher check your word lists and flash cards for correctness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use flash cards to study new words</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word lists to study new words</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn the new words in an idiom together at the same time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the vocabulary section of your textbook</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make an image of the word's meaning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The word lists, the vocabulary section in textbooks and flash cards can be considered as similar actions when remembering new words. They all represent text written either by the students themselves or writers of textbooks. Most of the participants in the present study strongly object to the use of these strategies. The use of so called flash cards is apparently not paramount to the participants. This can possibly be explained in two ways: either they do not want their teacher to check them or the do not see the value of them. If the latter is the case then the former statement seems reasonable, since there would be no flash cards for their teacher to check. There is also a possibility that they never have been introduced to flash cards, which makes it hard to draw any significant conclusions from the data in this aspect.

Regarding practice with word lists and the vocabulary sections of textbooks, Gu (2010) found that word lists were one of the most common rehearsal strategies in a Chinese context. When going through a six-month English language enrichment programme in Singapore – where Chinese is also spoken –, students’ use of word lists increased even further. In the current investigation, though, the students seem reluctant to turn to the word lists, which can be of their own making but also occur in their textbooks.

Making an image of the word's meaning relates to the VLS of looking at pictures to learn a new word, which was not a favored strategy in this study. Considering that, the result in this regard does not come as a surprise.

As Thyab (2017) states, it is considered a considerable part of the speakers' proficiency in English to master idiomatic expressions. The current study rather unsurprisingly show that three out of four students do not prefer to learn all the new words in an idiomatic expression. As part of the preparations for the answering of the questionnaires many of the participants were not aware of the meaning of the word *idiom*, even though it has both the same spelling and meaning in Swedish. If they were not familiar with the expression in their L1 one cannot assume them to master a strategy that includes learning all the words in an idiom at the same time.

As shown in the study conducted by Dobao (2014), there are advantages in working together in groups when trying to acquire new vocabulary. But in the present
study two out of three students do not see these advantages. One possible reason can be that they have not experienced it, another could be that they have actually tried it and not found it efficient.

Saying the new word aloud as a strategy will be discussed in section 4.5.

4.5 Favored remembering strategies

This section will address which strategies the students prefer when trying to remember new words.

Table 5: Favored remembering strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>4-6 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write the word many</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(repeat the word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to yourself)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Repetition is suggested as a strategy that is favored in this study's context. Both writing and using oral or mental strategies to repeat a new word are favored by almost two-thirds of the participants. The advantages of such strategies have been shown in the study conducted by Crothers and Suppes (cited in Gu, 2003). One conclusion from that study is that it is possible to learn many pairs in a relatively short time span. That the students in the present study put this as their most favored strategy to remember words could be encouraging for their own process (if word pairs are the aim, that is).

As mentioned earlier, rote learning, or memorizing, was the by far most common strategy among students to remember new words in an earlier study (Moir & Nation, 2002). In the current study it is also seen as a favored strategy among the participants. However, here it is in order to emphasize that the present investigation does not distinguish between the words being silently or audibly repeated. However, to the limited popularity of "say the new word aloud when studying it" (see Table 5) suggests that the students seem to favor to silently repeat new vocabulary items. Perhaps the difference between the two alternatives can be explained with where the students find themselves when thinking of using the different strategies. In a classroom context it might be seen as a disturbance to the other students to say the
new words aloud, while it might be seen as more accepted to do it in another environment.

4.6 Findings from interviews with the teachers

In this section the results from the content analysis of the teacher interviews will be presented and discussed. Three domains were discovered and found relevant to the study: student responsibility, student motivation and teacher strategies. The themes also correlate to some extent with the questionnaires that the students answered. In the column showing number of references in Table 6, the figures represent the instances in which extracts from the interviews corresponded with the themes in the middle column. Also, the instances where bullet points are used in sections 4.6.1-3, the sentences following represent verbatim quotes from either Teacher A or B.

Table 6: Content analysis from interviews with teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student responsibility</td>
<td>Obligations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student motivation</td>
<td>Learner interest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy access</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laziness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher strategies</td>
<td>Study techniques</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contextual learning</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.1 Student responsibility

If the students are not interested in acquiring new vocabulary, the pedagogical challenges become much harder. On one hand the teachers expect their students to be mature enough to take responsibility for their own education, on the other hand it is one of their missions to be there to assist the students:
• Teacher A: When they reach this level I expect them to be able to tend for themselves when it comes to words. I can help them of course, but they should, like, have some sort of grit, some sort of willingness to actually work with the words to learn them.

At the same time it is not taken for granted that the students come to upper secondary school with any vocabulary learning strategies at their disposal.

• Teacher A: Preferably they should have that with them, but I don't expect them to. Not always.

The teachers know that their students want assistance, but interpret their intentions as "taking the easy way out" instead of developing strategies to acquire new words on their own.

• Teacher A: It is easy to shout to the teacher to tell you. "Oh, a vocabulary list, oh, what's that?". Adopting this attitude has repercussions, according to the teachers.

• Teacher B: They won't reach the higher marks because they don't develop anything.

When asked at the end of the interviews which strategies they thought the students preferred both teachers were in agreement.

• Teacher A: They probably answered that they want us to do more work for them, in a sense. And I'm not sure I'm really up for that. It takes too long.

Since the students’ first choice is to ask the teacher for a L1 translation (see Table 3), and the teachers are aware of this, the difference could be in what the intention is when asking. Do the students ‘merely’ want to know the answers for the specific time when they ask, or do they benefit long term from hearing the translation? As shown in earlier research (Joyce, 2015) there are advantages of using L1 translations rather than using L2 definitions when helping learners to acquire new vocabulary. But the teachers' unwillingness to ‘merely’ answer with the translation and instead explain the word in a contextual setting, might be effective as well (Al-Daraysah, 2014).

4.6.2 Student motivation

In several instances the teachers mentioned their students' willingness, or rather unwillingness, to work with their assignments. For example:
• Teacher A: Unfortunately we have perhaps too many that are a bit lazy. Able but lazy.

In expressing this, the teachers return to the responsibilities they wish their students assume or the teachers' perception of the students' intentions. That laziness is a somewhat recurring theme in the teachers’ utterances reflects some kind of disappointment on their part:

• Teacher A: You actually need to use this word in this debate; otherwise they are a bit lazy because they can find what they need in an instant.

• Teacher B: And if they feel that they can master English quite well, according to themselves, they become even more lazy, some of them.

An explanation for the impression of laziness is thought to be a result of the students’ easy access to the Internet, which the teachers feel might block the students' need for actively learning and memorizing new vocabulary.

• Teacher B: They have cell phones, and you can find basically what you want on the Internet, you just have to look for it. They don't have to remember it. They have their vocabulary with them all the time so they don't need to remember it.

Since neither cell phones (nor the Internet specifically, for that matter) were a part of the questionnaire, it is hard to draw any concrete conclusions from this statement regarding the students' memorizing strategies. But if it is the case that the students see it as unnecessary to remember new words, this certainly could cause issues within the classroom and could possibly also create the picture of them being lazy.

There also seems to exist a general feeling from the teachers' perspective that the students lack the motivation necessary to internalize new vocabulary.

• Teacher B: In general they are missing that strive to accomplish themselves, because they find their English to be good enough.

• Teacher B: The student must be interested in learning. Otherwise it's almost impossible.

4.6.3 Teaching strategies

The teachers highlight the importance of context (see Table 7) for acquiring new vocabulary and spur their students to read more and focus on words that they do not already know.
• Teacher B: If you already know the words, don't work with them. Learn the words you don't know. And basically, they need a context.

Although the teachers favor context as an essential tool for teaching vocabulary, their students seem to be in disagreement. As seen from the results of the questionnaire (see Table 2), they hesitate to guess meaning from context, which could also be an indicator that their reading is not as extensive as the teachers wish it to be. And this happens despite that they try to use the encouragement of private reading as an inspiration for their students. The teachers highlight the benefits of reading and listening to English L1 speakers to expand their students’ vocabularies. They encourage reading, both in books and by using English subtitles when watching movies or TV series.

• Teacher A: Sometimes they ask "what can I do to learn new words?" and I usually tell them "you can always read books and really think about what the words mean, and you may not understand every word or phrase, but when you come across a word that is repeated you should really look it up so you have a word list for your book".

Another advantage of reading is, according to the teachers, to gain access to for example idiomatic expressions, knowledge of which is part of advanced proficiency.

• Teacher A: You get the idiomatic expressions as well. It's not just grammar; it's idioms as well.

This has yet to prompt their students to use idioms when acquiring new vocabulary (see Table 4), which suggests that the current advice from the teachers are not having the desired effect, at least not from the teachers' standpoint.

The present investigation has also shown that word lists are not a preferred strategy for the students. There are, however, plans on implementing tools of this kind in their school in the future.

• Teacher A: Those word lists, we're talking about creating one for each trade within the education. Word list for plumbers or painters.

Apart from creating word lists, plans were being made to improve the possibilities for the students to enroll in a study technique program. This is in line with the recommendations that teachers should be given both time and opportunities to teach learning strategies (Al-Darayseh, 2014).
Teacher B: We're talking about a study starting kit, with everyone at the start of the semester. However, study techniques are already introduced by the teachers and discussed with the students.

Teacher B: I do talk about study techniques of course and ask "do you know how you learn?". And while instructing their students, the teachers are careful not to give away too much information explicitly. The aim is to expand their students’ vocabulary in contextual settings.

Teacher A: If we are giving instructions they sometimes ask what the words mean, and when I explain they say "but why didn't you just write that?". It's because you need to learn new words. You need to expand your vocabulary and learn new words.

Teacher B: Never be scared of using difficult words.

The scenario in which what Teacher A stated above occurs, could be an indicator of a discrepancy of expectations between the teachers and the students regarding the intended aims of English studies, while at the same time also explaining the teachers’ perception of "laziness" among students.

There is no explicit use of VLSs in these teachers' classrooms, even though they claim they see the need for it to optimize their students' acquisition of new words. An explanation for why it is lacking could be the limited time available for teaching English, taking into account the other learning targets stated in the curriculum.

Teacher A: There are so many other things that we need to teach as well. There just isn't enough time to focus on vocabulary.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, I have presented insights into what kind of vocabulary learning strategies EFL students in a Swedish upper secondary school prefer, while also discussing whether the findings correlate with their teachers’ perception of teaching vocabulary and vocabulary learning strategies.
One of the more significant findings is that the majority of the students prefer to ask their teacher for a L1 translation if they encounter a new word in English. This is not something that they actively promote in their classrooms, but rather suspect that their students approve of. This could suggest that the students and their teachers do not agree on what is the best VLS for the students. When participants continually ask their teachers for translations, this could perhaps hinder their improvement in vocabulary knowledge if they are not actively using other VLSs. On the other hand, as mentioned before, earlier studies point to the fact that L1 translation actually benefits students rather than hinders them in their learning (Joyce, 2015).

The dilemma of students preferring a strategy that their teacher do not find useful also points to the importance of creating a learning environment in which both parties – the learner and the learners – find a common ground upon which to expand the pedagogical tools for the teachers and the learning process for the students. For example, even though the teachers emphasize how much effort they put in when creating context the students do not read as much as their teachers consider necessary to develop their skills. Thus, the teachers might need to change their pedagogical tools to achieve the intended targets. Discussions between teachers and students concerning learning strategies are hereby advocated to reinforce the feeling of progression in the classroom.

Another notable conclusion that could be drawn when looking at the results is the overall lack of generally favored strategies on the participants' part. Only three of the suggested learning and memorizing strategies had a majority in favor. This fact goes hand in hand with the teachers' answers, in which it is apparent that there is no explicit teaching of vocabulary learning strategies. Also, the teachers’ reported perceptions concerning their students’ deficiency in motivation might impact how prioritized VLSs currently are in the classroom. The fact that the program's main objective is to prepare the students for working directly after graduation might impact how much work they put into their theoretical classes.

Since the present study focused solely on the learners' perceptions regarding vocabulary learning strategies, it would be of interest to investigate further how the strategies – or lack thereof – could impact the students' breadth of knowledge of English words. For example, if they were explicitly taught vocabulary learning strategies, it would be of interest to see if that affects in any way their results and/or their motivation to study English.
A limitation in the present investigation is that the students' grades are not taken into consideration, but future studies on this topic could possibly show a correlation between the effects that vocabulary learning strategies and teaching these in English in a Swedish context could have on the learning outcomes. Another suggestion would be to explore the parallels between preferred strategies and the students' vocabulary size and how this affects their comprehension of the L2 in general.

Finally, it should be noted that the focus in this investigation was partly on investigating what strategies the students prefer and partly if their choices correlate with the pedagogy their teachers practice. Although this investigation has shown that there are discrepancies in the relationship, much research is still needed to explore both the challenges and possible solutions.
References


Appendix

Vocabulary Learning Strategies survey

Learning vocabulary is a very important part of learning English. To better learn new words, we should think about how we study vocabulary. There are two main steps. First, we must discover the new word's meaning. Second, we must study the new word to remember it. This survey is designed to help you think about how you do these two steps. Section 1 lists some techniques to learn a new word's meaning. Section 2 has techniques for studying and remembering new words.

Please indicate the extent to which you used the strategy statement to learn vocabulary ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

This survey is done anonymously and you will not need to write your name on this paper. One answer per row, circled, is sufficient. Please make sure that you have answered every question before you hand it in.

**Part I. Techniques for learning the meaning of new words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Look at pictures or gestures to understand meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Learn meaning in group work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Ask classmates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Ask teacher for an English synonym</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Ask teacher for a Swedish translation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Ask teacher for a sentence using the new word</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Use an English dictionary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Use an English-Swedish dictionary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Check prefixes, suffixes, and word roots to discover meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Guess meaning from context</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Skip or pass new word</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part II. Techniques for studying and remembering new words.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Paraphrase meaning of the new word</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Use the new word in sentences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Use Flash Cards to study new words</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Use Word Lists to study new words</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Have your teacher check your word lists and flash cards for correctness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Use physical action when studying words (do throwing action when studying the word 'throw')</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Take notes in class about new words</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Study words with a group of students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Study the &quot;sound&quot; of a new word</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Say the new word aloud when studying it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>K.</strong> Study the spelling of a word</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L.</strong> Connect the new word to some situation in your mind</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M.</strong> Associate the word with others which are related to it (water: swim, drink, wet, blue)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N.</strong> Imagine the word and its spelling in your mind</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O.</strong> Make an image of the word’s meaning</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P.</strong> Repetition (repeat the word to yourself)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q.</strong> Learn the new words in an idiom together at the same time</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R.</strong> Use the vocabulary section of your textbook</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S.</strong> Write the word many times</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T.</strong> Continue to study the word often over a period of time</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>